

## Introduction to Spiritual Formation

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Spiritual formation is increasingly becoming a term used in many different kinds of evangelical ministry settings for building depth, commitment, and active pursuit of God into the lives of individual Christians and their communities of faith. It requires a commitment to in-depth biblical spirituality in the lives of those who have put their trust solely in the pure gospel of salvation by grace through faith alone in Jesus Christ our Lord. From a biblical point of view, probably the best way to define spiritual formation as a synonym of spiritual growth is to consider passages that put the Holy Spirit in the context of forming or transforming or conforming one's life towards Christ's likeness, like in Galatians 4:19. When you understand it this way, spiritual formation is, first of all, above all and throughout the shaping or forming work of the divine Holy Spirit carried out according to the will of God the Father for the purpose of conforming us to the image of His Son, Jesus Christ.

There's this passage in Romans 8:26-29 which goes like this:

*The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will [The Father's will]. And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose. For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers.*

So we have this sequence in this passage from the Spirit Himself [who] intercedes, and He does it according to the Father's will. And the Father works this out according to His predestined work to conform us to the likeness of His Son, Jesus Christ.

It's Trinitarian by its very nature, and this is important. It's the Trinitarian work of God. Now spiritual formation is not a biblical term, but I teach at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, and Trinity isn't a biblical term either. Nevertheless, there's a great deal of information in the Bible to teach us that the Trinity is an important concept in our understanding of God, even though we don't completely understand the Trinity.

The same is true of spiritual formation. It's not a biblical term specifically, but the terms "spiritual" and "being formed" are there and they're connected. So there's a bit of mystery in understanding the Trinity. There's also a bit of mystery in understanding how the Holy Spirit actually brings about the transforming work that He does, and that's part of understanding what spiritual formation is.

Some are a bit suspicious of spiritual formation because of the background the term has in some of the theology and in some of the practices, and some of this is associated with different kinds of backgrounds, say within the Roman Catholic Church, or various sources that are there. And I'll be talking about that some in this lecture. We should be concerned about that, of course. What I'm concerned about here, though, is developing a thoroughly biblical and evangelical tradition of spiritual formation. That means that we need to do some serious biblical theological work to provide a foundation and some direction for it in the Church and in our own lives. God is using spiritual formation today to help us go deeper in Christ.

Some of what has happened under the guise of Church growth or Church marketing over the past few decades has shallowed the Church. And God is concerned to use spiritual formation today in a way that deals with this problem and takes us deep into life through the Spirit growing into the image of Christ according to the will of God the Father. That's what this whole thing is really all about in the first place. And it does seem like God is really using it in light of all that's been happening around the country and around the world in this field.

Now there are three main dimensions of spiritual formation. At the core of this spirituality is intimacy with God through the presence of the Holy Spirit, who works in us and among us to conform us to the image of Christ. And He does that also to bind us together in community with other believers and, furthermore, to empower us as servants of God in the kingdom mission to spread the gospel and live as salt and light in the world.

This is basically what spiritual formation is about. So, in talking about a spiritual formation ministry then, what we're talking about is that we are seeking to stimulate and support the ongoing spiritually transforming work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is really the one who does this, who energizes it, makes it happen. We can't make this happen, but the Holy Spirit works, and we are supporting and stimulating that work in and through the personal lives, relationships, and ministries of genuine believers so that we all progressively become more conformed to the image of Christ according to the will of God the Father, echoing again that passage from Romans 8 and many other passages that are connected to this discussion.

So there are basically these three dimensions that we have just introduced here of this work of the Holy Spirit that show up in Scripture, and so we want to work into them. Each of them has connections from the Old Testament into the New Testament, and each has specific New Testament applications for the Christian life. And each dimension is inextricably bound up with the other two as well.

I have this chart that you'll see in the notes that's intended to illustrate these three dimensions and the relationships between them. First, you see that it's a series of three concentric circles—meaning that they're all of one piece. The whole system is bound together into this concentric circle set. Then as you look at the concentric circles, first at the inner circle, you have the Holy Spirit and His work in the human spirit. And that's the first main topic we're going to take up in the following lectures—the Holy Spirit and how He works in the human spirit. There's not nearly enough that's been said, at least in the circles that I am in, about the Holy Spirit and especially about understanding biblically the human spirit. There needs to be work done on that if we're going to understand spiritual formation and the way the Holy Spirit actually makes it happen.

The next concentric circle around that I have [is] entitled the Temple of God and the Temple of the Holy Spirit, because temple and tabernacle—sanctuary terminology from the Old Testament—comes through into the New Testament. And God is building a Temple of the Holy Spirit in us. We are a temple individually, but also the whole corporate Church is a Temple of the Holy Spirit. We'll talk about that. And so that's about a community type development in spiritual formation.

First, the inner core is about the Holy Spirit's work in our human spirit. Second, you have this building of a community of faith in the second circle—this temple concept. And then the third concentric circle I have entitled Prophetic Spirit and Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit also has come into our lives to make us prophetic in the world—to have an impact in the world. And so His forming work includes both working in us and working, second, among us and then, third, working through us in the world.

And all three dimensions of this work of the Holy Spirit are what the Holy Spirit is shaping us in. This is what spiritual formation is actually all about, and so this terminology is very important and the various kinds of words that are related to it. These words for forming or transforming or conforming are words that come from the Greek word *morphe*. We have the word “morphology” or “metamorphosis” or these kinds of words in English that come from this Greek word. And what this is really about is bringing those kinds of words into connection with the Holy Spirit, who does this forming work. And that is how we're defining spiritual formation. And as you do the biblical theology of it, we seem to find three main dimensions of that—the three concentric circles.

You'll notice that also there are these arrows pointing inward and outward in this design. The arrows in and out show that each dimension reverberates against the others as they pulse. It's like a living thing. They echo against each other and impact each other as this design pulses like a human heart. It's a living thing, like a beating heart. If one part therefore does not work, well, it sabotages the other parts just like in the human heart. There has to be this ongoing dynamic of these three dimensions working in order to be truly biblical spiritual formation. And that's what we are really wanting to talk about here in these lectures.

Now the next part of the notes talks about discipleship, sanctification, and spiritual formation, trying to define these words in terms in relationship to one another. Discipleship is a term that, of course, we get the word disciple from. It is an adherent who is an adherent to a particular teacher—a learner or pupil or, maybe better, apprentice is a good term here. The apprentice follows the teacher around, imitates what he does, tries to follow the way he does it, assists him in doing it, serves him. This is a disciple—an apprentice.

And the word discipleship is really about that kind of relationship with the Lord. The disciple is committed and disciplined. The

word discipline is related to the word “disciple,” and disciplined means well-trained; a follower of a particular teacher—a rabbi. And, in fact, in John 1:38-49 Jesus is actually referred to as a rabbi. As a rabbi, Jesus not only taught us how to live but actually lived in such a way that we can see what it looks like to live out what He taught. That’s what He [did] as a rabbi. So He taught us and He lived it. So He’s both our teacher and our example.

Jesus has commissioned us in Matthew 28, and this comes out in other places as well in various forms, but He’s commissioned us to make disciples, make followers out of all people from various nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and teaching them.

Discipleship is very close to being learners, to being taught by a master. Teaching them, but not just teaching them concepts; teaching them, as it says, “to obey everything I have commanded you” [Matthew 28:20]. A disciple is not just a learner; he’s the one that actually does what is taught. And therefore it’s got to do with obeying. So discipleship is very much tied in with these kinds of apprenticeship, teacher, student relationship, teaching, following the rabbi around. This is the kind of expression that it is

Now sanctification comes from the Latin word sanctus. We get our word “sanctuary” from it, for example. And it arises and it’s used in the Old and New Testaments. This word “sanctification” for being holy or sacred, sanctuary refers to a holy place, and the word “saints” in the New Testament is actually a word for a sacred or holy person. We are called to be saints—sacred holy persons—and we are made that by the purifying and sanctifying blood of Jesus Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We’re made sacred people. That’s how God views us—as people who know Him. This is our identity before God. We are His sanctified holy ones, and the ongoing process of our sanctification is a continuation of that saving work of God in our lives. We have been saved, we are being saved, and we will be saved. These are all parts of God’s sanctifying work in us. It’s a progressive ongoing thing.

Spiritual formation then, in relationship to discipleship and sanctification, has a specific kind of focus to it. Here the Holy Spirit is the one who God the Father, at the request of Jesus the Son, has given us in this day and age to guide and enable this discipleship and this sanctification. So He actually enables us to function as followers of Jesus.

There's this passage in John 14:16-17:

*“I will ask the Father,” Jesus says, “And He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.”*

There are all sorts of interesting things in those verses, but the connection between Jesus and the Father and how they are really employing their work through this Helper—this Holy Spirit person of the Trinity—this is important for understanding spiritual formation if we're going to understand it as the work of the Holy Spirit transforming us.

So spiritual formation then is a term that talks about, first, the dynamic and its emphasis on the divine power and means of formation. So it's the power, it's that dynamic of how discipleship and sanctification actually work. And second, it is deep in its focus on the inner workings of the human person at the core, and then building that on out into the community and into the mission in the world. So the Spirit of God reaches into the spirit of the person to do the core of His work. Romans 8 talks specifically about that as we've seen.

There's another passage there in Romans 8, and we'll say more about this later, but maybe I should anticipate that here. In Romans 8:16, “The Spirit of God Himself testifies with our human spirit that we are children of God.” There's something going on between the Holy Spirit of God and the human spirit of the person that is tied in with our actual adoption and our taking in the significance of that adoption by God.

God has not therefore called us to something without enabling us to actually do it. He's not sitting by to see how we do. Jesus did not leave us commands and no power to fulfill them. The idea is that there's a divine person—the Holy Spirit—continually at work in us, who acts directly on the deepest parts of us on our human spirit to transform us and our relationships and our effectiveness in the world into something that's truly pleasing to Him. And we'll come back and say more about that in later lectures as well.

Now this has just been, so far, an introduction to try to understand what we're talking about when we're talking about spiritual formation. It's a dynamic and it's a deep work that is enabling and

is motivating and it turns our heart in a direction that isn't going to happen in any other way.

Now there are, however, some things as I anticipated earlier, that need to be said about problems in this field that should be anticipated at the beginning of the discussion. For example, Ignatius of Loyola, back in 1491–1556 was when he lived. He was the founder of the Society of Jesus—the Jesuits—and one of the leaders of the counterreformation. He wrote this in his spiritual exercises. This is actually the first paragraph of his *Spiritual Exercises*, which is about spiritual formation and its historical manifestations. He wrote this:

By the term “Spiritual Exercises” is meant every method of examination of conscience, of meditation, of contemplation, of vocal and mental prayer, and of other spiritual activities that will be mentioned later. For just as taking a walk, journeying on foot, and running are bodily exercises, so we call Spiritual Exercises every way of preparing and disposing the soul to rid itself of all inordinate attachments, and, after their removal, of seeking and finding the will of God in the disposition of our life for the salvation of our soul.

There are all sorts of good things in that paragraph. One of the things that takes place is that he actually attaches spiritual formation as a process through which you somehow attain salvation of our soul.

Now it's true that good works are of great importance to us in the Christian life. We have passages like, for example, in Ephesians 2:8-10 we have this:

*“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.” Then the next verse—verse 10—goes on to say, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”*

God is working His grace and it is completely through faith. It is not of any kind of our own works that we become accepted by God. It's by grace through faith, but He has done that also in order to create the dynamic in us for good works.

Good works are important to spiritual formation, and that's very

important to keep in mind. The problem is when you attach this works to doing the works in order to attain the salvation. This is where the problem comes in. This has been a difficulty that has shown up in some kinds of theology through the ages. The issue is that salvation actually comes by grace through faith. Sanctification continues that way, but sanctification is about using that grace of God to transform us so that we do the good works that God has prepared for us to do.

There is a big difference between a spiritual formation that is done in order to gain salvation as opposed to spiritual formation that is done as a result of already having salvation—of already having the grace of God working fully and justifying one purely by grace through faith. The dynamic of one view of spiritual formation, with the nature of it being tied to “this is how you get salvation,” is very different from one where you already have salvation and are freely following the dynamic work of God in your life to work that depth of the dynamic grace of God into our lives. This is a very different kind of thing. If you reverse the order of these things, pretty soon you don’t have the same thing at all. This is a problem that sometimes comes up because of the background of the term “spiritual formation” and how it’s been used through the centuries.

Another part of this comes out also in a Roman Catholic context in another place. I am not concerned here to be attacking Catholics—that’s not what this is all about. The problem is that a lot of background for spiritual formation does come out of that field and therefore has to be thought through in light of belief in the gospel of salvation by grace. So this is not meant to be an attack on Catholics. How many people, Catholics or not, otherwise think that somehow they will get to heaven if they’re good enough or selfrighteous enough? This is common across the board in all sorts of different denominational contexts, so this is not about that.

But in the catechism of the Catholic Church, there are some things that stand out about this that need to be clarified at the beginning so that we don’t misunderstand. First, in the Catholic catechism on pages that are cited in the notes, it makes much of the fact that justification and even sanctification is by the grace of God alone. Our merit derives from the fact that on His own initiative God has freely chosen to associate man with the work of His grace. This is a very good statement: “Justification is by grace through faith.”



On another page though, page 542, just following that previous quote that I mentioned, we read this: “Moved by the Holy Spirit and by charity, we can then merit,” and that’s the emphasis that’s in the catechism itself, “for ourselves and for others the graces needed for our sanctification for the increase of grace and charity and for the attainment of eternal life.” I’ve emphasized that last piece myself to see the connection, how it comes through in the official catechism. The point is that the official Catholic doctrine teaches that grace releases people from the condemnation of the old Law and allows them to perform meritorious works worthy of eternal life. That’s really what they’re saying in this.

The problem here is that we have this issue of what to do with this kind of misunderstanding from a biblical point of view. We need to be aware that it shows up sometimes when talking about spiritual formation in various kinds of theological contexts. This is again something that we need to be concerned about along the way.

There are certain other spiritualities as well that are not Christian at all, much less biblical. For example, we have this book by James Herrick called *The Making of the New Spirituality: The Eclipse of the Western Religious Tradition*. The material that he gathers together in here shows that there’s this new Western spirituality that really consists of a set of new spiritualities, some newer than others. They’re put together in various kinds of combinations. This is in the air we breathe in Western culture in the secular world. It’s promoted by powerful forces since the 1700’s—the Enlightenment, biblical criticisms, scientific approaches to religion and spirituality, psychoanalytic, humanistic spirituality, occult types of spiritualities, and Eastern spiritualities. All of this promoted by various forms of media and politics.

This is a problem that shows up in many different places, and we must not confuse it with biblical spirituality. This is part of Modernity. Also, the New Age movement and PostModernity make much of these kinds of spiritualities as well. It’s a mixture of humanistic and Eastern mystical spiritualities and spiritisms of all sorts and altered states and so on. The focus on these sorts of spiritualities is on the potential inherent in a person; not on the potential of God’s transforming activity in a person’s life through the Holy Spirit when He brings the gospel to bear in the person’s human spirit. So there’s potential with the person. It’s not coming from God. In this kind of spirituality, they reject the notion that there’s only one way and only one true God. They will argue that

through personal enlightenment, freedom, and liberation you can obtain Christian salvation or Buddhist enlightenment or Hindu Samadhi.

These kinds of things are commonly talked about now in our culture in these days. This is a serious problem that we have to deal with as we walk into this discussion about spiritual formation as it might be understood by people in the context that we are in. Therefore what we are concerned about here is specifically evangelical spiritual formation. Now the term “evangelical” derives from the Greek word euangelion, which means “gospel” or “good news.” We are committed to the good news of Jesus Christ. Trusting in Jesus is the only way to God.

John 14:6, for example, puts it this way (Jesus puts it this way):

*“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.’”*

Also, in Acts 4:12, it is put in another way, where the apostles say when they are being confronted about preaching Christ and told them not to preach Him. They say in Acts 4:12,

*“And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.”*

So there is this basic foundation that comes out in these passages and many other passages that there is this good news that comes. And that good news is found in Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ alone. This is the way God has provided. This is one of the things that makes our mission so important. People need to know or they are lost, and lost eternally.

Now perhaps a good way to clarify this and to talk about evangelical in terms of spiritual formation is to quote from a well known, again Catholic writer in this field of spiritual formation. His name is Henri Nouwen. He has a book that he wrote—it is the last book that he wrote—called Sabbatical Journey. He wrote in that book (November 10, 1995) an entry about a particular meeting he had. Now this meeting was with a group called The Gathering. This is a group of evangelical Christians to whom he spoke about giving in the Spirit of the gospel. They wanted to know about their endeavors of giving and how to do it in a way that was truly pleasing to God. In this discussion what he does is work through his engagement with them in reflecting upon it.

This is what he writes. This is again a journal entry in this book. It starts on page 51. He reflects that this group of evangelical believers believes that without an explicit personal, profession of faith in Jesus as our Lord and Savior we cannot make it to heaven. This is quoting Henri Nouwen here:

“They are convinced that God has called us to convert every human being to Jesus. Their love for Jesus is deep. It is intense and radical. They are very committed disciples, and not hesitant to pay the cost of discipleship.”

So he begins by making that very clarified, very clear statement of how he understands what it is about them that makes them evangelicals. Now quite frankly I couldn't do much better than that myself in terms of what an evangelical really is and what it really means to live the Christian faith in this “based-on-the-gospel” sort of way. Evangelical comes from the word “gospel”—euangelion. So it's a very good statement, it seems to me, in a way that he has put it together there.

Now many of you have heard perhaps of Henri Nouwen. He has written a lot; he is a very important person to read; he is a good writer; he talks deeply about Christian spirituality. But in the following paragraphs in this book he goes on to write this: as he was with them he writes, “I felt somewhat uncomfortable even though this belief was present in my own upbringing.” So he feels uncomfortable in the midst of these people even though he feels like it's there in his upbringing at least to some degree. Then he goes on:

“My conviction as a young man was that there is no salvation outside the Catholic Church and that it was my task to bring all nonbelievers into the one true Church.”

Now you notice the focus there on church. It's not specifically on the gospel but on the church as the way. So it's a very Catholic kind of statement. He sees it as analogous to what the evangelicals would believe that he is dealing with in these times.

Now it is not probably something that we would say. We would not say it in that way. That's a particularly Roman Catholic way of putting it. He goes on though and he goes further:

“Today I personally believe that while Jesus came to open the door to God's house, all human beings can walk through

that door, whether they know about Jesus or not. Today I see it as my call to help every person claiming his or her own way to God.”

Now this is a Catholic priest who is writing heavily on spiritual formation and on Christian spiritual formation. But he doesn't believe you need to know Jesus in order to really be accepted by God. So you are going to run into these mixes in the literature. That's what I'm trying to get at here. [It's] not just in Catholic literature but in all sorts of literature on spiritual formation. That's why doing the biblical theology of it is pivotal to actually doing this in a way that is pleasing to God according to His Word.

Now he goes on and says this:

“I feel deeply called to witness for Jesus as the one who is the source of my own spiritual journey, and thus create the possibility for other people to know Jesus and commit themselves to Him.”

So he still witnesses to Jesus. That's his way. He goes on:

“I am so truly convinced that the Spirit of God is present in our midst and that each person can be touch by God's Spirit in ways far beyond my own comprehension and intention.”

Now we all believe that. But how does the Holy Spirit to do that touching? What is that touching about? Well, according to the Bible, it's about Jesus. Jesus is the way to truth and life, and there is no other way. This is part of the problem with what is happening here in this discussion.

But again, Henri Nouwen is one of the wellknown writers in this field. He is coming out of a very wonderful service to severely handicapped people, and I think he is working out of that to some degree, but he is also working out all of some shifts. In some ways what he is saying here is not even Catholic.

Now moving on, there are a couple of other things I want to talk about from an evangelical point of view. One of the issues that we need to be concerned about is a problem that sometimes arises in this field with regard to a Gnostic or elitist mystical spirituality and perfectionism versus what I would call biblical spirituality and spiritual formation. This can become a rather severe problem.

In some contexts spiritual formation has sometimes degenerated into a search for a mystical form of a Gnostic or elitist spirituality or perfectionism. This has become something that I have observed in certain places. First, with regard to the concept, the notion of it being mystical. It's probably more mystical than some ways of talking about growth in Christ—for example, disciple and sanctification. It deals with actually how the Holy Spirit works. We will actually see passages in the Bible that talk about the Holy Spirit in a rather mystical sort of way. Jesus tells us with Nicodemus for example. And we will come back to that and talk about it. So there is a proper Christian mysticism, but sometimes it can be overdone so that there's a certain kind of mysticism that is not really proper Christian mysticism about the way the Holy Spirit works. We need to be concerned about that.

Probably the strength of spiritual formation is in this calling upon God for His power through the work of the Holy Spirit. In that way it takes us in this mystical direction to some degree. Then, however, with discipleship, for example, “disciple” is a perfectly good word and so is “sanctification.” They're perfectly good words, but in some contexts, for example, discipleship is related more to kind of a rigorous, kind of rule-focused kind of Christianity rather than the dynamic of relationship with walking with Jesus. Depending on people reacting in different places, these terms can be one better than the other. It's all depending on the perspective of the particular person.

Spiritual formation does get into this dynamic, this empowerment, this actual active work of God in a dynamic, powerful way in the human spirit. And again, we'll say more about that later. But sometimes we have a problem with an overly mystical form of this, or we can have a problem with perfectionism. For example, at the end of Matthew 5, within the Sermon on the Mount, there's this expression that I think has been quite often misunderstood. Matthew 5:48: “Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Now that can be taken and misunderstood. What needs to be understood in the context is that what He's talking about, starting with verse 43:

*You had heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward*

*do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same [verses 43-46]?*

People who don't know the Lord can love people who love them. That's what He's saying. That's not the issue. The question is whether you can love people who don't love you—if you can love your enemy. That's what makes you like your Father in heaven since He sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous and so on.

*Verses 47-48: “If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”*

That expression in verse 48 is about loving your enemy. That's what makes you perfect like your Father, if you can love your enemy just like the Father does. So this is the kind of thing that can be misunderstood. There are people who talk in a perfectionist way when you get into this material.

There are other passages that apply to this as well. We are to grow toward becoming like the Father. And as we do this He perfects us, but we never become perfect. So perfectionism can become a problem in this context. So we need to be concerned about that.

Biblical spirituality is, above all, practical. It is for every Christian. Even the apostle Paul wrote in I Corinthians 3:1,

*“Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual [pneumatikois] but as wordly [sarkinois],” fleshly is the word there, “mere infants in Christ.”*

He was exhorting all the Christians at Corinth to pursue true spirituality. This is what the Lord wants to do.

Now in I Thessalonians, for example, there's a helpful passage here. First Thessalonians chapter 3, we begin in chapter 3 but what I'm really after is a unit in chapter 4. Chapter 3:11-13 in I Thessalonians:

*Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you; and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you; so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of*

*our Lord Jesus with all of His saints [with all of his holy ones there].*

Now that's the end of chapter 3. He goes on then in the earlier part of chapter 4 to talk about the importance of dealing with your own lusts and those kinds of things in a way that mortifies them and that you don't live in the way the ungodly do.

*Then in 4:9: "Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another."*

So this is one of the things that makes you spiritual; [it's] really loving one another.

For indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more, and to make it your ambition [now this is important] to lead a quiet life and attend your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you, so that you will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need [verses 10-12].

This is an ambitious Christian life; to live a quiet life. Attending to your life properly, handling things well, working, and behaving properly toward outsiders, not having needs, and things like this. The point is that there's this ambition that is a true spirituality that's for every Christian. It's important to understand this is belonging to the life of the common, everyday Christian in the workaday world.

Spiritual formation is actually giving us an opportunity here in the evangelical world to develop a kind of unified pursuit of true godliness, of life and effectiveness of ministry together in the church worldwide.

There's the history of the church since the New Testament days, and that includes the story of Christian spirituality. Unfortunately, when you read through the history of the church and this history of spirituality, it's a mixed bag of principles and practices—some of which fit well under the umbrella of biblical spirituality and spiritual formation, and some of which do not. There's a very good history written by Gordon Mursell: *The Story of Christian Spirituality*. You can see how much of a mixed bag this really is as you look at this book and read through it. It's well illustrated and it really can help you to understand. There are other things out there as well that are very useful here.

We are, of course, concerned here with recognizing and making use of all that is of value in these traditions or strains of historical spirituality. There's a book by Bruce Demarest—again, this is in the notes—*Satisfy Your Soul*. It's a very good, discerning summary of the historical ways of thinking about spirituality and the resources from an evangelical point of view. So we look at these various things.

I myself have found great benefit, for example, in meditating my way through Thomas a Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ*. This is a monastic order that is reflecting its way of coming at pursuing spirituality. So there are all sorts of different useful resources—Teresa of Avila, various different kinds of resources from the Desert Fathers and all sorts of things like that. There were, in fact, quite a number of reformation movements within the Catholic Church before the Reformation. This is important.

Now I've made it clear in this lecture that the Reformation was about something. It was important, but the church did not start with the Reformation. The church began with Christ and what He did, and then the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost. And that worked on through the whole two millennia, now, that the church has existed. So we need to pay attention to things that may not be in the vein that we're used to, but [they're] very useful nevertheless for our life in pursuing Christ, even from the history of the church.

These lectures, however, focus on a whole bible approach to spiritual formation—Old Testament and New Testament. We're interested in collecting things and using the entire Bible to understand what spirituality is all about. We're interested in collecting what is good and beneficial then from this history of spirituality and arranging it under the umbrella of a focused biblical spirituality.