

Spiritual Formation: From Glory to Glory

Often when we are born into the family of God, the full implications of what that birth and its life journey will mean to us are left unexplained. We wonder why walking “by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7, NKJV) is filled with temptations, difficulties and challenges that are often beyond our comprehension. Yet if we understand the classic pattern of pilgrimage—the road map of the spiritual journey—we will fight, endure and prevail with greater joy and perseverance.

Men and women of faith through the centuries have defined the Christian’s pilgrimage of faith as having four distinct passages. The whole of these four passages describes our life journey with Christ, yet each may occur again and again throughout our pilgrimage—in whatever order the Father, in His tender yet powerful love, chooses for us.

In understanding the passages of our faith, we witness to Paul’s teaching that “we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory” (2 Cor. 3:18). Every passage of our journey, no matter how daunting or difficult, invites us to embrace that glorious transformation—perceiving its genuineness, depth and ultimate joy with unrelenting faith in Christ, whose earthly passages in following the Father’s will are patterns for our own transformation.

First Passage: God Awakens Us

It is the Lord who graciously awakens us to the glorious truth of the gospel message: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

Being awakened by the Lord brings joy and a very real

challenge, even fear to our hearts. For as surely as the Spirit of God touches the sleeping parts of our human spirits, He also calls for us to respond in faith to that awakening.

In the garden, Mary was awakened to the presence of the resurrected Christ. Joyfully, she reached out to hold Him, but He said, "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God" (John 20:17).

In beholding the risen Christ, Mary was awakened to new vistas of faith in her relationship with Him. As she beheld His transformation, He called her to a new response, a deeper faith relationship.

Because she had been awakened to this truth, Jesus gave Mary an apostolic commission to bear His glorious news to Peter and the others. In the passage of awakening, God's gives us both celebration and challenge.

Second Passage: The Lord Purifies Us

When we are born again into the kingdom of God, the love of God is shown so mercifully: The Holy Spirit begins to reveal to us our sinful thoughts, plans, words, actions and motivations. We are grieved at the knowledge of our own selfish and unloving ways of relating to others. We tend to recoil when again and again; the Scriptures reveal how very far we have been from God.

It becomes clear how low our trust level in God has been. We're amazed and ashamed at the depth of our commitment to the world's way of doing things. Purification then becomes the gift of our gentle, yet strong Shepherd. "He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake" (Ps. 23:3).

Third Passage: The Glory of God's Light

The light of God's truth enters in, changing our identities and motivations into a clearer image of Christ. God's light floods every area of our lives and reveals an intense need for consecration to a life of prayer. This new experience of His presence and love gifts our hearts with compassion for the poor, the oppressed and the lost, who are waiting for prayer and the action of ministering love.

As our hearts remain open to the presence of the Trinity, our experience of "Christ in [us], the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27) becomes more real—the living reality of God's splendor tabernacle, housed in "earthen vessels" (2 Cor. 4:7). Light reveals, warms and leads us. God's truth directs us to respond with more tenderness, more sensitivity, more desire to pray and to embrace God's every nuance of word and guidance.

Fourth Passage: United in His Perfect Love

Spiritual union with the Father, through faith in Jesus Christ, becomes an experience of love in the fourth passage. We begin to see that truly we are seated in heavenly places with Christ Jesus (see Eph. 2:6). This passage of faith may be experienced as unspeakable joy or more contemplatively, as the quiet, descending peace of God's grace that pervades our spirits.

And yet, as surely as there are springs of joy in this passage, darkness also comes. Sins that are resistant to complete surrender are revealed for what they are—separations from Christ's perfection.

During this season, God perfects our trust through a faith that chooses to remain constant while waiting on Him. We cast aside our prayer agendas and simply submit to God's presence, relinquishing every affection that is not worthy of Him.

Then a small light of recognition will dawn, as He brings us to this final cross of denying self, that we may truly know who He is and who we are: "For if we have been united together

in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection" (Rom. 6:5).

His love then conquers all our coldness, bursting forth in holy fire, burning to ashes the remaining structure of self's throne. The fourth passage takes us beyond blessing to the glories of being shown "a more excellent way" (1 Cor. 12:31).

The way is Christ Himself, the highest gift of all our yearnings, the fulfillment far beyond what we could know or desire. Our prayers become His pure life in us; our lives become His to lay down "that the world may believe" (John 17:21).

Each journey is holy, unique, yet all journeys bear witness to the grace that infuses every moment of pilgrimage with the presence of Christ. Each passage, as it occurs again and again in the spiritual pilgrimage, speaks of Christ, sometimes in whispers or in tears, sometimes in singing and shouting, but always "from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18).

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