

## Christ Community Church Spiritual Formation Defined and Explained



*We believe Spiritual Formation is a lifelong, transforming process in Christ Jesus that is cultivated through pursuing personal spiritual growth, participating in healthy community, and engaging in strong mission.*

For the overarching purpose of glorifying God forever, Christ Community has a burden to clearly define and then faithfully practice spiritual formation. This conviction arises because we believe that growth in Christ-likeness is the surest way to fulfill our mission: to be disciples, who make disciples and plant churches.

We believe that followers of Jesus become his lifelong apprentices in all areas. In Christ and through the Holy Spirit, God transforms us so that our souls, minds, hearts, and bodies will love and reflect him completely. This process has no end; it begins now and carries into eternity.

In order to nurture and cultivate maturity, we envision true spiritual formation growing out of three interdependent habits. *First, we pursue personal spiritual growth.* This aspect of spiritual formation assumes relationship with God through both Word and Spirit, combined with the dynamic interplay of intentionally giving and receiving from others. The graphic below uses imperfect words to describe our process that identifies personal maturation.

*Secondly, we participate in healthy community.* Our personal spiritual growth cannot take place apart from active involvement in a community of faith. These communities worship, connect, learn, and love. In Christ Community Church, small groups are the backbone of how we experience community and receive pastoral care. The Sunday morning celebration, along with medium-sized groups of teaching and fellowship, complement the relationships developed in small group.

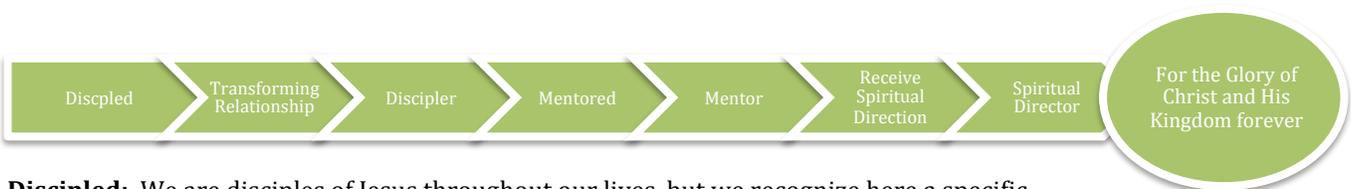
*Thirdly, we engage in strong mission.* This component of spiritual formation ensures the first two habits regularly move towards obeying God's glorious commission. Recognizing each person needs to obey the Lord's specific vocational call, we have committed as an institution to church planting as the key lens for local and global mission. This will serve to advance the vital deeds of mercy, justice, and evangelism.

## The Dynamics of Personal Spiritual Growth

One of three intentional habits of spiritual formation is the *pursuit of personal spiritual growth*. We desire to be like Jesus, and we hold onto this Biblical assurance.<sup>1</sup> This aspect of spiritual formation assumes relationship with God through both Word and Spirit, combined with the dynamic interplay of intentionally giving to and receiving from others.

We do not stumble by happenstance into maturity in Christ, but must purposely move this direction by God's grace. While only God can judge the heart, some benchmarks of growth – couched in relationship – are helpful to provide accountability and self-evaluation. CCC has identified these benchmarks based on a Judaic model of maturity whereby a youth would move from being a young apprentice to an “elder at the gate” providing wisdom for the town.<sup>2</sup>

The chart below uses imperfect words to describe our process that identifies personal maturation.



**Disciple:** We are disciples of Jesus throughout our lives, but we recognize here a specific relationship of *intentional apprenticeship in the basic foundations of the faith* that prepares the disciple for a more mature and discerning expression of this discipleship as he/she grows spiritually.

**Transforming Relationship:** *Long-term, Christ-centered friendships* that honestly and purposefully aim one another toward spiritual growth in Jesus. In these relationships, we acknowledge the Biblical mandate for peers who will regularly point us to Jesus, and where we “confess our sins and pray for one another”. Our faith does not mature in isolation, but needs a confidential relationship of trust and support with someone who will lovingly re-orient us to Christ on a regular basis. We’ve seen T-groups last 20+ years. We do not outgrow our need for these relationships.

**Disciple:** When we’ve experienced being disciplined and have a regular accountability relationship, we’re ready to sow what’s been planted in us by discipling others.

**Mentored:** Mentoring occurs within particular areas of our life situations, vocations and responsibilities. When being mentored, one learns how to apply faith-based knowledge within certain settings. Among other things, it includes coming alongside a more experienced practitioner to watch, learn, and then attempt.

**Mentor:** The mentor needs to release control and have desire to impart what God has given them. Mentors thrive in replicating themselves and giving away leadership.

**Receives Spiritual Direction:** Thomas Merton defines spiritual direction as “a continuous process of formation and guidance, in which a Christian is led and encouraged in his special calling, so that by faithful correspondence to the graces of the Holy Spirit they may attain to the particular end of their calling and to union with God.”

**Spiritual Director:** A spiritual director helps shepherd someone who has moved faithfully through the process of spiritual formation. The function of a spiritual director is, in Eugene Peterson’s words, to be “unknowing and uncaring, to not be a problem solver, and to show up and shut up.” While these words may seem harsh, they allow for a deep, trusting, and safe relationship to form where issues of life and Spirit are discussed and true Christian maturity is encouraged.

<sup>1</sup> John 15, Romans 8:28-30, 2 Corinthians 3:17-18, 1 John 3:2-3

<sup>2</sup> Dt. 25:7-10, Ruth 4:1-12, Lamentations 5:1-14