

Why Reading Your Bible Isn't Enough to Grow Spiritually

In today's culture, we are seeing a rise in the association of spirituality, yet the effects of an underdeveloped practice of disciplines has led to a depletion of core characteristics among those who identify as Christian. So what are these characteristics and how do they become commonplace in the practice of believers today? Medi-Share's Director of Ministry Development, Stephen Myers, answers this question for us.

Spiritual Formation

The idea of spiritual formation is not new to the body of the church; in fact; it is somewhat old. Sprinkled throughout Scripture are practices that should be adopted into the everyday lives of believers.

One mustn't look hard to find examples of the power that the practices involved in spiritual formation have had throughout Scripture and the history of the Christian church. Though this is sometimes reduced simply to the approach of "read your Bible and pray every day, and you'll grow, grow, grow."

So what exactly *is* spiritual formation, and how does it work?

Spiritual formation is the dedicated efforts of an individual or community committed to the internal development and external demonstration of faith through disciplined practices and characteristics.

Spiritual formation exists not to achieve right standing with God, but to demonstrate a relationship with God. Because of our relationship with God, the possibility of developing characteristics that align with God's commands and practices is possible through dedication in disciplines and fruitfulness of the Spirit.

Spiritual Disciplines

The psalmist says, "Blessed is the man who[se] delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season; its leaf will not wither, and whatever he does will prosper" (Ps. 1:1-4).

Though a list of spiritual disciplines is not found directly in Scripture, nor is the term "spiritual discipline," the principles can be found throughout Scripture, and the continuity of practices throughout the Old and New Testament, as well as in the practices of church fathers.

These practices are prayer, study, evangelism, worship, fasting, meditation, journaling and stewardship.

The goal of participation is that you give yourself wholeheartedly into the effort of such practices so as to expose the areas of weakness and vulnerability in your life in order to grow and develop the characteristics that accommodate those weaknesses.

Each spiritual discipline has a particular function on how it develops in the heart and mind of a believer. First by engaging a weakness, and then by developing a characteristic to accommodate that weakness. The end goal in this is growth, like an athlete who will change the way they lift weights in order to develop or strengthen new muscles for the competition ahead. Each of us needs to develop these disciplines to be strengthened and to build endurance for the race in which we run.

More common today in the lives of Christians is the rise of such characteristics such as depression, anxiety, stress and discouragement. These characteristics are ones that can lead a Christian into sinful practices or, ultimately, out of ministry and away from the church. If the formula for growth is available, how and why are these becoming such widespread

issues?

That is because the practice of these spiritual disciplines is often underdeveloped in the lives of believers. We have become far more inclined to engage with smart devices and entertainment than disciplines.

Rather than the health benefits of a well-balanced diet, we survive off of a diet of convenience. This is exactly what the psalmist warned against in Psalm 1:1, “who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers.”

Formula for Formation

The practice of spiritual formation and the commitment to spiritual disciplines is not a one size fits all. Each practice has a time and purpose for the benefits in which it reaps.

Success in spiritual formation is not quick, but rather a slow and methodical participation in these disciplines with the desire to glorify God above all else. Therefore, to stand in the face of those characteristics that derail us from our ministry and distract us from our purpose, we must commit ourselves to lives devoted to knowing God and participating in every area of spiritual growth to become mature believers, effective in our work for the kingdom of God. This is done most effectively by evaluating our strengths, weaknesses and current needs, and developing a plan to commit ourselves to the spiritual formation we so richly desire. {eo}

Florida-based Christian Care Ministry operates the Medi-Share health care sharing program through which members voluntarily and directly share each other's medical bills. Since the program's inception in 1993, Medi-Share members have shared more than \$2 billion in medical bills. And because of access to an extensive network of more than 700,000 health care providers, members have saved an additional \$1.3 billion in

medical costs during that time. Medi-Share has over 415,000 members in all 50 states.