

## ESSENTIAL #2 – SPIRITUAL FORMATION AS OUR GOAL TEACHING / PRESENTATION IDEAS

Revelation 1:10-3:22 reveals the glorified Jesus as standing in the midst of all his churches, continually assessing their quality and either praising or correcting them depending on how they're conducting themselves. Clearly he expects us, his assembled followers, to busy ourselves with what is important to *him*.

What *is* important to him? The scriptures repeat one emphasis many times in a variety of ways. They make it clear that God loves us unconditionally (Rom. 8:31-39), but he has no intentions of leaving us as we are. What is God's goal for every believer? What is he determined for us to become, and what are we supposed to be helping each other attain?

**QUESTION #1 (FOR STUDY):** What words do the following passages use to describe the final condition God wants us all to reach?

Matt. 5:48 **"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."**

1Cor. 14:20 **"Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults."**

Rom. 8:28 **"We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. 29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers."**

Gal. 4:19 **"My dear children, ...I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you..."**

Eph. 4:11 **"Jesus...gave these gifts to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. 12 Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ, 13 until we come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature and full grown in the Lord, measuring up to the full stature of Christ. 14 Then we will no longer be like children, forever changing our minds about what we believe because someone has told us something different or because someone has cleverly lied to us and made the lie sound like the truth. 15 Instead, we will hold to the truth in love, becoming more and more in every way like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church." (NLT)**

Phil. 3:12 **"I don't mean to say that I have already ...reached perfection! But I keep working toward that day when I will finally be all that Christ Jesus saved me for and wants me to be."**

Col. 1:28 **"We proclaim (Christ), admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ."**

Heb. 5:12 **"You have been Christians a long time now, and you ought to be teaching others. Instead, you need someone to teach you again the basic things a beginner must learn about the Scriptures. You are like babies who drink only milk and cannot eat solid food. 13 And a person who is living on milk isn't very far along in the Christian life and doesn't know much about doing what is right. 14 Solid food is for those who are mature, who have trained themselves to recognize the difference between right and wrong and then do what is right." (NLT)**

James 1: 2 **"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. 4 Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."**

ANSWER #1: "Perfect, mature, adult"

The same, basic Greek word lies behind each of these three terms. It is not used to describe people who always do everything right and have eliminated all of their sins, but rather those who have developed spiritually to the point that they are no longer childishly superficial, impulsive, gullible or unstable, either in their beliefs or in their practice of the Christian faith. They have reached a point of significant depth in their convictions and understanding of God's word. Essentially synonymous phrases like "conformed to the likeness of God's son", "measuring up to the full stature of Christ", "Christ is formed in you" and "not lacking anything" suggest that these people are usually consistent in living a life of love for God and others as Jesus himself lived.

ANSWER #2:

Other passages use words like "holy/sanctified" (Rom. 6:19-22; 1 Cor. 1:2; Eph. 1:4; 4:24; Heb. 12:14; 1 Per. 1:15) or "righteous" (Ps. 15:15; Prov. 11:3-6; Matt. 5:6; 6:33; Rom. 6:16-18; Eph. 4:24; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; James 5:16; 1 Pet. 2:24) to describe the condition God wants us ultimately to attain. These words are similar in meaning to the others, above, though they carry more of an emphasis on becoming fully God's: people whose character, attitudes, values, lifestyle choices and interactions with others are pleasing to him and distinct from the world around us that doesn't love Jesus. Perhaps the single word that best captures what God wants us to become is "Christlike".

**QUESTION #2:** What are we supposed to *do* with this information that God's goal for us is to make us like Jesus? How are we supposed to respond?

ANSWERS:

- Our first duty is to adopt it as our own, personal objective. As Paul said of himself:

Phil. 3:12 "I don't mean to say that I have already ...reached perfection! But I keep working toward that day when I will finally be all that Christ Jesus saved me for and wants me to be. 13 No, dear brothers and sisters, I am still not all I should be, but I am focusing all my energies on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, 14 I strain to reach the end of the race and receive the prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us up to heaven." (NLT)

- But we are not only responsible for ourselves. The scriptures repeatedly exhort us to help each *other* along whenever we're together:

Rom. 14:19 "Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to **mutual edification.**"

Rom. 15:2 "Each of us should please his neighbor **for his good, to build him up.**"

1Cor. 14:26 "...When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for **the strengthening of the church.**"

Eph. 4:29 "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for **building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit** those who listen."

Heb. 10:24 "Let us consider how we may **spur one another on** toward love and good deeds. 25 And let us not neglect meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us **encourage one another** — and all the more as you see the Day (of Jesus' return) approaching.

**APPLICATION:**

We can decide it's worthwhile to meet with other believers for any number of reasons, and we can spend our limited time together on all sorts of activities, but conscientiously assisting with each others' spiritual formation is paramount. To become more like Jesus we need *help* with...

- getting to know him as he really is,
- hearing and understanding what he's saying,
- discerning what he wants us to do, and
- obediently following his lead in every situation.

Practically speaking, we all need to learn and live certain fundamentals if we're going to exit spiritual immaturity and make steady progress toward our destination. These include (in no particular order):

### **FOUNDATIONAL TOPICS**

- Who God is, what he's like and how he can be known
- The Bible's inspiration, interpretation and application
- How to love God: a lifestyle of worship
- Who Jesus is, why he came and what he accomplished
- What happens when we die, the judgment of God and our eternal state
- Living under law versus living under grace
- How we can be reconciled to God and receive eternal life
- Prayer: its practice, various forms and value
- The Holy Spirit: who he is, what he does and how to live with him
- The Church as Christ's body and our role in it
- The return of Jesus and the end of this age
- Righteousness and love as a lifestyle
- Faith as a lifestyle (especially needed during "trials")
- The world, our flesh, the devil, temptation and spiritual warfare
- The kingdom of God and how to advance it

Adopting "spiritual formation" as a primary goal means frequently using our times together to study and grapple with issues like these until we have mastered them. In doing so, we will help each other become more like Jesus.