



SPIRITUAL
FORMATION
IN THE
EMERGING
CULTURE

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The Gospel of Matthew ends with these important words:

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him, but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and

**make *[spiritually form]* disciples
*[apprentices]***

of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. (Matthew 28:16-20)

This is our mission: *disciple-*
forming.

What is a disciple?

NOT simply a “believer” or a person who conforms to the rules or expectations of a particular church or denomination.

A disciple is someone who is learning how to live as Jesus commanded

Spiritual formation:

*The development of people
who “be,” think, feel, work,
relate, serve, and play
... in the way of Jesus.*

This holistic approach involves **apprenticeship in a community of practice** - as Michael Polanyi makes clear.

From Michael Polanyi, Personal Knowledge: Toward a Postcritical Philosophy (1958)

It follows that an art which has fallen into disuse for the period of a generation is altogether lost. There are hundreds of examples of this to which the process of mechanization is continuously adding new ones. These losses are usually irretrievable.

It is pathetic to watch the endless efforts -- equipped with microscopy and chemistry, with mathematics and electronics -- to reproduce a single violin of the kind the half-literate Stradivarius turned out as a matter of routine more than 200 years ago.



To learn by example is to submit to authority. You follow your master because you trust his manner of doing things even when you cannot analyze and account in detail for its effectiveness. By watching the master and emulating his efforts in the presence of his example, the apprentice unconsciously picks up the rules of the art, including those which are not explicitly known to the master himself.



These hidden rules can be assimilated only by a person who surrenders himself to that extent uncritically to the imitation of the master. A society which wants to preserve a fund of personal knowledge must submit to tradition.

... practical wisdom is more truly embodied in action than expressed in rules of action. (pp. 53-54)



QuickTime™ and a
TIFF (Uncompressed) decompressor
are needed to see this picture.



Think of it like this:

A disciple is a student who is invited to learn from a master-teacher (disciple)...

So he can eventually be sent out to play in the spirit of the master teacher and teach others also (apostle).

Discipleship is equipping people for integral mission.



transformation

...until Christ
is formed in you.

(Galatians 4:19)

Similarly, Paul speaks of ...

Being con-formed to the image of Jesus (Romans 8)

Being trans-formed by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12)

Christ being “formed” in us (Galatians 4)

Some church leaders seem to assume ...

institutional participation = growth + health.

Others seem to believe ...

knowledge = growth + health.

Still others suggest ...

knowledge + experiences = growth + health.

Some go further and say ...

*knowledge + experiences +
relationships = growth + health.*

With the growing consensus that conventional approaches to disciple-making are not working, some are gravitating to a more nuanced and holistic approach to spiritual formation that could be (partially) conveyed like this:

*knowledge + experiences +
relationships + practices + suffering
+service + time + the Holy Spirit =
growth + health.*

This holistic approach involves **apprenticeship
in a community of practice**

Spiritual formation involves intentional spiritual practices (or disciplines):



***Actions within our power which we do
to train ourselves to do things
currently beyond our power, and to
become people we are currently
incapable of being.***

-Running a marathon

-Making or playing a violin

-Learning a language

For example, fasting:

- Feeling and acknowledging our weakness in the face of impulses from our bodies.***
- Practicing impulse control.***
- Asserting to ourselves the importance of things other than impulse gratification.***
- Accepting weakness and “poverty” in faith that greater strength and satisfaction can come to us.***
- What benefits could come from this practice?***

What practices can you help people learn?

___solitude ___sabbath ___silence

___study ___spiritual direction

___practicing God's presence ___prayer journaling

___fixed-hour prayer ___contemplative prayer

___service ___submission ___simplicity

___feasting ___fasting ___self-denial

___identifying with Jesus ___reconciliation

___giving ___encouragement ___empathy

**Practicing our
faith ...**

**And faithing our
practices.**

The Celtic era (400-600 AD) in Christianity has much to teach us.

___prayers for washing your face

___prayers for stirring your fire

___prayers for leaving your house

___prayers for walking

___prayers for enjoying God's creation

They integrated spiritual formation into all aspects of normal daily life.

In the emerging culture ...

**... if your church cannot help
people experience
transformation into
Christlikeness,**

*why should anyone be part
of it?*

COME.
FOLLOW
ME.



Some preliminary suggestions:

1. Announce that your intention is to make disciples/apprentices of Jesus.
2. Turn your public gatherings into “spiritual practice” sessions (do it now), not merely teaching sessions for doing it later.
3. Practice “spiritual friendship” -- use “queries” for “storytelling.”
4. Do things with the Bible in addition to preaching and studying it: lectio divina, Ignatian readings, etc. “Fund the imagination.”

5. Replace leaders who are “mature” with those who are “maturing.”
6. Discover new heroes - “trade up your traditions for Tradition.”
7. Encourage retreats and mission trips - which are short-term monastic experiences.
8. Preach **personal formation for global transformation (Kingdom of God)**.
9. Seek formation yourself. Share discoveries -- but not as “programs.”
10. Honor the indigenous, question the colonial. Explore adaptive-reuse of indigenous practices.

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