

# *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*

Jim Wilhoit • IPC • January 2024 • Session 1

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Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

Jesus (Matt. 28:19-20 NLT)

## An Illustration of Public Character Formation

Here is a handout that was given to Blacks who would be riding on the newly integrated Montgomery city busses. Read over the guidelines and notice where it places an emphasis on:

1. Virtues or character qualities; 2. Community support; 3. Specific practices.

This is a historic week because segregation on buses has now been declared unconstitutional. Within a few days the Supreme Court Mandate will reach Montgomery and you will be re-boarding integrated buses. This places upon us all a tremendous responsibility of maintaining, in face of what could be some unpleasantness, a calm and loving dignity befitting good citizens and members of our Race. If there is violence in word or deed it must not be our people who commit it.

For your help and convenience the following suggestions are made. Will you read, study and memorize them so that our non-violent determination may not be endangered. First, some general suggestions:

Not all white people are opposed to integrated buses. Accept goodwill on the part of many.

The whole bus is now for the use of all people. Take a vacant seat.

Pray for guidance and commit yourself to complete non-violence in word and action as you enter the bus.

Demonstrate the calm dignity of our Montgomery people in your actions.

In all things observe ordinary rules of courtesy and good behavior.

Remember that this is not a victory for Negroes alone, but for all Montgomery and the South. Do not boast! Do not brag!

Be quiet but friendly; proud, but not arrogant; joyous, but not boisterous.

Be loving enough to absorb evil and understanding enough to turn an enemy into a friend.

Now for some specific suggestions:

- The bus driver is in charge of the bus and has been instructed to obey the law. Assume that he will cooperate in helping you occupy any vacant seat.
- Do not deliberately sit by a white person, unless there is no other seat.
- In sitting down by a person, white or colored, say “May I” or “Pardon me” as you sit. This is common courtesy.
- If cursed, do not curse back. If pushed, do not push back. If struck, do not strike back, but evidence love and goodwill at all times.
- In case of an incident, talk as little as possible, and always in a quiet tone. Do not get up from your seat! Report all serious incidents to the bus driver.
- For the first few days try to get on the bus with a friend in whose non-violence you have confidence. You can uphold one another by a glance or a prayer.
- If another person is being molested, do not arise to go to his defense, but pray for the oppressor and use moral and spiritual forces to carry on the struggle for justice.

According to your own ability and personality, do not be afraid to experiment with new and creative techniques for achieving reconciliation and social change.

If you feel you cannot take it, walk for another week or two. We have confidence in our people. God Bless You All.

The Montgomery Improvement Association  
Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., President  
Rev. W. J. Powell, Secretary.

## What do we mean by Christian Spiritual Formation?

“One generation commends your works to another; they tell of your mighty acts.” (Ps. 145:4)  
“Brother Saul” Ananias, first recorded words spoken to Paul as a Christian. (Acts 9:17)

Testimony by Lauren Mathues

The new language of spiritual formation

- The language of spiritual formation was popularized in the 1970s through the Association of Theological Schools (ATS).
  - Concern about the number of clergy exiting the ministry
  - Moral failures
  - Ineffective spiritual leadership
- Asbury Seminary, Fr. Adrian van Kaam and Susan Muto
- The intellectual leadership of Dallas Willard and Richard Foster

- Richard Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*. “There seemed to be a sanctification gap among Protestants, a peculiar conspiracy somehow to mislay the tradition of spiritual growth and to concentrate on side issues.”

Definition: CSF refers to the intentional communal process of growing in our relationship with God and becoming conformed to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Some implications of that definition:

- An intentional process
- Communal—occurring in and through the church, Kevin Vanhoozer “the church exists as a place to make disciples.” The outcome is not merely sanctified individuals but a holy people, the bride of Christ.
- It requires our engagement, “make disciples” and teach “them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19–20 NIV). Paul calls his audience to “redouble your efforts. Be energetic in your life of salvation” (Phil. 2:12 MSG).
- It is accomplished by the Holy Spirit.
- It is for the glory of God and the service of others
- Its means and end is the imitation of Christ.

## Two Commitments

Putting the Spirit back into spiritual formation

- Gordon Fee has persuasively argued that in the New Testament, spiritual (pneumatikos) “refers universally and unequivocally to the Holy Spirit” and “has to do with who the Spirit is and what the Spirit is doing.”
- “you [plural] also, like living stones, are being built into a temple of the Spirit to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 2:5 TNIV, marginal reading).

We never outgrow the need for the gospel.

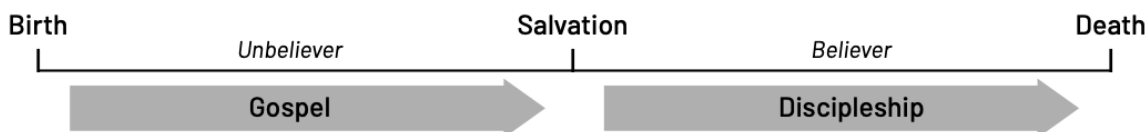


Figure 1. Gospel as pre-discipleship

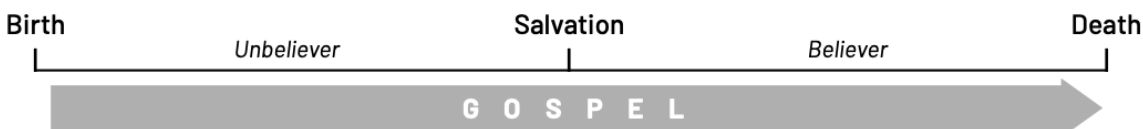


Figure 2. Gospel for spiritual formation