

<b>Series:</b> Journey Deeper	<b>Reference:</b> Various Passages	<b>Title:</b> For the Sake of Others	<b>Date:</b> 10.06.2019
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Website Writeup:</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Is our spiritual formation just between us &amp; Jesus? Or does it lead to taking on His heart for the world &amp; doing the things which He did, and calls us to do? The question may be rhetorical, but let's explore the statement that our spiritual formation is for the sake of others together.</p>			

### COLOR CHANGES IN TEXT INDICATE SLIDE CHANGES

This series follows along certain chapters of M. Robert Mulholland Jr.'s book, *Invitation to a Journey; A Roadmap for Spiritual Formation*. Much of these sermons will be reminiscent of, or sometimes direct quotes of his writings. I urge you to read along as we study this together.

For this series we're memorizing two short passages. Anyone brave enough to come up & recite them? If you get them right, you'll get a prize...

#### **Romans 12:1-2...**

*Therefore, I urge you, brothers & sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy & pleasing to God - this is your true & proper worship. <sup>2</sup> 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 & approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

#### **Ephesians 2:8-10...**

*<sup>8</sup> For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - <sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

Over the coming few weeks, use the cards provided, committing these to memory.

Many Evangelicals only memorize vv8-9 of Ephesians 2, not v10. Possibly the reason being - the idea or discussion of 'Good works' has always produced a sense of legalism in the Evangelical mind which we strive to avoid. We're drawn to words of Grace.

Remember, we broke away from the Catholic Church as Protestants on the issue of Grace vs Works concerning salvation. Our sensitivity in discussing works is set at a high level. But, like many things we swing to extremes, throwing the baby out with the bath water. Whatever the case, this is God's Word to us - and verse 10 isn't just an afterthought, nor a call to legalism, but it's that to which the other verses lead. If we stop with v9, we'd have a truncated view of spiritual formation.

We're called to Good Works which largely have to do with other people. Which is the next building block in our definition of spiritual formation, **that spiritual formation's for the sake of others.**

Our definition has been, *spiritual formation is the process of being formed into the likeness/image of Christ*. Being formed by the Spirit of God via His Word into the Image of Jesus. But to what end? Just to become a showpiece for God to sit on a shelf?

Obviously not...in growing in His image, we grow into His concerns, leading to doing the things He'd have us do. We know our salvation's secure, Ephesians 2 tells us. We don't earn our place with Jesus, our position is ascribed by Grace through Faith. However, it leads to good works - acts of love. If our radar is set high in any place, it's that we should never think we can *Earn* our place with Jesus, but that doesn't mean *Effort* towards Jesus in Good Works isn't a call of the spiritual life.

**A great part of Good Works is Truth-telling** - being a witness of Jesus. But who is Jesus? Why's it so important that you're His witness?

Jesus came to usher in the Kingdom of God, the thing of which He spoke most. He claimed to be the central kingly figure of this kingdom, the Messiah of Israel. He said, *"I am the way & the truth & the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* (Jn 14:6) He's exclusive in His claim of divinity, and how to know God. According to Jesus, there are no other paths to God other than through Himself.

You've heard the old adage of a bunch of blind men feeling around an elephant. One grabs the tail & says it's a rope. Another touches a leg & says it's a tree. Another touches the side & says it's a wall. One touches the trunk & says it's a snake. One touches the ear & says it's a fan. And finally one touches the tusk & says it's a spear. An old story sometimes used by many to illustrate the religions of the world, saying each one only sees in part, but none see the larger picture of who God is from their vantage point. Let me say, according to the Scriptures, according to Jesus Himself, that's absolute BS!

As we look at all of the Biblical narrative we see exactly what we need to see of who God is & how to reach Him - through Jesus, God incarnate. It leaves no room for another path. In Jesus we see the whole elephant!

He claimed the Kingdom broke into our reality via Him, <sup>16</sup> *"The Law & the Prophets were proclaimed until John (the Baptist). Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached...(Lk 16:16)* In other words, He's saying, 'The kingdom came with me.'

Really interesting if you think back to their encounter surrounding Jesus' Baptism by John in the River Jordan. At that time John said to the people gathered, *"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."* (Mt 3:2) Then to the Pharisees he warned, <sup>8</sup> *Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.* (Mt 3:8) Because to know Jesus & enter His kingdom requires repentance of your sin.

Then John made the unmistakable claim as to Jesus' positional Lordship in this Kingdom when he said to them, <sup>11</sup> *"I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry."*

*He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit & fire.” (Mt 3:11) Referencing Jesus, only God can baptize with the Holy Spirit.*

*<sup>29</sup> The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him & said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! (Jn 1:29) Then, <sup>34</sup> “I have seen & I testify that this is God’s Chosen One.” (Jn 1:34) This is the King of the Kingdom. This is the Messiah. This is God’s Anointed One who alone is able to save our souls.*

John’s painfully clear with his disciples, <sup>28</sup> *You yourselves can testify that I said, ‘I am not the Messiah but am sent ahead of him.’ <sup>29</sup> The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits & listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom’s voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. <sup>30</sup> He must become greater; I must become less.” (Jn 3:28–30) In other words, I’ve done my job, here’s Jesus, your King!*

*About the Good News of this in-breaking Kingdom Jesus said, <sup>14</sup> And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” (Mt 24:14) So, we don’t know exactly when Jesus will return, but we do know what we’re to be about until then - Truth-telling about HIM.*

*In Mark 6 & Luke 10 He sent the disciples out two-by-two to do just this - to proclaim the good news that the Kingdom of God had broken in via Himself. He spoke of it, modeled it, trained the Disciples towards it, provided opportunity for them to practice it, and eventually went to the cross for it.*

*In Luke 7 Jesus responds to John the Baptists disciples when they inquired, “John the Baptist sent us to you to ask, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?’” (Lk 7:20) John seemed to have been waffling a bit in his conviction, but to his credit he asks plainly - are you REALLY the Messiah?*

*Jesus replied, “Go back & report to John what you have seen & heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. <sup>23</sup> Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.” (Lk 7:22–23) These were all signs of the in-breaking Kingdom of God in the ministry of Jesus. Jesus is saying, ‘YES, I am most definitely HIM!’*

*But we don’t just have these claims, or instances of great joy as the Kingdom breaks in, we also have the crucifixion & resurrection! If anyone were in doubt before as to who Jesus was, this confirmed it! He predicts His own death & resurrection & it happens!*

*By the way, the integrity of the Scriptures & the truth of this whole story are beyond question! Thousands upon thousands of ancient documents confirm it. We have more textual evidence as to its integrity than any other ancient documents many from eyewitnesses. The story wouldn’t have been written the way it was if it were fabricated -*

no one would've used women as the first eyewitnesses of the empty tomb, it would've been suspect - that fact lends to its credence.

Eyewitnesses of Jesus death & resurrection went on to die for this message. They wouldn't have died for a fabrication, or even just a fleeting vision - they touched Him, Thomas stuck his finger in Jesus' side. Paul, an early enemy of the church, gave up everything when he came to faith after witnessing the risen Jesus. Jesus own brother James came to faith after the resurrection - you gotta see your own brother rise from the dead before you claim Him to be your God. Hundreds of people witnessed Him after his exit from the grave! There is absolutely no reason to doubt the veracity & integrity of this story, it has been under scrutiny for 2 millennia & has done nothing but grow in confirmation of its integrity.

**We're called to be Truth-tellers**, witnesses of Jesus as God incarnate, breaking into our reality with freedom & healing - this story, nothing else. And Luke 7 tells us, it's not just with words, but it's filled with power encounters where Christ broke through in healing & destruction of the spiritual world of evil holding sway over people. We're called to emulate Jesus in Good Works which exhibit the in-breaking Kingdom among people.

That's why we as a church have as one of our 8 systems governing our church - Kingdom Opportunities - where we get out with our neighbors, rub elbows & pray for opportunity to tell them of Jesus, exhibiting His kingdom among them. But none of that will happen if we only rake leaves, carve pumpkins & talk about the weather. None of that will happen if you're indifferent to spiritual formation & not overflowing His love to people.

That's why the Vineyard brilliantly calls us to ask people the question, "Can I pray for you right now?" Since there's no other way the kingdom breaks in more powerfully than when we pray freedom over people, revealing the Kingdom of God in their experience!

As transformation occurs, the heart of Christ drives us to make disciples of all peoples, baptizing them into the name of the Father, Son & Holy Spirit & teaching them to obey all that Jesus has commanded as seen in the Great Commission in Mt 28:18-20. His last command, our first concern - **Truth-telling**. As we get closer to Jesus, our heart for others to know, find freedom in Him, and to glorify Him grows within us. It's a response of gratitude & joy as to what's already been done for & in us through which we model this Kingdom life to others in **Word & Deed**.

We practice the **presence** of God, leading to **spiritual formation**, simultaneously being called to **mission**. **Mission in both Word & Deed**. BEING in Christ - DOING the things of Christ. Spiritual life moves forward in the invitation to journey deeper, going out to others. It's not about us, it's about God's Glory through God's Mission. It's about Jesus. Our language for this at Six:Eight has been *To Follow Jesus, To live as Jesus Did, and To Manifest Jesus* on the Eastern Main Line & beyond.

Someone shared this past Tuesday in our group, it's easy to find people claiming to be a Christian, but harder to find those who govern everything in their lives towards Him; finance, relationships, words, thoughts, choices, everything.

CS Lewis once said, *"Christ says, 'Give me All. I don't want so much of your time & so much of your money & so much of your work: I want You. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half-measures are any good...Hand over the whole natural self, all the desires which you think innocent as well as the ones you think wicked - the whole outfit. I will give you a new self instead. In fact, I will give you Myself: my own will shall become yours.'"*

In agreement with Lewis, M. Robert Mulholland says we can't cut corners in spiritual formation. In speaking of moving towards spiritual wholeness *he says, "...if we short-circuit our definition (as many definitions do at this point), we don't have Christian spiritual formation, we don't have holistic spiritual formation. What we have is some kind of pathological formation that is privatized & individualized, a spiritualized form of self-actualization. Although such forms of spirituality may be very appealing to look at on the outside, quite comfortable in their easy conformity to the values & dynamics of our culture, they are like a whitewashed tomb that has deadness on the inside if they are not life-giving, healing & redemptive for others."* (M Roberty Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, p49).

The dying to self Lewis speaks of is *not* horrific, it's wonderful! Wherever something in our lives isn't transformed into the image of Christ, it means we're incapable of being all that God calls us to be to Him & others. At best, in our indifference others are hindered in knowing the fullness of Christ in their lives due to our lack of word & deed towards them. At worst we become outright destructive towards them. Those places where I'm still Lord of my life & Christ isn't. Places where my agenda, purpose, desires & will still reign instead of His - to that extent our relationship with others will be controlled by these things instead of what Christ wants for them. Relationships with others are often seen as secondary & tangential to our relationship with God in pop-Christianity. But Biblical Christianity calls us to make a primary focus, at the same time, our relationship with God *as* we relate to others. Practicing His Presence - Being Formed - On Mission.

A good litmus test is to ask yourself, how well do I love others in Christ through Word & Deed? Are the things I involve myself in moving towards the end glorification of Jesus among people? Since spiritual formation leads us to become what we were originally created to be in relation to God & others. *Jesus summarized the whole Law in the command, <sup>30</sup> Love the Lord your God with all your heart & with all your soul & with all your mind & with all your strength.' <sup>31</sup> The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."* (Mk 12:30-31)

The Epistles regularly lifts this command up as the essence of Christian life - we see it in every one these passages listed here - Romans 13:9-10; 1 Corinthians 13; Galatians 5:14; Ephesians 4:15-16; 5:2; Colossians 3:14; 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10; James 2:8; 1 Peter 1:22; 4:8; 1 John 3:10-14, 17-18, 23; 4:7-8, 11-12 & 19-21, just to name a few. Jesus even says,

<sup>35</sup> *By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*" (Jn 13:35)

There's a consistency of message throughout Scripture concerning this issue of loving others well. Of Truth-telling & modeling the life of Jesus in love toward others - what better way to love people than to offer absolute freedom, eternal life & encourage them in Christ!?!)

But remember, *Love without Truth lies, Truth without Love kills.* Warren Wiersbe said it this way, *"Truth without love is brutality, and love without truth is hypocrisy."* Timothy Keller concurs when he says, *"Truth without love is imperious self-righteousness. Love without truth is cowardly self-indulgence. Both are selfish."* So, as followers of Jesus, we stick to the message proclaiming Him - loving others into relationship with Him without compromise to holiness & purity but with all sensitivity - because it's not about us, it's about God's glory through God's mission.

Last week we focused on the Image of Christ which is being formed in us. Jesus was fully God, fully Man, God incarnate walking among us, being tempted in every way like us. God who loved enough to be born in a stable, grow & be susceptible to all the temptations & pains of life. Who grew up as a boy & became a man & gave himself completely, absolutely & unconditionally for others. He calls us to the same life. <sup>11</sup> *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.* (Jn 10:11)

Then He commands us to the same, <sup>12</sup> *My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.* <sup>13</sup> *Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.* <sup>14</sup> *You are my friends if you do what I command.* <sup>15</sup> *I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.* <sup>16</sup> *You did not choose me, but I chose you & appointed you so that you might go & bear fruit - fruit that will last - and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.* <sup>17</sup> *This is my command: Love each other.* (Jn 15:11-17)

Birds have feet & talons, they can walk & grasp a branch, but flying is their characteristic action. Eugene Peterson tells a story of two parent tree swallows feeding their offspring on a branch extending four feet over a lake. Until mom & dad land on the branch & begin to push the fledgling birds off the end one by one. They'd never flown, but mom & Dad knew they could. Each one, after being nudged off the end, spread their wings & began to fly a foot over the water. Jesus knows you can fly. He knows you can love like this. He chose you, consecrated you, set you apart for it. Jesus gave Himself & chose us for the same reason. Giving is what we do best. Given to our neighbors, friends, family & community.

Spiritual formation in Christ is for the sake of others. You know the Master's business, it's been made known to you, we are without excuse - you've been chosen to go & bear fruit. And whatever you do in that vein of desire, will be given to you, since it's in line with the heart of Christ in you.

Use your cards provided with the verses we've chosen for this series (Rm 12:1-2 & Eph 2:8-10). If you didn't get one on the way in, there are more on the table by the door. And, as Jen & Lindley shared in past weeks, there are practices which enable us to submit ourselves to the Spirit's transformative hand. Christine's going to share another one of those with us today...