



## The Pursuit of Wholeness: Five Movements Towards Sustainable Spirituality

Your formation into Christ-likeness, or in theological terms, sanctification, simply means to experience wholeness or shalom (peace) with God, ourselves, others and creation. This goes beyond external manifestations of Christlikeness or moral conformity but involves one's inner-character transformation to resemble that of Jesus.

### **So how are you to integrate your human experience with the Ways of Jesus?**

One of the challenges is balancing your part and God's part. If you strive too much, you end up with a works-oriented form of sanctification that leads to self-righteousness, burn-out, or legalism. If you are too passive, you drift and fail to have a genuine relationship with God that brings about the change you desire. Virtually any imbalance in this area severely impacts your spiritual growth, but Scripture is clear that your faith is active and invites you to both own your formation into Christ-likeness and trust God to transform you in faith.

*"Train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come."*

1 Timothy 4:7-8

*"Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, because it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill [God's] good purpose."*

Philippians 2:12-13

At the same time, you are still left with the reality that you are rebellious and selfish where it's impossible to be perfect, where your experience of wholeness (sanctification) will never be

completed in this life. The world and sin fundamentally disintegrates you from God's intended design. This is the human condition.

Which is why you long for more. So, where do you start?

### **Movement #1: From Personal Kingdom to God's Kingdom**

Jesus, as fully human and fully God, shows all of us what the human experience is intended to be in the midst of the onslaught. Kierkegaard describes Jesus as the "prototype of a new humanity". It's expected that with time, followers of Jesus mature to become more and more like Him. Jesus often refers to the reality of the Kingdom of God or Heaven, which Jesus Himself embodied ("The kingdom of heaven is in your midst" -Luke 17:21).

In order for your spiritual life to be sustainable, you must first surrender your personal kingdom to God's Kingdom. So, what is your personal kingdom?

Your personal kingdom is:

- A. How you live in your **BODY**
- B. The patterns of thought in your **MIND**
- C. Your **FEELINGS, EGO & IDENTITY**
- D. Your **RELATIONSHIPS**
- E. The ethics of your **SPENDING AND POSSESSIONS**
- F. Your **WORK** and **VOCATION**
- G. How you spend your discretionary **TIME**
- H. Where your heart finds its **TREASURE**

Yes, Jesus wants all of you. The kingdom of God is not something to be *accepted* at some point and enjoyed at some later time, but something to be *entered* now. Where might you need to surrender your personal kingdom to God's?

Through God's divine power and promises, you are invited to participate in the divine nature through the power of the Holy Spirit.

*"His **divine power** has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very **great promises**, so that through them you may become **partakers of the divine nature**, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire". 2 Peter 1:4-5*

You've been given all that you need to become Christ-like, but there's no drifting into the ways of Jesus. The transformation of mind, body and spirit requires effort, discipline and a purposeful change in normal activities and patterns of habit.

## **Movement #2: From Desire to Discipline**

When Jesus was in the garden of Gethsemane facing crucifixion, his desire was for God to take the cup of future suffering away from him. He prays for God to remove this cup three times. But Jesus also prays, not my will God, but yours be done. Jesus was obedient even though his desire was not to suffer. Obedience requires discipline.

Our will is where we are in any given moment and is revealed in the choices we make. Our desire is where we would like to be. What determines where we would like to be (desire) to where we are at any given moment (will) is determined by our discipline towards or away from obedience to God. We can desire to be free of (fill in the blank) and yet lack the discipline (not be willing) to do what is necessary to know this freedom.

Desire in and of itself is not a bad thing at all. It's the object of our desires that requires our attention. Desire centered on our personal kingdoms produces restlessness and frustration. Desire centered on God's kingdom produces rest and peace.

## **Movement #3: From Lecture Hall to Dojo**

Dallas Willard defines discipleship as "the Spirit-driven process of forming the inner world of the human self in such a way that it becomes like the inner being of Christ himself." This is reflected in how Jesus taught his disciples. Jesus formed their inner world as a community of practice by engaging the head, heart and hands by giving the disciples practical foretastes of the kingdom of God and opportunities to participate within it.

For example, after a period of receiving his teachings and witnessing miracles, Jesus sends out the 12 disciples on a shared experience (Luke 9:1-6). He gives instructions on what not to bring, reminds them that he's given them authority over unclean spirits and sends them off healing and preaching the gospel.

Why in this manner? Because information alone does not transform.

God's grace is opposed to earning, but not opposed to action or effort on our part. Put another way, you did not do anything to achieve your salvation, but you must do something to exhibit it. Jesus' process of discipleship moved his followers from a lecture hall into a karate dojo. This isn't clean and controlled. Jesus constantly put his disciples in situations that were unpredictable, where they were out of control, unprepared, unsafe, and where failure was common. The disciples were in a community of practice where Jesus was their Rabbi inviting them to make a pilgrimage into the heart and life of God.

## Movement #4: From Fragmented to Embodied Faith

We can often have unrealistic expectations of what's possible from the mind and spirit centers of life and completely ignore the physical body, which can leave us frustrated and feeling like a failure when it comes to practicing the Ways of Jesus.

Imagine that you wanted to hit a home run from a 95 mph fast ball pitch. How successful would you be if you read books about hitting a baseball, attended a lecture on how to read pitches, listened to a podcast on batting stance, believed with all your heart that you could really hit a home run, and last but not least, prayed about it? Well, you may get lucky and make contact with a couple of pitches, but you're probably not going to hit it out of the park because you have little respect for your physical body. Professional baseball players **practice** rigorously to get their swing and technique down to the point where muscle memory takes over, making it look effortless. They also spend time with a coach and other people who also want to learn how to hit a baseball. It's a community of practice.

We can treat our formation into Christ-likeness the same way when we expect podcasts and prayers to make us more like Jesus. Then at some point, you realize, you're burnt out, stagnated or just tired of failing and decide to throw out your faith because it's just not working. This is fragmented faith.

How much do you bring your body into your faith? Paul writes to the Romans that offering our physical bodies comes as a prerequisite for renewing the mind.

*"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to **offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but **be transformed by the renewing of your mind.** Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."***

Romans 12:1-2

If we desire a more sustainable spirituality, formation into Christ-likeness must go beyond the intellect and set of beliefs, but must also incorporate our bodies and inner life, which form our habits, desires and longings. For example, when Muslims go to a mosque to pray, as an act of humility, they prostrate their bodies as they pray (try it sometime, it will change how you pray). Jewish religious traditions have Friday shabbat dinners along with many feasts and celebrations that carry historical significance. Fellowship at the table with food is an embodied practice that strengthens community. Buddhists practice forms of meditative breathing exercises to stay warm in cold weather, but it's also been proven to help control anxiety and depression. As Christians, the sacrament of communion and lifting our hands in worship are embodied practices that help us remember Jesus sacrifice and put us in a posture to receive from God.

## **Movement #5: From Experimentation to Transformation**

To experience the kind of transformation that reflects the effortless muscle memory in an athlete's experience, you have the choice to cultivate spiritual practices that make space for you to experience God in every aspect of life.

There are many ways to incorporate our body into our day to day faith practice. Exercise, abstaining from certain activities (e.g. social media), choosing to walk away or flee, feasting, singing, painting, writing, making something with your hands, cooking, and so on.

A spiritual practice is an intentional activity or discipline that directs the mind, body and spirit toward a specified outcome. For Jesus, this included practices such as solitude, service, prayer, rest, fasting, saying no, saying yes, seeing the image of God in others, living in the truth of how the Father viewed him, enduring suffering, lamenting, listening to the Spirit, going into nature, getting up early, discerning evil from good, interceding for others, being a peacemaker and many more. These embodied practices created space for the Holy Spirit to empower Jesus to live an integrated, love-oriented life where he was fully present to those around him.

How do you know if the spiritual practices you do are working? You experiment and make adjustments until you begin to experience the vision of change that you seek. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the fruit of our practices should result an increased capacity to love God, ourselves, others and creation.

Here's a resource to help you create your own Personal Transformation Experiment.