

# Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered

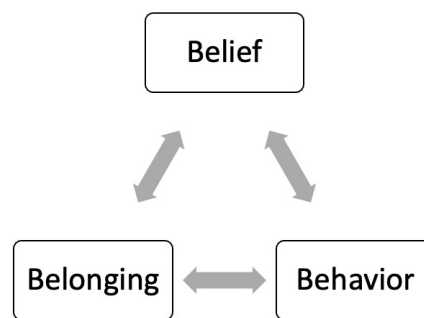
Jim Wilhoit • IPC • January 2024 • Session 3 Receiving and Remembering

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Almighty God, whose Son our Savior Jesus Christ is the light of the world: Grant that thy people, illumined by thy Word and Sacraments, may shine with the radiance of Christ's glory, that he may be known, worshiped, and obeyed to the ends of the earth; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who with thee and the Holy Spirit liveth and reigneth, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

*Book of Common Prayer* (Second Sunday after Epiphany)

A Recap from Week 2. Main Point: Community Spiritual Formation must be holistic and address the three Bs



## Three B Model

- **Belief** refers to the set of convictions members affirm as true or real. These beliefs typically center around God's nature, life's purpose, values, and theological tenets.
- **Behavior** encompasses the practices, rituals, worship acts, and moral conduct practiced by the faith community.
- **Belonging** concerns membership or identity, a sense of personal identification with the group, and a sense that this group cares about me.

For spiritual formation to be effective, it must involve all three elements.

- There is a tendency in church programs to privilege one dimension over the other two. Examples: youth programs prioritizing Belonging over teaching and spiritual practices or a “heady church” that pays little attention to discipleship and pastoral care.

- The elements do not follow a rigid sequence such as Belief→Behavior→Belonging.
- In terms of spiritual formation, the question is, does a person experience all three Bs in their life in the church? NOT does this program include an equal emphasis on all three?
- Note: The 3 B model is useful, but from an evangelical perspective, it misses emphasizing awe, regeneration, and being with God.

## Four Rs of Christian Spiritual Formation (Jim’s version of the 3Bs)

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Community Practices</b>
Receiving	The cultivating of spiritual openness and continual repentance	Confession, worship, sacraments, prayer
Remembering	Transformational teaching leading to a deep awareness of our being part of God’s community and his beloved children	Teaching, preaching, evangelism, meditation, spiritual guidance, small groups
Responding	Formation occurring for and through service	Discernment, honoring relational commitment, setting aside prejudices, ministries of compassion
Relating	Formation taking place in and through community	Hospitality, handling conflict well, honoring relationships, Sabbath observance, attending to the pace of life

## **Receiving: Three perspectives must be embedded in our corporate life maps to foster spiritual receiving:**

‘We are only the light bulbs, and our job is just to remain screwed in!’”

Desmond Tutu

- A deep sense of our sin (both personal and corporate) and knowing what the cross says about our sin  
Jack Miller, “Cheer up! You are worse than you think” and “Cheer up! God loves you more than you know!”<sup>1</sup>
- An awareness of the reality of our yearnings and how the embrace of God helps us live with them  
Jack Kelly and Naperville Presbyterian Church Recovery Ministry. An experience of Bill Wilson, “The Jesuit listened and quoted Matthew: “Blessed are they who do hunger and thirst.” God’s chosen, he pointed out, were always distinguished by their yearnings, their restlessness, their thirst.”
- A deep-seated conviction that all growth comes from grace through our union with Christ  
“Grace is not opposed to effort, it is opposed to earning. Earning is an attitude. Effort is an action. Grace, you know, does not just have to do with forgiveness of sins alone.”  
Dallas Willard  
Leanne Payne, Healing prayer and practicing the presence of Christ.

## **Remembering What God Sings over You**

- What are we to remember? We are to remember who we are (God’s beloved children), how we came to this place/position through Christ, whose we are (I belong not to myself but to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ), what God intends for our lives, where wisdom for living is found (in Scripture, “which [is] able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation” [2 Tim. 3:15 NASB]), and the joyful responsibilities of life in Christ’s kingdom.
- How do we do this? We do this as we hear people testify to the work of God in their lives and notice God’s work in our lives too. We do this as we read and hear the stories of God’s faithfulness to his people throughout the centuries. We do this as we learn of God and his wisdom for us. We do this as we remember our baptism and its meaning. And we do this as we learn spiritual practices that keep our minds focused on God.

After that generation died, another generation grew up who did not acknowledge the Lord or remember the mighty things he had done for Israel.

Judges 2:10 NLT

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<sup>1</sup> C. John Miller, *Saving Grace: Daily Devotions from Jack Miller* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2014), xv.

Remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and diligently observe these statutes.

Deuteronomy 16:12

Men more frequently require to be reminded than informed.

Samuel Johnson<sup>2</sup>

People know what they do; frequently know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what what they do does.

Michael Foucault<sup>3</sup>

WE ARE IN A CRISIS OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION.

We are in a crisis of spiritual formation because we live in an attention economy.

Attention is money.

Through a 2020 Wall Street Journal article concerning leaked internal Facebook corporate memos, we learned, “Our algorithms exploit the human brain’s attraction to divisiveness. . . . If left unchecked,” Facebook would feed users “more and more divisive content in an effort to gain more user attention & increase time on the platform.”

*The Great Dechurching*, 185

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<sup>2</sup> “The Rambler. Numb. 2. Saturday, March 24, 1749–50,” in *The Works of Samuel Johnson* (London: Nichols and Son, 1816), 4:13.

<sup>3</sup> Dreyfus, H.L., P. Rabinow, and M. Foucault, *Michel Foucault, beyond structuralism and hermeneutics*. 2nd ed, 1983, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 187.