

# What Is Spiritual Formation?

By Scott Aniol

## Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, students will take the following assignments.

### Assignment One

Turn to the comments related to 2 Peter 1: 3–4 in the section **It's in the Book**. After reading the comments about verse 4, read Ephesians 4:24. Prepare to share your answer to the following question: How can this verse help you understand what “partakers of the divine nature” means?

### Assignment Two

Compare the qualities listed in 2 Peter 1:5–8 with the qualities in Colossians 3:12–14 and the “fruit of the Spirit” in Galatians 5:22–23. Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: What qualities are similar, and which are different?

### Assignment Three

Read Acts 2:42. Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: To what were the earliest Christians devoted? How did these disciplines form them spiritually?

## Scripture to Memorize

*“Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness.”* 1 Timothy 4:7

## Session Goal

Consistent with God’s Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will recognize the importance of nurturing spiritual virtues in their lives through disciplined training and commit to pursuing such training.

**Scott Aniol** is assistant professor of Worship and Music Ministry at Southwestern Seminary. He is the author of several books, including *Worship in Song: A Biblical Approach to Music and Worship*, *Sound Worship: A Guide to Making Musical Choices in a Noisy World*, and *By the Waters of Babylon: Worship in a Post-Christian Culture*. He speaks around the country on the subjects of culture and worship and blogs at [www.religiousaffections.org](http://www.religiousaffections.org).

## It's in the Book

30 minutes

### Real-Life Scenario

What does it take to become better at a sport or a musical instrument? Is it automatic, or does it take work? How is this different from or similar to becoming a better Christian?

### What Does It Mean to Be Spiritually Formed?

Read 2 Peter 1:1–11 out loud.

#### Studying the Passage, vv. 3–4

**Verse 3. His divine power.** The power of Christ—the same power that raised Him from the dead—is the source of God’s divine gift to those who have faith in Him. **granted.** This word demonstrates the certainty of this divine gift from Christ. **life.** The first part of the divine gift refers to our new birth. **godliness.** The second part of the gift literally means “well worship” and is often translated “piety.” This is a heart of love and obedience to God and His directives. **through the true knowledge of Him.** The divine gift of life and godliness comes through a personal knowledge of Christ.

**Verse 4. so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature.** The result of the divine gift is the impartation of a new nature by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, enabling Christians to become sharers in the moral nature of God and to enjoy spiritual communion with God. **having escaped the corruption.** The other result of the divine gift is that believers can escape sinful corruption. These two results describe the essence of spiritual formation—a life that is progressing in communion with God and freedom from sin.

#### Assignment One Feedback

The student who completed **Assignment One** may now report on how Ephesians 4:24 sheds light on the meaning of “partakers of the divine nature.”

#### Discussion Question

What does it mean to be spiritually formed, and how does it relate to your salvation and relationship with Christ?

#### Studying the Passage, vv. 5–11

**Verse 5. applying all diligence.** Since we are partakers of the divine nature, Christ has enabled us to live godly lives, but nurturing the Christian life still takes effort, diligence, and hard work.

Peter then lists the important spiritual qualities every Christian needs to nurture. **moral excellence.** This literally means “that which properly fulfills its purpose or function.” **knowledge.** The second quality is practical knowledge, the ability to discern between right and wrong.

**Verse 6. self-control.** The third quality is the inner power to control your physical passions instead of being controlled by them. **perseverance.** The next quality literally means to bear up under a heavy load. **godliness.** The fifth quality refers to piety and reverence for God. **Verse 7. brotherly kindness.** Loving one another is an essential characteristic of Christianity we must actively add to our faith. **love.** The greatest Christian virtue is more than simply mutual brotherly kindness. This is sacrificial, deliberate, purposefully seeking the welfare of others.

Verses 8–9 describe the effects of this kind of spiritual growth. **Verse 8. increasing.** Spiritual formation is a lifelong continual process of growth. **neither useless nor unfruitful.** Christians who actively nurture these spiritual qualities will progressively grow in their personal relationship with Jesus Christ. **Verse 9. he who lacks these qualities.** Those who do not nurture these qualities are like someone with bad sight or a bad memory. They will have no confidence about their relationship with God.

**Verse 10. diligent to make certain.** Peter is once again emphasizing that spiritual formation requires faithful effort of every Christian. **never stumble.** Diligently nurturing Christian virtue will make Christians “sure-footed” about their relationship with God. **Verse 11. the entrance . . . will be abundantly supplied.** As spiritual qualities increase more and more in this life, blessings and rewards will increase more and more in the life to come.

### **Assignment Two Feedback**

The student who completed **Assignment Two** may now report on the similarities and differences between the qualities listed in 2 Peter 1:5–8 and those in Colossians 3:12–14 and Galatians 5:22.

### **On Your Own**

In the space below, list some spiritual qualities you believe you are growing in, and list some other spiritual qualities you believe you lack. When everyone is finished, the group can share their responses.

## **What Does It Take to Be Spiritually Formed?**

**Read** 1 Timothy 4:7–10 out loud.

### **Studying the Passage, v. 7**

**Verse 7. discipline yourself.** We get the English word *gymnastics* from the Greek word translated with “discipline yourself.” Spiritual formation requires disciplined, active training.

**Verse 8. profitable for all things.** The results of diligent spiritual formation are eternal.

### **Assignment Three Feedback**

The student who completed **Assignment Three** may now report on the early Christian disciplines in Acts 2:42.

### **Discussion Question**

What spiritual disciplines has God prescribed in Scripture that help Christians nurture spiritual virtues? How is actively pursuing spiritual virtue through disciplined training similar to developing a sports skill or musical talent?

### **On Your Own**

Choose one spiritual discipline you discussed earlier that you will commit this week to pursuing diligently, and write it in the space below. List a few deliberate ways you will pursue this discipline. Finally, list the spiritual virtues you believe this discipline will help form. When everyone is finished, the group can share their responses.

## **Heart and Hands**

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven.

Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart (the real you) for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something in your life for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit says to you below and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

## **Since Last Week**

5 minutes

Give the group this update: "In our last session I made a commitment to. . . . I want to let you know how that turned out. On that same issue I think the Holy Spirit now is leading me to . . ."

## **Grace-Filled Accountability**

5 minutes

Disciples can agree on a way to hold one another accountable. Confessing faults with other disciples allows them to offer grace, insights, and encouragement. Even more important is confession to Christ, the source of true forgiveness and cleansing.

## **Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service**

5 minutes

Groups of disciples always are making preparations for evangelism, missions, and service. Use these minutes to work on the next plan.

## **Prayer**

7 minutes

Every disciple will pray aloud, offering praise to King Jesus, thanking Him specifically for His gracious acts, making heartfelt confession, committing to actions flowing from the Bible study, praying toward evangelism locally and globally, and interceding for others as prompted by the Holy Spirit.

## **At Home: Nail It Down**

Through a relationship with Jesus Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, God has given every Christian new life, a new nature, and the ability to flee from sin and walk in godliness (2 Peter 1:3–4; Ephesians 4:24). Yet even though this process of spiritual growth is inevitable for true Christians, it is not automatic. Spiritual formation requires disciplined effort (2 Peter 1:5; 1 Timothy 4:7). Such effort is motivated by love and adoration of King Jesus. It also is motivated by gratitude for Christ's sacrifice and the gift of salvation.

The goal of this effort is that Christians will cultivate important virtues in their lives like moral excellence, discernment, self-control, perseverance, godliness, kindness, and love (2 Peter 1:5–7; Colossians 3:12–14; Galatians 5:22). Nurturing these qualities draws Christians closer in their relationship with Christ and allows them to live fruitful lives that are glorifying to Him (2 Peter 1:8–10).

The way God has established for Christians to nurture these spiritual virtues is through biblically prescribed spiritual disciplines such as Bible reading, prayer, and worship (Acts 2:42). Every Christian should commit to making habits of these disciplines, not as ends in themselves but toward the goal of blessed eternal communion with God and with His people.

### **Parent Question**

*What spiritual discipline have you committed to pursuing this week, and how will it help form Christian virtue?*

The Making Disciples curriculum is a gift from Southwestern Seminary to teenagers who, for the glory of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, will spend a lifetime embracing the full supremacy of the Son, responding to His kingly reign in all of life, inviting Christ to live His life through them, and joining Him in making disciples among all peoples.

For more information about the entire Making Disciples series, see [www.disciple6.com](http://www.disciple6.com).  
For more information about Southwestern Seminary, see [www.swbts.edu](http://www.swbts.edu).