

Christian Spirituality 101: Spiritual Formation and Devotional Intimacy

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"My soul is like a house, small for you to enter, but I pray you to enlarge it. It is in ruins, but I ask you to remake it."

Augustine

Christian Spirituality 101

Study 1: True Transformation

I. Call to Transformed Living

A. 2 Peter 1:3-4

“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”

B. Perpetua

C. Francis of Assisi

D. Ephesians 4:17, 24

“So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do...You were taught...to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness”

II. Static and Dynamic Holiness

A. Static Holiness

1. I focus on _____.
2. James 3:2

A. Dynamic Holiness

1. David

“I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.” (Acts 13:22)

2. Jesus

“I have brought you glory on earth *by completing the work you gave me to do.*” (John 17:4)

3. Paul

“I have not been disobedient to the vision given me from heaven.” (Acts 26:19)

III. Environmental Influences

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

1. What does it mean in 2 Peter 1:3-4 that, “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.”
2. What desires do the lives of past Christians like Perpetua and Francis of Assisi inspire? What is it about these believers that we should seek to emulate today? Whose example were they following?
3. What is the difference between static and dynamic holiness? Where do you focus most of your time and energy? Does this need to change?
4. Why should the Christian life not be solely focused on what we should “not” do?

Study 2: Full Bodied Faith

I. The Cultural View of the Body

A. An Obsession with Physical Beauty

B. The Adonis Complex

C. The Barbie and G. I. Joe Distortion

II. The Christian View of the Body

A. Creation

B. Incarnation

C. Ascension

D. Renewed Bodies

1. Prophesied in the Old Testament (Isaiah 32:4)
2. Fulfilled by Jesus in the New Testament (Matthew 13:13-16)

These Scripture show that the gracious influences to which the saint are subject, and the effects of Gods Spirit which they experience are entirely beyond nature or natural qualification. They are not just different in degree. They are different in kind. The result is a new kind of inward perception, which sanctifies the mind. It is a new way of perceiving, of thinking, of consciousness. It is operated by grace as an entirely new kind of principle."

~Jonathan Edwards

3. Taught by the Church (Romans 12:1-2; Acts 28:26-27)

4. Jesus came in the flesh as a representative of how glorious and powerful a fleshly person can be.

a. Spoke words never uttered before

b. Hands healed like never before

c. Confounded the wisdom of the Pharisees

d. Cared for those others would not

III. Application

A. For the Young

1. How do I change my heart?

2. Worshipping with our bodies

B. For the Old

1. Our culture's view of age

2. God's view of age

3. Madam Guyon

IV. God Oases

A. Isaiah 32:2

“Each man will be like a shelter from the wind and a refuge from the storm, like streams of water in the desert, and the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land”

B. Our Calling

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

1. How is the cultural view of the body today a distortion of God’s view? What effect does this have on the believer?
2. How is the hope of a “renewed body” a present reality and not merely an eschatological one? How should the Christians possession of a “renewed body” impact their life?
3. What does it mean to be a God Oases? What needs to change in order for me to be a better Oases for other?

Study 3: Sacred Pathways

I. An Invitation Turned into an Obligation

A. The Meaning of "Devotion" Today

B. Why has the invitation turned into obligation?

1. The answer is not in "who"
2. The answer is in "how"

II. Different Strokes for Different Folks

A. Marriage

B. Parenting

C. Scripture

1. Abraham
2. David
3. Solomon
4. Mary

D. Worshipping God in Different Ways

III. Unleashing the Power of Desire

A. Not Just Discipline

B. Enjoying Exercise

C. The Inadequacy of Guilt

D. Don't Fear Desire

IV. The Nine Sacred Pathways

A. Naturalists: Loving God Out of Doors

B. Sensates: Loving God with the Senses

C. Traditionalists: Loving God through Ritual and Symbol

D. Ascetics: Loving God in Solitude and Simplicity

E. Activists: Loving God through Confrontation

F. Caregivers: Loving God by Loving Others

G. Enthusiasts: Loving God with Mystery and Celebration

H. Contemplatives: Loving God through Adoration

I. Intellectuals: Loving God with the Mind

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

1. What is the difference between an invitation and an obligation? Why has spending time with the Lord become more obligation driven than desire driven?
2. Why is it important to understand that not everyone responds to God in the same way? Do you think God intended for man to respond in a specific way? Why?
3. How is discipline and desire to be mingled? What do I do when I do not “desire” the Lord?
4. Of the Nine Sacred Pathways, which one best describes you? How should you relate to others who respond in different ways? What place does the Word of God have in your pathway?
5. Does adherence to a specific pathway nullify other ways of worship, such as church gatherings or discipleship groups? Why? Why not?

Study 4: Spiritual Formation – Three Paths to Growth

A. I. Practicing the Virtues

A. Humility (1 Peter 5:5; Proverbs 3:34; James 4:6)

B. Gentleness

1. First Century Practice (1 Thessalonians 2:7)

2. Jesus as Our Example
 - a. Predicted (Matthew 21:5; Zechariah 9:9)

 - b. Affirmed (Matthew 11:29)

 - c. Remembered (2 Corinthians 10:1)

 - d. Modeled (Isaiah 42:3)

3. Why doesn't our culture think of God in this way?

“[Gentleness] may well be called the Christian spirit. It is the distinguishing disposition in the hearts of Christians to be identified as Christians...All who are truly godly and are real disciples of Christ have a gentle spirit in them.”

Jonathan Edwards

C. Surrender/Sacrifice (Acts 2:44-45)

D. Thanksgiving (1 Kings 17:7-24; Psalm 100:4; Colossians 2:6-7)

II. The Path of Difficulty and Suffering

A. Mike Dittman

B. Scriptural Witness (James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 1:6; Romans 5:3-5a)

C. Our Attitude toward God

III. Practicing the Spiritual Disciplines

A. Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*

“The spiritual disciplines are those personal and corporate disciplines that promote spiritual growth. They are the habits of devotion and experiential Christianity that have been practiced by the people of God since biblical times.”

B. Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*

“We become like Christ in character and in power and thus realize our highest ideals of well being and well doing. That is the heart of the New Testament message... We can, through faith and grace, become like Christ by practicing the types of activities he himself practiced in order to remain constantly at home in the fellowship of his Father.”

C. Don Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*

“We do not need to be hung on the horns of the dilemma of either human works or idleness. God has given us the disciplines of the spiritual life as a means of receiving His grace. The disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that He can transform us.”

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

1. What does Philippians 2:12-13 tell us about practicing spiritual virtues? What is my responsibility in my spiritual growth?
2. Of the four spiritual virtues given, which one do you feel is the most difficult for you? Which one do you feel you are doing well in? How does each one of these virtues reveal themselves in your life?
3. What is it about the pathway of difficulty and suffering that scares you the most? Would you gladly accept suffering if you knew it would benefit your spiritually? What would hold you back? What does this say about your view of God and his love for you?
4. Spend time meditating on Romans 8:31-39. Specifically focus on verse 32 and journal about what this verse means.

I. The Spiritual Challenge of Marriage

A. A Skewed View of Marriage

B. A Skewed View of Singleness

C. The Marriage Challenge

D. An Approach to Marriage

E. The Difficulty of Marriage

II. Discovering the Soul Building Aspect of Marriage

III. Becoming a God-Centered Spouse

A. A Spouse-Centered Spouse

B. A God-Centered Spouse

C. Illustrations

IV. The Soul Building Aspects of Parenting

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

1. Has marriage been harder than you thought it would be? Why?
2. What have you learned about yourself because you have been married? What has been your response to the things you have learned?
3. What have you learned about how Christ loved the church from your marriage?
4. Do you actively look for the ways in which God is trying to grow you into his likeness using your marriage? Knowing that God is using marriage and parenting to shape you, how should this affect your response to adversity in family life?

5. What will it take for you to become more of a God-Centered spouse than a Spouse-Centered spouse? Even if your spouse does not respond, what is your responsibility?

Study 6: Historical Overview of Christian Spirituality

I. Traditions

A. Contemplative

B. Holiness

C. Charismatic

D. Social Justice

E. Evangelical

F. Incarnational/Sacramental

II. Historical Expressions

A. The Desert Fathers

1. Historical Background
2. St. Antony
3. Characteristics:
 - a. Asceticism
 - b. Sleep Deprivation
 - c. Solitude
 - d. Self-mortification
 - e. Fasting
3. Leaders: Antony, Clement of Alexandria, Origen

B. The Eastern Tradition

1. Background
2. Characteristics:
 - a. The Unknowability of God
 - b. The Primacy of Spiritual Experience
 - c. Icons
 - d. Jesus Prayer (Hesychasm)
 - e. Salvation as Deification
3. Leaders: Athanasius, Gregory Nazianzen, John of Damascus

C. Monastic Living

1. Embodying the Teachings of Christ
2. The Three Vows:
 - a. Poverty – Materialism
 - b. Chastity – Lust
 - c. Obedience – Pride
3. Leaders: Basil the Great, Benedict

D. Contemplative Prayer (Mysticism)

1. Problems in the Monasteries

2. Reform Movements
 - a. Bernard of Clairvaux (Cistercians)

 - b. Francis of Assisi (Franciscans)

 - c. Teresa of Avila & John of the Cross

E. Puritan Spirituality

1. Background

2. Justification and Sanctification

3. The Two Aspects of Sanctification
 - a. Positional – declared righteous in Christ

 - b. Experiential – personal growth

4. Characteristics
 - a. God-centeredness

 - b. Emphasis on family

F. Pentecostal/Charismatic Movement

1. Background
2. Characteristics
 - a. Speaking in tongues
 - b. Special empowering of the Spirit

III. Reading the Classics

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

1. What lessons can we learn from some of these early church Fathers?
2. Of the books Gary listed, which one would you like to begin reading to challenge yourself?