

Andrews University

Theological Seminary

A Personal Development Plan related to the course of DSRE 676 Christian Formation and Discipleship

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Introduction

Christian or Spiritual Formation as Dallas Willard referred to in his book; "Renovation of the Heart", is an important process in every Christian's life and journey. It is a process that is of God and not an event because it has to be an ongoing working of the Holy Spirit in a person's life rather than a once in a life thing. Spiritual formation in fact is a journey back into the image of God wherein humanity was first created only to be defaced by sin (Gen 1:26, 27; 3:1-15). In fact Spiritual Formation and the spirituality that comes from Jesus is nothing less than an invasion of natural human reality by a supernatural life from above¹ through the work of the Holy Spirit of God on the grounds that one opens up to God and this is no human attainment but a gift of grace².

In this Spiritual Formation and Discipleship Plan, I intend to discuss three basic segments; first, where did we (humanity) come from? Second, where are we now and third, where are we heading to? These three segments will be discussed in the context of the concept of the church, the concept of dual allegiance and the concept of true discipleship. Hence, I will provide the context by discussing all these aforementioned and then lay out the plan. This plan contains concepts and insights gained through but not restricted to the materials I was assigned to read which included Steps to Christ, A praying Life, A work of the Heart, and Renovation of the Heart³. While in Steps to Christ, Ellen White covered the complete picture of the baby steps one must take to come to Christ and the contexts in which this transpires and why, Paul E. Miller discussed to the minutest details, how one should keep up with a life of pray. In Renovation of the Heart, Dallas Willard emphasized the reality that, Spiritual Formation is all the work of God

¹ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002), 19.

² Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 23.

³ *Steps to Christ* by Ellen White, *A Praying Life* by Paul E. Miller, *A Work of the Heart* by Reggie McNeal and *Renovation of the Heart* by Dallas Willard.

through His Spirit on the hearts otherwise while Reggie McNeal in *A Work of the Heart* discusses the significance of having leaders whose hearts are touched and graced by God; a significant point as leaders have influence on those they lead. It is always a blessing to have leaders who are in tune with Christ.

This spiritual formation plan is not only theory but has also been put into practice in the last twelve weeks (to the time I am writing this), and has proven to be a great blessing that can be shared among our spiritual care givers like the church pastors and teachers as well as our health workers. After all, we need people who are practical, know and experience God and His working in their lives ministering to others. It is anticipated this plan will help others also.

Where Did We Come From? (Human History)

Despite the conflicting propositions others would bring forward, the Bible, a book that stood the test of time and one that can be trusted is explicitly clear on the origins of humanity; we came from the hands of a Creator God; “So God created man in His own image; in the image of God, he created him, male and female he created them.” Gen 1: 27 NKJV. In the story of our origin, it is interesting to note the following;

First, mankind (or humanity) was not spoken into existence like the rest of God’s creation but were fearfully and wonderfully made (Ps 139:14). In fact, God had to stoop low, picked up the dust of the earth and got His hands stained with dust in order to create mankind; “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” Gen 2:7. Second, as it appears in the same text (Gen 2:7), that God shared His life with mankind he created by “breathing into his nostrils the breath of life; and

man became a living soul.” Consequently, the life we have is from God, hence, we owe our life to Him.

Third, the Creator God was part of a community as implied by the object pronoun ‘us’ and the possessive pronoun ‘our’ in the following statement God made prior to creating humans; “Let *us* make man in *our* own image, according to *our* likeness...” (Gen 1:26a). Apostle John defined the composition of that divine triune community as; God the Father, God the Son (Jesus Christ) and God the Holy Spirit; “For there are three that bear witness in heaven; the Father, the Word⁴ (Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one.” 1 John 5:7.

It was a divine plan that while mankind was to partake of the divine community, there was also the human spectrum of community also He created after indicating that; “It is not good that man should be alone. I will make him a helper comparable to him.” Gen 2: 18. Hence, in Eden before the Fall, mankind enjoyed both the divine as well as the human dimensions communal relationship. In the words of Reggie McNeal, “We are not born into a vacuum. We enter the world into a stream of the human family and human experience”.⁵

Fourth, God gave mankind power and authority to manage the rest of the created world; “Then God said; “Let *us* make man in *our* own image, according to *our* likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air and over the cattle, over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth” Gen 1:26.

Fifth and more importantly especially in regards to the subject of Spiritual Formation, God created mankind in His own image, after His own likeness (Read Gen 1:26, 27). And at the end of the creation, when God looked back to what He had created including human beings, He

⁴ “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. . .and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” John 1:1, 14.

⁵ Reggie McNeal, *A Work of Heart: Understanding How God Shapes Spiritual Leaders* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2011), 73.

‘saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good.’ Gen 1:31. Hence, according to divine judgment, all that God created was perfect, indeed ‘very good’.

In retrospect, all these which God gifted mankind with through creation was on one condition, that they continue to abide in God’s presence as well as within the rules that God has placed before them; ‘And the LORD God commanded the man saying; “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die” Gen 2: 16, 17. The future of humanity then as it is for us now today hanged on the exercise of the free will that a loving Creator God gave; either obey and live or disobey and perish. Eve and Adam chose the latter, hence, all the misery.

Where Are We Today? (Present State)

In this segment, we will have two parts; first, the effects of sin and second, God’s response to the human dilemma by gifting us with Jesus Christ. More so, God’s initial attempt to reach the world and to save it through Israel, the concept of Church; its ecclesiological and missiological components.

Just as sin lifted up its ugly head in perfect heaven so did it pop up again in perfect Eden as humanity chose to disobey; ‘she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave it to her husband and he ate it.’ Gen 3: 6b. Herein, is the concept of dual allegiance also; Eve while enjoying the blessings of God yet adhering to the wills of the evil one through the serpent just as much as Adam also having to choose Eve over God. This concept of dual allegiance is always a problem especially in countries like Papua New Guinea where the cultural context leans more to animism.

Also, in Genesis 3, we see the entrance of sin and everything thereafter is all tainted with sin resulting in decay, disease and ultimate death (see Romans 6:23). As Eve and Adam’s

descendants⁶, death had spread to all humanity for we all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom. 5: 12; 3:23). Sad to say after sin, mankind no longer carried that image and likeness of God. The shift that happened is depicted well in this text; “This is the book of the genealogy of Adam. In the day that God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female, and blessed them and called them mankind in the day they were created. And Adam lived one hundred and thirty years, and begot a son in his own likeness, after his own image, and named him Seth.” Gen 5: 1-3. Humanity no longer bears the image and likeness of God as a result of sin. In fact, cut off from the connection with God, humanity became a victim of its own bad choices. This was and is the unfortunate reality and state of being; sinful and doomed for disaster unless there was and is help from outside of us (the human sphere).

Yet, we have hope and thank God, it was and is through what God has done and is doing through Jesus Christ our Lord. Hence, the trend of things is rightly represented in the words of Apostle Paul; “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God-through Jesus Christ our Lord!” Rom 7: 24, 25a.

Jesus Christ was in fact that promised Messiah depicted in the following words right there and then when sin first entered; “And I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise His heel” Gen 3:15. This was the gospel in a nutshell and thank God fully realized when Jesus Christ came, lived, died, rose again and went to heaven to carry on the ministry in the heavenly sanctuary and will come back to take us home. Christ in fact was ‘the Lamb slain from the foundation of the

⁶ “And Adam called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all living.” Gen 3: 20. Hence, we all came from them-Eve and Adam.

world” Rev 13:8. Christ was the reason this world came into existence; “All things were made through Him and without Him nothing was made that was made” John 1:3.

In fact, statements like these depict the fact that heaven already foresaw the entrance of sin and fall of mankind and a commitment was made that Jesus was to come and die. Hence, the creation. Therefore, Christ is rightly called ‘the lamb slain from the foundation of the world.’ In this light, Jesus coming to die to redeem us wasn’t an afterthought but is something that already existed in the mind of the infinite God.

As we have already seen, mankind and God dwelled together as a community but after sin, God “sent him out of the garden of Eden...so He drove out the man and He placed a cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden” Gen 3: 23, 24. That community and union was broken and distorted. However, because God was still interested in His children, He devised a plan to make His presence felt among His people. Hence, He directs Moses; “Let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them” Exod 25:8. The concept of the Church is seen here in God wanting them to make Him a sanctuary in which to dwell in as well as the broader act of God calling out His people from slavery in Egypt.

In fact, in redeeming His people from slavery in Egypt, God told them this; “Now, therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people, for all the earth is Mine (for he created the whole earth and its inhabitants). And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” Exod 19:5, 6a.

God saved the Old Testament Church and gave them a mission to be the instrument by which He will save the rest of the world. Hence, we see both the ecclesiological and missiological aspects coming out, giving rise to the concept of true discipleship also. God was in the business of saving the entire human race. In that plan, He chose the Jewish nation to be

instruments of making this happen. However, as we all know, Israel failed to live to the calling for which God called them⁷, He then has transferred that function to the Christian Church as depicted here; “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” 1 Peter 2:9. This fit well with the New Testament Church’s definition and understanding of the Church and its mission. The Church was defined as the ‘Ekklesia’ or the ‘called out’ ones. As God called Israel out of Egypt so in the New Testament understanding, God calls His people out from ‘darkness’ into His marvelous light’ 1 Peter 2:9. Hence, ‘ekklesia’ (ecclesia) referred to a church or congregation.⁸

It was to the Church that Christ, the Head of the Church gave the great gospel commission as recorded in Matthew 28:19-20; ‘And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.” The Church's number one responsibility is to make disciples.

In summing up this segment, it is heartwarming to note that God has enlisted His Church that primarily are humans like you and me that make up the corporate entity the Christian Church. Hence, first and foremost, the Church has always been the person before the organization. It is the individual members working that make up the corporate organization termed also as Church. Hopefully, we do not get to fail God as the Children of Israel did. Christian Church leaders play an equally important role to inspire and lead in this work.

⁷ The parable of the Wicked Vinedressers in Luke 21:33-44 is a good summary of how when the nation of Israel finally failed to live to the challenge God called them to, He now transfers that responsibility to the Christian Church; “Therefore, I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you (that is Israel) and given to a nation (the Christian Church) bearing the fruits of it.”

⁸ <https://www.thefreedictionary.com/Ekklesia> accessed April 27th 2020.

Where Do We Go From Here? (Future)

It is implicitly clear that God who created the entire human race in the first place “is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” 2 Peter 3:9b. Hence, in the light of what has been discussed in the above segments, Christian Formation and Discipleship is all about responding to this desire of our Creator God. Hence, Christian Formation is all about resorting back to the original, about restoring back to God's children that long lost image and likeness of God. However, it is imperative to understand and to also acknowledge that this work is a work in progress and is fully attainable only through the working of the Holy Spirit with willingness on our part. As Ellen White said; “Christ changes the heart. He abides in your heart by faith. You are to maintain this connection with Christ by faith and the continual surrender of your will to Him; and so long as you do this, He will work in you to will and to do according to His good pleasure.”⁹

That is why, this grandeur work of Christian Formation as Willard said; “is no human attainment but is finally a gift of grace”¹⁰ from God. Hence, Christian spiritual formation is focused entirely on Jesus. Its goal is an obedience or conformity to Christ that arises out of an inner transformation accomplished through purposive interaction with the grace of God in Christ.”¹¹ This means God is willing to do this work for us and we must be willing to allow Him to begin His work in us through His Holy Spirit. Wherefore, this final segment is all about us doing our part. This is where it necessitates for a plan, a plan to help facilitate for Christian Formation and Discipleship.

The reality is that we are all in this valley of decision and we have to make a decision one time or the other as we have been challenged; “Choose you this day whom you will serve” and

⁹ Ellen White, *Steps To Christ*, (Nampa: Pacific Press, 2017), 62-3.

¹⁰ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 23.

¹¹ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 22.

“Today, if you hear His voice, harden not your hearts’ Josh 24:15; Heb. 3:15. Hence, in the Bible, the ‘heart’ is used often used interchangeably for the ‘mind’ as can be seeing in the following two texts; “Keep your heart with all diligence for out of it spring the issues of life” Proverbs 4:23 and

this from the New Testament; “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is good and acceptable and perfect will of God” Romans 12:2. As strongly visible in the afore two texts, the human mind plays an important role in the pursuit for Christian Formation ‘for as he thinks in his heart, so is he.’ Proverbs 23:7a. If we can by the grace of God bring everything in our mind under the control of the Holy Spirit, it will affect all our words and actions.

The devil knows that if he can take hold of the mind, the battle is over, therefore our minds become the very assert for which good and evil are competing to take control. It is in this space that we come in and the decisions we make determines who wins the battle. Therefore, the decisions we make are extremely crucial, as there are a matter of life or death. If only everyone can come to a fuller realization of this, I assume, many would be saved from eternal ruin. In the words of Willard; “He (Jesus) saves us (human being) by realistic restoration of our hearts to God and then by dwelling there with His Father through the distinctively divine Spirit. The heart thus renovated and inhabited is the only real hope of humanity on earth.”¹²

The question is, how can fallen human beings restore likeness and image of God? Interestingly, scripture has record of the questions been asked along this line of thought by people; ‘Now when they heard *this*, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?”¹³ Acts 2:37.

¹² Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 18.

¹³ The same question was asked again by the jailer in Philippi; “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” Acts 16:30.

The following plan for Spiritual Formation may help answer this question in getting to accomplish restoring the lost image and likeness of God in His people. While this may be a work in progress that can only be consummated at the second coming of Jesus Christ, it is worth helping in the process before Jesus comes back. Until that Day, God will richly bless us as we follow through. It is working for me and I am highly confident it will work for you.

Spiritual Formation and Discipleship Plan

In response to the question (of what shall we do?), Peter said to them; “Repent therefore and be converted so that your sins may be blotted out.” Acts 3:19. The very first act on the part of one is to repent and confess all our sins. The assurance is there; “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from all our unrighteousness” 1 John 1:9. In fact, confessing sins is to be an ongoing activity as long as we live on planet earth. This is our Christian responsibility number one in this journey of Christian (Spiritual) Reformation.

The next step is in line with what Jesus Himself said to Nicodemus; “Most assuredly I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” John 3: 3. Hence, being born again is necessary to the spiritual life, this whole journey of Spiritual Formation. The question then is as Nicodemus asked; “How can anyone be born again?” John 3: 4 paraphrased. The answer to this question is found in the following admonition by Peter. Peter said; “having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever” 1 Peter 1:23. According to this, one is born again through the word of God. Therefore, the admonition is to; “as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word that you may grow thereby” 1 Peter 2:2. Again, the word of God not only creates the new life by facilitating one to be ‘born again’ but also sustains this new life. Consequently, the word of God

is supposed to be taken daily for our daily sustenance (Read Matthew 6:11). Hence, with bible study as our ‘daily bread’, prayer stands as breath of the soul,¹⁴the oxygen to our spiritual life.

However, more importantly, the Bible and study of it is not an end in itself but a means to an end. In fact, the written word should lead us to the Living Word. Hence, through bible study, one should have an encounter with Jesus of the Bible as Christ lamented; “You search the scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life” John 5:39, 40. This means, one can be studying the Bible and not necessarily know Christ. Hence, prayer and bible study are very important in our pursuit of Jesus and Spiritual Formation.

Therefore, as one comes to read the Bible and comes into contact with Jesus of the Bible, and feels the conviction, and realizes is not yet baptized, baptism becomes a necessity. Baptism becomes the doorway to the body of Christ which is the Church (Read 1 Cor 12:12-31). And it is through the organization of the church that we continue to work and support the mission of Christ to make more disciples for Him.

Just as God called the Children of Israel out of slavery in Egypt and brought them out and positioned them on the ‘land bridge’ connecting the major continents of the time, God has also called us out of darkness into His marvelous light and placed us where we are now so that we should show forth His praise (1 Peter 2:9). The reality is that many in PNG would struggle with dual allegiance and taking them thoroughly through a life journey of prayer and deeper study of God’s word can help build a solid Spiritual Reformation that is anchored in Christ, the Rock of ages and absolutely nothing will prevail against it. Hence, it is imperative to form a strong prayer and bible study habit. As Paul E. Miller confesses; “If we think we can do life on our own, we

¹⁴ Ellen White, *Gospel Workers*, (Idaho: Review and Herald, 1948), 254- 5.

will not take prayer seriously.”¹⁵ However, continued commitment to bible study and prayer life as well as engagement in the church supporting ministries go a long way in keeping the flames of faith alive. Hence, a definite change will be seen in the character, the habits, and the pursuits. The contrast will be clear and decided between what they have been and what they are.¹⁶

The Way Forward: Thirteen Weeks Plan

The books that were recommended for me to read for this class were in fact life changing books. When I got convinced that this class was not just about theory but rather, more so about my own spiritual journey, I seriously devised this thirteen-week plan for Spiritual Formation and Discipleship. I started the journey one Tuesday which was February 04th, 2020 and will terminate next Tuesday, May 05th, 2020 after which I will revise and devise the next step. It is always a work in progress. This is the twelfth week in this thirteen-week plan and I am almost there.

Prayer and Fasting

For the next thirteen weeks, I will pray and fast every Tuesday and Thursday. Every Tuesday will be a whole day fasting (that is from six in the morning to six in the evening) while every Thursdays will be half day fasting. However, during the fasting, I will have special prayers every 6:00am, 12:00 pm and 6:00pm. I have asked my wife and a few of my PNG colleagues in the seminary, especially the Papua New Guinea students to join me. In fact, we are all enjoying it and there’s so much testimony to share by everyone.

During prayer, carry out the various techniques Miller recommended like praying for only His (God’s) will in every aspect of life. Prayer for change in my own personal life before

¹⁵ Paul E. Miller, *A Praying Life*, (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2009), 47.

¹⁶ White, *Steps To Christ*, 57.

expecting God to change my spouse and children. More so, prayer for change of heart and especially in the church leaders at all levels of leadership. And also prayer for the Later rain Spirit that when the time of refreshing shall come from the Lord, that we as a church do not miss this.

Bible Study

I will strive by God's grace to spend at least an hour every morning from 5:00am to 6:00am for bible study. I will spend this time studying the book of Revelation and write a journal of every study and discoveries I make. I will also encourage our PNG group as well as my wife to commit to bible study every morning. Now, with the lockdown, it gives us every reason to be spending enough time with God through prayer and bible study. Jesus did challenge His disciples if they could spend an hour with Him in prayer; "What? Could you not watch with Me an hour?" Matt 26:40. In fact, while being busy may be good, being busy at the expense of quality time with God is the greatest enemy to a good and vibrant spiritual life. Keeping one very busy was the very strategy the devil used during the time of Israel's slavery in Egypt and is still is the strategy he uses to get many of God's people away from spending time with God and bible study (Read Exodus 5:8,9¹⁷).

Some Kind of Ministry

The PNG students here at the Seminary have started a Facebook livestream ministry that is involved in preaching the word of God in the PNG vernacular (English Pidgin). Keep this going and also do extra preaching on Facebook especially every Friday morning and evening

¹⁷ Especially Exodus 5:9; the devil through Pharaoh suggested the following; "Let more work be laid on the men that they may labor in it and let them not regard false words." This was after Moses had asked Pharaoh to let the Israelites go so that they can go and sacrifice to their God.

which will be Friday evening and Sabbath morning back home in PNG. In fact, during the lockdown, these are proving to be a medium of feeding God's people from the word.

These initiatives had now inspired still other friends to utilize many more in going into social media to reach God's people and also to nurture them especially through this lockdown periods both at home and abroad.

Evaluation and Recommendation

Hopefully, once the thirteen weeks are up, I will evaluate and make changes where need be and continue by God's grace. Hopefully, I will have gained much experience and insights from these thirteen weeks to be of more use to God and His course in my life.

However, from the experience, all I can say is that the last twelve weeks had been the best in my life especially in the light of the many discouraging moments I had been through in the last five or so years. I feel I have rediscovered my God and I am thankful first of all to God and also for this class. I believe it was God's way of making me take this route knowing I have missed Him and was only pretending not for days, not for weeks and months but for years. I can testify this has been an experience for me and I am sure, the plan to Spiritual Formation is the way forward for those who want an authentic relation with God. May His name be magnified.

Appendix

Some quotes from the readings done

Steps to Christ- Ellen G. White

Of the forty- five volumes, large and small that had come out from the pen of Ellen G. White, Steps to Christ is the most popular and one widely read (page 5). “Surely, He has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows. Yet, we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon Him and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord had laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet, He opened not His mouth. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent. So, He opened not His mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment.” Isaiah 53: 4-8.

Like Jacob of old, we are all sinners but praise God, this ladder that connects heaven with earth was and is through Christ.

God’s Love for Man:

“For the Love of God compels me”

Even before we knew Him, He loved us and gave Himself for us.”

That love-the love of God (eternal love Jeremiah 31:3) can be seen even in the created world-the nature too despite its fallen nature-still reflect the perfect love of God

“Though fallen, it is not all sorrow and misery. In nature itself are messages of hope and comfort.” God is love is written upon every opening bud, upon every spire of spring grass... Through the things of nature, and the deepest and tenderest earthly ties that human hearts can know, He has sought to reveal Himself to us. Yet, these but imperfectly represent His love.’ P. 10.

John 1:18; Matthew 11: 27; Jesus also reveals God to us for He knows God and has seen Him. “Jesus, the tender, pitying Savior, was God “manifest in the flesh” 1 Timothy 3:16. P. 12.

God so loved the world that He gave His only Son-John 3:16. “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself.” 2 Corinthians 5:19. Love paid the price of our redemption.’ P. 14.

The more we study the divine character in the light of the cross, the more we see mercy, tenderness, and forgiveness blended with equity and justice, and the more clearly we discern innumerable evidences of a love that is infinite and a tender pity surpassing a mother’s yearning sympathy for her wayward child.’ P. 15.

Through Christ, we see a revelation of who God really is;

The Sinner’s Need of Christ

When man first came out from the hand of his Creator, was perfect and in harmony with God. His thoughts were pure, his aims holy. But through disobedience, his powers were perverted, and selfishness took the place of love. His nature became so weakened through transgression that it was impossible for him, in his own strength to resist the power of evil.’ P. 17.

Whereas man at first could find joy in the presence of God, now, he finds it rather strange and wasn’t to hide from God (Gen. 3:). He could no longer find joy in communion with Him. The

sinner could not be happy in God's presence; he would shrink from the companionship of holy beings. P. 17.

'It is impossible for us, or ourselves to escape from the pit of sin in which we are sunken. Our hearts are evil and we cannot change them...Education, culture, the exercise of the will, human effort, all have their proper sphere, but here they are powerless.' P. 18.

Unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. we must be born again-John 3:3, 7. There is hope for us only in Christ. like Jacob running away after sinning, we may be on the run but again like him, there is this Jacob's ladder...upon whom is representative of Christ. Through Christ we are brought into fellowship with God again. "In giving up His Son, He has poured out to us all heaven in one gift." P. 21.

Repentance

Peter during Pentecost said thus to those who asked; "What shall we do?" "Repent and be converted so that your sins may be blotted out." Acts 3:19. What is repentance? There's a need to fully understand this-what it means to repent. "Repentance includes sorrow for sin and a turning away from it.' p. 23. People like Esau and Judas showed sorrow for what they did, but that does not mean the repentance the bible talks about. Matt. 27:4; I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood." Sometimes, they are fearful of the consequences more than anything. Prayer of David gives us some insights into genuine repentance; (see Psalms 51: 1-14). 'The sinner has a sense of the righteousness of Jehovah and feels the terror of appearing, in his own guilt and uncleanness, before the Searcher of hearts. He sees the love of God, the beauty of holiness, the joy of purity, he longs to be cleansed and the be restored to communion with heaven.' . p. 24. Such was David.

Repentance of such is hard to accomplish unless it is obtained only from Christ." p. 25. The invitation from Christ is that; "Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest (come just as you are)" Matt. 11:28; Luke 5:32: "I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance". For the Son of Man came to seek and save that which was lost." Luke 19:10. "We can do nothing for ourselves. We must come to Christ just as we are." P. 31.

'beware of procrastination. Do not put off the work of forsaking your sins and seeking purity of heart through Jesus. Here is where thousand upon thousand have erred to their eternal loss.' P. 32.

'What we do not overcome, will overcome us and work out our destruction.' P. 33.

'Even one wrong trait of character, one sinful desire, persistently cherished, will eventually neutralize all the power of the gospel... Christ is ready to set us free from sin, but He does not force the will; and if by persistent transgression the will itself is wholly bent on evil, and we do not desire to be set free, if we do not accept His grace, what more can He do? We have destroyed ourselves by our determined rejection of His love." P. 34.

"Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the time of salvation." "Today if you hear His voice, harden not your hearts'. 2 Cor. 6:2. Hebrews 3:7, 8.

Confession:

"He that covereth his sins shall not prosper but whoso confesseth and forsakes them shall have mercy." Proverbs 28:13. 'Confess your sins to God, who only can forgive them, and your faults to one another.' P. 37. 'Confession of sin, whether public or private, should be heartfelt and freely expressed... All confession should be definite and to the point, acknowledging the very

sins of which you are guilty.’ Example; 1 Samuel 12:19; “WE have added unto all our sins this evil, to ask us a king.” P. 38. We are not to play blame games as Eve and Adam. The promise is there; “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all of our unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:9.

Consecration

The whole heart must be yielded to God, or the change can never be wrought in us by which we are to be restored to His likeness. P43. Ye shall seek Me and find Me when ye shall search for Me with all your heart.” Jer. 29:13. We cannot on our own change ourselves so we need to give ourselves entirely to God and allow Him to work His work through the Holy Spirit.

Faith and Acceptance

You have confessed your sins, and in heart put them away. You have resolved to put them away. You have resolved to give yourself to God. now, go to Him and ask that He will wash away your sins and give you a new heart. And believe that He does this because He has promised. (Isaiah 1:18; “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” ; Eze. 36:26- ‘A new heart will I also give you and a new Spirit will I put in you)’ P. 50.

“I believe it; it is so, not because I feel it, but because God has promised.” P. 51.

The Test of Discipleship

Once we come to Christ, we are a new creation, behold the old has passed and we are new-read 2 Cor. 5:17. “A change will be seen in the character, the habits, the pursuits. The contrast will be clear and decided between what they have been and what they are.” P. 57. ‘They will no longer fashion themselves according to the former lusts but by the faith of the Son of God they will follow His steps, reflect His character, and purify themselves even as He is pure.’ P. 58.

‘There is no evidence of genuine repentance unless it works reformation.’ P. 59. Faith without works is death See James 2:17. By their fruits you shall know them. John

‘Then with Christ working in you, you will manifest the same spirit and do the same good works of righteousness, obedience.’ P. 63.

Christ changes the heart. He abides in your heart by faith. You are to maintain this connection with Christ by faith and the continual surrender of your will to Him; and so long as you do this, He will work in you to will and to do according to His good pleasure.’ P. 62, 63. Whenever we fail, we must never give up but continue to depend on Him ever trusting in His promise. He that began a good work in us will carry it to the day of Christ. pg. 64.

Growing up into Christ

1 Peter 2:2; as newborn babies we have to grow up in Christ. John 15:4, 5-no more can we unless we abide in Christ. Apart from Him you have no life. ...’He is not only the Author, but the finisher of our faith. It is Christ first and last and always.’ P. 69.

It is by loving Him, copying Him, depending wholly upon Him, that you are to be transformed into His likeness.’ P. 71. Christ dwelling in His disciples shone out and people ‘took note of them that they had been with Jesus.’ Acts 4:13.

A Praying Life: Paul E. Miller

Ashley: “What good does it do? I prayed for Kim to speak and she isn’t speaking.” There’s this spiritual weariness that develops in us when heartfelt prayer goes unanswered. We keep our

doubts hidden even from ourselves because we do not want to sound like bad Christians... Our hearts shut down.p2.

Many who say, "I'll lift you up in prayer; I'll remember you in prayer" never get around to praying. Because many don't think prayer makes much difference.

Because of all these, we easily give up praying when we have started...

Our natural desire to pray comes from creation. Our inability to pray comes from the fall. As much as we want to pray, it just doesn't make any sense. We then give up thinking we ain't any good. We feel as though something could be wrong with us.

Obstacles to prayer:

I pray all the timebut with no focused time of prayer

Busyness- If you are not praying than time, money, talent are all you need in life-you feel no need for God. But realizing like Jesus you can't do life without God, helps you to come to God always in prayer. Act of prayer means you have to rely more on God. Page 37

Take baby steps-five minutes, ten then to twenty thirty minutes etc.

Prayer is an expression of who we are...we are a living incompleteness. We are a gap, an emptiness that calls for fulfillment. Prayer works because we are helpless. 43.

Our weaknesses are doors to God's grace. Matured Christians appear to prayer more because they have a greater view of their own futile sense of helplessness as opposed to less matured Christians who have a less view of their own need of their helplessness and so Christ ...45

My prayer journal life reflects both my inability to change my kids and my ability to change my kids and my inability to change my self-confidence. That's why I need grace even to pray. Speak less to the kids and more to God (about the kids and their need to change). If we think we can do life on our own, we will not take prayer seriously. Our failure to prayer will always feel like something else- 47

When something is important to us, we make room for it. Jesus must not be just and add 48

Don't underestimate kids. Let them learn to pray to their heavenly Father. I must make room for kids to prayer...during family worships from now on...48,49

Be quiet-find my rest in God. Interrupting, selling and boasting are a few things that got me into continuous prayer. Be in a childlike prayer depending ever on God. 52. Make a list of things that can make us be in a position of prayer more when we are in a group discussion or projectwhen others talk too much. When others get out of point etc. these should drive us into a praying life. Continuous crying out to God our heavenly Father must become a habit. 52.

We cry out 'Abba Father'- interestingly, the first recorded sentence of Jesus at age twelve; Did you know that I must be about My Father's business?" Luke 2:49. First word prodigal son used when returning home, first word of the Lord's prayer, first word of Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane and of course Jesus' last word too (Luke 23:46). ...53

Make short bullet prayers,,, father, help me.... Two and three word prayers... more in the Psalms..

Plan:

Remember always that mankind came from the hand of God so do I. We came from God and to God we are going.

Mankind was created perfect in the very image of God. However, sin that came as a result of disobedience brought about misery we now can see and experience all around us.

Ask God for the minutest to the biggest things. Don't only ask Him for the big things. Also be willing to share with a trusted friend your challenges. Also be the trusted friend to someone.

If you want your spouse to change, don't pray for her to change but pray that God will change you first.

Sin is complex, that is why we always have to pray. It is often sin versus sin. Therefore it pays to hold your patience at all times.

A Praying Life: Paul E. Miller

Prayer is private and personal, not public and real. P. 91.

To teach us to pray, Jesus told stories of weak people who knew they couldn't do life on their own. The persistent widow and the friend at midnight get access, not because they are strong but because they are desperate. Learned desperation is at the heart of a praying life. P. 98.

God is your financial advisor. 127.

Don't use spirituality as a means of getting power and glory. Jesus closes the door to getting your identity from your own righteousness. P. 140.

A Work of the Heart: Reggie McNeal

Spiritual leaders find Moses especially engaging. Page 3

Moses experienced what all leaders ultimately fear-rejection by the people they are called to lead. Moses was a child of two cultures, who never completely belonged to either. P. 7.

You may think you have lost your position or platform or power, but if you pursue your call, you can still be a player. P. 9.

We are not born into a vacuum. We enter the world into a stream of the human family and human experience. Language, race, geography. Demography, and economics status all influence and shape the world we live in and define our connectedness to it and our distinctiveness from it. p. 73

In the area of love, it is tough to lead others where you have not been. P. 124.

Renovation of the Heart: Dallas Willard

He saves us by realistic restoration of our hearts to God and then by dwelling there with His Father through the distinctively divine Spirit. The heart thus renovated and inhabited is the only real hope of humanity on earth. All human beings can now live the life of the renovated heart by nourishing ourselves constantly in His personal presence. P. 18.

The outer life of an individual becomes a natural expression of the character and teaching of Jesus. P. 22

But Christlikeness of the inner being is not human attainment. It is, finally, a gift of grace. P. 23

Everything we do counts for eternity and is preserved there. P. 41.

Giving is more joyous than receiving not because it is a deprivation but because in the act of giving lies the expression of my aliveness. P. 69.

Vision of the kingdom is the place we must start. P. 86.

Spiritual formation in Christ moves toward a total interchange of our ideas and images for his. P. 102.

Often they cannot distinguish between their feelings and their will and in their confusion, they also quite commonly take feelings to be reasons. ... self-control is the steady capacity to direct yourself to accomplish what you have chosen or decided to do and be even though you don't feel like it.. p. 127.

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