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CREATING A SPIRITUAL FORMATION MODEL AT
SHADOWBROOK CHURCH IN
SUWANEE, GEORGIA

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APPROVAL SHEET

CREATING A SPIRITUAL FORMATION MODEL AT
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I dedicate this project to the saints at Fellowship Bible Church, The Well Community Church, and Shadowbrook Church. Your engagement for the cause of Christ was instrumental in this project.

I also dedicate this to my wife, Jen, and our three boys. Without my first church, work in the other churches would have been meaningless, pursued out of selfish ambition, and fueled by neglect.

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PREFACE

This project was a culmination of my journey to Georgia and the first four years of ministry in the role of Lead Pastor at Shadowbrook Church. First, I want to thank my wife, Jen. Your support through this endeavor has been more than a small sacrifice. You have been my helper, friend, editor, and cheerleader. The countless hours you gave up so that I could read, write, and study are such an example of the service of Christ.

Second, I want to thank the financial supporters who literally made this journey possible. Without you, I could not have even started this process. Your support through prayer, money, encouragement, and support have proved invaluable.

Third, I want to thank Dr. Rick Taylor and the team at the Well Community Church for helping spiritual formation become more than an idea but a discipline. Dr. Taylor, there is not a person on this planet who has shaped me more than you have over the years. To Brad at the Well, thank you for modeling great leadership and fighting for the things that matter most in church.

Fourth, I want to thank my supervisor, Dr. Timothy Beougher, for his guidance in this project as he has become a trusted friend, counselor, and mentor. I also want to thank the professors at The Southern Theological Baptist Seminary. Thank you for your tireless pursuit of teaching the deep things in practical ways.

Finally, to the saints at Shadowbrook Church. My heart has wanted to see so much good come from this work and the Lord is doing it. We are better, stronger, more gospel centered, and increasingly committed to the work of Christ.

Jerrod Rumley

Suwanee, Georgia

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The mission of Shadowbrook Church is to live out the gospel as we gather and go. First and foremost, the gospel needs to drive what we seek to accomplish as a local church. It is imperative to have a thorough understanding of what the gospel is and what the gospel is not. As believers in the gospel, individuals will show themselves transformed over time. Sanctification is not an easy process and takes large amounts of focused time to let the new birth that has taken place grow and transform the new spiritual person. This transformation begins at two distinct levels. First, individuals need to have a *heart* that is submitted to God (Deut 6:1-5), and second, a desire to have their *minds* biblically formed (Rom 12:1-2).¹ The connection between the heart and mind can be traced throughout Scripture. Within these two spheres, spiritual formation occurs. For this reason, Shadowbrook Church seeks to develop a model of spiritual formation that affects the whole church and can serve as a necessary tool to carry on the mission of the church.

Context

Shadowbrook Church (SBC) in Suwanee, Georgia, began in the summer of 1982, as a result of a split with another Baptist church. The original charter members were passionate about pursuing their faith and reaching the lost. The church has only had three senior leaders to date and has a long history of stability with core families and staff. The second pastor was in his role for the longest period of the church's history and only recently decided to pursue a call to a church a county away. I began my service with the church in the spring of 2016, and immediately experienced a wide range of circumstances

¹ All Scripture references are the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

and experiences. The ministry environment is that of revitalization work, and over its thirty-five-year history, SBC has run through a typical church life cycle.²

By the end of the second pastor's tenure, SBC was in an identifiable moment of polarization, with some members wanting to grow and others wanting to stay the same. SBC had members who were expecting the church of the past to resurrect itself and members who were committed to a new chapter in the life of the church. This latter pocket of people hoped a new pastor and some fresh vision would usher the church into a new life cycle. One of the main ministry areas in which the church had become stale was spiritual formation or discipleship. SBC had long been committed to a Sunday school model with occasional Bible studies offered at different times. These environments had little change occur within them over their thirty-five-year history. The following sections look at the strengths and weaknesses of SBC, define which qualities are of most concern for the current leadership, and define one specific focus for development. Also described is the detailed process to which a holistic spiritual formation process was addressed.

Shadowbrook Church's Strengths

Every church will leave a legacy. It is just a matter of what kind of legacy that will be. SBC has demonstrated several qualities to convey a sense of integrity in its mission. First, the church members care for each other. This can be seen when tragedy

² The cycle described by Tom Cheyney and Terry Rials is seen in a bell curve illustration with the following terms:

A church's life cycle begins with a *dream* in the hearts of the initial members. This dream gives birth to *beliefs* about how, when, and where a church will operate. Once beliefs crystalize in the minds and expressions of the people *goals* are set and *structures* are put in place to see further progress made. At the high point of a church's life cycle, *ministry* is occurring and peaking in influence. As is the case in so many churches, once ministry begins to decline, the members face a declining set of factors. *Nostalgia* sets in and people begin to idolize the past about when times were "really good." *Questioning* then begins to occur amongst pockets of people within the church who wonder why the church no longer affects the community and people the way it once did. This questioning can breed *polarization* between those who are looking to the past and those who have a sense of hope and renewed focus the future. At the end of a church's life cycle, the most likely shrunken congregation will face eminent *dropout* from its people. (Tom Cheyney and Terry Rials, *The Nuts and Bolts of Church Revitalization* [Orlando: Renovate Publishing, 2015], 26, emphasis added)

strikes someone in the body or a great need arises out of the ebb and flow of life. Hundreds of meals have been made. Even more cards have been written to encourage, grieve, support, and thank people. This church does not give intellectual assent to praying for each other; it practices the discipline often. One of the primary reasons God has continued to put a favorable hand on the church is the number of praying members the church has. Their involvement in beseeching the Holy God on behalf of the church has procured the opportunity for the church to be impactful once again.

Second, the church is a giving church. They give of their time, they give of the talents, and they give of their treasure. They understand the importance of supporting a church financially and one sees a steady base of givers to the church. Volunteer service days do not lack volunteers, which is rare in many churches, but not for SBC.

Third, SBC is a church committed to the Word of God. The church has long held to the great Baptist doctrines that are reformed in design and thoroughly driven by biblical mandates. SBC focuses on God's Word in small groups and preaches it regularly within formal gatherings. Finally, the church has desire. It does not want the end of its life cycle to be the end of the church. SBC is motivated to see and learn, hear, and be convinced of a future that is bright, exciting, daring, and focused. Impressive and resolute describe the strengths of SBC. However, SBC does have weak areas that need focus and attention.

Shadowbrook Church's Weaknesses

A perfect church without weaknesses does not exist. It is what a church does in view of its weaknesses that will produce health and lasting ministry impact. First, SBC is a divided church within its four walls. Generational gaps are the clearest divider, but they are permeable. An older generation exists that is driven more by their preferences than their wisdom. History, nostalgia, and habit have long cured in the spiritual bones of the older saints. This curing has led to a myopic view of the world around them and the inability to recognize the ever-changing community in which it resides. The younger saints

have passion and zeal but wrestle with entitlement and consumerism. They, too, can be driven by their preferences and there is a subtle driver within them to compete with the larger more influential churches around them. Some of Generation X and some of the Builders find themselves leaning toward one direction or the other. Unity must be the focus of addressing these weaknesses for it is what Jesus called His church to practice (John 15).

Though the church does have a history of great givers, recent departures of people have left the church in a financially unstable and insecure place. The need to support the staff, building costs, ministry, and mission of the church are crucial to solidify and build moving forward.

The church has lost its first love. In Revelation 2, Jesus's words are recorded, and he rebukes the Church at Ephesus for forsaking its first love, namely Jesus. He desires that the church returns to its emotional and focused love that it had when the church came to life. The church desperately needs a renewed sense of mission, vision, and focus on living out the gospel. This living needs to be assessed by its biblical relevance, sanctifying fruit, and ministry growth. If addressed, these weaknesses could see substantial areas of improvement in just a short period.

The church needs to grow in the area of grace. Grace is a gift from the Lord and its impact is felt deeply, especially at the time of conversion. The enemy will use a lack of understanding in grace to mislead and deceive God's church. When a church loses its understanding of grace, it must begin to rely on behavior, rules, and works. This belief is a deadly road to go down. If left unchecked, believing in behavior over belief or information over transformation can end a church's life cycle entirely.

The final weakness is a hard one to identify. Simply put, the church does not know what it does not know. It has been so intrinsically focused on itself that it has difficulty looking at itself in the mirror with fresh eyes. The community around them has

drastically changed and the church has failed to learn from other churches who have moved forward without compromise to minister effectively to the saints and to the lost.

Most concerning weaknesses. Of the weaknesses, two need the most attention. The first is in the area of awakening the first love again. It is imperative for SBC to focus at a heart level on humble submission and commit to being biblically formed in the minds of its members. What people truly love is connected to the deepest parts of who they are. Examining these deep areas is often difficult and time consuming. However, that kind of examination is useful. If the church has the courage to commit to this kind of work, it can see spiritual formation happen on an individual level within the church body and through mission to the world around it.

The other area of focus needs to be on unity within the church. From saints who serve as charter members to the ones who arrived three weeks ago, SBC needs to commit to being together on mission as one body. If the church wants to reflect the kind of church Jesus prayed for, then it is imperative to focus on unity. Unity within SBC will help increase a common goal for a common good. SBC would then reflect the gospel.

Rationale

Shadowbrook is a redeemed, good, and growing church. Every church has deficiencies and SBC currently has some evident areas in which to grow. SBC also has many strengths that put the glory of Christ on display. These strengths are based on biblical values. These strengths need to be built upon and these weaknesses need to be recognized, evaluated, and focused on with intentional responsible effort. SBC has the opportunity to begin a new life cycle and build new structures from biblically-guided beliefs. If it dares to endure such a process, it will find itself healthy and spiritually formed for the glory of the gospel.

This project aimed at helping SBC use its discipleship environments and spiritually-forming systems to strengthen the church. If a holistic model can be bought

into, developed, and strategically implemented over time, then the church stands to make much of the gospel. The discipleship environments can be categorized into three distinct groups. Those three groups are a member's individual relationship with Jesus, a member's relationship with other believers, and a member's relationship with lost and perishing people. A common language must develop. A curriculum that supports the holistic formation of the church was created. Members were trained and a systematic approach to evaluating, communicating, and releasing individuals to reproduce themselves was the final step to address meeting the two weaknesses of forsaking their first love and the need to grow in unity.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to equip members in a holistic spiritual formation model to affect their personal growth.

Goals

To successfully develop a holistic spiritual formation model SBC, four goals were established. The goals were progressive, each building on one another. Part of what 1 Peter 5 calls the pastor to do is shepherd the flock of God. These goals were rooted in the desire to see personal growth as a result of shepherding the church.

1. The first goal was to assess the current level of understanding of spiritual formation within a class of SBC members.
2. The second goal was to develop a spiritual formation model and curriculum for the purpose of assessing one's own spiritual formation and growing in the biblical awareness of the terms listed within the model.
3. The third goal was to teach a spiritual formation model through curriculum for the purpose of assessing one's own spiritual formation and growing in the biblical awareness of the terms listed within the model.
4. The fourth goal was to have an improved understanding of spiritual formation among the SBC members.

Research Methodology

Four goals determined if the transformation desired was a success within the church. The methodology used a pre- and post-assessment taken by the participants and the difference were evaluated.³ The first goal was to assess the current level of understanding of spiritual formation within members who attended the equipping class. This goal was accomplished by administering the spiritual formation self-assessment to twenty members at SBC. The tool was titled “The Anatomy of a Disciple Self-Assessment”⁴ and was administered through a paper survey. The survey was modified due to length and piloted with doctoral students and SBC staff before the project began. Each person completed a paper version of the assessment focused on various spiritual formation topics. This goal was considered successfully met when twenty leaders completed the assessment and the results were returned.

The second goal was to develop a spiritual formation model and curriculum for the purpose of assessing one’s own spiritual formation and growing in the biblical awareness of the terms listed within the model. The second goal was accomplished by introducing a spiritual formation model titled the “Anatomy of a Disciple.”⁵ The spiritual formation terms displayed in the original visual model and which were covered were *humbly submitted, biblically formed, sacrificially generous, relationally healthy, and morally discerning*. Modifications were made in language to contextualize the model for SBC. The modified model used the terms heart, mind, give, live and love as simplified terms. An expert panel was assembled to assess the quality of the model and the

³ All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

⁴ The Anatomy of a Disciple, “Self-Assessment,” accessed February 1, 2020, <http://anatomyofadisciple.com/assessment>.

⁵ Rick Taylor, *The Anatomy of a Disciple: So Many Believers So Few Disciples* (Fresno, CA: The Well Community Church, 2013).

curriculum to teach it.⁶ They evaluated biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, and applicability to the local church context. The goal was considered successfully met when 90 percent or more of the evaluation criterion had been scored sufficient or exemplary.

The third goal was to teach a spiritual formation model through curriculum for the purpose of assessing one's own spiritual formation and growing in the biblical awareness of the terms listed within the model. The third goal focused on SBC members to understand and evaluate their own spiritual formation compared to the model presented. The model was taught in an five-week training course (each course at one and half hours long) that intended to grow the member's knowledge of what spiritual formation is, define terms to evaluate formation in their own life, and increase their biblical knowledge and understanding of the terms used. Success in this area was measured by having all members participate in all teaching sessions. The sessions were recorded via video and audio. If leaders were not able to attend a session, then they were able to listen the session at another time through an online link.

The fourth goal was to have an improved understanding of spiritual formation among the SBC members. The goal was accomplished by administering a post-self-assessment on the *Anatomy of a Disciple*,⁷ which was used to measure increased knowledge and change in their own spiritual formation compared to the original assessment results. The goal was considered successfully met when the *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a statistically significant improvement between the pre-class assessment and the post-class assessment.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

Spiritual formation. Many definitions exist for the term. One of those definitions has been described by Dallas Willard: "The Spirit-driven process of forming

⁶ See appendix 2.

⁷ See appendix 2.

the inner world of the human self in such a way that it becomes like the inner being of Christ himself.”⁸ Spiritual formation is not behavior modification alone. It is a process that works from the inside of a person outwardly into their behaviors. At its core, true *spiritual formation* deals with heart issues, motivation, worldviews, and beliefs. The primary focus of this project looks to address that core. For this project, *spiritual formation* is defined as the grace-filled process by which man matures and conforms to the image of Christ. Preemptively, this process is fueled by the Word of God and through the power of the Holy Spirit.

One limitation of this project can be seen in how the people agreed to participate. With the desire to have a common spiritual foundation, participants were limited to members of SBC and who had voluntarily agreed to take the pre- and post-assessment online and attend an equipping class where the vetted curriculum was taught.

One delimitation for this project was time. The church focused on the assessments and instruction toward its people for a specific season of the calendar year. As the senior leader, I only focused on implementation of the project over a fifteen-week period. It would take much longer to fully and completely equip the people in the area of spiritual formation. Another delimitation to the project was regarding the people selected for the assessment. We have a great number of members at the church and that number changes frequently during the year. Selecting an appropriate pool is the goal.

Another delimitation was regarding the niche of people chosen as class participants. The selected participants were the members who voluntarily signed up at SBC when the invitation was extended to the larger church body. Therefore, input was not received from people in the church who did not sign up and could very well be thriving and growing in their own spiritual formation. While spiritual formation can indeed take

⁸ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002), 22.

place in communities of people, the focus on this project was solely on individual SBC members within the class and focused on their own personal spiritual formation.

Conclusion

The members of Shadowbrook Church need to personally grow in the area of spiritual formation. As they grow personally, the church should be better equipped for its mission of living out the gospel as they gather and go. Having leaders equipped in spiritual formation should strengthen the discipleship environments. The Bible's clarity on how change occurs through the heart and mind, combined with insights gained from spiritual formation literature, should aid this project's development. The purpose of this project was to equip Shadowbrook members in a holistic spiritual formation model to affect their personal growth.

CHAPTER 2
THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR
INDIVIDUAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

God has historically called his people to obedience from the inside out. Spiritual formation begins with change at the deepest level within an individual; namely, the heart and mind. Three biblical passages will be examined in this chapter: Moses's interaction with the people of God in Deuteronomy (Deut 6:1-5), James's warning against pride and encouragement toward humility (Jas 4:6-10), and Paul's command for Christians to have their lives transformed by renewing their mind in his letter to the Romans (Rom 12:1-2).

**God's Revealing of Himself and the Individual's
Whole Responsive Obedience**

Deuteronomy 6:1-5 is a portion of a famous passage of Scripture in the Old Testament where Moses exhorts the people of God before they enter the Promised Land. Up to this point in the narrative, God had revealed himself to the people following the great Exodus. His servant, Moses, commands the people to acknowledge from where the governing authority in their life came, and then calls them to move to action, or obedience. It is important to note that God is the one who reveals himself to Moses and then calls Moses and the people to respond in obedience. This pattern is not a new concept for the people of God. In other Scriptures, God consistently revealed himself to mankind and asked for a response of obedience (Gen 1-2, 15; Exod 3:2; Ps 8:3-4; Job 26:8, 9, 14; Rom 1:20, 2:14-15; Heb 1:1-2; 2 Tim 3:16). Seeing this pattern is helpful to understand Deuteronomy 6:1-5 in its context and validates the consistency of Scripture and the character of God.

In the book of Genesis, Christians first see the pattern of God calling his people to obedience while God is pursuing a relationship with his people. God made himself known as the ultimate authority to his creation in various ways and asked for a response from mankind in the form of obedience. Genesis 1:27 shows that God the great creator, made man in his image as a display of his glory. The Bible goes on to say that God placed his highest creation (mankind) in the garden to obey (Gen 2:15). Another example of God revealing himself and then requiring obedience can be seen in the story of Abraham (Gen 12).¹ God revealed himself to Abraham and then asked him to follow in obedience by entering the land that God was going to show him. God reveals himself as the supreme authority in one's life and then asks for obedience. This pattern is consistent in many passages within the Bible and is clearly seen in the narrative of Deuteronomy 6:1-5. It is a pattern of God's revelation and man's response. Nelson explains,

Deuteronomy 5:1-33 is a reiteration of the ten commandments that were given in the book of Exodus. Moses is communicating to the current generation who is about to embark on a journey to enter the long anticipated promised land. Moses is also helping them remember what God has done for them past. What exactly are the statutes and the rules Moses mentions in Deuteronomy 6:1? The phrase "statutes and ordinances" describes and illustrates the content of the "commandment." "Commandment" here could refer to the preceding Decalogue or perhaps, more generally, to Yahweh's basic demand for exclusive loyalty. The phrase "statutes and ordinances," however, clearly refers to the laws of chapters 12-26.²

Deere argues that one interpretation of Deuteronomy 6-11 states that the chapters "may be viewed as an expression of one great command."³ In chapter 6, Moses

¹ Genesis 12:1-5 says,
Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

² Richard D. Nelson, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 88.

³ Jack S. Deere, "Deuteronomy," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1:274.

specifically identifies that what was previously written as a list of numerous commands (in chap. 5) and the following instructional chapters (chaps. 6-11) sum up “the commandment—the statutes and the rules—that the LORD your God commanded me to teach you” (Deut 6:1). Earl Kalland agrees with this view that connects all the previous verses in Deuteronomy to chapter 5, plus the information that comes in chapters 6-11. Kalland suggests, “‘This is the legislation, the decrees and laws,’ the latter being in apposition to ‘the commands,’ the legislation, and explaining what the legislation involves, and so refers to both what precedes and what follows.”⁴ By using the same terms God used in 5:28, Tigay argues that Moses shows he is giving Israel exactly what He was commanded to give.⁵

This reiteration of the law and its requirements would remind the people of the Exodus, Mount Sinai, and the covenant the Lord made with the people about what he would require in obedience. In Deuteronomy, Moses acknowledges from where these behavioral requirements came—they came from the Lord. God is the object of their obedience. Knowing the goal or target of where obedience is focused helps clarify corresponding behaviors. It is important to see obedience in light of the one who call his people to obey. God has given his law (revelation) and it is man’s requirement to follow in obedience (response).

In Deuteronomy 6, Moses was responding to what God had called him to teach the people. He instructed them to respond in a similar way by asking, “Do them [the statutes and the rules] in the land to which you are going over, to possess it” (Deut 6:1). It was not sufficient for them to just hear the commands Moses read, but to follow in obedience. Christopher Wright suggests, “The emphasis on motivational factors is almost

⁴ Earl S. Kalland, *Deuteronomy*, in vol. 3 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 63.

⁵ Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 75.

overwhelming in this short passage. Five times we read ‘so that’ or ‘that.’ The stakes were high. The rewards were great. The blessing and promise were in place. But obedience was the heart of the matter.”⁶

The result of obedience was going to produce a healthy fear in the people of God. Peter Craigie writes, “The object of Moses’ teaching of the law was life-long *fear* (or reverence) of *the Lord your God*; the evidence of this reverence would be seen in the obedience of the Israelites to God’s law, and its fruit would be long life.”⁷ The expanded phrase could mean either “fear in order to keep” or “fear by keeping.”⁸ The people of God would need to remember that it was the Lord who went ahead of them and it was the Lord who asked for their obedience to the Law. They would be responding to what God graciously revealed to them; it would not just be for one generation. This obedience was to have a purpose for many generations to come. Moses wrote, “You and your son and your son’s son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long” (Deut 6:2). God wanted his people to show future generations how they should live and obey under God’s authority. They were to see God for who He was. They were to take the law that had been given to them and teach the next generation and the generation after that. God wanted the obedience of his people to be a continuous process for multiple family generations.

One of the primary environments where their obedience was going to be lived out was in the Promised Land. The blessing of the land (fulfilling the covenant God made with Abraham in Genesis), was not going to be because the people had obeyed but because God had provided the land for them. Knowing that God was the one to provide

⁶ Christopher J. H. Wright, *Deuteronomy*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 93.

⁷ Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1976), 168.

⁸ Nelson, *Deuteronomy*, 88.

the land is an important distinction to be made regarding the response people give to God once he has revealed himself. There is a real danger in believing behavior alone will earn favor with God rather than resting in the secure truth that God has ultimately given favor in Christ,⁹ and not on own merit. Christopher J. H. Wright writes about the blessing the Israelites were going to receive: “Not that obedience would *earn* such blessing. The final line of 6:3 recalls that the lush future in the land will be theirs because of God’s faithfulness to the promise made to their forefathers. It was a gift of grace, but to be appropriated and enjoyed through obedience—a constant biblical pattern in both Testaments.”¹⁰

Deuteronomy 6:4 is a complicated and highly debated verse in the Bible. There are a variety of varying opinions on what each of the phrases mean. Nelson explains,

On the one hand, “one” may signify that Yahweh is *unique* in relationship with Israel, alone as Israel’s only God. Zechariah 14:9 supports this understanding (cf. 1 Chronicles 29:1), as does the surrounding context of exclusive relationship (“our God”; “love”) and the first commandment. In contemporary terms, Yahweh is to be Israel’s “one and only.” On the other hand, “one” may indicate *incomparable* (cf. 2 Sam 7:23), that is, unrivaled and unparalleled by any other god. “Yahweh our God is the one, the only Yahweh.” This translation is supported by the general theological outlook of Deuteronomy. Yet again, “one” may refer to Yahweh’s *unitary nature*: singleness, internal oneness, and absence of plurality. Viewed as a matter of character, Yahweh’s oneness signifies a personal integrity that allows for no duplicity in promise or intention. In contrast to the capricious gods of mythic narrative, Yahweh’s singleness of will and purpose means absolute dependability. Thus Yahweh’s corresponding claim on Israel’s “one” undivided loyalty is logical and justified.¹¹

Known as *the Shema*, Deuteronomy 6:4 is famous based on the Hebrew word *hear*, which means to hear or to call one to listen. Eugene Merrill argues that it is conceivable to link hearing and obeying: “‘To hear,’ in Hebrew lexicography, is

⁹ Phil 3:9 states, “And be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.”

¹⁰ Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 93.

¹¹ Nelson, *Deuteronomy*, 89.

tantamount to ‘to obey,’ especially in covenant contexts such as this.”¹² This understanding would be consistent to what Moses was asking the people in Deuteronomy 1-3. Ironically, one of the great problems the people of God have faced through history is dealing with the incongruity of hearing and obeying. If what Merrill argues is true, then Christians today would be well served to hear what God has revealed in his Bible regarding obedience and respond immediately in action.

What exactly is the relationship between the phrases “The Lord our God” and “the Lord is one” (Deut 6:4)? When the reader looks at the original language and the context of this verse, it makes the most sense to see the phrases as linked. Both have similar morphology. Nelson writes, “This approach is supported by the observation that elsewhere in Deuteronomy ‘Yahweh’ and ‘our God’ always stand together in apposition and never function as subject and predicate.”¹³ The phrase *our God*, indicates the truth that the uniqueness of the singular God of the Israelite people made them a monotheistic people. Moses is reminding the people of God where their hope should remain. He is making a declarative statement about the covenant-keeping Yahweh being their God. Identifying himself as a part of that people and that hope, Moses goes on to say, “the Lord is one” (Deut 6:4b).

This expression of the Lord being one, is focused on God’s wholeness and refers to the monotheistic understanding God’s people have of Him. This God is the only God and he is also one unified person. This belief is a separating quality for the Israelites compared to the rest of the religions seen in the land surrounding them. Much of the surrounding beliefs of the pagan people in the land are polytheistic, meaning belief in multiple gods. Moses makes a statement about God that stands opposed to the duplicity of beliefs of the people in the land. Merrill explains, “The confession of the Lord’s

¹² Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, The New American Commentary, vol. 4 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 162.

¹³ Nelson, *Deuteronomy*, 90.

unique oneness leads to the demand that Israel recognize him as such by obedience to all that that implies. In language appropriate to covenant, that obedience is construed as love; that is, to obey is to love God with every aspect and element of one's being."¹⁴ Two prevailing thoughts are expressed concerning the exact nature of this phrase "the Lord is one." Most commonly, it can mean "The Lord our God the Lord is one" or "The Lord our God is one Lord."¹⁵ In his commentary notes, Tom Constable writes,

The former stresses the uniqueness or exclusivity of Yahweh as Israel's God and so may be paraphrased "Yahweh our God is the one and only Yahweh" or the like. This takes the noun *ehad* ("one") in the sense of "unique" or "solitary," a meaning that is certainly well attested. The latter translation focuses on the unity or wholeness of the Lord. This is not in opposition to the later Christian doctrine of the Trinity but rather functions here as a witness to the self-consistency of Yahweh who is not ambivalent and who has a single purpose or objective for creation and history.¹⁶

Readers of the Bible will consistently see in Deuteronomy that God was concerned with revealing his desired will and hope of obedience along with revealing himself as the subject and recipient of the act of obedience. In response of this truth that Moses declares in verse 4, He will then call the people of God to obedience in the following verses.

The way Moses calls the people to obey is through love. Love here cannot be accomplished through effort that only gives a portion or fragment of energy and focus. Moses calls the people to obey with *all* their heart, soul, and might. He makes it clear that loving the Lord their God would require everything from them. In a simple way Moses has said the Lord our God is sufficient and trustworthy. This is the God whom people need to love with everything they have and all that they are made up of. How do people know that the heart, soul, and might include the full makeup of a human being? Looking

¹⁴ Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 163.

¹⁵ Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 24. Janzen believes the second of these meanings was the proper one. J. Gerald Janzen, "On the Most Important Word in the Shema (Deuteronomy VI 4-5)," *Vetus Testamentum* 37, no. 3 (July 1987): 280-300.

¹⁶ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Garland, TX: Galaxie Software, 2003), Dt 6:4.

to the understanding of each word helps bring clarity to the encompassing view Moses is presenting. Collectively, heart, soul, and might are words Moses used to show the fullness of the person. Those words are not meant to be intentionally dissected. However, looking at the words individually does help bring clarity to the fullness Moses was showing. Bible readers will see several uses of types of these words in the New Testament. Kalland writes,

They were to love him totally (v.5). The exhortation to love “with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” is not a study in faculty psychology. It is rather a gathering of terms to indicate the totality of a person’s commitment of self in the purest and noblest intentions of trust and obedience toward God. The verse does not invite analysis into ideas of intellectual, emotional, and physical parts. The words behind heart, soul, and strength basically relate to what a person is or how a person directs himself toward another person. It is, therefore, not inaccurate for the NT writers to quote (or translate) the Hebrew words, which are often synonymous, by differing Greek words, which are also often synonymous, since the words taken together mean to say that the people are to love God with their whole selves.¹⁷

Obedience Begins in the Heart

The word *heart* is a word with deep biblical meaning and wide usage through the Bible. *Heart* occurs over 600 times in the Old Testament and has the most occurrences in the book of Deuteronomy. Moses regularly used this word to help people understand that obedience is connected to the heart or inner man of a person. The word can refer to the biological organ of a human, but it also carries wider more abstract meanings in Scripture. Andrew Bowling writes, “This word ‘heart’ became the richest biblical term for the totality of man’s inner or immaterial nature. In biblical literature it is the most frequently used term for man’s immaterial personality functions as well as the most inclusive term for them since, in the Bible, virtually every immaterial function of man is attributed to the ‘heart.’”¹⁸

Heart has been referred to as the seat upon which one’s emotions and thoughts rest, and the place where the will of a person is acted upon. Jesus makes this same

¹⁷ Kalland, *Deuteronomy*, 64-65.

¹⁸ Andrew Bowling, “1071 לֵבָב,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 466.

connection later in the New Testament when he quotes the Shema in Matthew 22:37.¹⁹ It is true from a biblical perspective that the deepest part of a human is his heart. Because the heart encompasses the motives of the mind, it is closely tied to the mind and decision making. The heart and mind go together and have from the very beginning of the creation of man.

The degree to which the heart or in Hebrew לֵבָב, can be expressed emotionally is wide. There are numerous occasions in the Bible where heart and an emotional feeling go together. Hannah had an increase in joy within her heart when she was praying (1 Sam 2:1). Joshua's men experienced deep emotion in the battle with Ai and they knew in their minds the consequences of their own disobedience (Josh 7:5). David had it in his heart to build a house for the Lord (1 Kgs 8:7). A final example can be found in the Psalms when the author writes about the emotions of his heart—he is feeling and thinking and asks the Lord to bring him out of his distress (Ps 25:17). Emotions can be difficult to work through in decision making, but people must learn to see them clearly. It is also important to understand what Moses meant when he commanded for the people to love the one God with all their soul.

The word *soul* is translated in a variety of ways in the Old Testament. There are 728 occurrences in the Old Testament and their translations range greatly. Some of the examples in how the word is used range from soul (being), life, individual personhood, and one's very being. Though the original meaning of the word most likely meant “to breathe,” many commentators expand its meaning.²⁰ *Soul* has a real connection to the definitions used for *heart* as well. There is a totality to *soul*, that calls the people of God to hear Moses and the demand he is placing on them to love God with everything. Tigay writes, “To do something with all the heart and soul means to do it with the totality of

¹⁹ Matt 22:37-38 states, “And he said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.’”

²⁰ Bruce K. Waltke, “1395 שֶׁפֶט,” in Harris, Archer, and Waltke, *Theological Wordbook*, 588.

one's thoughts, feelings, intentions, and desires. The phrase is used to describe how Israel must love God, serve Him, observe His commandments, and return to Him."²¹

Finally, Moses commands the Jews of his day to love God with all their might. *Might* is the easiest of the words to interpret as it refers to one's strength, ability, or power. Harris adds, "*mē'ōd* (or the Hebrew word for might) accents the superlative degree of total commitment to Yahweh."²² This is the greatest expressed degree that the people of God can obey the one true God and show their steadfast commitment to Him. When people expend great amounts of physical energy and time to get something done, they feel spent and feel like they have given "everything" to the task. Understanding this emotional feeling helps the reader understand what Moses meant when he called Israel to love God with their all their might. God's people were being asked to give up everything they had to enter the Promised Land. They were to take the land and continue on a faithful relationship with God. This hope and expectation were timely and needed from Moses.

The New Testament also shares references from Jesus, who gives similar timely and needed teaching referenced from this same passage in Deuteronomy. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus's listeners were called to love God with their heart, soul, mind, and strength (12:30). Likewise, in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus references this by proclaiming that his listeners must love God with the heart, soul, and mind (22:37). Both passages reinforce from Jesus the need to devote every component of mankind to devotion to God. It also shows the cohesive biblical narrative fully and finally revealed in Jesus Christ. The salvation that Jesus came to offer is a salvation that demands the whole person come under the authority and rule of the Savior.

²¹ Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 77.

²² Walter C. Kaiser, "1134 מְאֹד," in Harris, Archer, and Waltke, *Theological Wordbook*, 487.

Though people can see how much understanding certain words add to the value of this passage in Deuteronomy, it was meant to be read as a collective and summary call to the people. The one true God was speaking through Moses and calling His people to obey and love him with all that they had. Accomplishing this was hard for the Israelites. A great number of preventative traits within them would be at war with loving God in a total sense. The greatest of these traits was pride and it is a hindrance to loving God with everything inside a person.

Heart Change Begins with a Humble Submission to God (Jas 4:6-10)

God calls his people to obey with everything they have, yet a real barrier hindering obedience exists, and that barrier is named pride. God has graciously created mankind with a free will to make choices. Because of mankind's depraved nature, they do not naturally seek to obey God and what He requires. At the heart of that disobedience is the sin of pride. James, the half-brother of Jesus, warned the early Christians about the dangers of pride. The context of James is the writer sending a practical letter to Christians of the first century, encouraging them to live an obedient life because of what Christ has done for them. As persecution is at an all-time high for his readers, the instruction was probably filtered through anxiety and stress. There has been quarreling in the church and in chapter 4, the author is warning the Christian teachers of the day against worldliness and the dangers of living a life based on worldly passions. He wants to bring clear instruction about how to come back to God and obey Him. James has been writing about the inner battle between the world and their new heavenly standing in Christ. He has accused the people with some strong language, equating the behavior in the world as adultery toward God. Within this strong teaching James encourages the reader to turn from his pride and obey by the means of humility.

James begins verse 6 by stating that God gives grace to people despite their current obedience. He then quotes Proverbs 3:34. This same phrase is quoted by Peter in

1 Peter 5:5, but as Johnson notes, “Peter uses it to encourage mutual submission in the community.”²³ That phrase is, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” (Jas 4:6). James gives a name to the rebelliousness being expressed by the early Christians. He gets to the core of it: he calls it pride. Pride will be an enemy of true spiritual formation, and God desires obedience from his people. People cannot be obedient with their heart and mind if they are operating out of the root issue of pride.

James uses strong language when he chose the word *opposes*. Louw states that the word involves “not only a psychological attitude but also a corresponding behavior—‘to oppose, to be hostile toward, to show hostility.’”²⁴ The imagery used is of two people standing face to face as if to illustrate opposing viewpoints. The word also has connotations of arrogance, which helps the reader see that opposition to God is never merely behavioral. A deeper place of oppositional motivation exists in the part of a person that houses belief. Individuals do not just have behavior problems on the exterior, but they have belief problems at the core of their being.

Verse 6 helps the reader see a gracious side of God. Peter Davids writes, “The call, then, is to submit to God. If one remains proud and continues to seek the world, God’s jealousy, God’s resistance will surely fall. But all is not lost. There is still an even greater graciousness to God. If one will simply humble oneself, God will extend his grace and mercy.”²⁵ Though there is difficulty when one looks in the original language to see how verses 5b-6 are broken up, a parallel comes to light that helps reveal mankind’s disposition compared to the nature of God. The depraved heart desires envy, but God gives more grace. The depraved mind is in opposition to God due to pride, but God gives

²³ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James*, Anchor Yale Bible, vol. 37A (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 283.

²⁴ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 491.

²⁵ Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 164-65.

grace to the humble. McKnight reinforces this understanding: “The B lines are nearly synonymous, though the second takes us one more step: God not only gives grace, but he gives it to the humble.”²⁶ What is the reader to do in response to the grace so clearly seen in verse 6? They are to submit with everything they have to the gracious God they are opposing. Submission in humility will be the antidote to the disease of pride. This understanding to lower oneself is remarkable to understand and obey. Scot McKnight writes, “God’s grace can wipe the slate clean and restore the teachers so that they can become what God desires.”²⁷

Submission is a difficult posture for human beings. This command is the first of a series of commands in verse 7 aiding the proud to move toward obedience and submit to God. The one who was in opposition and face-to-face against God is asked to come underneath the authority of God and lay their fleshly desires aside. This part of the text clearly reveals the necessity of individual responsibility in regard to obedience. The author does not say for the individual to submit primarily to another person or imaginary force that is not God. James calls the read to submit themselves unto God. God can aide in humbling a person, but this verse reinforces the idea that change in a person occurs through the personal motivation and discipline one has to come under God’s authority. If an individual is unwilling to submit himself to God, then he will find himself in direct opposition to the creator of the world.

For the person in opposition to God, the root of that opposition is pride. Pride has been manifested in the enemies of God throughout history. God’s peopled learned from prophets, like Isaiah, that pride was the very reason Satan rebelled against God, and since then, he has influenced those who resist what God has asked them to do.²⁸ Like he

²⁶ Scot McKnight, *The Letter of James*, The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2011), 341.

²⁷ McKnight, *The Letter of James*, 342-43.

²⁸ Isa 14:12-14 states,

did with submission, James also commands to his reader that they should resist the devil and he will flee. James is confident that the reader can achieve the goal and is hopeful for obedience in the right direction. If resistance occurs in concurrence with submission to God, then the enemy will respond accordingly and flee from the individual working through obedience. This is a great promise James gives the reader. When people submit rightly and resist rightly, they begin to draw near to God.

The fact that the God of the Bible is approachable is quite revealing. It shows a compassionate and caring side of God. Many worldly religions keep their god at a safe distance between their religion and their own personhood. Mankind can gingerly approach their god but feel a sense of separation relationally. This is not true of the God of the Bible. James is sharing with the reader that if people draw near to God, he will draw near to them (4:8), which is exceptional. The fact that Israel's God was one who "approached" people, in contrast, was regarded as exceptional (Deut 4:7): Johnson writes, "What great nation is there to whom their god approaches (*engizein*) as the Lord our God does for all those who call upon him."²⁹ A God who wants to have a relationship with His people is a humbling idea. It models for the Christian a tremendous heart motivation. To be someone who approaches another proves to be an action that affirms dignity to the other person and models the lovingkindness of God. In the next verse, James calls for a series of humbling actions to take place.

True obedience stems from a lowly place, not a prideful place. It begins at the heart level and works its way to the mind and finally actions. In 4:8b-10, James calls for humility. Cleansing, purifying, being wretched, mourning, and weeping are all acts of

How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! You said in your heart, "I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High." His desire to be "like" the most high reveals the pride that was in his heart.

²⁹ Johnson, *The Letter of James*, 284.

spiritually-broken unclean people. The language here is connected back to similar words in the Levitical law. God had called His people to be holy (Deut 7:6).³⁰ Historically, they accomplished holiness through physical acts of sacrifice (giving, cleanliness, animal sacrifice) and now James is calling them to paralleled actions both outwardly and inwardly at the heart level. Cleansing hands has the idea of being focused on the outside behavior or deeds of life. In contrast, the purifying of heart is an inward motivation and deals with thoughts. Thus, James connects inward disposition with outward social concern and action. He is calling his readers to a radical repentance-conversion that orients the whole person to God and his ways in this world.³¹ If people live a life marked either by inward stain or outward disobedience, then they are communicating that their life is inconsistent. James calls this being double-minded. To befriend the world (i.e., resort to worldly methods to bring in the kingdom) is to oppose God and his way.³² God wants his people to live a distinct and holy life. He desires and calls for their obedience from the inside out. The demand for the “double-minded” to sanctify (make holy) their hearts recalls here the command in Deuteronomy 6:5 (cited by Jesus as the greatest commandment; Matt 22:37 and pars.) to love God with the whole (i.e., undivided) “soul.”³³ This kind of change will not come easy in an individual’s life. It will take action, discipline, and the sacrifice of emotional energy.

What Real Repentance Requires

James uses the words *wretched*, *mourn*, and *weep*, which are emotional words. Understanding the emotional level is helpful when understanding how obedience works

³⁰ Deut 7:6 states, “For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.”

³¹ Ralph P. Martin, *James*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 48 (Dallas: Word, 1998), 153.

³² Martin, *James*, 154.

³³ Dan G. McCartney, *James*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 218.

because it clarifies that an individual's evaluation of emotions and corresponding actions are part of the process (2 Cor 7). To be *wretched*, as James defines it, involves handling tough things in a personal way. Johnson suggests, "The verb *talaiporein* is intransitive and means to endure hard labor, distress, or hardship"³⁴ Johnson later states, "The word *mourn* is a word used historically for those who have lost a loved one and mourn their death publicly."³⁵ When people mourn a deceased person, it is natural to have a physical expression of that mourning. Some people lament, some cry out, and many cry real tears. Tears are evidence of what it means to weep. Johnson explains, "The word *weep* comes from the verb *klaiein*, which means to give expression to sorrow and mourning by weeping."³⁶ The pain people begin to experience internally is express outwardly with physical characteristics. James wants the reader to be cleansed and purified by these three connected verbs.

Collectively, the three verbs of being *wretched*, *mourn*, and *weep* are evidence of repentance taking place (Ps 32). It is not just a change of action but a change of heart that leads to a change in action. These physical traits and heart motivations will help counter effect the root issue of pride in one's life. This posture is the way toward humility. For those who humble themselves before the Lord, James gives a promise for people to see. He says, "Humble yourself before the Lord, and he will exalt you" (Jas 4:10). This understanding is opposite to how selfish people think. The final exhortation of James 4:10 matches the spatial imagery of the passage as a whole: the wisdom from below seeks self-assertion but will be lowered. The wisdom from on high lifts up those who make themselves lowly.³⁷ People must not miss who is doing the action of lowering and

³⁴ Johnson, *The Letter of James*, 285.

³⁵ Johnson, *The Letter of James*, 285.

³⁶ Johnson, *The Letter of James*, 285.

³⁷ Johnson, *The Letter of James*, 286.

who is doing the action of exalting. Mankind or the individual is the one called to humble themselves and in turn the Lord is the one to do the exalting. Many writers have debated if this verse is suggesting an improvement on the old or the complete change to something new. The debate ranges around the tense of the verbs, but the careful student will show caution in not letting the tense drive to much of the interpretation. One must be cautious about putting too much weight on the aorist tense, but it is true here that James is calling for a change from the current state to a new one.³⁸ Scot McKnight gives a concise summary about what James is writing:

First, repentance is about a person's relationship, mind, and behaviors before God: it is profoundly theological. This is why this section begins and ends with the face of God (4:7, 8a, 10). Second, repentance leads to forgiveness that can be described in terms of purification (4:8b). Third, repentance is both embodied and emotive—as 4:9 makes clear. And, fourth, repentance leads to grace that elevates a person not into envy but into peacemaking, love, and compassionate deeds (4:10).³⁹

Understanding James 4:6-10 and putting its commands into practice will aid the individual from being in opposition to God and lead him to an internal heart change with external obedient behavior to follow. How do people do this when they have no desire? This question is key. Relying on the grace of God and moving toward what one knows in the Scriptures will help create an environment for heart change to occur. It is a process catalyzed by repentance. This kind of repentance will help believers fight their battle against conforming to the world, help them transform into something new, and to exist as a living sacrifice.

Obedience at the Level of the Mind

Obedience is an expectation of God that involves change within every area of one's life. Change occurs first at the heart level fueled by humility, but real change involves reorienting one's mind (beliefs). As these actions are accomplished in time, one

³⁸ McCartney, *James*, 219.

³⁹ McKnight, *The Letter of James*, 358.

will change how he acts or behaves. Romans 12:1-2 confirms the truth of how change occurs. In the context of Romans, Paul has been writing to the church in Rome defending the faith and clearly articulating to the Christians about their own justification in Christ. Chapters 1-11 are Paul's legal defense for the Christian faith, then he transitions in chapter 12 to address behavior or actions. Both the defense and the application are connected thoughts from the author. Mounce suggests that this break "marks the transition from the theology of God's redemptive act in Christ Jesus to the ethical expectations that flow logically from that theological base."⁴⁰

Obedience Is Marked by People Giving Everything They Have to Be a Living Sacrifice

Paul wants the reader to act on the truth he has clearly laid out in the previous eleven chapters, which is why the word "therefore" is used to follow his introductory wording. In that introduction, he uses the word *appeal*, which is a strong emotional word. In Greek, it is translated *parakaleo* and its effect can be felt when people understand it. Louw and Nida state, "To ask for something earnestly and with propriety—to ask for (earnestly), to request, to plead for, to appeal to, earnest request, appeal."⁴¹ This definition helps reinforce that Romans 12:1) is a strong opening statement to appeal to the believers to which Paul is writing. Moo poignantly writes, "All that Paul has written in the letter thus far may be summed up under the heading of the mercy of God in action."⁴² The change Paul, is going to call for unmistakably begins in an individual by the catalytic and gracious movement of God. By using the phrase "mercies of God" (Rom 12:1), Paul is putting God's grace before human behavior. Some commentators have wrestled in the

⁴⁰ Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, The New American Commentary, vol. 27 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 230.

⁴¹ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 407.

⁴² Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996), 749.

interpretation of this phrase, wondering if it means action is due “because of” these mercies or “through” the mercies of God. Making sense of this distinction will affect the view of obedience that is to follow. Schreiner suggests, “The causal meaning is preferred because it is more likely that Paul exhorts believers ‘because’ of God’s mercies rather than ‘through’ God’s mercies, though in the final analysis the distinction may be overpressed.”⁴³ Writing about the same phrase and connecting it to the desired behavior that is called for in verse 2, Moo explains, “That God’s mercy does not automatically produce the obedience God expects is clear from the imperatives in this passage. But God’s mercy manifested in his Spirit’s work of inward renewal (see v. 2) does impel us toward the obedience that the gospel demands.”⁴⁴

Looking back to the consistency of God’s actions will motivate an individual to keep pursuing a life of obedience. Mounce writes, “If God had not done what he did for us, there would be no compelling reason why we should now do what he says.”⁴⁵ Paul then urges in Romans 12:1 that the believers present their bodies as a living sacrifice. Mounce argues, “One cannot consign dedication to God to the spirit and neglect the body. Genuine commitment to God embraces every area of life and includes the body in all of its particularity and concreteness.”⁴⁶

Commentators differ on the exact meaning of the phrase “to present” in verse 1. The debate centers on the tense of the verb. Does the aorist tense mean it is a once and for all act, or does it mean it is communicating an ongoing act? New Testament scholar, Douglas Moo, says, “Paul simply commands us to make this offering, saying nothing

⁴³ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 643.

⁴⁴ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 749-50.

⁴⁵ Mounce, *Romans*, 230.

⁴⁶ Schreiner, *Romans*, 644.

about how often it needs to be done.”⁴⁷ This sacrifice is described in three ways, as Nida explains, “Living, dedicated to his service, and pleasing to him.”⁴⁸ This kind of sacrifice is different from what the people of God had experienced for the previous 2,000 years. Sacrifices of old involved bringing animals or materials and presenting them as the sacrifice. Paul is now asking for something holistically greater. Dunn writes,

The sacrifice God looks for is no longer that of beast or bird in temple, but the daily commitment of life lived within the constraints and relationships of this bodily world. The boundary of cultic ritual is transposed from actual cultic practices to the life of every day and transformed into nonritual expression, into the much more demanding work of human relationships in an everyday world.⁴⁹

Personal sacrifice of oneself will be a living sacrifice, not a deceased one. It will require obedience in all areas of one’s life in an ongoing way. It will also be a sacrifice that is holy. Mounce suggests, “Holiness of life rarely progresses apart from deliberative acts of the will. While sanctification is gradual in the sense that it continues throughout life, each advance depends upon a decision of the will.”⁵⁰ Holy sacrifices are also acceptable sacrifices to God. Because God himself is Holy (Isa 5:16; Exod 15:11), he can receive a holy sacrifice. Murray clearly states, “Holiness is the fundamental character and to be well-pleasing to God the governing principle of a believer.”⁵¹ Paul makes it clear that this kind of well pleasing living is spiritual worship.

The meaning of *spiritual worship* is difficult to understand in the text. Whether it is centered on reason or rationale is where most of the debate revolves. The word *worship* specifically means, as Louw and Nida write, “To perform religious rites as a part

⁴⁷ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 750.

⁴⁸ Barclay Moon Newman and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1973), 233.

⁴⁹ James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 38B (Dallas: Word, 1998), 717.

⁵⁰ Mounce, *Romans*, 231.

⁵¹ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1968), 112.

of worship—to perform religious rites, to worship, to venerate, worship.”⁵² Moo suggests that it could take one of four paths in translation of meaning. It could deal with the inner sense of mind and heart, being rational as appropriate for human beings, being rational as making sense, or just generally reasonable, or logical. Seeing how it is used in other translations helps people see “and recognize that each of the usual translations ‘spiritual’ (NIV; NASB; NRSV) and ‘reasonable’ (AV) misses an important part of the meaning, it would be best to follow TEV and translate “true worship.”⁵³ There is a fullness to believers understanding of worship. Schreiner writes that Paul did so “to emphasize that yielding one’s whole self to God is eminently reasonable. Since God has been so merciful, failure to dedicate one’s life to him is the height of folly and irrationality.”⁵⁴ Patterns contrary to what God desires are tempting to follow for an individual. This concern urges Paul to write in the next verse about how believers can truly be transformed in offering their bodies as living sacrifices.

Obedience Helps People Transform to a Life God Desires

Though there is debate on why Romans 12:2 follows verse 1, most commentators agree it is subordinate to the first comment. The verse helps clarify how people carry out the appeal Paul makes to offer their bodies as a living sacrifice. When Paul writes of being conformed to the world, he is writing about people following patterns that the secular pagan culture promotes compared to what God calls people to. Coming to trust in Christ by faith does not lead to complete holistic life change and obedience. Believers are made new from the inside and must begin to let sanctification work its way outward. Moo encourages, “For while belonging to the new realm, we continue to live, as

⁵² Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 532.

⁵³ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 753.

⁵⁴ Schreiner, *Romans*, 645.

people still in the ‘body,’ in the old realm.”⁵⁵ This understanding will create tension for an individual desiring to walk in obedience. Paul gives two commands to help address the tension. He states that the individual should “not be conformed” and instead “be transformed” (Rom 12:2). To conform would be to mold behavior after a worldly pattern. Much like garment designers use patterns or templates to create their work, apart from God’s grace, the individual lives according to patterns of the world. Instead of conforming, Paul urges transformation in the mind. This transformation would be similar to the garment designer creating a new pattern and re-engineering the design to make the product something new. Moo reinforces this idea: “This ‘re-programming’ of the mind does not take place overnight but is a lifelong process by which our way of thinking is to resemble more and more the way God wants us to think.”⁵⁶ The term *transformed* implies, as Murray states, “that we are to be constantly in the process of being metamorphosed by renewal of that which is the seat of thought and understanding.”⁵⁷

Richard Longenecker helps believers see this change clearly:

“Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its mold,” has effectively captured the ethos of Paul’s negative exhortation, and therefore must be credited as being helpful for an understanding of the apostle’s desire for all Christians in whatever time and whatever circumstance—even though such a paraphrastic rendering fails to “translate” the apostle’s appeal in terms of its ideological background, its distinctive linguistic forms, and its specific language.⁵⁸

When this transformation of the mind takes place, and through testing, Paul argues that then the individual can see what the will of God is for his life. Murray asks, “Is this the will of determinate purpose or the will of commandment?”⁵⁹ Cranfield explains,

⁵⁵ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 755.

⁵⁶ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 756-57.

⁵⁷ Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 114.

⁵⁸ Richard N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2016), 923.

⁵⁹ Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 115.

It is this absolute demand of God by which He claims us wholly for Himself and for our neighbours, which those who are being transformed by the renewing of their minds recognize and gladly embrace as it meets them in all the concrete circumstances of their lives, and to which they know themselves altogether committed, although in this life they can never perfectly fulfil it.⁶⁰

God commands that his people change. He helps them do so by proving to be a historically faithful God who has been consistently merciful over time. He does not wait idly by for individuals to muster obedience through frivolous means but urges individuals to present their lives and whole bodies as a living sacrifice. They are not to conform to the pattern of a world that has rejected God but are to actively and consistently be transformed through thinking and behavior. When this obedience occurs from the inside out, then the will of God can and will be understood. This process is something God calls good, and that he accepts, and is perfect in the sense of what he requires (Rom 12:2). Mounce gives hope: “Real and lasting change comes from within.”⁶¹

⁶⁰ C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, International Critical Commentary (London: T & T Clark, 2004), 611.

⁶¹ Mounce, *Romans*, 232.

CHAPTER 3
SPIRITUAL FORMATION LITERATURE REVEALS
BOTH OBSTACLES AND ASSETS NEEDED
FOR PERSONAL CHANGE

This chapter presents gleanings from the precedent literature on spiritual formation with an emphasis on personal change stemming from a Christian worldview. The review of the literature and research provides awareness and understanding on how to achieve personal change in one's life. This chapter has two primary goals of presenting obstacles to spiritual formation and providing support for specific disciplines. A key term used frequently within the chapter is *spiritual formation*.

The term *spiritual formation* was popularized in the west during the late nineteenth century. A turbulent 1960s and 1970s ignited the desire for Christian communities to increase their efforts and focus on the basic spiritual development and disciplines of their people. The church increasingly faced cultural influence from new age thinking and mystic practices. This competition within the Christian culture forced people to more clearly define spiritual formation and spiritual disciplines. Author James Houston writes about the terms development: "Spiritual formation originates in the training of Romans Catholic priests, whose enrolment began to fall drastically in the post-war cultural revolutionary changes."¹ This training crossed into Protestant movements as well as seminaries. Nathan Finn and Keith Whitfield stress this in their writing: "Following the lead of the Catholics, in 1972, the Association of Theological Schools highlighted

¹ James Houston, "The Future of Spiritual Formation," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 4, no. 2 (2011): 134.

spiritual formation as a needed emphasis in theological education,”² The reemphasis and normalizing of the term *spiritual formation* took on different shapes and focuses in the following years after its origination. Finn and Whitefield rightly define categories when they write, “Increasingly, the spiritual formation movement has been characterized by two broad trajectories. The older and larger trajectory might be called the ‘Renovare’ wing of the movement. . . . The other trajectory, which is smaller but seems to be growing, might be called the ‘New Calvinist’ wing of the spiritual formation movement.”³ The former is eclectic, egalitarian, and more liberal while the later tends to be more biblically focused and complementarian in nature. It is important to understand from what worldview an author is coming from when he writes a book on spiritual formation.

When discerning and sorting through literature, it is essential to understand the sphere in which spiritual formation occurs, and the degree of change expected from a viewpoint with Scripture. A clear understanding of spiritual formation and a mental picture for the scope of modification helps the reader make necessary comparisons from the literature reviewed.

Spiritual Formation in the Local Church

Spiritual Formation Defined

Many authors have given definitions for the term *spiritual formation*, and they have unique perspectives on what spiritual formation is. It is crucial to understand that spiritual formation is primarily concerned with internal change that leads to external behavior. Alan Andrews reinforces this idea when he writes, “Spiritual formation

² Nathan A. Finn and Keith S. Whitfield, *Spirituality for the Sent: Casting a New Vision for the Missional Church* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2017), 19.

³ Finn and Whitfield, *Spirituality for the Sent*, 24-25.

involves a radical internal change in which the spiritual heart directs the transformation of the entire person to reflect Jesus Christ.”⁴

Several definitions increase the awareness of what current literature is producing in regard to a sustainable and definitive definition of *spiritual formation*. On a basic level, James Wilhoit suggests, “Spiritual formation is *the task* of the church. Period.”⁵ Wilhoit goes on to finitely define the *spiritual formation* when he writes, “Christian spiritual formation refers to the intentional communal process of growing in our relationship with God and becoming conformed to Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.”⁶ Written from a broader religious perspective, Evan Howard defines Christian *spiritual formation* as “responding to the gracious work of God and requiring both perseverance and progress, is the intentional and Godward reorientation and rehabilitation of human experience.”⁷ Robert Mulholland defines *spiritual formation* as “a process of being formed in the image of Christ, a journey into becoming persons of compassion, persons who forgive, persons who care deeply for others and the world, persons who offer themselves to God to become agents of diving grace in the lives of others and their world—in brief, person who love and serve as Jesus did.”⁸ In a rather robust definition of *spiritual formation*, Frank Stanger references a statement from Central Baptist Theological Seminary in 1978-1979:

Spiritual Formation for the Christian is growth of the total person toward maturity in loving relationship to God, to self, to other persons in the community, and to the

⁴ Alan Andrews, *The Kingdom Life: A Practical Theology of Discipleship and Spiritual Formation* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2010), 105.

⁵ James C. Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 15.

⁶ Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, 23.

⁷ Evan B. Howard, *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 269.

⁸ Robert M. Mulholland, Jr., *An Invitation to a Journey: A Roadmap for Spiritual Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2016), 31.

whole of God's created world. The goal is maximizing the use of God's gifts to a person in the journey toward wholeness. The process is the opening of the human spirit to the Holy Spirit at work in every dimension of human existence (cognitive, affective, and physical) integrating all of life through the love and grace of Jesus Christ. The process is the forming of Christ in a human being. Spiritual Formation is growth in all relationship toward wholeness.⁹

Though a rather lengthy definition, it provides some correct insights into the breadth and depth of *spiritual formation*. For this project and for perspicuity and brevity, *spiritual formation* is the grace-filled process by which people mature and conform to the image of Christ. This process is revealed in Scripture and driven by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Why Spiritual Formation Matters

If it is true that God is the creator of mankind, then it is evident that His creation is important. People matter because God created them, and He gave them a purpose on this earth; forming them in the garden He commissioned them to have a purpose. God formed his people through experiences and encounters over time. He consistently works to shape his created beings. Howard writes, "We are constantly being formed."¹⁰ Howard then goes on to write about the intentionality of being aware to the forming constantly happening: "As we shall see, attending to who we are to the form of our lives at any given time—our embodiment, our story, our emotional needs, our experience of the spirit of God, our relational networks, and so on—enables us to focus intention and means where they can best foster union with Christ."¹¹

Christians need to be both watchful and discerning. Individuals need to be on guard. Peter says, "You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet 3:16-17). If

⁹ Frank Bateman Stanger, *Spiritual Formation in the Local Church* (Grand Rapids: Asbury Press, 1989), 15.

¹⁰ Howard, *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality*, 272.

¹¹ Howard, *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality*, 272.

humans are always being formed by something, then the Christian should make it a priority to be formed by the power of the Holy Spirit and the clear desires expressed from God through the Scriptures. Spiritual formation is not a task toward perfectionism, but a movement toward sanctification. Simply put, sanctification is the process to which Christians conform to the image of Christ and mature. Wilhoit says, “The heart of spiritual formation is to teach and train people to follow the wisdom and instructions of Christ through the enabling power of his grace.”¹² Failure will be inevitable while Christians pursue personal change, even for the most mature believer, but Christians must be committed to use all of life’s experiences to grow in Christ. Howard reinforces this idea when he writes,

At times transformation occurs with little effort on our part. At other times (perhaps even frequently) the introduction of a means of grace results not in Godward transformation, but rather in failure. Through repeated failures at preserving in spiritual disciplines, perhaps we become aware of deeply ingrained (perhaps even unconscious) self-destructive patterns hindering our transformation. . . . Or perhaps we find ourselves, through our apparent lack of change, broken and thrown into the hand of God—right where God wanted us to be in the first place. . . . Through both unexpected success and failure, we come to see the gracious hand of God more clearly and we grow in surrendered relationship with God, which is what this is all about anyway.¹³

The Need to Engage Literature

Literature written about spiritual formation is robust. There is a lot to filter through when considering texts to read. This spiritual formation literature can help or hurt the spiritual formation process. The goal in filtering through the wide scope of spiritual formation literature is to find research that reinforces what God has said through his Word. A byproduct of reading literature is to discover writings that are opposed to God’s Word. When individuals look to literature, they are hopefully trying to find the author’s arguments to try and discern what personal change must occur. Literature can often

¹² Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, 39.

¹³ Howard, *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality*, 282-83.

enhance practical helps to the spiritual formation process and also expose obstacles that make spiritual formation difficult. Readers must be aware of two major ends of the change spectrum. Brad Waggoner labels each end as the Chicken Little syndrome and the Pollyanna bubble. Waggoner writes, “I told myself that I did not want to become ‘Chicken Little’ to the church crying, ‘The sky is falling!’” Even though our research reveals reasons for concern, my underlying theology allows me to maintain confidence.”¹⁴ Not everything is broken within churches and their ministry of spiritual formation. Not everything is perfect either. Waggoner calls a Pollyanna “an excessively or blindly optimistic person.”¹⁵ Pollyanna thinkers can assume that everything is fine and that there is really no need to continue personally pursuing spiritual formation. This kind of thinking can produce a metaphorical bubble that shrouds the reality surrounding the Christian pursuing spiritual formation. This bubble prevents Christians from seeing plainly the need to always be pursuing change.

Being conformed to Christ is tough work and there will always be opportunity for improvement. When readers look at literature about spiritual formation and avoid the extremes Waggoner mentions, they can see more clearly and listen more intently to what needs to change within their life. Literature can help add tangible ideas to spiritual formation. Literature can also help identify obstacles to the change God desires. Therefore, reading and discerning through literature is important.

Obstacles to Personal Change

It is essential to understand that obstacles exist within the local church and that they inhibit the spiritual formation process God is doing within an individual. Churches that want to grow in awareness will look to research about formation in the local church.

¹⁴ Brad J. Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come: Spiritual Formation and the Future of Discipleship* (Nashville: B & H, 2008), 3.

¹⁵ Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 3.

Fortunately, much research has been conducted around local churches and the fruit of their ministries. Eric Geiger, Michael Kelly, and Phillip Nation completed expansive research on how people change, and they came to an alarming conclusion. Geiger writes, “There is a discipleship deficiency in most churches resulting in a lack of transformation.”¹⁶

Getting to the root of this deficiency is essential for Christians. Because Christians know the Bible declares human beings to be sinful (Gen 3, Ps 51:5, Rom 2:12, 3:23, 5:12-13) they know that obstacles come from a fallen world and out of the hearts and minds of sinful mankind. Christians must not stop at obstacles and become vanquished in the spiritual formation journey. Spiritual formation literature reveals that common obstacles prevent growth from happening.

There are many examples of obstacles in spiritual formation literature. Authors try to promote strategies toward change, but many, if not all of them, talk about barriers individuals will face when pursuing spiritual formation. Understanding obstacles help readers see with clarity how they can overcome them.

The Obstacles of Sin, Satan, and the World

Christians will have obstacles to personal change in their life. Though many obstacles can be seen clearly as being independent, many obstacles are connected. A holistic connection between some obstacles helps Christians see how big the challenge to personal change can be. Chan writes about the interconnectedness of these obstacles when he says, “Taken together, they encompass the depth of extent of human evil. The flesh is the sin within us, the world designates the sin around us and the devil, the sin beyond us.”¹⁷ Having a right theological understanding of sin and the devil are important

¹⁶ Eric Geiger, Michael Kelly, and Phillip Nation, *Transformational Discipleship: How People Really Grow* (Nashville: B & H, 2012), 16.

¹⁷ Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1998), 65.

for individuals looking to grow spiritually. Paul writes to help clarify his readers' theology on sin, warning the Christians in Ephesus,

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. (Eph 2:1-3)

Paul wants the Ephesians to understand their spiritual depravity, the danger of the devil, and the serious consequences of living in the flesh. These are great obstacles to the process of spiritual formation. Not only is it important to have correct theology regarding these things, but it is important to understand the theological perspective from which authors of spiritual formation literature are coming. For example, when discussing the theology of sin from the Catholic viewpoint versus a Protestant understanding, Chan writes,

The advantage of the Catholic view is that it produces a more systematic program for advancement in the spiritual life. It is no coincidence that ascetical theology became a highly developed theological science long before Protestants came to recognize its importance. . . . The weakness of the Catholic view lies in not fully appreciating the radical nature of sin. . . . But if we accept the Reformation conception of sin as a radical evil that fundamentally alters our relationship with the God, then the spiritual life is not conceivable without a strong awareness of the depth of sin.¹⁸

Readers must be able to make distinctions like Chan does when reading about sin. Authors share different understandings of sin, and in turn when they write about spiritual formation they take different trajectories in their arguments about change and how sin effects change in people. For example, regarding sin, Eric Johnson writes, “The Bible teaches that the general havoc in the creation pertaining to human life is related *indirectly* to sin.”¹⁹ This perspective is inaccurate. The Bible teaches that the havoc in creation is *directly* related to sin. Sin is the great problem introduced in Genesis 3 and its consequences have been far-reaching, both physically and spiritually since the fall in the garden. When

¹⁸ Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 65.

¹⁹ Eric L. Johnson, *Foundations for Soul Care: A Psychology Proposal* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2007), 476, emphasis added.

mankind operates out of their fallen nature, they operate out of what the Bible calls the *flesh*.

The *flesh* is the motivational core of a person where sin begins to conceive and then manifest itself through according actions. Living in the flesh is selfish and focused around personal pride. In a western culture that values individualism, Christians must be aware of the false truth the culture will promote. Waggoner writes, “We believe a lie when we believe that the rugged individualism of our culture is based on biblical truth.”²⁰ Andrews writes, “The flesh is primarily to be identified with the natural desires of human beings, and the flesh within the human being wars with the human spirit.”²¹ One of the greatest enemies to an individual’s maturity in spiritual formation will be the individual himself.

The Bible makes distinctions when it speaks about living in the flesh or living in the spirit. Operating out of the flesh moves individuals toward what Geiger describes as drifting. Geiger explains, “Drifting brings about a tolerance for distance. The first time we drift away, pretty immediately we catch where we went wrong and correct our actions. But if we keep allowing ourselves to drift, we go farther and farther each time.”²² The flesh is an obstacle and one can see their error by examining the visible fruit produced when operating out of the flesh. Fleshly living will regularly be at war against the freedom Christ brings for Christians to live in the Spirit. Paul reinforces this idea while warning his readers to examine real spiritual formation fruit:

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy,

²⁰ Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 75.

²¹ Andrews, *The Kingdom Life*, 45.

²² Geiger, Kelly, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 116.

drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. (Gal 5:16-26)

If an individual is producing the works of the flesh, then they can be sure in knowing the flesh is working as the primary guide in transformation. Production of behavior from the flesh is a real obstacle to the kind of spiritual formation done by the Holy Spirit. It is important to note, as Boa writes, “The conflict is inward versus outward (Rom 7:22-23), that is, between the Holy Spirit, who indwells our spirit and our flesh. This conflict does not diminish with conversion but becomes more intense as we pursue the Spirit-directed and Spirit-empowered life.”²³ As individuals better define sin and the flesh, they are more equipped to see the obstacle for what it is. Not only is there an enemy within mankind but there is an external enemy as well.

Since his fall, the enemy of God has been at war with God. Over time, readers of the Bible have had to come to certain understandings about who Satan is and what a demon is. In coming to an understanding of who Satan is, it is possible to find Christians at odds with each other in their conclusions. How much focus do Christians need to put on understanding the enemy of God? In his classic work *The Screwtape Letters*, C. S. Lewis writes, “There are equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them.”²⁴ Lewis helps his readers avoid the extremes of the belief spectrum on Satan.

These extremes should be avoided and Christians need wise counsel to help discern how the enemy of God wants to hinder spiritual formation. Biblically speaking, it

²³ Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Implications for Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2001), 330-31.

²⁴ C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 5.

is clear in God's Word that Christians have an enemy who is against them. Paul writes in his letter to the Ephesians, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Eph 6:12). Speaking specifically about the Devil, Howard writes, "The devil is the enemy of Christ and Christ's gospel, so it follows that the devil will try to prevent our formation into even-greater intimacy with Christ and the gospel at any and every point."²⁵ John writing about Satan in his gospel, states, "You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44b).

Getting mankind to think untruthfully about truth is one of the main strategies Satan uses to hinder spiritual formation. Writing about Satan's influence on Christians' formation, Kenneth Boa writes, "Satan and his minions utilize the world and the flesh to accomplish their purpose of defeating the lives of Christians and rendering them ineffective. But Satan can oppress only while we are controlled by the flesh."²⁶

Additionally Andrews writes, "When he (Satan) undertook to draw Eve away from God, he did not hit her with a stick, but with an idea."²⁷ When individuals have a better understanding of the theology around what Satan does and who Satan is, they can see more clearly the obstacles that may be hindering their own spiritual formation. While Satan is a force to be reckoned with outside of the Christian individual, there also is a sin stained creation that can be an obstacle to spiritual formation.

²⁵ Evan B. Howard, *A Guide to Christian Spiritual Formation: How Scripture, Spirit, Community and Mission Shape Our Souls* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018), 189.

²⁶ Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, 114.

²⁷ Andrews, *The Kingdom Life*, 47.

The combination of sin, flesh, and Satan at work also happens in the context of a fallen world. Mankind was corrupted by sin in the garden and that corruption extended to creation (Gen 3). The Bible makes clear that mankind will face suffering from the world, and within each person's own spiritual formation journey the world will provide obstacles to hinder growth in Christ. Loving material things and the pleasures the world can offer is dangerous; thus, Christians must not love the world and validate the claim that God is not in them (1 John 2:15-17). The word *world* used in the 1 John passage shows up seventy-three times in the New Testament and often the authors use it to express concern. Natural disasters cause real harm, pain, and death. Disease can bring sorrow to an individual or a society. These natural components of the world are a result of the fall and its implications on creation. They are very really enemies to the spiritual formation of Christians. Richard Lovelace sums up the dangers well when he writes, "The major distortions both in the world and in worldly Christianity spring from the perversion of the legitimate human drive for dominion."²⁸ These distortions can be found in freedoms, technology, politics, economies, businesses, marriages, medicine, and education. All of these categories can create enormous obstacles for the Christian to overcome and Christians need to have a deep and passionate biblical worldview to compete with the enemy of the world.

The Obstacle of Focusing on Information over Transformation

As individuals living in the twenty-first century, today's Christians are constantly forced to process large amounts of information. Through technology, advertisement, print, and marketed information, people take in a lot of data every day. People have become consumers of vast quantities of information. People have become experts in areas because they are able to do Google searches and discover answers

²⁸ Richard Lovelace, *Renewal as a Way of Life: A Guidebook for Spiritual Growth* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1985), 96.

quickly. What do people do with this information? Will this information lead to something great regarding transformation in a person? These questions must be asked, and Christians should be alerted that this kind of thinking can find its way into the spiritual formation process. Processing information and believing that only knowing what to do versus doing it will be an obstacle in the everyday lives of people. Christians should desire to be a follower of Jesus. Knowing information about being a follower of Jesus is different from living a life of following Jesus. The danger of this obstacle is clearly seen in James 2: “You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!” (v. 19). Demons had belief about who Jesus was yet are Christians to believe that demons are in the common fellowship with believers? James goes on to make the argument in his letter about the need for transformation to be demonstrated in the lives of Christians. If this living fruit is the goal, then there must be more to the spiritual formation process than just consuming and retaining large amounts of information. In his research, Geiger, Kelly, and Nation discovered, “Many churches equate discipleship with knowledge. . . . Churches who view discipleship as information transfer seek to stuff as much biblical knowledge into as many people as quickly as the possibly can. It sounds noble, but the essence of discipleship is transformation not informational.”²⁹ Knowledge is burdensome. Geiger, Kelly, and Nation write, “Knowledge makes us accountable because it puts us in a position where we must respond. The more knowledge we have, the greater the accountability we owe.”³⁰ Knowledge should not be done away with in the transformation process but should be used as a catalyst to action.

On a basic level, the Bible is a book that has words and that communicates information. It is also much more. The Bible itself declares that all Scripture “is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in

²⁹ Geiger, Kelly, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 18.

³⁰ Geiger, Kelly, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 24.

righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17). An obstacle Christians can easily stumble over is losing the scope of what 2 Timothy teaches and just consuming words on a page. Mulholland calls the obstacle becoming informational readers:

When we do information reading, we exercise almost total and complete control over the text. We usually select the material we are going to read. We read the text with our own agenda already in place, knowing in advance what we expect to receive, what problems we want the text to solve for us. We read the text analytically, viewing it as an object over which we as subject exercise our control, to ensure that it conforms more or less comfortably to our desires and purposes. We read the text as rapidly as possible, to amass as much information as we can in as little time as possible. . . . The final goal of informational reading is our mastery of the text for the fulfillment of our purposes.”³¹

This dangerous obstacle is deceptive in churches specifically because of the value perceived by many that declares having a high volume of information is equivalent to having a high volume of transformation. Christians cannot forget what was at hand when Jesus gave the Great Commission. Jesus said in Matthew 28: “And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age’” (Matt 28:18-20). Jesus did not call his believers to teach new disciples to *know* all that God commands, but rather to *observe* all that God commanded. Jesus had transformational living in mind when he gave his last instructions to the church before he ascended into heaven. The church today needs to be reminded of the obstacle of information over transformation now more than ever before.

Churches risk direct disobedience when they put information burdens on their people at the expense of transformation. Wilhoit discusses this dangerous obstacle when he writes about an information focused model: “This model leads people to believe that the most significant variable in determining whether a person grows or not is their intake

³¹ Mulholland, *An Invitation to a Journey*, 128.

of spiritual truth.”³² Individuals will become big-headed and fact-oriented when they rely on information only. The information God gave His people in His Word has purpose. That purpose is to see people conformed to the image of Christ. Paul writes in his letter to the Romans, “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers” (8:29). The expectation God has on the spiritual formation process in a believer’s life is squarely set on his creation becoming like the Son. God desires not to solely impart information, but to let the information be a catalyst for transformation. Chan warns against missing the purpose in transformation for acquiring information:

Spiritual reading presupposes the Bible as God’s Word calling us to make a decisive response and thus trains us in a certain spiritual attitude—openness to God, humble listening, willingness to obey. These basic dispositions are the fertile ground from which the seeds of virtue sprout. Unlike ordinary reading, spiritual reading is done to affect the heart, not to gain information.³³

Chan explains the difference between ordinary reading, which seeks information, and spiritual reading, which is done to see transformation. Chan also cautions readers to consider the worldviews that surround them. Chan warns Christians to be aware of competing non-Christian worldviews, such as education systems, governments, and the secular world, which will base their presentation of information from something other than the Bible. Chan also cautions readers to be aware of coming to the Bible with false presuppositions, or assuming too quickly that the readers believe they are a theological expert. Chan also warns against the danger of emotionally led reading. He argues it is possible for an individual to expect “that every spiritual reading must be accompanied by good feelings or a powerful challenge. This attitude is symptomatic of our pragmatic reflex.”³⁴ Culture has had more influence in developing that kind of mindset in

³² Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, 51-52.

³³ Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 160.

³⁴ Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 162.

individuals. Identifying the obstacles that hinder spiritual formation is of first importance for Christians. Christians should be, as Geiger writes, “deeply concerned when you see evidence of deficient discipleship. Allow the lack of fruit and the parched lives to break your heart.”³⁵ When the heart is broken, it is in ripe position for tools to be utilized to help spiritual formation flourish. Spiritual formation literature is consistent in revealing that Scripture, personal discipline, and accountability help overcome obstacles to spiritual formation.

Scripture, Discipline, and Accountability as Assets to Spiritual Formation

If Geiger is right when he states that “the distinguishing mark of Christian discipleship (spiritual formation) is a transformed heart, transformed affections,” then Christians need to have some help in knowing how they can overcome obstacles which prevent those distinguishing marks from occurring.³⁶ It is important to know how to navigate the landscape of spiritual formation literature. Reviews of some respected works help identify three specific tools that show up repeatedly in the texts. These assets are the study of Scripture, personal discipline, and like-minded accountability.

Spiritual Formation Is Centered on the Study of Scripture

Richard Averbeck writes about the importance of the Bible in *The Kingdom Life*: “We do not worship the Bible. We worship God who has revealed Himself to us the Bible. And that is why we take the Bible so seriously.”³⁷ Christians study the Scriptures to learn more about God. Waggoner articulates, “A major part of the spiritual formation process is to be a diligent student of the Word of God and to have a hungry, teachable

³⁵ Geiger, Kelly, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 46.

³⁶ Geiger, Kelly, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 29.

³⁷ Andrews, *The Kingdom Life*, 274.

spirit. To be a disciple means being a learner. Being a learner involves both attitude and effort.”³⁸ Having this kind of diligent behavior will help Christians overcome obstacles in their life and open up their spiritual life to transformation. Andrews writes, “The discipline of study, for instance, is critical for engaging our minds on the things of God.”³⁹ One surprising mark of the Bible itself is that it does not give a pragmatic set of specific actions on how to study the Bible. Andrews again writes,

What the scripture does not provide is a normative phenomenology of formation, a comprehensive description of the particular stages, means, and experience necessarily included in a growing relationship with Christ. What it does provide is a theology of formation, a basic framework of understanding relationship with God and what righteous response to God means—putting off and putting on.”⁴⁰

God wants everything to be examined and sanctified in a believer’s life. Andrews reinforces this idea when he writes, “When we read the Scripture with our hearts open to the Holy Spirit, nothing is hidden.”⁴¹ Knowing that it is impossible to keep things hidden from God will help the Christian in study to let the Bible affect every area of their life.

Studying the Scriptures also helps the reader clearly see the gospel and its power. Geiger calls this clarity the most foundational lens to look through in one’s study. Regarding what is discovered in study, Geiger writes,

We will discover that the gospel is for believers, that the gospel is sufficient not only for justification but also for sanctification. People are transformed as they encounter the gospel again and again. Leaders must view discipleship through the lens of the gospel and help their people constantly preach the gospel to themselves.⁴²

³⁸ Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 59.

³⁹ Andrews, *The Kingdom Life*, 100.

⁴⁰ Howard, *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality*, 281.

⁴¹ Andrews, *The Kingdom Life*, 115.

⁴² Geiger, Kelly, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 67.

The gospel is of utmost importance. The gospel shapes foundational understanding, and that understanding helps shape spiritual formation of Christians.

Writing to the Corinthians, Paul says,

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. (1 Cor 15:1-8)

This gospel must have been more to Paul than just information in his head. Pierre writes, “The true influence of instruction in the faith is relationally weighted. The gospel message for Paul was not merely knowledge content to be transferred, but also a life of to be live in light of that knowledge.”⁴³ The Bible will be the source for hearing from God specifically and clearly. Another aid to the spiritual formation process in the life of a believer is one’s willingness to be proactive with regard to personal discipline.

Personal Discipline Is an Asset to Spiritual Formation

Mankind was created with many wonderful attributes. Those attributes include a mind, will, emotions, and a soul. Regarding the attribute of will, Christians must be spiritually responsible in stewarding it. This responsibility is manifested through discipline. Pierre writes,

To be human is to have responsibility. After the breath in their newly formed lungs, God gifted work to Adam and Eve (Gen. 1:28). The responsibility to use God-given capacities for the good of others in the care of creation is one of the crowning honors given to human begins. So, responsibility is a daily, not occasional, aspect of a person’s experience and a necessary expression of the image of God.⁴⁴

⁴³ Jeremy Pierre, *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2016), 148.

⁴⁴ Pierre, *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life*, 175.

It is important for Christians to biblically understand that their new operating mode in discipline and effort can stem from both the Holy Spirit and their own drive. John writes in his gospel, “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.” (14:16-17). The Holy Spirit is a precious and powerful gift from God to the believer. In his work on sanctification, Michael Allen argues from a Reformed perspective on how God initiates and sustains the work of transformation in an individual’s life while the individual exercises faith in action to continue it: “Sanctification must always proceed by faith alone. And yet sanctification takes in every facet of our lives and does proceed by faith to transform us wholly.”⁴⁵ Howard writes, “The Holy Spirit also provides a unique supernatural dimension to existing patterns of human experience.”⁴⁶ This gift adds an additional dimension and does not remove a Christian’s will as an agent being used in spiritual formation. Stanger reveals in his work that “it is not complicated to lead the spiritual life, but it is difficult.”⁴⁷ Stanger speaks plainly of what is needed to be spiritually formed. It is a dichotomy of simplicity and difficulty.

To overcome the difficulties that come when pursuing spiritual formation, one must rely on personal discipline. From a spiritual vantage point, discipline is defined rightly by Andrews: “A discipline is an activity within our power that enables us to accomplish what we cannot do by direct effort.”⁴⁸ The process is not passive. Andrews explains, “This is crucial to the details of spiritual formation, because this process is not a passive process. It is a process in which we continue to make choices and our character

⁴⁵ Michael Allen, *Sanctification* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 286.

⁴⁶ Howard, *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality*, 273.

⁴⁷ Stanger, *Spiritual Formation in the Local Church*, 64.

⁴⁸ Andrews, *The Kingdom Life*, 97.

develops, and sometimes the experience is hard.”⁴⁹ Showing that transformation is a discipline interrelated between the Spirit’s and the individual’s effort, Stanger writes, “Spiritual formation calls for divine-human cooperation, and before we can grow spiritually, we must recognize that.”⁵⁰ When one perseveres through self-discipline, he is helping the spiritual formation process grow. Rarely do Christians experience transformation in an easy way, nor is it normal for Christians to change quickly. Howard writes, “Though guided and empowered by the Spirit, it demands an *intentional* and even, at times, *aggressive* effort on the part of the believer.”⁵¹ When individuals rely on the grace of the Spirit’s work and act responsible in their own will, the process of spiritual formation will bear fruit over time.

Personal discipline requires effort. Christians should actively pursue and work out desired outcomes to their faith through personal effort. The idea of working out one’s faith is reinforced in Scripture. Paul writes in his letter to the Philippians, “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (2:12-13). Paul encouraged similar discipline when he discusses his own efforts: “For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me” (Col 1:29).

Discipline must be in response to the power of the gospel. Once Jesus opens individuals’ hearts and minds to trust him by faith, they have different and uniquely Christian motivations to obey in love. Andrews brings clarity to the discipline discussion when he provides a helpful dichotomy about the categories of disciplines. In writing about distinctions of discipline, Andrews writes, “There are two basic categories of

⁴⁹ Andrews, *The Kingdom Life*, 50.

⁵⁰ Stanger, *Spiritual Formation in the Local Church*, 15.

⁵¹ Howard, *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality*, 270.

spiritual disciplines: (1) disciplines of abstinence and (2) disciplines of engagement.”⁵² He argues that there are both actions to remove oneself from and actions to perform. Both actions require discipline. Examples of disciplines of abstinence are fasting and solitude while examples of disciplines of engagement include prayer, confession, and Bible study. Individuals must be disciplined in a godly way, but they also need to find communities that share their convictions.

Spiritual Formation through Accountable Relationships

The Scriptures clearly call Christians to be connected to one another. Boa writes, “The New Testament frequently underscores the importance of unity among brothers and sisters in Christ. The church is to be a community of unity within diversity.”⁵³ One of the most clarifying passages on connectedness Christians have in Scripture comes from Hebrews 10:22-25:

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Christians need each other. They need other accountable brothers and sisters to help them live out the gospel as they love one another and as they promote good works. Pierre writes, “God gave people dynamic hearts in order to represent him on earth, and the way people do so is primarily through interacting with others.”⁵⁴ Living life with other Christians is vital.

The reason this fellowship is needed is because sin is a threat to change. Sin most naturally will cause a person to isolate themselves. Geiger reinforces this idea when

⁵² Andrews, *The Kingdom Life*, 98.

⁵³ Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, 430.

⁵⁴ Pierre, *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life*, 145.

he quotes, “Sin demands to have a man by himself. It withdraws him from the community. The more isolated a person is, the more destructive will be the power of sin over him.”⁵⁵ If this understanding is true, then individuals need to find community. However, not just any community. For Christian spiritual formation to occur, individuals need community that is truly Christian. Howard argues that the significant markers of Christian community are “its voluntary composition,” “its intentional gathering,” “its instructional nature,” and “its fellowship.”⁵⁶ The gospel is the linking component to how all those markers interrelate. It is also important to understand that God is the initiator of bringing individuals into spiritual community when the Holy Spirit awakens a heart to faith. God initiates the inward change and provides the sustaining power of saved people living together in meaningful accountable relationships. When this accountable living happens in the local church, that body experiences real tangible life in the body of Christ. These mutual benefitting relationships will help spiritual formation flourish. Mulholland broadens this picture of flourishing:

Corporate spirituality is life in the body of Christ, not as a metaphor but the living reality of the presence of Christ in the community of faith. As individual cells of the body of Christ, we each have unique gifts of temperament preference, personality and character that exist for the welfare of the entire body. We are to be means of God’s grace to the other cells in the body and in turn receive from our companion cells what God graces to us through them. . . . Only in the body of Christ are we constantly challenged to allow God to be in control of the relationship we have with God.⁵⁷

All relationships are with people who are flawed and sinful people. Those relationships need something between them to help each person move toward godliness. That something is submission. Submission is the willing subjection of oneself to another. Boa reinforces the definition of submission when he writes, “Biblical accountability is not a matter of

⁵⁵ Geiger, Kelly, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 157.

⁵⁶ Howard, *A Guide to Christian Spiritual Formation*, 158.

⁵⁷ Mulholland, *An Invitation to a Journey*, 181.

external imposition but of voluntary submission.”⁵⁸ When individuals focus on external imposition, they become an independent person. When an individual focuses on submission, the person become dependent. People need to be regularly dependent on other people to help them see God work. If people are dependent on a communal environment as individuals, then they must accept the role a community plays in their life. Wilhoit argues for this community need:

People change most readily when they are in environments that foster change as they learn to live out their unique communal calling. . . . There is a shift from independence to healthy interdependence. We begin to let go of our disgust for self-disclosure, vulnerability, and weakness. Commitment is upheld instead of being feared as binding or controlling.⁵⁹

Howard reinforces the idea of spiritual formation flourishing in community:

Christian spiritual formation is also the formation of a people. We are a people of God: visible in households, congregations, networks and monastic expressions. . . . Missionary theologian Lesslie Newbigin writes, “The Church is an entity which has outlasted many states, nations, and empires, and it will outlast those that exist today. The Church is nothing other than that movement launched into the public life of the world by its sovereign Lord to continue that which he came to do until it is finished in His return in glory.” The final portraits in Scripture of God’s forming work are those of a bride and a city—illustrations of personal relationship and of a transformed corporate identity.⁶⁰

This descriptive picture of a bride and an eternal city perfectly illustrates the relational necessity of a Christian’s future. People have the same need for a personal relationship with Jesus and the transformational work of the Christian community on this side of eternity.

Conclusion

Spiritual formation is a process to which all Christians will be exposed. Keeping the gospel at the center of that process is key. Undoubtedly, individuals will face obstacles during the process—obstacles of sin, Satan, and the flesh. Those obstacles can

⁵⁸ Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, 444.

⁵⁹ Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, 184.

⁶⁰ Howard, *A Guide to Christian Spiritual Formation*, 171.

be overcome. Through submission to God the Father, empowerment by God the Spirit, and living to make much of God the Son, Christians will see maturity in this life occur. Prayer can be a driving force that helps the process stay focused on God. Christians overcome obstacles through personal Bible study, discipline that flows from a right heart and mind, and living in authentic community with others.

CHAPTER 4

MINISTRY PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

After showing the biblical and theological basis for spiritual formation and reviewing spiritual formation literature, this project focused on equipping Shadowbrook Church members in a holistic spiritual formation model to affect their personal growth in a variety of discipleship environments. To fulfill the purpose of the project, an equipping class was created to promote understanding within spiritual formation and lay the groundwork to build a model to affect personal growth. This project was developed in the spring of 2020, and presented in a five-week course where each class met for one and a half hours. Participants were Shadowbrook (SBC) members who joined the class to grow in their own spiritual formation. This chapter informs and summarizes the implementation of the project and focuses on curriculum development, the equipping class format, measurable assessments, and their results.

Target Group

Part of the rationale for this project was to help SBC members use their discipleship environments to strengthen the church and address the weaknesses previously mentioned. I wanted the target group's first love to be reawakened and to promote unity within the church. One step in preparing for project implementation was working with the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary's Ethics Committee. This committee approved the curriculum, the curriculum rubric, the ethics forms, and the in-class assessment.¹ The risk factor was assessed for the people who would be involved in

¹ See appendix 1 for the ethic form that all SBC members signed before participating in the equipping class.

the class, and that assessment revealed low risk for those in target group. The target group in this project was SBC members who volunteered for the class. They understood the five-week attendance requirement and that a pre- and post-assessment were to be filled out individually for statistical analysis. Thirty-two members completed the course, and a total of twenty-five members completed both the pre-assessment on the first day of class and the post-class assessment after the final class, so that I could compare the results between the two sets of scores.

Equipping Class Curriculum

I began to work on the content for the class in the fall of 2019. Much of the work that I had done in chapters 2 and 3 of this project were used as informational and teaching material for the class. In January of 2020, I came up with the title “How People Change: Holistic Gospel Change in the Christian Life”² The course had five objectives:

1. Explain and define a strategic definition for spiritual formation.
2. Understand the complexities of the heart and the interconnectedness of the whole person.
3. Understand the connectedness of the heart and mind in relationship to spiritual formation.
4. See sin, flesh, Satan, and the world as enemies of spiritual formation.
5. See Scripture study, accountability, and personal discipline as commonly agreed on tools for spiritual formation as given in a review of literature on the topic.

I created each of the five classes’ material to accomplish these objectives as well as encourage classroom participants.

Class 1 focused on a general understanding of spiritual formation and exposed the complexities people will face while pursuing it. The class also raised the level of importance of spiritual formation in the individual’s mind. The pre-assessment was also administered during class 1. The teaching material helped the class members understand

² See appendix 4.

spiritual formation and began to direct the participant toward seeing how the heart, mind, and will are connected as Christians grow. The class finished with a presentation and discussion on a definition of spiritual formation. That definition states that spiritual formation is the grace-filled process by which people mature and conform to the image of Christ. The Bible and the Holy Spirit were conveyed as the instruments for which this definition would become living reality in the class member's life.

Class 2 focused on how God designed the whole person while identifying significant parts that make up the whole. Particularly, the lesson focused on how one defines the heart, mind, and will biblically. Jeremy Pierre's *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life* helped shape the content of class 2. Barriers to spiritual formation made up the content of the second half of the class. Specifically, James 4:4-10 was explained to show how pride is a core barrier to spiritual formation. The concepts of sin, Satan, and the flesh were also addressed.

Class 3 largely centered on the heart. One of the key scriptural passages on spiritual formation, Deuteronomy 6:1-5, was presented and explained. Several other scriptures were used to show the dynamics of the heart while also elevating the importance of focusing deeply on heart issues in the process of spiritual formation. This class also introduced the gleanings gained during the literature review of chapter 3. Accountability was the tool focused on specifically. SBC connects lessons learned to its value of renewing community. The aim was to help the class members see how Scripture, literature, and values within the church have purpose in their design.

Class 4 targeted the mind as the focal point of the content. The convicting Scripture found in Romans 12:1-2 was explained and applied during the class time. Beliefs that drive behavior was a summary theme during the teaching time. A definition for the biblical word "mind" was given and then a larger expansion of Bible texts help show the connection of the mind to the heart. This classed helped give descriptions to the word "maturity" and the phrase "conforming to Christ" within the definition of spiritual

formation presented throughout the curriculum. The second recommended tool, the study of the Bible, which was analyzed from the literature review, was given to the class and practical steps were given on the importance of individuals spending consistent focused time in the Bible.

Class 5 was the final class, and the topic was personal will and transformation. Class members were given brief reviews of the previous four weeks and then spent time interacting on what personal responsibility would look like for them in the coming weeks. The goal was to shape personal discipline in their lives. At the end of the class, the members took a post-class assessment to help me see if there was marked growth from class 1 to class 5. The results of both surveys are discussed later in this chapter.

The third goal was to teach a spiritual formation model through curriculum for the purpose of assessing one's own spiritual formation and growing in the biblical awareness of the terms listed within the model. Success was determined as having twenty SBC members attend the equipping class and experience the curriculum being taught. Twenty-five SBC members completed all the courses thereby showing success for the third goal.

Expert Panel

After the sessions were drafted and constructed, I sent the curriculum and the curriculum rubric to an expert for panel for review. The rubric evaluated biblical faithfulness (two sections), scope (three sections), methodology (two sections), and applicability (two sections). Nine total sections were scored by the expert panel.³

The scores received for the expert panel helped address the second goal of the project, which was to develop a spiritual formation model and help individuals grow in their own spiritual formation. This model was introduced via the curriculum of the equipping class and the expert panel scores helped determine its effectiveness. Teaching

³ See appendix 5.

materials and suggested readings were passed along via email so that participants could have resources in a digital format for future study.

The results of the expert panels review were encouraging, and the second goal was considered a success when 90 percent of all areas of the evaluation criterion received a sufficient or better rating. Overall, 98 percent of the curriculum was scored sufficient or exemplary; therefore, the second goal was considered a success. The concerns that represent the other 2 percent had to do with the types of words used in the curriculum. Those concerns were addressed in modifications of terms or explanations of theological words within the class teaching time. The panel of experts consisted of the following six men: Jon Akin, Bryant Wright, Micah Fries, Jeff Pennington, Tim Akin, and John Green.

Jon Akin is currently the interim pastor of First Baptist Church in Naples, Florida. He holds a PhD in Old Testament from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He also serves as the director for young leader engagement for the North American Mission Board. Akin serves as an adjunct professor for SBTS and is the son of Danny Akin, president of Southeastern Theological Seminary. Akin and his wife have three children, and live in Knoxville, Tennessee.

Bryant Wright is the former senior pastor of Johnson Ferry Baptist Church in Marietta, Georgia. He is currently president of SEND Relief, a joint ministry partnership between the North American Mission Board and the International Mission Board. Bryant also served as the president of the Southern Baptist Convention from 2010–2012. Founder and chairman of Right from the Heart ministries, Wright and his wife live in Georgia.

Micah Fries is currently the senior pastor of Brainard Baptist Church in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Prior to serving at Brainerd, he served at LifeWay Christian Resources in Nashville, and was a frequent speaker in churches and conferences. He has served as a Senior Pastor in Missouri, and an international church planter in Burkina Faso, West Africa. He holds a Master of Divinity from Midwestern Seminary and a

Bachelor of Arts in Theology from The Baptist College of Florida. Micah is currently a PhD student, studying North American Missiology at Southeastern Seminary.

Jeff Pennington is the senior pastor of First Baptist Church in Smyrna, Georgia. Pennington has a PhD from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Before moving to Georgia, he served as the executive pastor for Buck Run Baptist Church in Frankfort, Kentucky. He now resides in Smyrna, Georgia, with his wife and four daughters.

Tim Akin is the senior pastor of First Baptist Church in Douglasville, Georgia. Tim Akin is also a son of Danny Akin, and brother to Jon Akin, another panel member. He is working on his PhD at Southeastern Theological Seminary and before moving to Georgia, he worked under Jimmy Scroggins at Family Church in South Florida. He and his wife reside with their five children in Georgia.

John Green is the senior pastor of Wallace Memorial Baptist Church in Knoxville, Tennessee. He and his wife moved their family of five to Tennessee in 2017. Green holds a PhD from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is committed to the Great Commission and strives to equip his church to love the Bible and live on mission.

Pre-Class Assessment

There are a lot of spiritual formation assessments on the market today and selecting one that matched the goal of this project was completed when finding the *Anatomy of a Disciple*, a book written by Rick Taylor. The book makes an argument for a model that has been adapted and modified with permission. I have worked with the *Anatomy of a Disciple* content for nearly eighteen years. In its original form, Taylor simply called the model “The Seven.” This model had seven distinct areas of spiritual formation that were titled and described. When Taylor moved to Fresno, California, he and a team of pastors worked to deconstruct and reconstruct the early model into something new during the 2012 calendar year. This process formulated the content that

Taylor used to write the book. The pastors spent six months praying and working through spiritual formation language to help create a memorable and useful tool to be used in the local church. Eventually landing on the title *Anatomy of a Disciple*, the team felt strongly about the content. Over the years, as I continued working through the model and comparing it with the knowledge I was learning in school, I concluded that even more modifications would be helpful for the local church. The model needed to become simpler to grasp both in visualization and in language.

The modified model was built for this project and the assessment that goes along with it were used with permission from the Well Community Church in Fresno, California.⁴ The new graphic model focused on language that was simple using the terms *heart, mind, and will*. The will section was expanded to include the terms *give, live, and love*. These terms were linked to the assessment and used throughout the teaching of the course.

To streamline the pre-class and post-class assessment I used language from *Anatomy of a Disciple* for the actual assessment that the SBC members filled out. The assessment was divided into five sections with eighteen questions under each section.⁵ The five sections were categorized by headings of Humble Submission (heart), Biblically Formed (mind), Relationally Healthy (love), Sacrificially Generous (give), and Morally Discerning (live). Questions in each of the sections were mostly designed to elicit a positive answer in mind but three were worded differently to elicit a negative score. SBC members scored themselves on each question with a scale rating valued from 1-10. The number 1 was labeled as *not* descriptive with the number 5 labeled as *usually* descriptive,

⁴ See appendix 3. The graphic seen within the appendix is a visualization of the spiritual formation model that was referenced throughout the duration of the equipping class.

⁵ See appendix 2. The assessment was modified for the equipping class and was used to measure strengths and deficiencies in each of the five sections. The concepts of each section were taught through the course of the equipping class. The same assessment was used at the beginning and the end of the course.

and the number 10 was labeled as *perfectly* descriptive. Members could use all numbers 1-10 to score themselves. A Likert scale was used to give numeric value to each individual score. All sections had eighteen questions and a fifteen of those assumed positive answers while the last three questions in each section were oriented with an assumed negative response. To score the negative questions consistently, I reversed the value of the numbers on the Likert scale.

The first goal of the project was to assess the current level of understanding of spiritual formation with the members who attended the equipping class. The first goal was considered a success when twenty members completed the assessment. Having twenty-five people complete the pre-assessment gave me a quality sample size to evaluate over time. After the pre-assessments were collected, I entered the data into an Excel file that eventually hosted the post-assessment scores and helped with the statistical analysis.

One fear in a project like this, is that the participants might not attend every class. I faced that fear in the first week, but I was deeply encouraged to see that all of the SBC members who signed up were able to participate in the class. The class occurred in the spring of 2020 and did have some unforeseen barriers because of a national crisis. The Covid-19 pandemic set in, and in Georgia, the shelter in place ordinance took place during the middle of implementing the equipping classes. The Ethics Committee at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary approved the adjustment of the last two classes to a digital format given the situation.

Post-Class Assessment

The ultimate heart of the project was to see SBC members grow and change for the better. The post-class assessment was a key component to evaluate if the heart of the project was completed. After the final teaching component of class 5, the members were asked to fill out the post-class assessment. This second assessment was identical to the pre-class version and I hoped to compare the results of pre and post for each

individual. The fourth goal was considered successful when the *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a statistically significant improvement between the pre-class assessment and the post-class assessment.

Results

After the conclusion of the fifth equipping class, the twenty-five members were given the post-class assessment to complete. Given that the shelter in place order was still in place and the final two classes occurred over zoom, participants were emailed the assessment and they filled out the forms and emailed them back to me. I allowed one week for the final assessments to be completed and returned. Twenty-five SBC members returned the post-class assessment. Upon receipt of those assessments, I entered the second set of scores to an Excel file. I assigned Likert scoring to the whole set and ran a *t*-test on dependent samples to generate the results in each of the assessment's five sections. The level of significance for the *t*-test was set at .05, and the results below represent all individual scores for each section.

Section 1 was titled "Biblically Formed," and there was a statistically significant improvement ($t_{(24)} = 4.38, p = .0001$). This demonstrates that SBC members grew in their understanding of how the Bible serves as the source of information for spiritual formation.

Section 2 was titled "Humbly Submitted," and there was a statistically significant improvement ($t_{(24)} = 4.38, p = .0001$). This demonstrates that SBC members grew in the understanding of what it means to maintain a humble posture while pursuing their own spiritual formation.

Section 3 was titled "Sacrificially Generous," and there was a statistically significant improvement ($t_{(24)} = 3.89, p = .0003$). This demonstrate that SBC members grew in the understanding of what it means to steward their time, talents, and treasure well.

Section 4 was titled “Relationally Healthy,” and there was a statistically significant improvement ($t_{(24)} = 3.84, p = .0004$). This demonstrates that SBC members increased in their understanding of how important it is as a believer to be involved in renewing community and accountability.

Section 5 was titled “Morally Discerning,” and there was a statistically significant improvement ($t_{(24)} = 3.78, p = .0005$). This demonstrates that SBC members increased in their understanding of the importance of living a moral and discerning life as a Christian.

Once the results of the *t*-test were conducted, an email was sent to the SBC members letting them know the overall growth through the course that they displayed. Individual names and scores were not a part of that concluding email to show improvement.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on the equipping class implementation and the design and results of the spiritual formation assessment used for the project. The class was purposed to deepen and engage the individual members with their own spiritual formation journey. The assessment helped provide diagnostic information that could be tracked between the beginning and end of the course. Having met all four goals of this project, the project was a success and definite theological and practical takeaways were gained. The project aimed at keeping the gospel at the center of that process is key. Undoubtedly, individuals will face obstacles during the process—obstacles of sin, Satan, and the flesh. Those obstacles can be overcome. Through submission to God the Father, empowerment by God the Spirit, and living to make much of God the Son, Christians will see maturity in this life. Those individuals overcome obstacles through personal Bible study, discipline that flows from a right heart and mind, and living in authentic community with others.

CHAPTER 5

MINISTRY PROJECT EVALUATION

At Shadowbrook Church (SBC), Suwanee, Georgia, the people understand that they are on mission to live out the gospel as they gather within the church and go out into the world. Understanding the gospel is important not just for salvation but for sanctification as well. Generally speaking, from 2000-2015, SBC members had lost their first love over time and needed a renewed sense of purpose and understanding for spiritual growth. I am grateful for the truth Andrew Nicholls and Helen Thorne rightly state: “God is not reluctant to change his children. We might be like run-down houses that need lots of renovation, but God never thinks, ‘What a wreck! I can’t be bothered with them.’ He knows what we will one day become.”¹ The purpose of this project was to equip members in a holistic spiritual formation model to affect their personal growth.

This chapter seeks to evaluate the efficacy of this project and its purpose and to reflect upon the goals set at the beginning. The project had strengths and weaknesses, and a few changes would need to be made in future iterations of the project. The chapter finishes with personal and theological reflections on the project.

Evaluation of the Project’s Purpose

The purpose of the project was to create a holistic spiritual formation model to affect SBC members personal growth. Evaluating the ultimate and comprehensive breadth of the purpose being fulfilled was difficult because I cannot see into the future. However, I can observe what happened in the spring during the project’s implementation. When I

¹ Andrew Nicholls and Helen Thorne, *Real Change: Becoming More Like Jesus in Everyday Life* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2018), 6.

evaluate the purpose based on what occurred over the preparations, five-week course, and subsequent evaluations, I can conclude the purpose was fulfilled. If SBC was in a place of having lost its first love and in need of seeing the grace of God in a fresh way, this class helped revive people's love for the Lord Jesus and regularly reminded SBC members of the glories of grace.

What made the project holistic was the teaching on the all-encompassing parts of a human with regard to heart, mind, and will. Many members in the class have been Christians for long period of time and seemed to have their spiritual life compartmentalized or privatized. I heard members express that they felt like their emotions were separated from their thinking, and that their actions or will were beyond from their understanding. The majority did not feel the connectedness of all the heart, mind, and will components until they had walked through the material and it was explained to them. I witnessed a change within the class. At the end of each class we talked about big takeaways. People regularly made statements about their emotions being expressive of their heart and before acting in any way they needed to spend time at a heart level to address the issues at hand. The course also helped SBC members receive fresh encouragement to have a renewed focus on Bible reading in a consistent daily way. They made comments along the lines of, "I feel like I am always in my head trying to convince myself what is true and right, and I have ignored turning to Scripture primarily as the voice to listen to." Pastor and author Paul Tripp describes this idea in his book *New Morning Mercies*:

No one is more influential in your life than you are, because no one talks to you more than you do. We never stop talking to ourselves. We are in a constant conversation with ourselves about God, others, ourselves, meaning and purpose, identity, and such. The things you say to you about you, God, and life are profoundly important because they form and shape the way you then respond to the things that God has put on your plate. You see, you are always preaching to yourself some kind of worldview, some kind of "gospel," if you will. The question is, in your private moment-by-moment conversation, what are you saying to you?²

² Paul David Tripp, *New Morning Mercies: A Daily Gospel Devotional* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), April 7, 2014 entry, emphasis original.

Instead of listening to themselves, the members in the class were renewed to speak to themselves more by allowing Scripture to be the voice that effects their own spiritual formation.

Creating a visual spiritual model was connected to the purpose of this project. This model was developed, modified, and elaborated upon during the curriculum development. In class the model was created and explained in full. The assessment taken before and after class helped the members evaluate their current spiritual formation compared to the sections of the model. I am not convinced the model itself was the most important takeaway compared to the content and biblical material presented through the curriculum. Most members identified in their small group responses that their heart and mind connection within the model was the most helpful. In one sense, this connection helps the purpose of the project as it deals with SBC members developing a holistic mindset. Models are only helpful if they help lead a person to action. James Wilhoit reinforces this idea when he writes “The heart of spiritual formation is to teach and train people to follow the wisdom and instructions of Christ through the enabling power of his grace.”³ SBC members were encouraged to receive wisdom and instructions from Scripture while also being called up to follow in action with what the Scriptures revealed.

As a pastor in the religious south, this is truly encouraging. Performance Christianity reigns and southerners are generally at ease with neglecting heart issues to appear religious or act in a righteous way. Having members become excited to look at their heart in a new a different way was encouraging. Others in the class commented about being committed to combat fleshly thinking by letting the Scriptures be their primary source to influence what they know to be true. They are setting themselves up for Spirit empowered change and spiritually significant transformation when they think and act in

³ James C. Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 39.

that way. A robust, holistic vision for spiritual growth was given to the members through the project and they were able to grow in their understanding personally.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

Evaluating the projects goals was helpful to see if the high-level goals were accomplished and how the completion of those goals occurred during the project's implementation. Laying out the goals for the project early on in development helped me stay focused through the months of preparing and executing the project. Reviewing the fruitfulness of the project depends on evaluating the success of the four goals set at the beginning.

The first goal was to assess the current level of understanding of spiritual formation within a class of members. An assessment at the beginning of the project helped participants grow their mind and gave them self-disclosed data to help them see where they were strong or weak within their own spiritual formation.⁴ Most participants were excited to complete a pre-class assessment because it got them personally engaged and moving toward a better understanding of themselves. One of the strengths of SBC members is their love of knowledge and desire to grow. Some members were confused by some of the questions and wanted to look too deeply into each word. They failed to see the simplicity in the phrasing and drew out too much meaning, which limited some of the members from finishing on time and needing to stay after the class to finish the final sections. The quality of the questions challenged SBC members. Most questions were written to elicit a positive response while some questions were written to elicit a low score. The varieties of questions helped class members stay engaged through the assessment. The average class participant needed twenty to thirty minutes to complete the assessment. The first goal was accomplished through administering the pre-class

⁴ See appendix 2.

assessment to twenty-five (5 more people than the goal originally aimed for) SBC members and their results were returned to the leader.

The second goal was to introduce a spiritual formation model and curriculum for the purpose of assessing one's own spiritual formation. The goal also helped SBC members grow in the biblical awareness of the following categories: humbly submitted, biblically formed, morally discerning, sacrificially generous, and relationally healthy. The spiritual formation model for this project was repeated over multiple weeks to reinforce the ideas. Some members noted the language difference from the assessment and the model presented in class. This helpful observation pushed me to consider streamlining all the language for future class offerings. The expert panel that reviewed the curriculum scored all the areas at better than 90 percent being sufficient or exemplary. The second goal was completed when the rubrics were returned by the expert panel and the data was calculated.

The third goal was to teach through a spiritual formation model for the purpose of assessing one's own spiritual formation and growing in the biblical awareness of the terms listed within the model. Chapter 4 detailed the class specifics and the forthcoming sections in this chapter unpack how the class could be built upon for the future. Completing the teaching session made for successful goal completion as all of the SBC members participated in each class.

The fourth goal was to have an improved understanding of spiritual formation among the SBC members. Appendix 6 shows that in each of the five sections of the survey a significant majority of members had improved scores from the first assessment to the second. In the "Humbly Submitted" section, 23 out of 25 had scores that improved. In the "Biblically Formed" section, 22 out of 25 class members' scores improved. In the "Sacrificially Generous" and "Relationally Healthy" sections, 19 out of the 25 members had scores that improved. In the "Morally Discerning" section, 21 of the 25 members had improved scores. This basic data viewing helps reinforce that improved understanding of

spiritual formation actually occurred in the minds of the SBC members.⁵ Almost all of the feedback from SBC members declared the class to be helpful for their own understanding. The SBC members seemed to be challenged and stretched in their thinking. The improvement came from having a broader understanding of spiritual formation, the barriers to spiritual formation that do exist, and the personal responsibility to force reflection on one's own heart and mind first, then to determine how to engage the will for living out their faith. The improvement was reinforced by the *t*-test data that showed significant improvement between the pre-class assessment and the post-class assessment.

Strengths of the Project

Looking back over the course implementation and execution, there are four major strengths. First, the study was anchored in the Bible. Each week passages of Scripture served as the foundation for material that was taught. Commitment to the Scriptures provided an opportunity for truth to be declared in a clear way. The church competes with many voices in the culture to influence the lives of those whom the church serves. Therefore, having a strong resolve to the perspicuity of Scripture on topics like God, sin, Jesus, salvation, sanctification, grace, and glory made the project strong. One of the strengths of SBC is its commitment to the Word of God and a biblically grounded equipping class was well-received by the SBC members.

Second, the project was personally challenging for the SBC members who completed the equipping class. SBC members have historically wrestled with not having a deep understanding of the gospel and its implications, and the intentional call to personal responsibility created an opportunity for them to learn. Thinking about grace that leads to personal change is challenging for an SBC member who is stuck in a historically performance-based church. SBC welcomed this challenge and responded well

⁵ See appendix 6.

through the course to trust what the Bible says, even if it is challenging. Not only was the equipping class personally exacting, it was practically helpful as well.

The equipping class regularly produced opportunity for individual participants to make a practical change in their own lives through an emphasis on small group discussions. From thinking about grace in a fresh way, to looking deep into their heart and examining motivations and renewing their own mind to conform to the image of Christ. At the end of each class, SBC members were given small group questions to work through in groups of three or four. Dialoguing about the questions reinforced the hope for practical change. The questions helped members recall information that was taught and pushed them to put something learned in the lesson into practice through the week. Brad Waggoner reinforces the idea that doctrine needs to lead to application when he writes, “Knowing includes, but goes beyond, theological reflection and beliefs. It is essential that we embrace biblical doctrine, but we must not allow ourselves to divorce doctrine from our daily attitudes and perspectives.”⁶ SBC members were encouraged to embrace and apply what they were learning in the equipping class to their everyday life throughout the week. The pre- and post-assessment also helped with practical growth. The pre-assessment showed them areas in which they were strong or deficient. Knowing their strengths and weaknesses made the members more ready to receive information and apply it to their own life.

Much time went into reviewing spiritual formation literature and this was an additional strength for the overall course. It was important to appeal to a large pool of literature to create a wide range of material. From this material themes were assessed, strengths of spiritual formation were observed, and I recognized where agreements by multiple authors on which personal disciplines help spiritual formation flourish. As a teacher, the research in spiritual formation literature gave the project more breadth and

⁶ Brad Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come: Spiritual Formation and the Future of Discipleship* (Nashville: B & H, 2008), 293.

credibility. The themes that emerged and were detailed in chapter 3 helped target and solidify teaching points during each of the equipping classes. Finding the consistencies and variances amongst the literature forced me to compare that material with the expositional work of the Scriptures and determine what fit and what was biblically obscure. Another advantage of the research was that it provided visuals and language that would not have made it into the project material unless it was discovered prior. For example, the New Growth Press model given in week 1 of the curriculum visually displayed how Christians continually grow in knowledge of God and grow in their own awareness of sin. The model helped show how the gospel has to cover the gap and be an understood component to growth. Several SBC members gave verbal feedback of appreciation and feedback about remembering the graphic. The visualization of the model⁷ and the definition of spiritual formation given in class were the two greatest developments in the material that were created from a well-researched project.

Weaknesses of the Project

In every project there is an opportunity for the researcher to evaluate and improve. This project had a few weaknesses that I observed over the course of the implementation. The first area weakness came in the form of a virus. The Covid-19 crisis had not yet developed in the United States when the project was initially implemented, but the heightened number of cases and subsequent government action caused a break in the normal flow of equipping. As a result, teaching was suspended for a few weeks and then moved to a digital medium to complete the final two classes. The pandemic break and consequences were perceived as a weakness because they hindered learning during the course and the time gap made it potentially more difficult to retain information. Students were unable to be in a weekly rhythm where they were learning, absorbing information, and being reminded of the connectedness of the courses. However, being

⁷ See appendix 3.

forced to a digital meeting without the extra support of in-person meeting did help SBC members practice disciplines at home and think in different ways. I sought to create an environment where self-reflection and personal decisions could be fostered. George Knight shows the need for self-reflection when he writes, “Self-control, rather than externally imposed control, is central in Christian education and discipline. Individuals must be brought to the place where they can make their own decisions and be responsible for those decisions without continually be coaxed, directed, and/or forced by a powerful authority.”⁸ Without the presence of SBC members in the class, valuable time was lost trying to keep the members engaged in learning and reflecting on the biblical content. It was possible for the students continue learning and self-reflection, but the Covid-19 crisis brought temporary disruption to the project’s implementation regarding person-to-person engagement.

The second area of weaknesses dealt with the connectedness of the language used in the pre- and post-class assessment material compared to the information presented in each of the classes within the curriculum. Some members wanted to see consistency in the simplified modified language of the model and have it on the assessments. The section headings used in the assessment only showed up sparingly in the material, therefore, though sufficient for its designated purpose, the assessment was more of a bookend tool to the material rather than a weaved pattern of language through the course. If the course material had used more language from the assessment or had been referred to more along the journey of teaching, then more cohesive learning could have taken place and a better total package of curriculum would have been developed.

Another weakness in the project was seen in the absence of some key theological understandings within spiritual formation. More material could have been created within the curriculum to firmly establish the role of the Holy Spirit and the Word

⁸ George R. Knight, *Philosophy and Education: An Introduction to Christian Perspective* (Berrien Spring, MI: Andrews University Press, 2006), 246.

of God as the primary agents of change. The Spirit was spoken about and briefly taught while the Word of God was present and expounded in each lesson; however, a foundational explanation of the Spirit and Bible near the beginning of the course to help identify and incorporate the importance of the Spirit and the sufficiency of Scripture when it comes to spiritual formation was lacking.

What I Would Do Differently

As a pastor who is responsible for spiritual formation within our local church, I hope to have the opportunity to reteach this course in the future. I hope to modify the course to show adaptability and refinement in future equipping classes through updated material. Reflecting on the project, I would modify several things within the project to make it even better for the future.

First, I would create a digital version of the pre- and post-class assessment. In today's technologically savvy world, this change makes pragmatic sense. Participants could be given the assessment in an email link or text prior to the class and be able to take the assessment on their own time. The answers would be recorded digitally and, depending on how sophisticated the assessment was built, calculations could be created in the digital format that would help with the statistical measurements. In addition, if the participants completed the assessment before the class, I would have real time data to give an immediate understanding to the SBC members that they could observe and absorb in class.

Second, I would encourage more new believers to go through the class because of its connection between salvation and spiritual formation. Only one young believer attended the equipping class. I primarily observed this need (to equip new believers) through the feedback of the expert panel. All of the panel members are involved in ministry in a significant way and work in the realm of spiritual formation with people every week. Their feedback showed me that this material served as a great initial step into discipleship once a person has been converted. The panel members also helped me see

that the material served as a bridge between salvation and the personal responsibility that comes with spiritual disciplines. One panel member in particular helped me see the importance of people understanding the biblical consistency that link heart and mind together first, and then encouraging them to think about the biblical application through their own will. When people focus primarily on the will over the heart and mind, the potential for a life driven by legalism is potentially taking shape. Barriers like legalism were exposed in the spiritual formation literature review from chapter 3. Encouraging newly converted persons to work through this course material would help them identify and navigate the barriers to spiritual formation and help in their progressive sanctification. I desire to see new believers accept the importance of connecting the heart and mind on spiritual issues.

Third, I would invite some of the younger pastors and teachers to teach the course with me. Giving these pastors the opportunity to own the material through study and teach the material to SBC members would keep their minds regularly focused on spiritual formation. I wish I would have done this research and project early on in my ministry career. In doing so, I would have ministered to youth and people with a more biblical mindset and helped to shape worldviews in a stronger way. Imparting what I have learned now to the next generation of leaders would help them develop as a pastor. Looking back over my years in ministry, the material in this project stands juxtaposed to many of the practices present in the churches in which I have served. None of the churches I grew up in instructed me about heart issues and the connectedness of the mind to those issues. My youth group was more recreation than training and the youth were stifled spiritually because of that focus. I do not want to make the same mistakes with the generations that the Lord gives to Shadowbrook Church.

Fourth, I would reevaluate the language and words used during the teaching time and within the curriculum. The language a teacher uses really matters when it comes to students' absorption of the material. In *Small Teaching*, James Lang validates that those

kinds of changes, though small, can be “powerful modifications to our course design and teaching practices.”⁹ One of the expert panel members helped me see this need clearly. The panel member offered feedback that a lot of the language in the curriculum that pastors and doctoral students would understand but might be confusing or complex for the lay person in an equipping class. In the future I would simplify the language and use repetition as a teaching tool to help SBC members grasp the concepts.

Fifth, I would rename the course. In the original design, the course was entitled “How People Change.” The initial expectations this created in people’s mind leaned toward actual spiritual disciplines as the overarching tool to be taught. While spiritual disciplines were present, the class material was more weighted toward internal understanding and creating a biblical understanding for where change begins and how the gospel connects to the holistic development of a Christian. A more appropriate name for the course might be “Where Change Begins for Christians.” I could easily see a second course of material developed that builds on the material in this course while adding in specific spiritual discipline practices and mindsets.

Sixth, I would add an additional teaching day focused solely on the biblical theology of the Spirit and the Word. This would set up SBC members to have a stronger grasp on who and what initiates spiritual formation. This key information would give the curriculum a robust view of formation and provide essential material for a believer to consider when evaluating their own spiritual formation.

Finally, I would remove the phrase *spiritual formation* from the material and replace with a better descriptive phrase. I would use the phrase *biblical transformation* over *spiritual formation*. I discovered that *spiritual formation* is broad in scope and is perceived as somewhat mystical for a non-believer or new believer. Chapter 3 showed in its beginning paragraphs that there are many definitions for *spiritual formation* within the

⁹ James Lang, *Small Teaching: Everyday Lessons from the Science of Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2016), 5.

different literature pieces that were reviewed. It is a phrase that has become a bit of a buzzword in the western church today and the concept of progressive sanctification could be better illustrated with a different phrase. In a clarifying way, the phrase *biblical transformation* values the source of God's special revelation and truth while indicating that real lasting change is the goal. The phrase puts better emphasis on what the Bible teaches to be true in both salvation and sanctification. The Bible is a Christian's source of truth and reveals how lost people are reconciled back to God in a relationship. The Holy Spirit is the transforming agent when a person's new life in Christ begins.

Theological Reflections

As a minister, it brought much joy to reflect back on the work that God accomplished through the project and to see my own theological convictions grow over time. The project journey lasted for almost two years. It began with praying through a project proposal, building the initial context and scope of the work, writing chapters on the Bible and spiritual formation literature, and implementing the actual project. The project concluded with a chapter written to synthesize summary thoughts and reflect back on the whole process. As I reflected on theological gleanings over the whole project, I recognized themes in sanctification, God's sovereignty over His creation, the Holy Spirit, humility, and the biblical pattern connecting the heart and mind.

Most of the class had the SBC member reflecting on life in the present. This reflection could make it possible to connect the area of spiritual formation and sanctification to only pertain to present day realities. Biblically speaking, I was reminded during reflection that sanctification is both a past, present, and future reality for the Christian. A component of a Christian's sanctification is viewed in the past tense (1 Cor 1:2, 6:11). This gift is the permanent one-time act where God sets his chosen believers apart in Christ. Christians have progressive sanctification (Rom 6:9, 2 Tim 2:21), which is the process where the Holy Spirit uses the Word of God and the power of God to make Christians more like Jesus. For the SBC members the project landed in the realm of

sanctification. Finally, Christians will be perfectly sanctified one day (1 Thess 5:23, 1 Cor 15:53-56). It would be important to inject all three of these areas into the curriculum to help members see the scope of sanctification.

At times, while I was teaching the course, I may have relied on the information and the presentation too much to complete the work of spiritual formation in the student. This was a lack of trust in the sovereignty of God. The apostle Paul finishes his letter to the Philippians reminding hearers that God will supply every need they have in the form of the riches of the glory of Christ (4:11). God is working in the hearts of his people at all times. The Deuteronomy text discussed in chapter 2 reinforces the vastness of who God is and what He requires for holistic change in the hearts and minds of his people (6:5-10). Regularly reminding SBC members of this truth as a reality in their spiritual formation will be helpful in their personal growth.

Similar to seeing the sovereignty of God in a fresh way, I recognized that the Holy Spirit is the ultimate teacher of the course. I was reminded that pastors can study, practice, and teach (Ezra 7:10), but unless the Holy Spirit works in the hearts of SBC members there will be no lasting change or true spiritual formation. Jesus was the greatest of teachers and he promised the disciples (and future generations) at the end of his life that he would not leave them alone. The great teacher would send a great teacher in the Holy Spirit (John 14:26). This biblical understanding helped me grow in my trust and dependence on God to move during the class time.

SBC members who partook in the project needed to practice the discipline of humble submission found in James 4. In chapter 2, I talked about the opposition people will face from God when they choose to live in pride of humility. The project's effectiveness was due in large part to SBC members having the courage to come to class with a humble posture and to be open to allow God to change them. The spiritual formation literature revealed that trusting flesh alone would be a barrier to spiritual

formation. Watching God help SBC members overcome this barrier by the power of His spirit was truly encouraging for my own heart.

My final theological reflection had to deal with the connectedness of people's hearts and minds in spiritual formation. Over and over within each class, I reinforced the idea that people have heart issues and thinking issues before they have behavior issues. This inside out transformation focus brought consistency to the project. It was the center piece of the Shema (Deut 6) and was traced through large portions of Scripture (Exod 36:2, 1 Sam 3:25, 1 Chron 28:9, Ps 7:9, Jer 11:20, Matt 22:37, Mark 12:30, Luke 10:27, Rom 8:27, Phil 4:7, Heb 8:10, James 4:8, 1 Pet 3:8, Rev 2:23, Rev 17:17). God changes the hearts of people by grace and renews their minds through his Word and through his Spirit. These theological gleanings reinforced the project's definition of spiritual formation, which is the grace-filled process by which people mature and conform to the image of Christ over time.

Personal Reflections

This project was a pleasure to complete and journey through. As a pastor, I learned a great deal about the church that I get to serve. Generally, I grew in love and appreciation for SBC people through this project. In 1 Peter 5, the author gives the charge to shepherd the flock of God. This project helped me in a micro way better shepherd the members of SBC. I am a better pastor and shepherd for having gone through this journey.

I was unable to see in the beginning of the project what I can clearly see now; the project developed and morphed over time. In the early stages of development, ideas for what the project could be were complex and, in some ways, abstract. Over time, the project became refined in a simple way with a focus on the heart and mind. The project became clearer and more concrete through the spiritual literature review, and themes also became evident. The project became more focused and specialized through the two years of development. Seeing this specialization gives me a better perspective on being patient with future curriculum development and church ministry projects.

As I encountered different counseling opportunities with SBC members taking the course, I observed how idols really do reign at the heart level. The purpose of expositing and defending what the Scriptures say in Deuteronomy proved to be a helpful tool in counseling individual members. They confessed beliefs they held at the heart level as being more important than Christ and His desire for their heart. When they were able to address these motivational issues with Scripture, they opened themselves to making real holistic progress.

Metaphors for spiritual formation come in a variety of forms within spiritual formation literature. In the past, it has been difficult to find illustrations that would help people in a practical sense grasp the tension between grace and effort regarding personal change. In one of my final doctoral seminars I was reminded of an illustration when the professor shared a boat illustration. He shared with students an idea that compared spiritual formation to three types of boats: a rowboat, a cruise ship, and a sailboat. The distinctions were made that a rowboat is all about the individual and his sheer strength to guide the vessel, compared to the cruise ship, which has an individual sit back and let the captain and crew carry the workload. In contrast to the first two, the sailboat illustration shows the need for personal responsibility but power that comes from another source. All of these illustrations can be seen in spiritual formation when an individual depends on his own strength (rowboat) versus that of relying only on God to do the work (cruise ship). The sailboat metaphor is a good one to help people see the need for doing the hard work of personal discipline while relying on God's grace and his Spirit's work to accomplish the task with spiritual power. It is a tool that helps me grasp the work of renewing my own mind (Rom 12:1-2). I was able to look back on the project and see that I was setting up SBC members to model the sailboat idea in their own spiritual formation journey.

Finally, I observed in this project that most often people do not change easily, nor do they change quickly. This is true in my own sanctification as well as I what I observed through assessments, teaching, application, and discussion. The ideas presented

in this project will need to be further explained over time and repeated in different ways at Shadowbrook Church. Settling in on personal change primarily starting with God and developing over time matured me as a pastor and gave me more of a mindset to take a long view approach to spiritual formation rather than hoping individual events, experiences, or worship gatherings will produce significant change in a person in a short time. It is hard and exhausting work to put off the old self and put on the new, but God makes it possible by His good sovereign and gracious will (Col 3:1-15).

Conclusion

The purpose of the project was to create a holistic spiritual formation model for the SBC members that would affect their personal growth. The goals of this project were met and the hopeful continuation of growth in spiritual formation will occur for the church in general. Members who participated were gracious and diligent to work on their own personal growth. As a pastor, I am stronger and more devoted to the work of spiritual formation. If Shadowbrook Church can commit to letting God rule and reign in all parts of their lives (heart, mind, and will), then the church will be stronger and more fruitful to live out the gospel as we gather and go.

APPENDIX 1

WELCOME LETTER AND AGREEMENT

Dear Survey Participant,

Thank you so much for stepping into this process to discover more about your own spiritual formation. The goal is to help you develop a holistic model for spiritual formation and the teaching materials will hopefully help you grow in a positive way regarding transformation. If you have any question or concerns along the way feel free to reach out to me at the information below.

Sincerely,

Jerrod Rumley
Lead Pastor :: Shadowbrook Church
770-945-1524
jrumley@shadowbrookchurch.org

Sign and return to Jerrod before the initial survey is taken and classes begin

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to help you develop a holistic model for spiritual formation and discover how you might grow in transformation. This research is begin conducted by Jerrod Rumley for purposes of helping our life group leaders at Shadowbrook Church growing in their understanding of the process of spiritual formation. In this research, you will be asked to take a pre-survey on spiritual formation, attend 8 weeks of training focused on spiritual formation, and take a post survey on spiritual formation to assess the level of change and understanding you have. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with you responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

Printed Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX 2
ANATOMY OF A DISCIPLE SPIRITUAL
FORMATION SURVEY

Please score yourself after each question on a scale of (1-10)*¹
*you can write any number 1 through 10, see below for range help

1=Not Descriptive 5=Usually Descriptive 10=Perfectly Descriptive

“Humbly Submitted”	Score (1-10)
1. Jesus is the absolute Master of my life	_____
2. I am passionately committed to Jesus as the only Master of my life	_____
3. I always follow Jesus completely as the Master of my life	_____
4. God is at work to help me come to the end of myself	_____
5. I am deeply broken when God shows me how embedded sin is in my	_____
6. I respond to God dealing with pride and sin in my life by humbling	_____
7. The Holy Spirit is working in my life to make me more like Jesus	_____
8. It comforts me to know that God is working in my life	_____
9. I respond to the leading of the Holy Spirit in my life on a moment by	_____
10. Jesus paid the penalty for my sin when He died on the cross	_____
11. I feel completely secure in the salvation I received through Jesus	_____

¹ The survey was adapted and used with permission from The Well Community Church (Fresno, CA) and The Anatomy of a Disciple designers. www.thewellcommunity.org.

- 12. I have personally received Jesus' gift of forgiveness and new life _____
- 13. God is working in my life to change me to be more like Jesus _____
- 14. Knowing God is working to change me to be more like Jesus makes _____
- 15. I ask God for strength, courage and His will in my life on a daily _____
- 16. God has given me the natural abilities to grow spiritually on my own _____
- 17. I am compelled to work hard so God will love me _____
- 18. I do good things because I want God to love me more _____

“Biblically Formed” Score (1-10)

- 1. It is important for me to understand the meaning and flow of all 66 books of the Bible _____
- 2. I enjoy my time in God's Word and find it compelling and fulfilling _____
- 3. I both read and study my Bible often to understand what God is teaching me _____
- 4. The Bible is from God and He uses it to change me to be more like Jesus _____
- 5. God's Word encourages me, challenges me and guides me _____
- 6. I spend regular time meditating on or memorizing the Word of God _____
- 7. I believe the Bible is a true and reliable source of truth from God _____
- 8. I am inspired by the truth that I'm learning in God's Word _____
- 9. I faithfully practice a regular and consistent time in God's Word _____
- 10. God uses His Word to change the way I think about Him – and me _____
- 11. When I read the Bible, I look forward to the next time I can continue in it _____
- 12. I make better choices in life because the Bible has changed my perspective on things _____
- 13. The Bible is an important book for me to read _____
- 14. The Bible helps me feel different about God, myself and this world _____

- 15. I have a Bible and I read it _____
- 16. There are several parts of the Bible that are inaccurate or irrelevant _____
- 17. I am confident that I have all the knowledge I need to make my life work _____
- 18. I don't need to study the Bible anymore; I just need to practice what I know _____

“Sacrificially Generous”

Score (1-10)

- 1. Giving my time, talent and treasure is an awesome act of worship _____
- 2. I long to give more of my time, talent and treasure for Jesus and others _____
- 3. I purposely give of my time, talent and treasure for others – till it hurts _____
- 4. Everything I have is a gift from God and ultimately belongs to Him _____
- 5. I feel much pleasure when I give what I have to benefit the church and others _____
- 6. I intentionally give my best to God, not what's left over after I do what I want _____
- 7. Money is important, but certainly not the most important thing in life _____
- 8. The more I give of my talent and time, the more I want to give _____
- 9. I make some personal sacrifices so I can give more of my time and talent away _____
- 10. I believe it gives God great pleasure to take care of His children _____
- 11. I enjoy seeing God take care of my needs as I give to Him and others _____
- 12. I think as much about what I can give away as I think about my own needs _____
- 13. It is good to be generous with who I am and what I have _____
- 14. I enjoy seeing the joy in others when I share who I am and what I have with them _____
- 15. I try to share myself and what I have with others – when I can _____
- 16. My time, talent and treasure are mine to use as I see fit _____

17. I am too tired and stretched to give much of anything for someone else

18. I avoid people who might want some of my time, talent or treasure

“Relationally Healthy”

Score (1-10)

1. I believe healthy relationships are absolutely necessary for everyone

2. I am deeply thankful for my relationship with God and so many people

3. I meet with a small group regularly to deepen my relationships with God and others

4. I know all relationships have conflicts, but it’s important to work to resolve them

5. Conflict is never easy, but I am compelled to always work through it when it comes

6. I regularly work through any conflicts in my life in a timely manner

7. I believe God wants me to make personal sacrifices in order to have healthy relationships

8. I desire to put others above myself, even though it’s not always easy

9. I work diligently at being a good friend, and consequently, I have good friends

10. I understand strong marriages and families are hard work but completely worth it

11. I am encouraged by investing in marriage and/or family relationships

12. I invest significantly in my marriage and/or family relationships

13. I realize healthy relationships are important for a healthy life

14. I enjoy the good relationships I have

15. I try to foster good relationships

16. I think people need to accept me for who I am or stop wasting my time

17. Relationships are more trouble than they are worth

18. I gossip and/or keep score in my relationships

“Morally Discerning”

Score (1-10)

1. I believe time in God’s Word shapes my views of right and wrong

2. I get excited when the Bible challenges my worldview in a convicting way

3. I consistently resist being shaped by the world system around me

4. I believe the Bible is clear about right and wrong as well as my need for discernment

5. I often feel the weight of discerning between right and wrong

6. There is a consistency between what I believe is right and what I do

7. I realize being truthful to God, myself and others is extremely important

8. When I feel guilty for not being totally truthful, I desire to set it straight immediately

9. I always confess my sin to others and God when I’ve wronged them in some way

10. I know I should do what is right, not just what I can get away with

11. I always feel like doing what is right more than what I can get away with

12. I never rationalize my way into doing what I can get away with

13. I think it is good to make and keep commitments

14. I feel good when I do what I know is right

15. I am a decent and honest person

16. I believe I am a reasonable person and can decide what is right for me

17. I try to ignore feeling guilty since it is just an improper, learned response

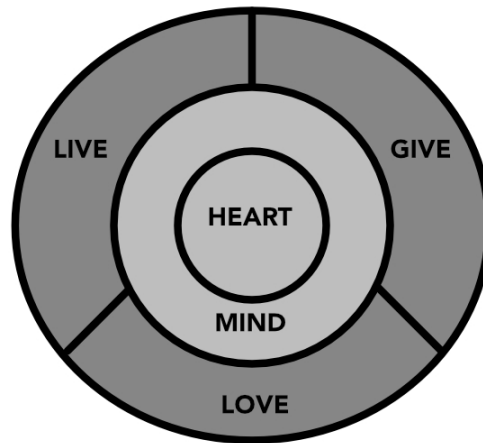
18. I always try to do what makes me happy

APPENDIX 3

SPIRITUAL FORMATION MODEL

The graphic is the visual representation of the substance of the project. It is a way to show people the connectedness of the heart and mind. This is at the core of spiritual formation. The outer rings in green is where the will comes into action. The equipping class was primarily concerned with addressing the core of the model.

THE **ANATOMY** OF A **DISCIPLE**



APPENDIX 4

EQUIPPING CLASS CURRICULUM

The following appendix is the curriculum teaching notes that were used to administer the equipping class over the five weeks. It was developed over the course of the Spring of 2020 and evaluated by an expert panel. The curriculum focuses on the casual core of a person and instructs the classroom participant in the biblical connection of the heart and mind. This curriculum deals with the inner components of spiritual formation found at the core of a person.



Living out the **Gospel** as we **Gather** and **Go**.

How People Change

(Holistic Gospel Change in the Christian Life)

Equipping Class

Jerrod Rumley :: Lead Pastor of Shadowbrook Church

Introduction

Have you ever wondered how people change? The church has dealt with this issue of spiritual formation since its inception in Acts chapter 2. This class will help you define spiritual formation, understand its complexities, and develop strategies for your own spiritual formation focusing specifically on a person's heart, mind, and will. This class will also require you to take a survey on the first day and last day of the course. Attendance for all five classes is strongly encouraged as each class will build on the other.

Schedule

Class #1	Spiritual Formation – It's Complexities and It's Importance
Class #2	God and The Whole Person / Barriers to Change
Class #3	The Heart and Change
Class #4	The Mind and Change
Class #5	The Will and Change

Course Objectives

1. To explain and define a strategic definition for spiritual formation.
2. To understand the complexities of the Heart and the interconnectedness of the whole person.
3. To understand the connectedness of the heart and mind in relationship to spiritual formation.
4. To see sin, Satan, flesh, and pride as enemies of spiritual formation.
5. To see Scripture Study, Accountability, and Personal Discipline as commonly agreed on tools for spiritual formation as given in a review of literature on the topic.

Class Expectations

- Be here and ready to go at 9 am
- Come prayed up and ready to engage
- When the class moves to discussion groups, involve yourself and recognize the contribution of others

- Strive to make every class as they will build on each other and fit together as a package deal.
- A notebook or legal pad is recommended to take notes and practice drawing some of the assignments

Recommended Resources on Spiritual Formation

- Allen, Michael. ***Sanctification***. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017.
- Andrews, Alan. ***The Kingdom Life: A Practical Theology of Discipleship and Spiritual Formation***. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2010.
- Boa, Kenneth. ***Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation***. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. ***The Cost of Discipleship***. New York: Touchstone, 1995.
- Chan, Simon. ***Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life***. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998.
- Cheyney, Tom, and Terry Rials. ***The Nuts and Bolts of Church Revitalization***. Orlando: Renovate Publishing, 2015.
- Geiger, Eric, Michael Kelley, and Philip Nation. ***Transformational Discipleship: How People Really Grow***. Nashville: B & H, 2012.
- Howard, Evan B. ***The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality***. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2008.
- _____. ***A Guide to Christian Spiritual Formation: How Scripture, Spirit, Community, and Mission Shape Our Souls***. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018.
- Johnson, Eric L. ***Foundations for Soul Care: A Christian Psychology Proposal***. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007.
- Mulholland, Robert, Jr. ***Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation***. Expanded by Ruth Haley Barton. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2016.
- Pierre, Jeremy. ***The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life: Connecting Christ to Human Experience***. Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2016.
- Stanger, Frank Bateman. ***Spiritual Formation in the Local Church***. Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, 1989.
- Waggoner, Brad J. ***The Shape of Faith to Come: Spiritual Formation and the Future of Discipleship***. Nashville: B & H, 2008.
- Wilhoit, Jim. ***Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community***. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008.

Recommended Commentaries for the Texts Covered in Class

- Bratcher, Robert G., and Howard Hatton. *A Handbook on Deuteronomy*. UBS Handbook Series. New York: United Bible Societies, 2000.
- Christensen, Duane L. *Deuteronomy 1-11*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 6a. Dallas: Word, 1991.
- Craigie, Peter C. *The Book of Deuteronomy*. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976.
- Cranfield, C. E. B. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*. Vol. 2. International Critical Commentary. London: T & T Clark, 2004.
- Davids, Peter H. *The Epistle of James*. The New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009.
- Dunn, James D. G. *Romans 9-16*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 38b. Dallas: Word, 1988.
- Johnson, Luke Timothy. *The Letter of James*. The Anchor Yale Bible, vol. 37. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005.
- Longenecker, Richard N. *The Epistle to the Romans*. The New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2016.
- Martin, Ralph P. *James*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 48. Waco, TX: Word, 1988.
- McCartney, Dan. *James*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009.
- McKnight, Scot. *The Letter of James*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2011.
- Merrill, Eugene H. *Deuteronomy*. The New American Commentary, vol. 4. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994.
- Moo, Douglas J. *The Epistle to the Romans*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1996.
- _____. *The Letter of James*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000.
- Mounce, Robert H. *Romans*. The New American Commentary, vol. 27. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995.
- Murray, John. *The Epistle to the Romans*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968.
- Nelson, Richard D. *Deuteronomy*. The Old Testament Library. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002.
- Schreiner, Thomas R. *Romans*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 6. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998.
- Wright, Christopher J. H. *Deuteronomy*. New International Biblical Commentary, vol. 4. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996.



“Spiritual Formation It’s Complexities and It’s Importance”

INTRODUCTION TO THE CLASS

- Golf Analogy about language to use in showing need that we don’t have words to help us in Spiritual Formation.
- Overview of the Survey Tool
- 10 Minutes to take the survey (instructions and clarifications up front)
 - The three areas (Heart, Mind, Will) will be measured as (Humbly Submission (HS), Biblically Formed (BF), Sacrificially Generous (SG), Morally Discerning (MD), Relationally Healthy (RH). This is explaining how the five areas of the survey are being scored and will relate to the goal of the class.
- Present letter that was approved by Ethics Committee for people to sign

TOPIC 1 – WHAT IS SPIRITUAL FORMATION

- What Spiritual Formation **is** and what it **is not**

Not - Knowledge only, behavior without belief, or just ideas

Is – God initiated, grace given, deep change, that works out with the will of the man

- The complexity of formation and the difficulty people have to measure it
- Introduce the three texts that will be worked through to show the connection of **HEART, MIND, WILL** with regards to spiritual formation. Have a volunteer read

Deuteronomy 6:4-6

4 “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.

James 4:6-10

6 But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” 7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

Romans 12:1-2

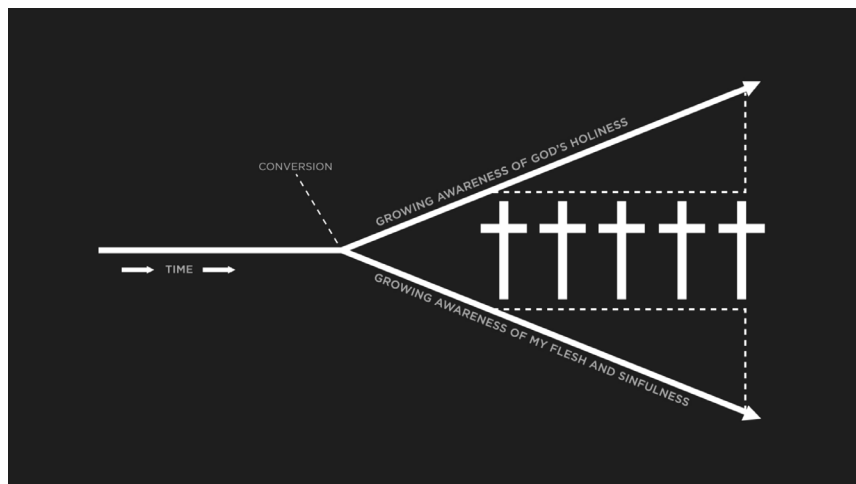
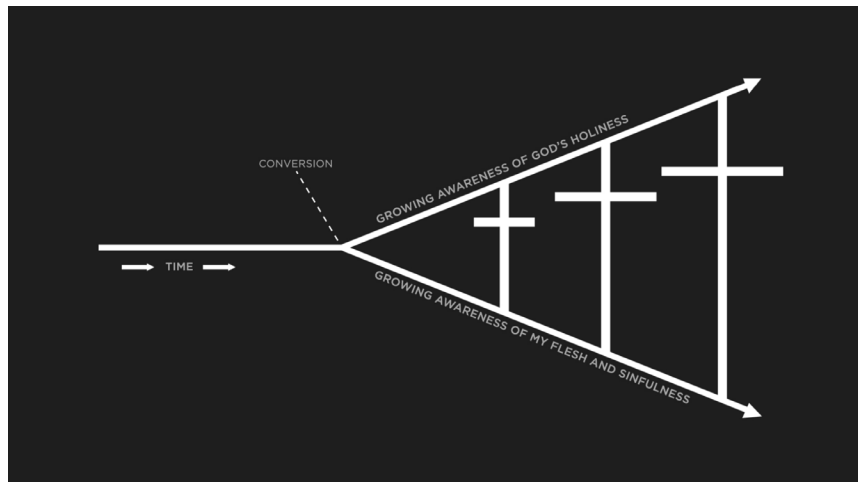
I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

TOPIC 2 – SPIRITUAL FORMATION HAS GREAT COMPLEXITIES AND GREAT IMPORTANCE

- Matthew 28 – Great Commission guiding principle
(Authority Affirmed, Assignment Given, Promised Presence)

How the great commission is both **EVANGELISM** and **DISCIPLESHIP**
Reaching people and Teaching them to obey is intertwined to spiritual formation

- Historical view on Spiritual Formation
- Church has defined it differently through the ages
Disciplines / Discipleship / One Another's / Missional / Maturity / Growing in Christ
- Gospel gap – NEW GROWTH PRESS MODEL (Danger of Pretending and Performing areas when we shrink the cross) Read and Review 2 Peter 3:18



Give a definition

***Spiritual Formation* is the grace-filled process by which people mature and conform to the image of Christ.**

- Truths revealed in the Bible and the Power of the Holy Spirit are the instruments from which this process flows.

Final Thoughts

Legal Obedience (Flesh, law, fear, information)

vs

Gracious Obedience (Spirit, love, friendship, transformation)

Big takeaways and reflection questions.

- My big takeaways were...
- Was this a helpful introductory day and did it meet your expectations for the class?



“God and The Whole Person / Barriers to Change”

Reminder of Definition

Spiritual Formation is the grace-filled process by which people mature and conform to the image of Christ.

Jeremy Pierre's *Dynamic Heart Model*

- **Cognitive:** thinking (Matthew 9:4), knowing (2 Cor. 4:6), believing, reasoning, remembering, interpreting
- **Affective:** desiring, valuing, feeling, emoting (There is an order to these)
- **Volitional:** willing, deciding, intending, committing, acting

“Commitment is the heart devoting itself to something it deems worthy” (J. Pierre quote)

2 Peter 3:16-17

“You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”

- Spectrum of what people perceive – It's all awful (Everything is broken) to I'm pretty good (I've arrived). Reality is that we live somewhere in between the two
- Time – This is not an instant/microwavable process

Pride and the Barriers to Spiritual Formation

Getting to the root of this deficiency is essential for Christians. Because Christians know the Bible declares human beings to be sinful (Gen 3, **Ps 51:5**, Rom 2:12, **3:23**, **5:12-13**) they know that obstacles come from a fallen world and out of the hearts and minds of sinful mankind. Christians must not stop at obstacles and become vanquished in the spiritual formation journey.

Things that will prevent change – James 4:4-10 & the root issue of Pride

- Exegetical walk through of James 4:4-10
- ⁴You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. ⁵Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, “He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us”? ⁶But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” ⁷Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

Barriers to Spiritual Formation

- Sin – the things we think, say, do or don't do, that break God's law
- Satan – an enemy, at work, who has a goal to disrupt, disqualify, and lie to mankind
- Flesh – working out of a human core

Smaller Group Questions to talk through

- In what area do you feel most challenged to change?
- What barriers are you most often running into with regards to your own spiritual formation?
- Describe a recent response in life when you encountered a barrier to spiritual formation.



“The Heart and Change”

Spiritual Formation is the grace-filled process by which people mature and conform to the image of Christ.

Recap of Sin, Satan, and the Flesh as barriers to Spiritual Formation (Week 2)

The Heart and Change

(Deuteronomy 6:1-5)

“Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the rules—that the Lord your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it, ² that you may fear the Lord your God, you and your son and your son’s son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long. ³ Hear therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly, as the Lord, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey. ⁴ “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ⁵ You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

Context Walk through – Pentateuch [Metanarrative Stuff]

Showing the Patters of God’s **REVELATION** his crowing creation being called to **RESPOND**

Genesis 2 / 12

Exodus 20

Deut. 5 (Background to 6)

- Heart – definition, scope, and how it is the target
- “Casual core” (P. Tripp) the seat for all your emotions, desires, intentions

Have people read and discuss what aspects of the heart are shown in these texts

Joy – 1 Samuel 2:1

Sorrow – Joshua 7:5

Hope – 1 Kings 8:17

Psalmist – 25:17

Soul – the part of you that is the deepest connection to your (inner-self)

Might – will (nod to discipline coming in week 5)

Jeremiah 17:9

If the heart is wicked and the most twisting of its desires can happen within, we need help from other people.

1st Agreed upon tool in Spiritual Formation Literature - (Accountability)

What we call at Shadowbrook Renewing Community - see paragraph on the church value below

Spiritual growth happens best in community. When the Spirit of God and the Word of God come together among gathered believers, the Work of God continues and the Glory of God is on display. We strive to have an authentic, welcoming, biblical community at Shadowbrook Church. God takes you just the way you are, but He won't keep you that way. He is in the business of making you more like Christ. Our life groups are the primary environments where this takes place.

Hebrews 10:22-25

²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

- Community helps us fight sin together with Gospel Hope
- Accountability is good and for our benefit
- We are the best “self-justifiers” we know
- Key point – to do this well, we need to submit to one another

Big takeaways and reflection questions.

- What is one big idea that you have taken in your heart today to ponder and act upon?
- Do you have true community where sin can be dealt with in a gospel and collective way?
- What is one action step you will take this week in lieu of what you heard today?



“The Mind and Change”

Recap of Spiritual Formation (Week 1-3)

Spiritual Formation is the grace-filled process by which people mature and conform to the image of Christ.

Romans 12:1-2

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ²Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Context

- Paul writing to the church in Rome defending the faith and clearly articulating to the Christians about their own justification in Christ
- Chapters 1-11: Legal Defense for the faith (highlights)
- Chapter 12: Begins transition as to what to do in light of what God has done (Again Revelation and Response)

Mounce suggests that this break “marks the transition from the theology of God’s redemptive act in Christ Jesus to the ethical expectation that flow logically from that theological base.”

Appeal – means to ask for something earnestly and with propriety. (strong emotional word)

- why is “therefore” there?

Mercies of God – this is really important for change

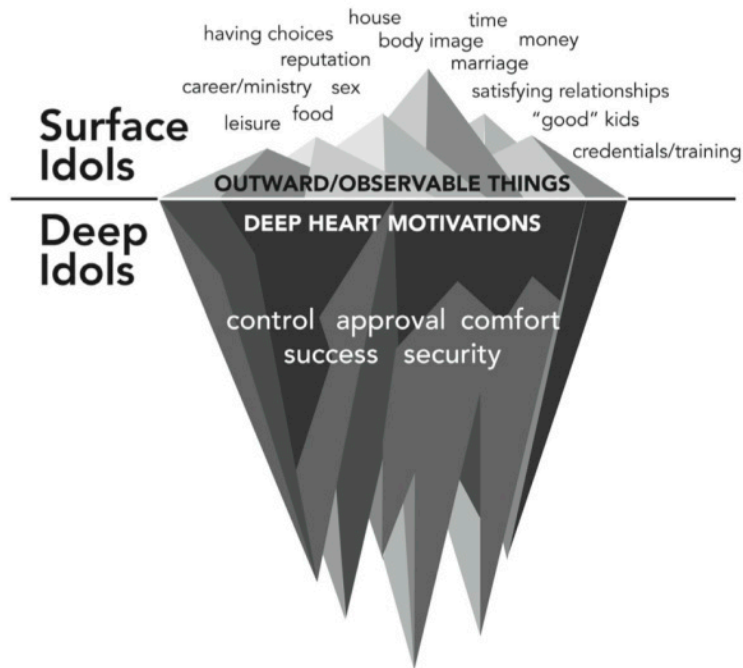
- It is the clarity to see that Spiritual Formation is a grace driven process 1st
- chapters 1-11 argue for the mercies that have taken place.
- Because of what God has done, we strive to do.
- God’s mercies don’t automatically produce obedience

What is a living sacrifice?

- connection to worship
- action oriented and continual in process
- The Christian life is a daily life

Mind – definition, capacity, and how it ties to the heart

Our hearts are idol factories and we can see the fruit of them when we think with our minds. What we then need to do is think deeply, below the surface.



From the Gospel Centered Life @ Work

[\(https://thegospelcenteredlife.com/2014/11/18/the-gospel-centered-life-at-work/\)](https://thegospelcenteredlife.com/2014/11/18/the-gospel-centered-life-at-work/)

The Word and Your Mind

2nd Agreed upon tool in Spiritual Formation Literature Practice – Scripture engagement

- We have a worldview or mindset that is developed over time from the moment we are born.
- When we become a follower of Jesus, we have to reorient that worldview to God's worldview
- Scripture is the primary way that God speaks to His people

Connect to our Spiritual Formation Definition

Maturity

- happens over time
- Things of real importance grow
- Fruit of the Spirit grows
- Wisdom is a key marker

Conforming to Christ

- We become more of what he has designed us to be
- We live in a way that models what he called is people to
- Like a potter shaping clay, He is shaping us

Big takeaways and reflection questions.

- My big takeaways were...
- Example 1 :: What are your habits regarding Scripture reading?
- Example 2 :: What things in your life compete with Scripture reading? Why?
- Example 3 :: What is one action point you want to take this week and apply in your life?



“The Will and Change”

Recap of Spiritual Formation (Week 1-4) – this is due to the time gap of the corona virus pandemic

- Make a few minutes to connect digitally

Recap quickly

- Deut. 6 / James 4 / Romans 12
- Accountability / Scripture as growth necessities. Pride – will be the great enemy

Spiritual Formation is the grace-filled process by which people mature and conform to the image of Christ.

Will – to purpose, generally based upon a preference and desire effort vs information, how it is the used in scripture

After creation God gifted man with responsibility (Gen. 1:28)

- caring for self
- caring for others
- caring for creation

The Word and Your will

- God's will of decree
- God's will of command
 - Ephesians 5:17-18
 - 1 Thessalonians 4:3a
 - 1 Thessalonians 5:18

Looking back to Romans 12:1-2

These three commands intersect with all areas of life and display God's revealed will for us. It is this will that the apostle Paul discusses in Romans 12, where he clearly connects discernment and God's will. "Do not be conformed to this world," Paul writes, "but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (v. 2). Here the Bible tells us that by testing we will be able to discern the will of God. In the Greek the words *testing* and *discern* are one, a word which is often translated as "prove" or "try." It means "to test, examine, prove, scrutinize (to see whether a thing is genuine or not) . . . to recognize as genuine after examination, to approve, deem worthy." This will of command does not include God's decree but his will as to what we should do in order to please him and in order to live in such a way that we bring honor to his name. This will was given in days past through the priests, through the mysterious Urim and Thummin, and through judges and prophets. Today it is given to us in its full and final measure in the Bible, the Word of God.¹

¹ James Strong, *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible: Showing Every Word of the Text of the Common English Version of the Canonical Books, and Every Occurrence of Each Word in Regular Order*, electronic ed. (Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship, 1996), Logos Bible Software.

3rd Agreed upon tool in Spiritual Formation Literature – Discipline

- Don't forget the Done vs Do argument we clarified last week

God initiates and sustains his work of sanctification

- Amazing gift of the Holy Spirit in discipline

Andrews definition of discipline

“A discipline is an activity within our power that enables us to accomplish what we cannot do by direct effort.”

Spiritual disciplines in two categories

1. Abstinence
2. Engagement

Dangers in the will

- Rebellion – Hebrews 3:15
- Pride – James 4
- Sloth – Proverbs 13:4

Geiger's insights

- Drifting (backsliding)

Sounds innocuous / no danger

As a Christian, no one sets out to drift from far from Christ

- Illustration of a ship losing its way by one slight trajectory change
- The less attention given to a person, the less affection will occur
- When you start saying things to yourself like – “I know how far I've gotten away from the Lord, I've always made it back, I know how far I am right now....we tolerate distance from GOD!”

Means - this is not a **passive** process. It is **intentional** and at times aggressive – Segue to quote from Sproul

“It is the will of God that we sin not. It is the will of God that we have no other gods before him; that we love our neighbor as we love ourselves; that we refrain from stealing, coveting, and committing adultery. Yet the world is filled with idolatry, hatred, thievery, covetousness, and adultery. Here the will of God is violated. His law is broken.

One of the great tragedies of contemporary Christendom is the preoccupation of so many Christians with the secret decretive will of God to the exclusion and neglect of the preceptive will. We want to peek behind the veil, to catch a glimpse of our personal future. We seem more concerned with our horoscope than with our obedience, more concerned with what the stars in their courses are doing than with what we are doing.

With respect to God's sovereign will, we assume we are passive. With respect to his preceptive will, we know that we are active and therefore responsible and accountable. It is easier to engage in ungodly prying into the secret counsel of God than to apply ourselves to the practice of godliness. We can flee to the safety of the sovereign will and try to pass off our sin to God, laying the burden and responsibility of it on his unchanging will. Such characterizes the spirit of Antichrist, the spirit of lawlessness, or antinomianism, that despises God's law and ignores his precepts.

Protestants are particularly vulnerable to this distortion. We seek refuge in our precious doctrine of justification by faith alone, forgetting that the very doctrine is to be a catalyst for the pursuit of righteousness and obedience to the preceptive will of God.”¹

¹ R. C. Sproul, *Following Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1996), Logos Bible Software.

What two illustrations are used for the Christian life in the NT?

1. War
2. Athletics
3. Farming

“No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops” (2 Titus 2:4-6).

Final Class – 2nd Survey instructions and time frame.....1 week

Big takeaways and reflection questions.

- My big takeaways were...
- What is one thing you will commit to pursuing change in with God’s help?
- With regard to what you are learning, who can you share with this post class and have them help you with accountability?

APPENDIX 5

EVALUATION RUBRIC FOR SPIRITUAL
FORMATION CURRICULUM

Name of Evaluator: _____

Date: _____

1 = insufficient; 2 = requires attention; 3 = sufficient; 4 = exemplary

CRITERIA	1	2	3	4	COMMENTS
Biblical Faithfulness					
The course curriculum is biblically and theologically sound.					
The course curriculum effectively establishes the scriptural basis for spiritual formation.					
Scope					
The course curriculum adequately covers each topic it addresses.					
The course curriculum is content appropriate for lay church members.					
The course curriculum provides a basic understanding of personal spiritual formation concepts.					

Methodology					
The course curriculum effectively teaches a basic biblical spiritual formation methodology.					
The course curriculum effectively utilizes various personal spiritual formation methods.					
Applicability					
The course curriculum is applicable for personal spiritual formation.					
The course curriculum will effectively equip church members in spiritual formation.					

Please include any additional comments below:

APPENDIX 6

SPIRITUAL FORMATION SURVEY
DATA COMPARISONS

Table A1. Humbly submitted change

Member	Humbly Submitted (1st Score)	Humbly Submitted (2nd Score)	Change
1	142	169	27
2	164	172	8
3	146	164	18
4	158	161	3
5	107	127	20
6	115	129	14
7	96	145	49
8	98	114	16
9	102	128	26
10	155	153	-2
11	116	138	22
12	155	173	18
13	152	162	10
14	115	169	54
15	136	158	22
16	124	145	21
17	115	146	31
18	170	158	-12
19	154	174	20
20	111	134	23
21	113	165	52
22	145	159	14
23	155	155	0
24	107	160	53
25	108	138	30

Table A2. Biblical formed change

Member	Biblically Formed (1st Score)	Biblically Formed (2nd Score)	Change
1	146	169	23
2	166	174	8
3	159	171	12
4	176	175	-1
5	119	144	25
6	139	166	27
7	77	111	34
8	110	117	7
9	112	129	17
10	163	166	3
11	135	138	3
12	161	167	6
13	169	163	-6
14	129	162	33
15	151	162	11
16	144	151	7
17	110	124	14
18	176	162	-14
19	159	178	19
20	114	136	22
21	119	163	44
22	158	168	10
23	171	171	0
24	145	165	20
25	119	150	31

Table A3. Sacrificiously generous changes

Member	Sacrificiously Generous (1st Score)	Sacrificiously Generous (2nd Score)	Change
1	128	154	26
2	139	132	-7
3	120	147	27
4	139	141	2
5	117	140	23
6	128	150	22
7	102	116	14
8	79	90	11
9	95	104	9
10	164	170	6
11	150	142	-8
12	164	159	-5
13	126	134	8
14	128	165	37
15	139	158	19
16	133	136	3
17	114	140	26
18	149	136	-13
19	162	174	12
20	124	152	28
21	90	126	36
22	130	149	19
23	154	139	-15
24	164	158	-6
25	131	149	18

Table A4. Relationally healthy change

Member	Relationally Healthy (1st Score)	Relationally Healthy (2nd Score)	Change
1	126	161	35
2	159	163	4
3	130	149	19
4	143	143	0
5	130	152	22
6	144	154	10
7	113	147	34
8	101	97	-4
9	117	118	1
10	167	164	-3
11	141	134	-7
12	165	174	9
13	158	172	14
14	119	161	42
15	141	156	15
16	113	130	17
17	139	156	17
18	159	140	-19
19	163	175	12
20	122	135	13
21	132	162	30
22	144	164	20
23	164	154	-10
24	166	165	-1
25	138	154	16

Table A5. Morally discerning change

Member	Morally Discerning (1st Score)	Morally Discerning (2nd Score)	Change
1	105	153	48
2	140	137	-3
3	124	157	33
4	150	155	5
5	118	140	22
6	88	127	39
7	112	143	31
8	96	105	9
9	101	101	0
10	155	157	2
11	135	133	-2
12	173	175	2
13	144	161	17
14	111	160	49
15	124	136	12
16	119	137	18
17	123	124	1
18	155	148	-7
19	169	169	0
20	134	157	23
21	96	155	59
22	146	155	9
23	149	140	-9
24	171	160	-11
25	119	138	19

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ABSTRACT

CREATING A SPIRITUAL FORMATION MODEL AT SHADOWBROOK CHURCH IN SUWANEE, GEORGIA

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Chapter 1 introduces the project and outlines its goals. This chapter also gives rationale for the project and reveals essential information on the background and demographics of Shadowbrook Church. Chapter 1 shows the need to create a spiritual formation model that will help in transformation within a life group leader's personal life.

Chapter 2 provides the biblical and theological support for spiritual formation and helps the reader understand how transformation occurs in the Bible. This chapter looks to writings from Moses, Paul, and James to see clearly how transformation is an inside out work that begins at the heart, continues to the mind, and finished with one's personal will.

Chapter 3 reviews literature on spiritual formation and indicates what obstacles and assets exist in the spiritual formation process. The chapter shows what elements encourage personal change from the literature review and argues for certain essential disciplines.

Chapter 4 explains the project essentials and reviews the results of the spiritual formation course taught at Shadowbrook Church. The chapter includes the spiritual formation survey used, a teaching schedule and curriculum that was reviewed by an expert panel, and clarifies the subtle nuances of the project.

Chapter 5 looks at the results of the pre- and post-survey to statistically evaluate how much change occurred in the life group leader's mind. The project will hopefully be a trusted equipping opportunity for the life group leaders and further discipleship and sanctification at Shadowbrook Church.

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