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Since Richard Foster published his ground-breaking book, ***Celebration of Discipline***, in 1978, Spiritual Formation has become one of the most written about and talked about topics among Christians of all ages. In fact, to some it might even seem to be a “new” concept. But, as the late Dallas Willard explained in an interview for ***Leadership Journal***, “*Spiritual formation isn’t new; it’s only been lost for a while.*”

The door of Spiritual Formation may be opening for many, but it is an ancient door. So, what is spiritual formation? Perhaps these definitions will help.

*Christian spiritual formation is a process of yielding oneself to being conformed into the image of Christ for the sake of others.*

— From ***Invitation to a Journey*** by Robert Mulholland

*Put in Trinitarian terms, Christian Spirituality means following the risen Christ, in the power of the Spirit, to the glory and praise of the Father.*

— From ***Participating in God’s Life*** by Leonard Allen and Danny Swick

*Christian Spiritual Formation is the continuing process of life and experience through which we are progressively formed, conformed, and transformed into the image of Jesus Christ.*

— From ***Church Ministry by Design*** by Gary H. Woolverton

*Christian Spiritual formation is the God ordained process of inviting disciples through the power of the Holy Spirit, to live daily as instantiations of Christ for the sake of the world.*

— From ***Brazil Missionary Conference*** by David Wray

*Spiritual formation is a rather general term referring to attempts, means, instructions, and disciplines intended towards deepening of faith and furtherance of spiritual growth. It includes educational endeavors as well as the more intimate and in-depth process of spiritual direction.*

— From ***Care of Mind*** by Gerald G. May

*God gradually and slowly “captures” the inner faculties: first the heart and the will, then the mind, the imagination, and the passions. The result is the transformation of the entire personality into the likeness of Christ. More and more and more we take on his habits, feelings, hopes, faith, and love.*

— From **Streams of Living Water** by Richard J. Foster

But, of course, the best place to find a definition is in scripture. And if we simply take the phrase “*Spiritual Formation*” and break it into parts, its true meaning becomes very clear.

“**Spirit**” is translated from *pneuma* meaning breath, wind, spirit, the human soul. It is the part of us that animates the body and gives it the power to know, to decide and to act. It is one of God’s greatest gifts to humanity. “*Who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man’s SPIRIT within him?* (1 Corinthians 2:11) “*The body without the SPIRIT is dead.*” (James 2:26)

“**Form**” is translated from *morphoo* meaning to shape, to mold, to sculpt, to build. Here God is at work as the eternal artist, following a spiritual pattern and taking our entire lifetime to shape our inner lives. “*My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is FORMED in you.*” (Galatians 4:19) “*And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being TRANSFORMED into his likeness.*” (2 Corinthians 3:18)

And so, Spiritual Formation takes place when we offer to God the deepest part of who we are, our heart, our soul, our mind, our strength, the part of us that will survive our death. And we allow him ...

... to form our spirit.	... to teach our mind.
... to shape our heart.	... to direct our inner being.
... to change our life.	... to determine our purpose.
... to grow our soul.	... to set our course.

Spiritual Formation is not an event, a weekend retreat, an online course, a book or a class. It is a long-term process that moves through our entire lifetime. Brian McLaren has written, “*The Gospel is not an evacuation plan, it is a transformation plan.*”

This lifetime process of internal change takes place both in solitude and in community. It does not happen quickly, neatly or predictably. It is clearly God’s work, but it requires my participation. It is handcrafted, not mass-produced.

And all we have to do is look in scripture at the lives of people God has formed — Moses, David, Noah, Jonah, Joshua, Abraham, John the Baptist, Peter, Paul, Timothy. How did the Spiritual Formation process occur in their lives? It happened slowly, painfully, personally, individually over their entire lifetime.

We can give our hearts to God in a moment, but our habits will take much longer.

Behold, He stands at the door and knocks. Open the door and start the journey. But, don’t just get your religious ticket punched and then wait for the great evacuation at the end of time. Begin the exciting voyage of transformation.

*photo taken at Garden of the gods, Colorado Springs - BC*