

The Roadmap for the Journey (2/4)

Being Conformed
(*The Nature of Spiritual Formation*)
(Rom. 12:1-2; Mat. 4:1-11)

Rev. David G. Bostick
08/01/10

Introduction: *Spiritual Formation*

In his book, *Invitation to a Journey*, Robert Mulholland says that...

"Spiritual formation is a process of being conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others." (3)

There are four aspects of Spiritual formation:

1. It is a process
2. It is being conformed
3. Conformed to the image of Christ
4. For the sake of others

The word formation in the phrase *Spiritual Formation* mandates that something must be happening. Our spiritual life is not stagnant.

When a child is young, there are many things that parents look at to see proper development.

- Do they have all their fingers and toes
- Are they breathing and eating properly
- Are they going to sleep all night tonight
- Are those that I have to leave them with, going to properly take care of them

There are all kinds of charts that show normal boundaries of growth patterns in the physical and mental development of children. Parents regularly take their children to the doctor to be measured, weighed and evaluated.

The doctor compares the Child's development to normal standards, and if the child is outside of those standards, a process of evaluation is started to see if there is something wrong with the child.

For example, on a website called, *Ask Dr. Sears*, I found some of this information:

- Weight gain of 4-7 ounces a week during the first month
- An average of 1-2 pounds per month for the first six months
- An average of one pound per month **from** six months to one year
- Babies usually grow in length by about an inch a month during the first six months, and around one-half inch a month **from** six months to one year.

(<http://www.askdrsears.com/html/2/t023600.asp>)

The list could become very long couldn't it? One of the things that I think all loving parents are concerned about is the physical and mental development of their children.

That's why so much of the New Testament is devoted to our spiritual development. That development, or spiritual formation, is important to God, our Heavenly father who loves us.

The first step in spiritual formation is recognizing progress, which we talked about two weeks ago.

The second step is being conformed.

I. Being Conformed

Being conformed is not the same as conforming. Paul makes this clear in his letter to the church at Rome.

Romans 12 (NASB)

[1] Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

[2] And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Transformed:

The word transformed means to change into another form. It is the Greek word '*metamorphoo*' which comes from combining two Greek words. (2)

The first is '*meta*', which implies change. The second is '*morphe*', which means from. Combined they mean, 'to change from'. (2)

This is where our word metamorphosis comes from. We use it to describe the process of a caterpillar changing into a beautiful butterfly. How appropriate to describe the transformation that a sinner goes through in living life as a follower of Christ.

Notice that Paul does not say, "transform yourself". He says, "be transformed". This implies that the transformation comes from a power that the individual does not possess in themselves.

Paul is trying to tell the church at Rome, and you and I, that transformation is a work of God, not self. Our part is to present ourselves as living and holy sacrifices.

'Living sacrifice' implies a process of becoming something different. Something that is living is always changing. We make a commitment to change.

'Holy sacrifice' implies that we are surrendered to God's holy will. We are allowing Him to change us, to transform us, into His child, for His purpose, and by His will.

But, what about you and me in the 21st century? What does a living and holy sacrifice look like?

- It looks like a young mother struggling to leave her little baby in a daycare under the care of others because she has to go to work every day.
- It looks like a father trying to explain why it is important for his daughter to dress modestly.
- It looks like the employee who struggles to keep a loving spirit in a nasty work environment so that those around them can see the love of God.

- It looks like the teenager who struggles to avoid the temptations that are brought on by peer pressure.
- It looks like the retired person who wants to be active in a church that seems to be changing so fast that it is leaving them out in the cold.
- It looks like the pastor who struggles to discern between the priority of his calling from God and the demands of a parish that has a never-ending list of expectations to fulfill.

All of them are just people, living in the world like any other peer, but with one difference; they have surrendered their lives to God and they allow Him to be in charge.

They allow Him to transform their lives in spite of the mistakes they make or the circumstances they face.

That brings us to the next important aspect of being conformed - who's in control.

II. Control

Control seems to be the real issue in being conformed. Quoting Robert Mulholland again...

"We tend to see such (*self*) control as essential to the meaning, value, and purpose of our being. ...we live as though our doing determines our being.

"Spiritual formation is the great reversal: from being the subject who controls all other things to being a person who is shaped by the presence, purpose and power of God in all things.

"The doing is an outflow, the result, of being that exists in relationship with Jesus as Lord. So spiritual formation is not something that we do to ourselves, but something we allow God to do in us and for us as we yield ourselves to the work of God's transforming grace" (3)

Often we meet with failure in our spiritual formation because we fail to see that in our own strength we are trying to conform to what we think God wants. Instead, we need to allow Him to transform us. That's what Paul was trying to get across in His epistle to us.

III. Being and Doing

Too much of the time we live as though what we do in life determines our being or who we are. In fact, it is the value system of our culture. Our culture values a person, primarily for what they do; the nature of their work.

This is part of the reason for the high suicide rate among adolescents up to age 25. Then in 1987, it was discovered that the suicide rate among seniors was double that of adolescents. (3)

In a society that places such great value on what people do, there isn't much value or fulfillment in sitting in a rocking chair watching the endless hours pass, on the gold watch the company gave you because they didn't need you any more.

Not much value or fulfillment in bagging groceries or flipping burgers as you try to figure out who you are and where you are going to fit into society.

In our culture, the career of being a mother has been demoted to a meaningless, boring endeavor of mopping floors and changing diapers. But, forming and shaping the minds and spirits of children is the most important job on the face of our planet.

We live as though what we do in life determines our being or who we are. And, we let society dictate what is meaningful or menial.

This is what the temptations of Jesus in the wilderness were all about. In Matthew 3, Jesus is baptized. When He comes up out of the water, God says that Jesus is His Son, and He is pleased with Him.

Then Jesus is tempted. The devil tempted Jesus to conduct His ministry by His own power, strength and wisdom. The devil wanted Jesus to define His ministry by what He would do instead of being surrendered to God's will and plan.

Partnership:

Matthew 4 (NASB)

[1] Then Jesus was **led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted** by the devil.

Notice that the Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted or tested. Luke gives us a little more detail about the role the Holy Spirit played in Jesus' temptations. He says...

Luke 4:1-2a (NASB)

"Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was **led around by the Spirit in the wilderness** for forty days, being tempted by the devil."

The Holy Spirit did not lead Jesus into the wilderness and leave Him there to face the tempter alone. The Spirit was there going around with Him.

Luke wants us to know that Jesus was not left on His own to face the temptations of the devil.

Jesus was not left to do the work of resisting His temptations on His own strength and power. The Spirit of His Heavenly Father was right there with Him leading Him around.

Knowing that God would not leave His own Son alone to face the devil, do you think He would leave you and me on our own to resist the temptations of the devil?

Matthew 4 (NASB)

[2] And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. [3] And the tempter came and said to Him, "**If You are the Son of God**, command that these stones become bread."

Identity:

Look at the devil's statement: "**If You are the Son of God...**". The devil was trying to do two things that are common in almost all of his temptations.

He was trying to sow a seed of doubt. In this case he was trying to get Jesus to doubt who He was; the Son of God. Prove who You are, turn stones into bread to satisfy your natural God given hunger. Prove to me your IDENTITY!

Jesus' answer...

Matthew 4 (NASB)

[4] But He answered and said, "It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.'"

Jesus was saying my identity comes from God, not my power to turn stones into bread. God's words, His will, His plan, **shape** my identity in this life.

The devil did the same thing to Adam and Eve in the garden when he tempted them. He planted a seed of doubt about who they were.

You will not die as the Words of God have declared. Instead, you will become more like God; you will be able to make your own decisions about what is right or wrong for you. You can shape your own identity.

The devil is hard at work today in this same manner. He would have us prove our own identity by what we do.

We live as though what we do in life determines our being or who we are.

Matthew 4 (NASB)

[5] Then the devil took Him into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple,

[6] and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written, 'HE WILL COMMAND HIS ANGELS CONCERNING YOU'; and 'ON their HANDS THEY WILL BEAR YOU UP, SO THAT YOU WILL NOT STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE.'"

Control:

In the second temptation, the devil strikes out at the identity of Jesus in a way that questions the identity of who God is.

Again the words, "If You are the Son of God...". Throw yourself down, God will protect you. In other words, you control, or manipulate the circumstances of your life to prove who God is. As if God could not do that on His own.

By throwing Himself down, Jesus would be forcing the hand of God to keep a promise that He made to protect Jesus.

How often do we try to prove God and His favor in our lives by trying to get God to show us a sign or answer a prayer in a certain way?

Jesus will not conform to God in His own way; rather, He will be conformed by the word and plan of God.

Matthew 4 (NASB)

[7] Jesus said to him, "On the other hand, it is written, 'YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.'"

Paradise:

Then, as if the devil could think of nothing else, he tempts Jesus to obtain what would one day be His, in God's time and

by God's plan. The devil asks Jesus to bow down and worship him.

Matthew 4 (NASB)

[8] Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; [9] and he said to Him, "All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me."

Does this seem absurd to anyone else or is it just me? The devil is asking Jesus to fall down and worship him. At first this seems crazy.

But, think about this for a moment. The devil is trying to get Jesus to conform to God's plan, but by taking a shortcut. The appeal is to possessions; to have an earthly kingdom.

In our case, the devil would tempt us to have paradise on earth instead of following God's word and plan.

One of the things our culture assigns as giving a person value, identity, and worth in this life, are the possessions we are able to obtain.

I guess it's not so crazy to think that the devil can convince people that their possessions can give them value and meaning in life. After all, hasn't God promised us that we can have anything we ask for?

Matthew 4 (NASB)

[10] Then Jesus said to him, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY.'"

Jesus' response shows that, while we shall all one day have paradise, it is not what defines a person's value. Paradise does not give us meaning or identity. Paradise is not something to be grasped, but rather it is something that comes to us in the plan and timetable of Almighty God.

Our identity only comes when we realize that it is not what we do, or what we have that gives us meaning and value. Our identity comes in being conformed to God's will, plan and timetable.

One last important thing...

Relationship:

Matthew 4 (NASB)

[11] Then the devil left Him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to Him.

As the Spirit of God led Jesus through the wilderness and the temptations Jesus faced, He was there in the end when the devil left. God never leaves us or forsakes us for any reason.

Conclusion:

In Jesus response to every temptation, he was declaring that out of His being flowed conformity to the will and plan of God for His life and ministry here on earth.

But, what about you and me? What about the 21st century? What about our culture, our country, our church? What does being conformed look like?

Life Application:

Being conformed and allowing God to transform our lives takes two important things.

1. Recognize that we were created for God's pleasure and purpose. He made us in a special and unique way, to do a special thing in life.
2. We must make a decision that we are going to be who we were created to be by allowing God to use us in any way He chooses.

Chariots of Fire: (video clip)

Eric Liddell, "I believe God made me for a purpose. He also made me fast. I'm going to run for His pleasure."

In his life, there was the friction of those who thought his call to be a missionary should be his priority right away.

There was the pressure of his culture and nation to compete even though it was Sunday.

Resources:

1. NASB - New American Standard Bible (NASB). Cedar Rapids: Laridian, 2002.
2. CWS-NT - AMG Complete Word Study Dictionary - New Testament (CWS_NT). Cedar Rapids: Laridian Electronic Publishing, 2007.
3. Mulholland, M. Robert Jr., Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation, Downers Grove, Illinois, InterVarsity Press, 1993.

Final editing by Robyn Harper.