

Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered

Jim Wilhoit • IPC • January 2024 • Session 4 Responding and Relating

A Recap from Prior Weeks.

- Week 1: MLK and Montgomery Bus Training (Need for holistic teaching and recruiting community support)
- Week 2: Creating a CSF Climate: Safety, Integrity, and Gospel-Centered
- Week 3: 3B Model (you need them all), Receiving and Remembering
 - Not more programs, but invite the church to support spiritual vulnerability
 - Remembering whose we are and what we are called to do

Testimonies of Church/Community-Based Spiritual Formation

Some best practices that are in trouble

- Christian summer camps
- Small group inductive Bible study
- Thoughtful Bible memorization
- Testimonies
- Church meals
- Intergenerational relationships & hospitality
- Prayer meetings
- “World Christian” services
- Redemptive Sabbath keeping
- Gospel frugality

Throughout Scripture there is a pervasive sense that all generations were typically present when faith communities gathered for worship, for celebration, for feasting, for praise, for encouragement, for reading of Scripture, in times of danger, and for support and service...

To experience authentic Christian community and reap the unique blessings of intergenerationality, the generations must be together regularly and often—infants to octogenarians.

(Intergenerational Christian Formation, Allen and Ross, 84)

Jesus’s Invitations to a Life of Flourishing

In his final charge to his followers, Jesus told them, “Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you. I’ll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:19–20 Message). To instruct them well, we need to have a clear grasp of Jesus’s invitations. The chart below is a starting point for thinking about this, but I want to emphasize that we should not be on a quest to identify all Jesus’s commands. This list is intended as a help for discerning what the people in a particular community need to learn to do at a particular moment to follow Jesus more closely.

| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Abide in Jesus. | “Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.” (John 15:4) |
| Abide in the Scriptures. | “Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, ‘If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.’” (John 8:31–32) |
| Act out of love, not worry. | “For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.” (2 Tim. 1:7 NLT) |

| | |
|---|---|
| Avoid hypocrisy. | “But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy.” (James 3:17) |
| Baptize new disciples. | “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” (Matt. 28:19) |
| Be born again. | “Jesus answered him, ‘Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.’” (John 3:3) |
| Be grateful. | “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” (1 Thess. 5:16–18) |
| Believe in Jesus. | “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.” (John 14:1) |
| Beware of false prophets. | “Thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you; they are deluding you. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord.’” (Jer. 23:16) |
| Do not commit adultery. | “You shall not commit adultery.” (Exod. 20:14) |
| Get away to pray. | “But Jesus often withdrew to the wilderness for prayer.” (Luke 5:16 NLT) “Then Jesus said, ‘Let’s go off by ourselves to a quiet place and rest awhile.’” (Mark 6:31 NLT) |
| Give generously. | “The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” (2 Cor. 9:6–7) |
| Keep the Ten Commandments. | Worship no other gods, have no idols, don’t misuse God’s name, observe the Sabbath, honor one’s parents, don’t kill, don’t commit adultery, don’t steal, don’t lie, don’t covet. Exod. 20:2–17; Deut. 5:6–21 |
| Learn deeply that we are one in Jesus. | “For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal. 3:26–28) |
| Listen to God’s voice. | “Listen for God’s voice in everything you do, everywhere you go; he’s the one who will keep you on track. Don’t assume that you know it all. Run to God! Run from evil!” (Prov. 3:6–7 Message) |
| Love your enemies, pray for them, and bless them. | “But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” (Matt. 5:44) |
| Shape your praying by the pattern of the Lord’s Prayer. | “He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.’ He said to them, ‘When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name . . .’” (Luke 11:1–2) |
| Shine like stars. | “. . . so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world.” (Phil. 2:15) |
| Show hospitality. | “When God’s people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality.” (Rom. 12:13 NLT) |
| Speak the truth. | “So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another.” (Eph. 4:25) |

| | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Take, eat, and drink at his table. | “So Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day.’” (John 6:53–54) |
| Teach others. | “The purpose of my instruction is that all believers would be filled with love that comes from a pure heart, a clear conscience, and genuine faith.” (1 Tim. 1:5 NLT) |

| Dimension | Description | Community Practices |
|------------------|--|--|
| Responding | We are to respond to God’s gospel of love and forgiveness with love and service to God and others. | Discernment, honoring relational commitment, setting aside prejudices, ministries of compassion |
| Relating | Formation takes place in life. Most of the deeply forming events of our lives will come through relationships. | Hospitality, handling conflict well, honoring relationships, Sabbath observance, attending to the pace of life |

How we Foster Responding

Climate

- Formed to serve, formed by serving
- Priesthood/ministry of all believers
- Empathy

Practices

- Evangelism
- Discernment of needs
- Discernment of calling and gifts
- Keeping relational commitments
- Ministries of compassion
- A lifestyle with margin

How we Foster Relating

Climate

- Time: A necessity of community
- A norm of 1 + 2 (One Church service plus 1 education event & 1 service or fellowship activity)
- A culture of true peacemaking

Practices

- Participating in church life
- Church meals
- Intergenerational celebrations
- Small groups
- Community prayer