

Finishing Well
A conversation about living for Jesus on the back nine of life

Conversation Five: Spiritual Formation & Spiritual Maturity

All Saints' 10 Spiritual Formation Practices

A major theme in Scripture has God's people on a journey or pilgrimage, as sojourners.

- Abraham – Ur to Canaan (Gen 11:31)
- Israel – Egypt to Promised Land (Exodus)
- Church – Jerusalem to the ends of earth (Acts 1:8 → 8:1ff)
- People of God –
 - Jerusalem to New Jerusalem (David → Rev 21)
 - Eden to New Heaven & Earth (Gen 1-2 → Rev 21)

Every journey has a beginning and an ending. The Ultimate Human Journey of Salvation moves from Justification, through Sanctification, and ends in Glorification.

- Westminster Shorter Catechism # 33
– **Justification** is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardons all our sins and accepts us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.
 - 2 Cor 5:17 – if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come
- Westminster Shorter Catechism # 35
– **Sanctification** is the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die to sin, and live unto righteousness.
 - Romans 6:4 – We were buried with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too *might walk in newness of life*.

Each of God's people is a sojourner, on a pilgrimage or journey, to one's salvation destination.

- 1 Peter 2:9-11 – ⁹ you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for [God's] own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. ¹¹ Beloved, I urge you as *sojourners and exiles* to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.
- Gal 5:16-17, 25 – walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.... ²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also *keep in step* with the Spirit.
- Eph 4:22-24 – ²² put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, ²³ and...be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴ and ...put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.
- Phil 3:14 – ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.
 - All our aspirations are found in Jesus

So, where do you find the fuel, map and guidance for this Journey?

- Without it you'll stall, get distracted, lost, crash, burn.
- With it, you can enjoy delights along the way and enjoy rest at your destination.

All Saints' Mission Statement

- All Saints is a community of God's People called to live as the body of Christ in Austin for the world through worship, spiritual formation, and service.

10 SPIRITUAL FORMATION PRACTICES of All Saints

- ...in order to be formed into the image of Christ.
- ...in order to be strengthened and to push back on temptations.

Ask yourself:

- Where are you well-prepared, stocked up and well-developed for your Journey?
- Where might you be susceptible, vulnerable or exposed for your Pilgrimage?

1 – Daily Office

- ...refers to our responsibility as Christians to daily read and pray Scripture. It sets aside times each day to pause, rest, change gears and meditate on God's Word and pray it back to him. The Psalms speak of listening and speaking to God, even "7 times a day" (119:164), so that our living and doing (e.g., cleaning dishes, raising families, duties at work, serving in your community) are always grounded in our *being* (a beloved son or daughter of God, a forgiven brother or sister in Christ). The beauty of the Office is that it can be made more simple or complex as time allows. All Saints has created three versions of the Daily Office based on the *The Book of Common Prayer*.
- Morning or Evening Prayer at All Saints 8 times each week
- John 17:17 – Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.
- Psalms 119:105 – Your word is a lamp to my feet and light to my path
- Psalms 1:1-2 – Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; ² but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.
- Psalms 55:17 – Evening and morning and at noon I utter my complaint and moan, and he hears my voice.

2 – Spiritual Direction

- A spiritual director is a coach, guide and friend, someone who's probably a bit further along on the Christian journey who can help you through its twists and turns. It's someone you intentionally meet with every 4-8 weeks for prayer, direction and support, who listens, cares, questions and counsels. It's someone you trust, respect, and are willing to follow. It doesn't need to be a clergy member; often the best directors are not.
- All Saints Triads can serve this need
- Titus 2:2-6 – ² Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. ³ Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, ⁴ and so *train the young women* to love their husbands and children, ⁵ to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled. ⁶ *Likewise, urge the younger men* to be self-controlled.

3 – Small Groups

- We walk the Christian journey in community with other Christians, not alone. We're not called to love, serve and know people in general, but specific, particular ones. It's in community that we mature and develop as Christ-followers, with family, friends and small groups. Such community most naturally should be tied to one's local church.
- Acts 2:42-47—⁴² And they devoted themselves to the apostles' *teaching* and the *fellowship*, to the *breaking of bread* and the *prayers*. ⁴³ And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all who believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵ And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, *as any had need*. ⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the *temple together* and breaking bread *in their homes* ...

4 – Study

- The Christian life is complex, and so is Scripture. We need help from others to learn. Christian theology is a wonderful resource, guide and friend. Disciples (learners) of Christ (the Living Word) study individually and in groups his written Word.
- Psalms 1 – ... on God's law he meditates day and night ...
- Acts 2 – devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching ...
- Colossians 3:16 – ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom
- 2 Timothy 2:15 – ¹⁵ Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

5 – Sabbath

- Every night reminds us we're finite creatures in desperate need of rest. We're reminded more fully of this every week. But in a technological world, rest is especially elusive. We can work late into the night; e-mail, texts and calls seldom stop, and our work hours vary and blur together. However, we need to put aside work for different rhythms, patterns and habits involving worship and rest, to be re-energized, restored, and recreated. The ancient Christian practice of Sabbath is especially needed today.
- Exodus 20:8-11 (4th Commandment) - ⁸ "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. ¹¹ For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.
- Luke 4:16 – ¹⁶ And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read.
- Hebrews 10:24-25 – ²⁴ And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

6 – Retreat

- This is a longer version of daily and weekly rest and of daily reading and prayer. It's an extended, intensified time to listen, learn, pray, and be silent, alone and/or with others, and to enjoy God's amazing grace.
- Mark 6:7, 13, 30-31 – ⁷ And he called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits.... ¹³ And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them.... ³⁰ The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. ³¹ And he said to them, "*Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.*"

7 – Tithing & Sacrificial Giving

- The apostle Paul asks the rhetorical question: "What do you have, that you have not received?" (1 Corinthians 4:7). The answer is nothing. Everything we have we've received as a gift. But, in our pride, we often think that the things we've attained in life have come from own strength, wisdom, and ingenuity. They haven't. They're all a gift. Even and especially our financial standing. Tithing and sacrificial giving tangibly remind us to live God-directed, other-oriented lives, instead of self-centered ones. Sacrificial giving disciplines us to be more generous, joyful, caring and gracious people. A paradox of Christianity is that we're more blessed, satisfied, and fulfilled when we give, rather than when we receive. It was true of our Savior and it's true of us. A goal of sacrificial giving is to more fully manifest the generosity of Jesus to us through our giving to others.
- Malachi 3:9-11 – ⁹ You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. ¹⁰ Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.
- Matthew 6:19-21 – ¹⁹ "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.
- 2 Corinthians 9 – whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

8 – Fasting & Moderation

- God did not make us for excess or over-indulgence in anything other than Himself; instead, we are to enjoy all created things in moderation. One of the ancient practices of the church is to abstain from food (and other things) for a season, so that we might more fully hunger for God. Learning how to deny ourselves is hard. But learning to say no and live moderately is vital for those called to "take up our cross" and follow Jesus.
- Matthew 6:16-17 – ¹⁶ "And *when you fast*, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷ But *when you fast*, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

9 – Hospitality

- We were made for friendship, relationship and community. True community isn't only receiving from others; it's also giving to others. Hospitality is an ancient practice of loving neighbors, strangers, and friends in real and tangible ways. It's a way of opening up our lives to others and to God through them. It's a way to embody the grace we've received—God's lavish, loving, warm welcome.
- Acts 2 – ...breaking bread in their homes...
- Matthew 25:35 – ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me ...
- Hebrews 13:2 – ² Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares

10 – Service

- Just as Christ came not to be served, but to serve (Mt 20:28), so we also should seek to serve others in real and practical ways. Christian service isn't ultimately about a to-do list, but an attitude, stance, and posture. The apostle Paul began most of his letters with: "Paul, a bond-servant of Christ." The Greek word he used was that of the lowest servant. For Paul, everybody was above him—children, slaves, barbarians. He was ready and eager to serve because he knew he'd been served by Christ. Paul's posture is much-needed today, as we seek to become more like Jesus, the true servant of all.
- Acts 2 – ... distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need...
- Hebrews 10:24 – stir up one another to love and good works
- James 2:14-18, 26 – ¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food,¹⁶ and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good^[b] is that? ¹⁷ So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. ¹⁸ But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. ²⁶ For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.