

## Reflections on Spiritual Formation



What do you think of when you hear the words ‘spiritual formation’? Do you hear the good news that this term communicates? Our heavenly Father cares about our lives and journeys. Jesus walks with us inviting us into an ever deepening relationship of love and trust. The Holy Spirit is at work within us to make us more like Christ. Life-giving change is possible!

It is hard to define spiritual formation in a few sentences. This reflection paper is meant to be a starting point, not the whole picture. It is an invitation to engage with God’s Word and your lives in order to grow in your understanding of spiritual formation. Please do not just read through this paper; take the time to prayerfully reflect on the Bible passages and questions provided. Alone or with others.

Before you read on, take a moment to write down some of the thoughts and Bible passages that come to your mind when you think of spiritual formation...

At the heart of spiritual formation, we do not find expectations or activities, but relationships. We find a living and growing relationship with the Triune God working itself out in our communities and in our daily lives. God is the main actor in this relationship – his love, his words, his power – they are decisive. We cannot change ourselves; the Holy Spirit changes us. And yet, we are not passive in the process, but active participants. As we think about this process, let’s remember that it is both individual and communal. It is not only about me and my life, but also about us and who we are becoming in community and as communities.

Listen to some Scripture passages that talk about God’s formative work in our lives. What can you learn from them about spiritual formation?

Please read and reflect on: Romans 8:28-30; Romans 12:1-2, 2. Cor. 3:17-18; Gal. 4:19-20.

Notes...

When looking at Galatians 4, did you realize that Paul is concerned about the spiritual formation of others? He invests himself at great cost (like pains of childbirth) to see others grow up in Christ. God uses us for his formative work in each others lives.

Let us be available for God to use us in the lives of others. It is a gift and privilege to have God work *through us* in this way. As long as we also allow God to work *in us*. Sometimes we are so focused on what God is doing through us that we miss out on his work in us. We can be active serving God and not realize that our relationship with Christ is no longer living and growing. We can be busy for God and not realize that we need God's healing and formative touch in the depths of our lives. As you read on, I invite you to prayerfully hold out your life to Christ. Let's not only think about spiritual formation, but open ourselves for it to happen.

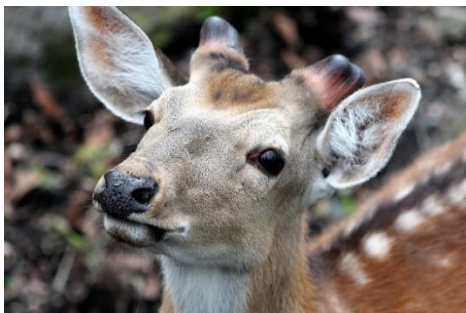
Scripture is full of rich imagery that shows us different aspects of spiritual formation:



***O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hands. (Isaiah 64:8)***

God wants to form us; he is in the process of doing so – even if it means making his hands dirty. He does so in a very intimate way; the potter is never closer to the clay than when he is forming it.

We cannot form ourselves, but we can invite God's touch in our lives, even in those places we would prefer to hide or control.



***„Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live.” (Isaiah 55:3)***

God is a God who speaks words of life; therefore the call to listen to him repeats itself throughout Scripture.

In order to listen, we need to be attentive. In order to listen, we need to stop doing and producing something ourselves. In the process of spiritual formation, we are called to the paradoxical work of waiting and receiving.

And then we need to decide how we will respond to what we hear. God's call to listen is always also a call to trust and obey.



***“In Jesus, you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.” (Ephesians 2:27)***

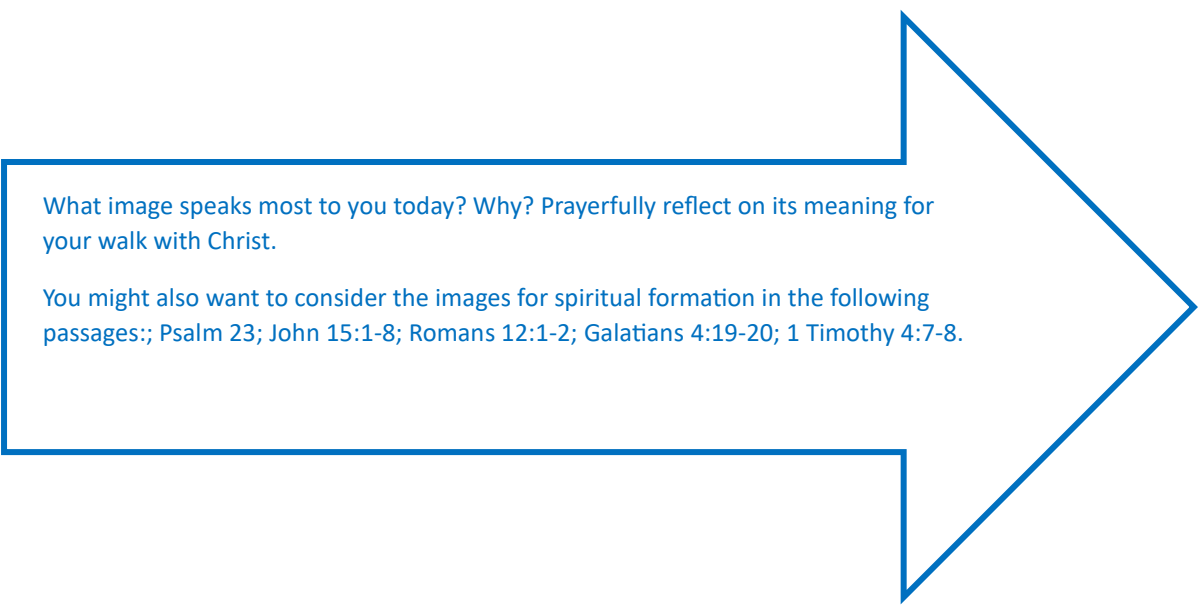
We are being built into something that is bigger than our own lives. God gives us a place in the community of believers; together we become a 'building' where others can meet the living God.

God is not only forming us for our own sake, but also for the sake of the world. So that his presence becomes visible.



***“God will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge.” (Psalm 91:4a)***

God is our refuge in the midst of uncertainty and challenges, pain and failure. Whatever is happening around us or in us, we can come home to God. We have a place where we can be honest before God and ourselves, leaving behind all masks. Here we can dare to be vulnerable as we put our trust in God's grace, goodness and faithfulness. As we shelter ourselves in God, something happens in our lives – we are changed.



What image speaks most to you today? Why? Prayerfully reflect on its meaning for your walk with Christ.

You might also want to consider the images for spiritual formation in the following passages:; Psalm 23; John 15:1-8; Romans 12:1-2; Galatians 4:19-20; 1 Timothy 4:7-8.

Spiritual Formation plays itself out in the midst of our lives. We are constantly being formed in some way or another – through relationships, experiences, our work, our culture, etc.. God can use everything to draw us closer to himself. By his grace, even suffering can lead to beauty of character (see Romans 5:1-5). God is present and at work in the realities of our lives.

And so, spiritual formation also involves looking at our lives. With a desire to discover God's fingerprints on our way. With an openness to learn from experiences. With the expectation that God is present everywhere. On this basis, we can have hope for our lives and communities.

Set aside at least one hour to look at your life story in light of spiritual formation:

\_Draw your life as a journey over time. What context, people, experiences etc. played a key role in shaping you? Reflect on this and try to name 5-7 formative elements in your life (they don't only have to be positive). Add some key words to your drawing.

\_As you look at your life, where do you see God at work drawing you to Christ and shaping your life? Add this to your drawing with a heart of thankfulness.

\_As you look at your life, what would you say needs unforming? Talk about this with Jesus. Ask him to change you and show you next steps.

\_What patterns of fellowship with the Triune God help shape this phase of your life? (For a deeper reflection on this question, [see Life-Giving Rhythms.](#))

It is possible to reflect on these questions for your personal life, but also with regard to a community e.g. an IFES movement, a student group, a church community, etc.

*"God's divine power has given us everything needed for life and godliness." (2 Peter 1:3). God gives enough. From him, we receive all we need. And so we continue on our journeys with him and one another... learning to trust his good work in our lives.*