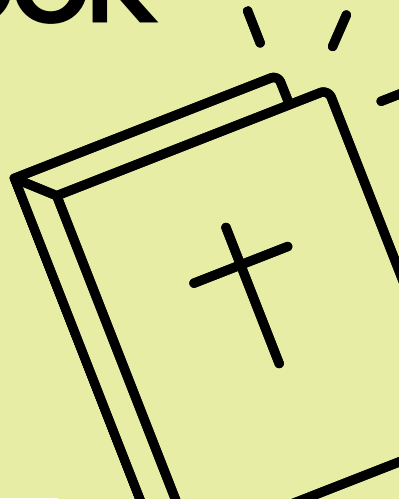


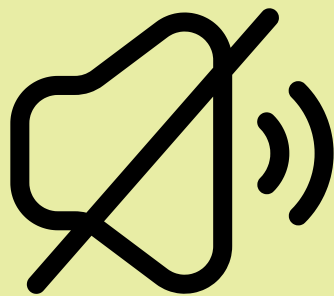
Spiritual Formation Guidebook



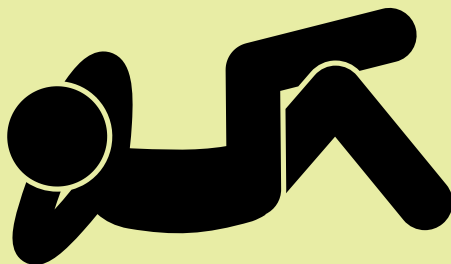
THE CHURCH IN
WESTCOTT

Building Friendships. Sharing Life.

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Introduction

Each and every day you and I are being spiritually formed. The question is whether our spiritual formation is intentionally deepening our relationship with Christ and our own Christlikeness, or whether we are being formed by the particular norms and expectations of the surrounding culture and the age we live in. As a church community we want our discipleship and formation to be intentional for our sake, for the sake of the world, and to the glory of God. We are going to spend some time in the coming weeks looking at the wisdom of Christians who have gone before us in different ages who developed practices that deepened their faith and their ability to be counter-culturally Christlike in their own ages and cultures.

Some of these practices may be familiar and are already part of your life week to week, others may be more alien and challenging. One thing needs to be stated strongly before we begin - these practices are never to be an end in themselves. We don't do them to make God love us more or to manipulate Him into doing what we want - His love cannot be earned, it is freely given. We do them to seek to become more like Christ and to create the space whereby he can meet with us and form us - because he desires for us to know life in all its fullness and to be people filled with grace and peace in an age of rage and noise.

Each section builds on that weeks sermon which you can catch up with online if you miss the service. You can use this guidebook on your own, with your small group, or with a friend each week. There are three sections to work through:

BIBLE PASSAGES - Read and reflect on/discuss each passage. What stands out to you? How does it relate to the topic of the week?

QUESTIONS - For you to reflect on or discuss in a group. They are there as a launchpad for discussion/thought - don't feel confined by them.

JUST ONE THING - Three possible ideas for putting each practice into practice. If you are new to a practice, start small and build from there - it takes time to embed these things in our lives. If you want to go deeper in a practice choose *one* of these ideas or come up with your own application, and write it in the '*This week I am going to...*' box below.

00

Spiritual Formation



*“Stand at the crossroads and look;
ask for the ancient paths,
ask where the good way is, and walk in it,
and you will find rest for your souls.”*

- Jeremiah 6.16

We're all being formed. President Trump is a product of spiritual formation. Mother Teresa is a product of spiritual formation. Gandhi was spiritually formed. Hitler was spiritually formed. I'm spiritually formed. You're spiritually formed. We're being formed. We will be formed. It's just a part of who we are. So Christian spiritual formation is how we apply a level of intentionality to our formation that is based on the lifestyle, the patterns, the rhythms that are laid down by Jesus Himself, rather than just getting sucked into the kind of habit architecture and worldview that's all around us.

- John Mark Comer

SERMON NOTES

BIBLE PASSAGES

Jeremiah 6.16, Romans 12.1-2

QUESTIONS

01 What are the main sources of your formation at the moment = TV, news, books, social media, a particular social group? (Try and be honest with yourself - God is interested in you as you are, not as you think you should be when doing religious activities).

02 In what ways do these things help your thinking and living be more like Christ, and in what ways might they pull you away from being Christlike?

03 What are (or have previously been) the intentional rhythms or practices in your day/week/year that allow you to connect with God and become more like Him?

JUST ONE THING

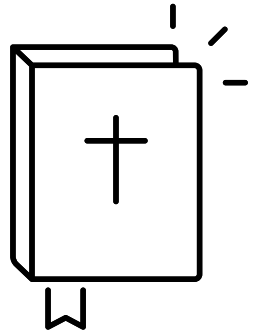
01 Is there one thing which is currently forming you - consciously or subconsciously - in an un-Christlike way that you could leave behind?

02 Is there a practice that you have done in the past which deepened your relationship with God that you could take up again?

03 Is there a friend or a couple of friends that you could arrange to meet with as we look at Spiritual Formation to share the journey with and offer mutual support and encouragement?

THIS WEEK I AM GOING TO...

01 Why and How we... Read the Bible



Jesus replied, 'You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.

- Matthew 1.29

For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.

- Romans 15.4

Scripture is like a river, broad and deep, shallow enough here for the lamb to go wading, but deep enough there for the elephant to swim.

- Gregory the Great

SERMON NOTES

BIBLE PASSAGES

Romans 15.2-6, Matthew 22.23-33

QUESTIONS

01 Do you have a favourite Bible passages or a verse that has been of particular significance for you?

02 Is there anything that you find hard/uncomfortable/frustrating about the Bible?

03 Have you found any ways to engage with the Bible that deepen your relationship with God?

JUST ONE THING

01 Read through the Gospel of Mark as if you were reading a novel - it is surprisingly short. What do you notice? What stands out to you?

02 Watch this short animated introduction to the Bible and explore the other videos that explore the Bible on the Bible Project Website:
bibleproject.com/explore/video/what-is-bible/

03 Order some daily Bible Reading notes to encourage a habit of exploring the Bible each day. You can get free notes from UCB here:
ucb.co.uk/signup

Scripture Union also provide good daily notes that you can order here:
content.scriptureunion.org.uk/bible-reading-guides

THIS WEEK I AM GOING TO...

02 Why and How we... Pray



The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young assistant Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent.

- Exodus 33.11

The best bit of advice I ever received about how to pray was this: keep it simple, keep it real, keep it up. You've got to keep it simple so that the most natural thing in the world doesn't become complicated, weird and intense. You've got to keep it real because when life hurts like hell you're going to be tempted to pretend you're fine. And then at other times, when you make a mess of things, you're going to be tempted to hide from God (which never really works) and end up hiding from yourself (which works quite well). And you've got to keep it up because life is tough, the battle is fierce, and God is not an algorithm. The journey of faith demands a certain bloody-mindedness of us all, not least in the realm of prayer.

- Pete Greig

SERMON NOTES

BIBLE PASSAGES

Exodus 33.7-14, Mark 1.35-36

QUESTIONS

01 How, why and when do you pray?

02 Are there particular ways of praying that have helped you to go deeper in your relationship with God?

03 What do you find hard about prayer? (Important note - I have yet to meet anyone who doesn't find prayer hard in one way or another or at some point in their life - and that includes vicars, monks, and international Christian speakers).

JUST ONE THING

01 If you already have a point in the day when you pray, try doing it in a different location or in a different way. Go for a walk while you speak to God, or try writing your prayer in the form of a letter to God.

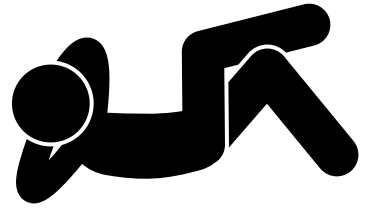
02 Pick an activity that you do everyday - waiting for the kettle to boil or brushing your teeth for example - and make that a moment where you tell God what is going on in your day and invite him to be with you in it.

03 If you struggle to find the words when you pray (this happens to all of us at times) then you may find downloading one of these apps to your phone a helpful tool. Lectio 365 offers daily meditations and guided prayer each day: 24-7prayer.com/resource/lectio-365/

If you prefer something more formal/liturgical then try the Church of England Daily Prayer App: chpublishing.co.uk/apps/daily-prayer

THIS WEEK I AM GOING TO...

03 Why and How we... Sabbath



Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

- Exodus 20.8

The Sabbath rest of God is the acknowledgment that God and God's people in the world are not commodities to be dispatched for endless production and so dispatched in the service of a command economy. Rather they are subjects situated in an economy of neighbourliness. All of that is implicit in the reality and exhibit of divine rest.

- Walter Brueggemann

So on the Sabbath, we don't just take a day off from work; we take a day off from toil. We give him all our fear and anxiety and stress and worry. We let go. We stop ruling and subduing, and we just be. We "remember" our place in the universe. So that we never forget . . . There is a God, and I'm not him.

- John Mark Comer

SERMON NOTES

BIBLE PASSAGES

Exodus 20.8-11, Deuteronomy 5.12-15, John 2.13-20

QUESTIONS

01 What does meaningful rest look like for you?

02 Is there a period of time in your week that you set aside, as far as you are able, to seek God, joy, rest, friendship and delight? (God knows your circumstances - he invites you to rest with Him as you are able - sabbath-ing with small children in the house or while caring for a relative will look different to Sabbath-ing in other seasons of life).

03 What are the things that you may want to avoid when resting on the Sabbath to enable you to see God's world differently?

JUST ONE THING

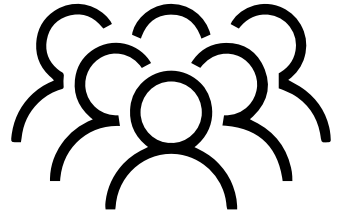
01 Turn your mobile phone off, or only use it to receive and make phone calls, for a whole 24 hour period this week - if it is possible and you notice the benefits to your Sabbath, make it part of your weekly rhythm.

02 Pencil in two activities/meals/treats that you really enjoy, and one thing that helps you focus on God, to do on your next Sabbath.

03 Make a list of how you would like your Sabbath day of rest to look. Write down the things that you would want to lay down for the day, and the things you would like to do to seek rest, joy, God and delight well. Think about what you could put in place to make your actual Sabbath closer to your ideal Sabbath.

THIS WEEK I AM GOING TO...

04 Why and How we... Gather



Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

- Hebrews 10.22-25

The person who loves their dream of community will destroy community, but the person who loves those around them will create community.

Let him who cannot be alone beware of community... Let him who is not in community beware of being alone... Each by itself has profound perils and pitfalls. One who wants fellowship without solitude plunges into the void of words and feelings, and the one who seeks solitude without fellowship perishes in the abyss of vanity, self-infatuation and despair.

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer

SERMON NOTES

BIBLE PASSAGES

Hebrews 10.22-25, John 13.34

QUESTIONS

01 What are the most important parts of gathering as on a Sunday morning for you?

02 Are there spaces/individuals/groups of people with whom you can be honest and vulnerable about life and faith with? How have you built mutual trust and relationship in these settings?

03 What are the 'gatherings' that have most influenced your faith with God? Small groups/prayer partners/events/New Wine/walks/Sunday mornings/regular coffee with a friend/group retreats etc.

JUST ONE THING

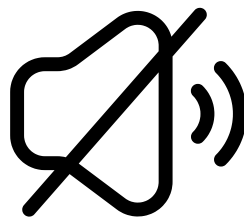
01 Join a small group/life group.

02 Ask someone or a couple of people in church if they would like to meet to pray and talk about faith together every few weeks.

03 A group of us will be going to New Wine - a big gathering of Christians in Somerset - from the 25-30 July 2024. Why don't you investigate coming along with us - for a number of people in church it has been a (perhaps unexpectedly) positive and profound experience over the years: new-wine.org/events/newwine24/

THIS WEEK I AM GOING TO...

05 Why and How we... Seek Solitude



But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

- Luke 5.16

In our day God is using the spiritual discipline of solitude as the great liberator. Solitude liberates us from all the inane chatter that is so characteristic of modern life. It liberates us from the ever-present demands that are put upon us; demands that in the moment feel so urgent and pressing but that in reality have no lasting significance... In addition, God uses our experiences of solitude to enable us to become who we truly are. We begin, slowly at first, to live simply before God. Increasingly we come to see things in the light of eternity, and as a result, successes and failures no longer impress us or oppress us. Experiences of solitude root in us a deep, abiding hope; a hope that sees everything in the light of God's overriding governance for good. In solitude we are so bathed in God's greatness and goodness that we come to see the immense value of our own soul. The result is that we become increasingly freed from our frantic human strivings.

- Richard Foster

SERMON NOTES

BIBLE PASSAGES

Psalm 62, Luke 5.15-16

QUESTIONS

01 Make a list of all the regular sources of noise/information - both audible and visual - in your life at home (TV, radio, checking your phone, conversation, reading, listening to music etc.) Do you get a moment each day in actual silence and solitude?

02 Are silence and solitude things you seek out or something that you are wary of?

03 What are the moments in your life when God has most clearly spoken to you, and is there a connection with creating enough space and solitude to be able to listen to Him?

JUST ONE THING

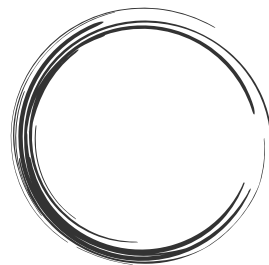
01 Put a 20 minute window in your diary this week when you can seek solitude - in your room/on a walk/sat in a café/in church - and turn off all distractions, don't seek and input, just invite God to be with you in this time and 'be'. See what comes up and whether you find it easy or hard.

02 Book in a retreat day/weekend. This could be booking into a retreat centre, or carving out the space in your diary to go on a long walk with your Bible and a notepad.

03 Work out which 'things' in your life most regularly break your moments of solitude and fill any potentially quiet spaces - for me it is my phone. Put some 'rules' in place with yourself to limit their influence on your time.

THIS WEEK I AM GOING TO...

06 Why and How we... do Simplicity



But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.

- 1 Timothy 6.6-8

Christian simplicity is an inward reality that results in an outward lifestyle.

- Richard Foster

*O teach me Lord to walk this road,
The road of simple living;
To be content with what I own
And generous in giving.
And when I cling to what I have
Please wrest it quickly from my grasp;
I'd rather lose all the things of earth
To gain the things of heaven.*

- Stuart Townend

SERMON NOTES

BIBLE PASSAGES

1 Timothy 6.6-8, Matthew 6.19-34

QUESTIONS

01 What things in your life take the majority of your time, energy and focus?

02 If you could start from scratch with no stuff or clutter in your life, what would you choose to own/keep and why?

03 Discuss this definition of Simplicity from John Mark Comer: *‘Simplicity (also called minimalism) is a way of life where we intentionally prioritize the things that really matter, by cutting out all that is ancillary and stripping our life down to make abiding the centre of everything. It’s a life of focus in a cultural moment of distraction. It’s intentionally living with less, to make space for more of what we most value before God.’* Does this sound an appealing way to live, and if so why (or why not)?

JUST ONE THING

01 Is there something in your house that you haven’t used for a while that you could give away this week?

02 Write down a list of the things in your house than mean something to you, are regularly used, or are beautiful. Then write a rough list of the things that you own. What sorts of things are cluttering your life that you could let go of?

03 Put a note on your wallet or card for the next month which says ‘Do I really need or want this thing I am going to buy?’ See if it has an impact on what you purchase.

THIS WEEK I AM GOING TO...

07 fast

Why and How we...



*'Even now,' declares the Lord,
'return to me with all your heart,
with fasting and weeping and mourning.'*

- Joel 2.12

More than any other single discipline, fasting reveals the things that control us. This is a wonderful benefit to the true disciple who longs to be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. We cover up what is inside us with food and other good things, but in fasting, these things surface. If pride Controls us, it will be revealed almost immediately... Anger, bitterness, jealousy, strife, fear — if they are within us, they will surface during fasting. At first we will rationalize that our anger is due to our hunger; then we know that we are angry because the spirit of anger is within us. We can rejoice in this knowledge because we know that healing is available through the power of Christ.

- Richard Foster

SERMON NOTES

BIBLE PASSAGES

Joel 2.12, Isaiah 58.6, Matthew 6.16-18

QUESTIONS

01 Have you ever tried to fast? If so, what was the experience like?

02 What do you think are good and bad motivations for fasting?

03 Read this quote from Richard Foster: *‘Although the physical aspects of fasting intrigue us, we must never forget that the major work of scriptural fasting is in the realm of the spirit. What goes on spiritually is much more important than what is happening bodily. Fasting can bring breakthroughs in the spiritual realm that will never happen in any other way. It is a means of God’s grace and blessing that should not be neglected any longer.’*

Why do you think fasting is generally neglected in the West, and how can you keep your focus on God and what is going on spiritually when fasting?

JUST ONE THING

01 Try a fruit fast. Swap one of your normal meals in a day for a couple of pieces of fruit. As you sit down to eat, use the time you would normally have spent preparing the meal to thank God for his provision and to pray for situations and people known to you.

02 Fast until Sunset one day this week. Keep drinking water, and if you normally start the day with a tea or coffee still do this to avoid withdrawal, but have it black. Give as much time to prayer and reflection as you can. Try and slow down your normal routine and see everything you do as an opportunity to present yourself to God. If you feel unwell or lightheaded at any point, stop fasting. It takes time for our bodies to adjust to the practice of fasting.

03 If you can’t face fasting - that is absolutely fine! But spend some time asking God what it is about the idea of fasting that you don’t like.

THIS WEEK I AM GOING TO...

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 and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Romans 12.2

