

-Suggestions for Time Alone with God this Week

Sometimes in our spiritual journey we have a desire to move forward, but we aren't sure how. Each of the opportunities provided at SCBC during the "formed in Christ" emphasis are designed for that purpose. They are ways of opening oneself to God, so the Holy Spirit has access to your spirit for the purpose of being formed in Christ.

The reflection times below are some possibilities for that opening to begin this week. They are created around some of the thoughts shared at the orientation sessions January 6-13. If you were in attendance at one of the sessions, you will recognize these things. If for some reason you were not able to attend one of the sessions, these reflection guides can still be helpful and serve as an invitation for you to begin the journey with us.

-You are encouraged to leave space for God's Spirit to move in your spirit each day. Completing one reflection a day will provide that space.

-Don't be caught off guard if you find some resistance in your spirit. This may come in the form of:

"It just feels awkward."

"I don't have time."

"I ought to want to do this, but I don't."

"I don't need to do this; I already read my Bible and pray every morning."

"I just can't concentrate on this right now."

"I'm not sure I really think God relates to us this way. Isn't all this a bit too much?"

"I can figure out how I'm supposed to do this on my own. I don't need anyone's suggestions."

"I feel stupid 'talking to God'. Sometimes I am not sure it is real. Then I feel guilty for even thinking that!"

"I'm stronger than this. I think God loves me and all, but he expects me to be able to handle my life. I've gotten along okay so far. I don't need to get all into my feelings and all that stuff."

There are a multitude of others. When you listen to the touches of desire from God and begin to move "further in" with God, the forces of darkness rise up to cause doubt and fear. Consider being willing to move forward regardless of whatever resistance you may feel. In fact, that may be the first thing you want to tell God. "This is how I feel. This is what I think right now. If this is going to go anywhere, you are going to have to help/change me."

-For each of the reflections, you are encouraged to find a quiet place alone. Remove any distractions. (Yes, this does and especially means your phone along with any other electronics that will buzz, beep or vibrate!)

-Plan to spend as long as needed. Don't rush. Silence and time is needed as you listen to God's Spirit.

-God longs to be with you—all of you—your thoughts, your feelings, your worries, your concerns, your joys, your sorrows, your questions, your doubts, and your confusion.

-Don't be afraid to think or feel anything that surfaces. God already knows. He wants to be "with" you in whatever rises within you.

-Don't expect spiritual fireworks! This time isn't to "solve" something. This time is to "be with" God.

-Know that this time is sacred. If it is not something you are used to doing, that is okay. There is no “right” answer or insight God is waiting for you to get. His hope is to “be with” you. And over time, this “being with” will be a time of comfort, joy, safety, and yes, sometimes challenge.

-There is no better time than now. God is waiting and hoping for you to show up.

Reflection #1:

Enter into this time by taking some deep breaths and quieting your spirit. Sit silently for 2-3 minutes before reading on.

One of the quotes used in the orientation was:

We are not human beings having a spiritual experience.
We are spiritual beings having a human experience.
Pierre de Chardin

Read the quote aloud a couple of times. Listen to it deeply in your spirit.

Talk with God about the following:

(Talking with God can be actual speaking out loud or writing or drawing something or sitting quietly.

Find your “voice” by experimenting with these or other ways you may know that help you express your thoughts and feelings.)

-How do you feel when you read this quote?

(No feeling is off limits! Be honest. If you aren't being anything else with God, be honest!)

-Do you believe this quote? Why or why not?

-Do you want to believe this quote? Why or why not?

-Is this the way you view your life—all the time, some of the time, none of the time?

Would you want your answer to be different? Why or why not?

-If you wanted to do so, how would you “live into” this quote?

-Tell God of your desire. Describe it to him. Sit with it with God. Spend 2-3 minutes in silence before you move on to the next thing you need to do.

-As you go through the rest of your day or tomorrow—as you drive or wash dishes or take a run or whatever you are doing, let this conversation about this quote continue with God.

Reflection #2:

Enter into this time by taking some deep breaths and quieting your spirit. Sit silently for 2-3 minutes before reading on.

One of the quotes used in the orientation was:

I come from God. I belong to God. I return to God.
St. Ignatius

Read the quote aloud a couple of times. Listen to it deeply in your spirit.

Talk with God about the following:

(Remember talking with God can be actual speaking out loud or writing or drawing something or sitting quietly. Find your “voice” by experimenting with these or other ways you may know that help you express your thoughts and feelings.)

-How do you feel when you read this quote?

(No feeling is off limits! Be honest. If you aren't anything else with God, be honest!)

-Do you believe this quote? Why or why not?

-Do you want to believe this quote? Why or why not?

-Is this the way you view your life—all the time, some of the time, none of the time?

Would you want your answer to be different? Why or why not?

-Talk to God about your “coming” from him. Express any gratitude you have for who he created you to be. Confess any consternation or disappointment about who you are. Ask God any “why” questions about your “coming” from him that leave you confused or uncertain. Affirm with God the goodness and comfort from the thought that you “come from” him.

-Talk to God about your “returning” to him. Express any gratitude you have for that assurance. Confess any fear, doubt, or confusion you have about returning to God. Ask God any questions about your eternal future with him that concern you. Affirm with God the goodness and comfort from the thought that you will “return to” him.

-Talk to God about your “belonging” to him. This “belonging” is the here and now of your relationship with God. It is the abundant life Christ brings to your human experience. Express any gratitude you have for the life of “belonging” you have with God. Confess any sense of entitlement, taking for granted, or disdain you have about your life. Ask God any questions about your human experience that you don't understand or you wish were different. Affirm with God the goodness and comfort from the thought that you “belong to” him.

-Can you claim that: “I come from God. I belong to God. I return to God.” as the reality of your life? If so, speak it to him now:

God, I gratefully acknowledge that you knew my unformed body. I come from you. God, I gratefully acknowledge that one day I will return to you to live eternally in your presence. God, I gratefully acknowledge that I belong to you. I desire with all that is in me to live this life abundantly in you. Amen.

- Spend 2-3 minutes in silence before you move on to the next thing you need to do.

-As you go through the rest of your day or tomorrow—as you drive or wash dishes or take a run or whatever you are doing, let this conversation about this quote continue with God.

Reflection #3:

Enter into this time by taking some deep breaths and quieting your spirit. Sit silently for 2-3 minutes before reading on.

The definition for Christian Spiritual Formation we are using at SCBC is:

Christian Spiritual Formation
is a process
guided by the Holy Spirit
which transforms
followers of Christ into His image
through a variety of spiritual practices
for the glory of God,
the abundance of the believer,
and the sake of others.

Read the definition aloud a couple of times. Listen to it deeply in your spirit.

At Shades Crest, we want to definitively and unapologetically claim that the formation of our spirits that we desire is Christ-centered. We believe that this is God's best and God's desire for all of his children.

Talk with God about the following:

(Talking with God can be actual speaking out loud or writing or drawing something or sitting quietly.

Find your "voice" by experimenting with these or other ways you may know that help you express your thoughts and feelings.)

-When you read that spiritual formation is a "process" what comes to your mind?

-Do you believe this? What evidence do you see in your relationship with God that would indicate that you believe it is a process?

-Can you look back over your life and see the "process" of your formation to this point in time? Take time now to give thanks to God for the people, the churches, the circumstances, and the marker points in your formation process to this moment in time.

-Are you able to value and appreciate that your formation in Christ is a process? Are you able to "live into" the reality that your human experience as a spiritual being is the context for this process? Are you

able to embrace that all of your years on earth are meant for you to journey “further in” with God rather than arriving or achieving your status as a fully formed Christ-follower? Talk to God about what these questions stir in your spirit.

-The definition of formation states that the process is “guided by the Holy Spirit.” The gift of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, as promised by Jesus before his crucifixion, assures us that God himself is living in us as followers of Jesus. This Spirit, as invited, will guide your spiritual formation. Do you believe that? Do you really believe that God’s Spirit wants to respond to any opening you provide to guide your transformation in the likeness of Jesus? If so, stop for a moment. Talk to God about your desire and this truth. If not, talk to God about your doubts and your fears that this is not the case. Ask God to find ways to show you clearly and draw you more closely to his love.

-This process guided by the Holy Spirit transforms followers of Christ into His image. Dallas Willard says that formation is “the process of becoming who Jesus would be if he were you.” That statement can be astounding and very exciting in the midst of our human experience! You are created in the image of God. God loves your personality, gifts you with skills and talents, and grants you the ability to think and feel. He wants to take the “deformation” the world has done in your life and transform it to the image of his son, Jesus Christ and to live through who you are! He wants to reshape you to reflect his values, his thoughts, his purposes in your personality and being—the True Self he created and knew in your unformed body. Do you believe this is possible? Do you believe this is what God desires for you or are you tempted to think that is true for others but not you? Are you tempted to believe that you’re not perfect, but you really don’t need that kind of transformation? Talk to God about your thoughts and feelings about being transformed. Remember, honesty is critical in conversation with God. He can work with what is. He needs your truth, not a polished version of what you think he would want you to say.

-Tell God of your desire concerning your formation. Describe it to him. Sit with it with God. Spend 2-3 minutes in silence before you move on to the next thing you need to do.

-As you go through the rest of your day or tomorrow—as you drive or wash dishes or take a run or whatever you are doing, let this conversation about this process guided by the Holy Spirit transforming you continue with God.

Reflection #4:

Enter into this time by taking some deep breaths and quieting your spirit. Sit silently for 2-3 minutes before reading on.

At the conclusion of the orientation, you were asked three questions about your spiritual formation. They are printed below with some additional reflective questions. Spend this time with God talking with him about these questions.

Question #1: Do I desire above all else to be like Jesus?

Be honest with yourself and with God as you respond. Do not be afraid to tell God your truth. Do not leave this question too quickly. Really consider what you desire. Ask God to speak with you about your answer.

Question #2: Am I willing to decide to devote myself to becoming like Jesus? Be honest with yourself as you respond.

Consider what it means to “devote” yourself to something.

Consider what it means to “decide” to be devoted.

Consider what it means to be “willing” to decide.

Talk with God about your thoughts and feelings.

Question #3: Will I systematically and progressively rearrange my affairs to that end?

“The end” referred to here is devoting yourself to becoming like Jesus.

The stark reality is that any relationship requires time - time to be nurtured, to understand one another, to enjoy one another, to “be with” one another, to express yourself to one another, and to know one another.

Many of us lead lives that leave little space for our relationship with God. We really want too, but something keeps us from deciding to be devoted or making space for it. Some of us have so much discretionary time that we aren’t really sure where the hours, days, or weeks go. We intend to be with God, but we struggle overcoming the inertia that seems to have taken over our lives. Either way, the final question must be answered.

Am I willing to change my day to day life to open the space to go “further in” with God?

Be honest with yourself. Be honest with God. The Holy Spirit is waiting for the slightest nod, for the slightest opening in your spirit to begin the transforming work you desire. The very fact that you are reading this and attempting to talk with God about it is an indication of your heart. God knows and loves you. He is not mad or frustrated with you. He understands and wants to come to you and let you rest in this truth this day:

Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”

Matthew 11:28-30
The Message

-Read the passage above aloud. Read it in the tone of voice you think God would read it to you. As you choose the tone of voice you will use, remember that God knows you and God loves you beyond

anything you can really understand. Remember that God knows you come from him, God know you will return to him, and God knows you belong to him.

-When you are finished reading, say whatever you want to say to God. He is listening.

-When you are finished, just sit with God. Spend 2-3 minutes in silence before you move on to the next thing you need to do.

-As you go through the rest of your day or tomorrow—as you drive or wash dishes or take a run or whatever you are doing, let these three questions and this passage ring in your heart.