

I saw a commercial the other day for some sort of weight loss medication. The company guaranteed that it was possible through the use of this medication to shed off as much as 75% of your body fat. The best part of this product, according to its users, was that one could lose this weight without any change in lifestyle, diet, or regular exercise. All you had to do was take the daily pill and you would begin to see immediate results. This was the ultimate quick-fix to unwanted body fat.

Sounds sketchy to me.

**(Questions in red should be answered on the Student Reflection Page at the end of this lesson and brought with you to your next small group)**

**Q1: What do you think is problematic about this weight loss advertisement and medication?**

I think this advertisement speaks to a lot of things. We are a people that need instant gratification. We are not interested in long-term investments. We do not like to wait or anticipate. We want results on-demand. We don't like to work. We expect life to function much like those token machines at an arcade. We have a dollar. We insert it in the machine. Out come four tokens or quarters for use in the desired game, instant change and little effort.

This is a lot like our approach to the spiritual life.

Insert person into church, hear message, leave inspired. Insert worship song in ear, sing a few lines, and experience God. Go to CREDO, be confirmed, now be a good Christian. That doesn't seem to be what the Bible describes as the Christian life. None of these methods seem as though they will actually lead us into a relationship with God that will actually have any depth or lasting impact.

The spiritual life was never intended to be a quick fix, on-demand experience. The input-output method will do nothing but disappoint and leave us empty and unchanged. Instead, the Christian life incorporates what we call *spiritual formation*.

**Q2: In your own words define what you think is spiritual formation. How does spiritual formation differ from the weight loss advertisement?**

One of my favorite definitions of spiritual formation goes like this, "Christian spiritual formation is the process of being conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others."<sup>1</sup> We are in process and under construction. Spiritual formation takes time, intention, discipline, and even change. There are going to be moments where we feel strong in the faith and confident in our spiritual direction. There may be other times where we struggle, question, and contemplate giving up. That's part of the formation. Our highs and our lows, and mostly the in-betweens, are all part of the *process* of becoming more like Jesus for the sake of our own lives and for the hope of others and the world. It takes work.

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<sup>1</sup> The words of M. Robert Mulholland, as cited in *The Jesus Creed* by Scot McKnight. Paraclete Press: Brewster, MA (2005). p. 232.

## PERSONAL FORMATION

READ JOHN 15:1-17

**Q3: How do we show that we are Jesus' disciples? What does Jesus mean when he says that we are to "bear fruit?"**

**Q4: What must we do in order to bear fruit?**

I love this passage because it reminds me that I cannot do anything on my own. Jesus uses an agricultural metaphor in order to remind us of our need for him and the significance of spiritual formation. As a branch clings to the vine for nourishment and strength in order to bear nutritious fruit, so are followers of Jesus to cling to Him for the same in order to live more like Him and be a blessing in the world. As we abide in Jesus we begin to experience real life and real transformation.

**Q5: What are some ways that we can "abide" in Jesus? How does this relate to spiritual formation?**

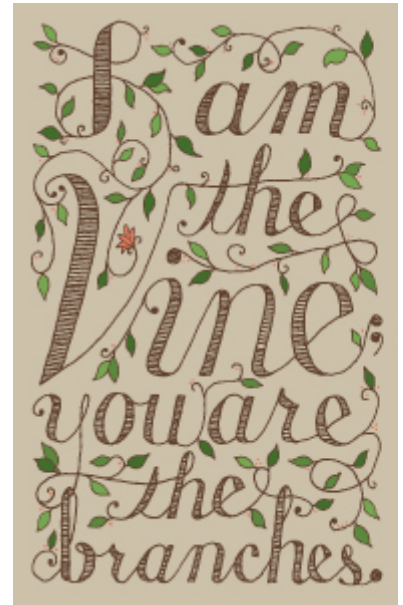


Image by Eric Crow

Spiritual formation takes time, effort, and discipline. A branch does not reproduce fruit overnight. Instead, through regular dependence and "abiding" in the vine the branch is able to bear fruit that is of value to those who come near, particularly during the harvest. We must not expect too much out of our spiritual formation too soon. Spiritual formation is a lifelong journey, a marathon that requires a steady pace and perseverance. This formation, though, needs to start somewhere. And it doesn't end at confirmation.

## COMMUNAL FORMATION

READ HEBREWS 10:19-25

Just as we cannot expect to grow spiritually without dependence on Jesus, we also cannot expect to be formed spiritually without the help of others. The Christian life is meant to be lived into and pursued in community. We need each other. That's why we meet together on Sunday's, during the week, for youth ministry, and even in small groups for CREDO. Faith is a communal discipline.

**Q6: Why is faith a communal discipline?**

**Q7: How does Hebrews 10:23-25 relate to our need for one another? How are we supposed to support each other as we follow Jesus?**

If we only pursue spiritual formation as individuals, when we face difficulties and begin to struggle in our "confession of hope" it may become easy to give up altogether. However, when we pursue spiritual growth as a community, we can encourage one another and hold each other up.

**Q8: Who are some of the people in your life that you look to for encouragement and support in your spiritual journey? What are some ways that you pursue faith and spiritual growth as a community?**

**Challenge of the Week: This week find a way to be an encouragement to someone in your small group. Talk with them about their life, family, and faith journey. Ask them how you can pray for them and maybe be a support as they continue on in the CREDO experience. This can be done in person, over the phone, etc.**



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The Apostle's Creed was adopted by the early church in efforts to convey what they believed about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the church, and other elements of the faith. It is a *creed*, or confession of faith, which we still recite today. *The creed is a communal "confession of hope" (Hebrews 10:23)*. Throughout the year we will work on understanding this beautiful tradition within the community of Christian faith.

Continue to memorize the Apostles Creeds which describes what the church believes about God.

I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, dead, and buried;  
He descended into hell.  
On the third day he rose again from the dead;  
He ascended into heaven,  
And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty,  
From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting.  
Amen.

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