

**Title:** It's Time...for Spiritual Formation

**Date:** February 14, 2010

1. Discussion Starters

- a. Who helped you grow up? What did these people add to your life?
- b. What is one piece of advice you've never forgotten?
- c. Who has deeply influenced your spiritual life and how did they do that?
- d. Daniel Vestal writes, "As Baptists, we have excelled in calling people to conversion, but we have not been as proficient in calling them to maturity and growth after conversion. Many have embraced a popular Christian religion that has adopted an entertainment mentality, created Christian celebrities, and baptized a materialistic culture into the Church." Do you agree? Do you disagree?
- e. Defining "spiritual formation": "It is the lifelong process of being molded by God's Holy Spirit according to God's will." Rev. Anita Thompson.

2. What does each of these passages say to you about "spiritual formation"?

Reference	Text
Jeremiah 18: 1-6	<sup>1</sup> The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: <sup>2</sup> Come, go down to the potter's house, and there I will let you hear my words." <sup>3</sup> So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was working at his wheel. <sup>4</sup> The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him. <sup>5</sup> Then the word of the LORD came to me: <sup>6</sup> Can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as this potter has done? says the LORD. Just like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.
Romans 8: 28-29	<sup>28</sup> We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. <sup>29</sup> For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family.
2 Corinthians 3:17-18	<sup>17</sup> Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. <sup>18</sup> And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

a. Jeremiah 18: 1-6

i. Background

- 1. One of the 4 major prophets, the other 3 being Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel.
- 2. Lived about 2,600 years ago.
- 3. Of priestly descent with his father being Hilkiyah.
- 4. Raised in Anathoth, about 3 miles north of Jerusalem.
- 5. Preached 40 plus years from 628-526 BC in Jerusalem during the reigns of 5 kings: Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoikin, Zedekiah.
- 6. Known as the weeping prophet—prophesied destruction and judgment but also spoke of God's grace. Lived through Babylonian invasion of Judah.
- 7. In our passage, God tells Jeremiah to watch the potter as he molds the clay into a desirable vessel just as God planned to shape Israel into a vessel characterized by God's glory.

ii. Discussion

- 1. What "pot" best describes you and why—kettle, crack-pot, frying pan, cast-iron, flower pot, fine china, other?
- 2. Are God's plans set in concrete or wet clay? What is the value of moist clay? Reflect on this statement: "Let your clay be moist, lest you grow hard and lose the imprint of the Potter's Fingers". Irenaeus, 2<sup>nd</sup> century Saint.

3. How much does God mold us and how much do we mold ourselves? What is God's role? What is our role?

b. Romans 8:28-29

- i. Written by Paul to a church he had not founded or visited, probably 56-57 AD but no later than 59 AD.
- ii. Paul declares that God intends that we be formed into the very likeness of Christ.
- iii. What does "being conformed to the image of His Son" mean to you? How are life experiences involved in this process?

c. 2 Corinthians 3:17-18: In these verses, who is transforming us? How does the transformation take place?

3. How does this "spiritual formation" work?

a. It begins with grace.

- i. The Jesus prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner."
- ii. What does praying the Jesus prayer mean to you? What does it have to do with spiritual formation?

b. It requires receiving the love of God.

- i. "Our identity is in what we receive." Daniel Vestal
- ii. Think for a moment. From what do you derive your identity? From what do your friends derive their identities? How is your identity affected by spiritual formation?
- iii. Where in your life is God calling you to move from performance to grace?

c. It comes about through the communion of the Holy Spirit.

- i. The Holy Spirit brings God up close and personal—He abides with us and empowers us. We are not left on our own in this mission of reconciliation.
- ii. The Scripture uses a number of symbols to represent the Spirit—fire (power and purging), wind (freedom), oil (equipping and enabling), breath (life), water (cleansing). Which symbol means the most to you right now and why? How can you live out these characteristics in ministry to others?

d. It means intentionally making room in our lives.

- i. Spiritual formation happens through but is not limited to various spiritual disciplines (daily prayer and scripture reading, reflection/contemplation, small group study and discussion, regular worship, sacrificial giving of time and resources, ministry to the needs of others, discerning spiritual gifts and serving through them).

1. Which ones have been most important in your spiritual formation to this point?

2. Which ones need to be more evident in your life?

- ii. Spending time in silence and solitude.
- iii. "Embracing the complexities of our time, the ambiguities of life, and the frailty of our humanities as the means and instrument for God's use" Vestal

4. Final questions

- a. God, through the Holy Spirit, is forming you into the likeness of Jesus. How are you assisting with this transformation? Impeding it? How will you partner with God to bring about this transformation?
- b. How are you helping the next generation find its way to God?

