



The Flow of Spiritual Formation

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There is a powerful process at work as our inner lives, shaped and sculpted by God, overflow into all of our other relationships. In fact, we make a serious mistake when we understand spiritual formation to be simply and only time alone with God. When Jesus was asked to identify the single greatest commandment (Matthew 22:36) he did not give a “single” answer! In essence his answer was:

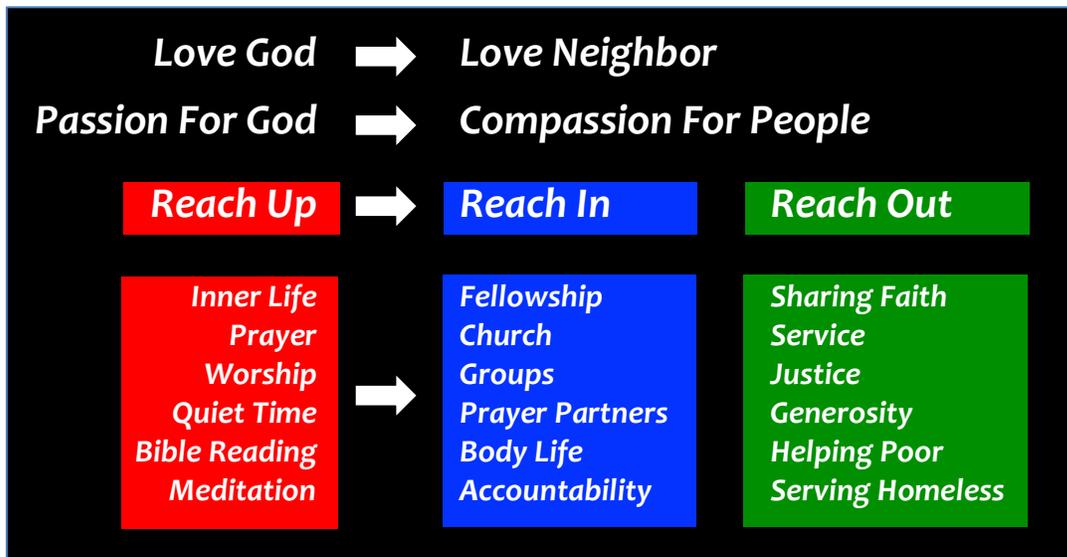
You have asked me one question, but I cannot give you one answer ... I have to give you two answers, because I can't talk about God without talking about people. They always go together.

It is true that our culture seriously underestimates the value of silence and solitude. The world around us will not help us to slow down and will not teach us to contemplate, meditate, ponder, or even think. In fact, the message from our culture is “*think quickly, act swiftly and don't waste time.*” And so, there **is** a desperate need for time alone with God.

But still, these solitary experiences are not the end. They are part of the process ... part of the “flow.” They are the prelude to movement, to relationship and to service. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote in his classic work, *Life Together*:

Let him who cannot be alone beware of community. He will only do harm to himself and to the community. Alone you stood before God when he called you; alone you had to answer that call; alone you had to struggle and pray ... ***Let him who is not in community beware of being alone.*** Into community you were called, the call was not meant for you alone; in the community of the called you bear your cross, you struggle, you pray.

And so, there is movement in spiritual formation. There is “flow” from our inner life to our outer life. Jesus knew that loving God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength would unavoidably impact every other relationship. Passion for God will overflow into compassion for people. Walking with God will flow towards caring for people. Reaching Up is the power, the energy and the very fuel for Reaching In and Reaching Out.



And scripture is filled with examples of the flow of spiritual formation:

WE ARE FORGIVEN ... SO WE FORGIVE

“Forgive as the Lord forgave you”

— Colossians 3:13 —

WE RECEIVE COMFORT ... SO WE GIVE COMFORT

*“Praise be to ... the God of all comfort,
 who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort”*

— 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 —

WE ARE TAUGHT ... SO WE TEACH

*“You welcomed the message ...
 The Lord’s message rang out from you”*

— 1 Thessalonians 1:6-8 —

WE ARE RECONCILED ... SO WE RECONCILE

*“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ
 and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.”*

— 2 Corinthians 5:18 —

WE RECEIVE GRACE ... SO WE EXTEND GRACE

“Faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms”

— 1 Peter 4:10 —

WE ARE SERVED ... SO WE SERVE

*“Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet,
 you also should wash one another’s feet.”*

— John 13:14 —

And so, to ask about the lifestyle value of spiritual formation is like asking if our bodies need

food or if our cars need fuel. Relationships, family, fellowship, service, generosity, justice, ministry, sacrifice — they all need fuel. And the purest, most powerful fuel is generated through the presence of God inside, in our very spirit. God heals and cares for our souls so that we can extend his love and compassion to those around us.