

Living Into the Life of Jesus: The Formation of Christian Character

Part 1: A Process for Christian Character Formation

Chapter 1: Form Your Heart, Not Just Your Behavior (Mt 4:17; change, kingdom here)

1. Problem: Is deep life change realistic? “Willing-doing gap” is “normal” part of life
Jesus e.g.-- prays for Peter about his future gap (failed New Year’s resolutions)
2. Interpretive Guide for Jesus’ teachings (otherwise seem burdensome & extreme)
 - a. shock value to arrest attention, jar open, and critique prevailing values
 - b. cultural references (& values) (a & b go together)
 - c. illustrations to suggest---for range of possible actions from a Jesus-Heart
3. Jesus is the ultimate reference point of Christian living, Christian ethics, sanctification, discipleship--3 metaphors: Inner Heart, inside-outside, tree and fruit-bearing, not rule-keeping; [i.e., Christianized virtue ethic over rule-based ethic] ;
(Christology leads the way for both salvation and for sanctification)
4. Focus on core worldview beliefs vs. will power to change heart, for effective life change;
Use will power for small decisions to engage in spiritual practices (indirect vs. direct)
Computer analogy---operating system and third party software
5. Questions—We partner with God in sanctification; change is possible, though no “perfection” this side of heaven
6. Kingdom—central topic for Jesus---New Covenant, Jesus inaugurated availability now, and more to come later, Bock and Ladd summaries (eschatology)

Chapter 2: Wake Up to Your Formation Gaps (Mt 7:3-5 Clueless)

1. Problem—we’re clueless about our gaps;
2. Parable of Soils—as applied to Christian life, major barriers to receiving truth in our lives (Table 2.1, from 3 unfruitful soils)
 - a. thorns—Distracted gap—slow drift away from a Jesus-lifestyle
 - b. rocky soil—Discrepancy gap—“professed” worldview belief that is not rooted in character (opening story of soccer player—“That’s no me!” –idealized view of ourselves)
 - c. by the road—Dismissive gap---new ideas not welcome (Satan reinforces this)
3. *Spiritual Practice*: Benner’s ideas; listen to emotions: glad, sad, mad, dreads dreams
4. 4th gap from *Jesus’ e.g.--* Gethsemane experience—Distressed gap—moment of distress
[a 5th gap added in Ch 6, Table 6.3)
5. *Spiritual Practice*: 4 Steps to address gaps, based on Jesus’ Gethsemane experience
 - a. Awake—be awakened to gap
 - b. Admit—own it
 - c. Ask for help (divine and human)
 - d. Act—and begin to address gap (Jesus prayed 3 periods of prayer)
Summary box reminder for 4 steps at end of each chapter
6. How Leaders/Teachers Inadvertently Reinforce Gaps for those under them

Chapter 3: Grow into a Jesus Lifestyle With Formation Projects

(Mt 7:24-27 put Jesus' words into practice)

1. *Jesus' e.g.*, --own formation Journey—child/young adult/ adult (Table 3.1)
2. Questions: Why the drama? Worth Effort?--Long-term perspective---“Heaven” goal—hope for the future---Present Age/Next Age (eschatology); What we take with us into next age? relationships (God, Jesus' family), character & competencies, effects of good deeds (rewards)
3. Illustrative Framework for change process—Prochaska model (Table 3.2, Fig 3.1)
 - A. Becoming Aware of a Gap
 - B. Carrying Out a Formation Project (and getting over “tipping point”)
 - C. Settling into a Changed Character & Lifestyle
(some examples of formation projects; including NT cases)
4. *Spiritual Practices*: Lifestyle Routines [rule of life] (macro practice), (Table 3.3)
Pause Button (micro practice)

Part 2: Essential Divine Resources for Christian Character Formation

Chapter 4: Love: Divine Relational Commitment & Support (Lk 15 prodigal son excerpt)

1. Problem—only experience of conditional love (feel unsafe, need to hide); Deep need for unconditional love—objectively true—but need subjective experience of it—with a safe relationship to admit gaps, no need to hide anymore), can take risk to change
(five languages of love)
2. Limited view of God hinders receptivity to God's love initiatives---
(worldview item) need a continuing God image make-over
3. Jesus introduced use of “Abba”—personal, intimate term to address the Father
Jesus e.g., --as beloved Son
4. Receiving God's love---God' partial hiddenness—relational room to notice/respond
Spiritual Practice—suggest develop emotionally-laden image in connecting with Abba;
Pause Button prayer—Abba, I belong to you.

Chapter 5: Holy Spirit: Divine Mentoring & Partnership (Jn 14:16-17 another paraclete)

1. Acts 1:8 is Key Link between Jesus & Spirit, and us as Disciples (Epistles)
Kingdom “Already” is the realm of Spirit's ministry (Saucy); not left as orphans,
2. Jesus needed to live a fully human life in order to fulfill two *essential* messianic functions—a. sinless human sacrifice for our sin, and b. to become our sympathetic high priest--- then also he becomes our example as a byproduct (though I think it was an intended 3rd goal);
[a theological argument for main claim #4,
Scripture provide doesn't need to carry whole weight of the argument]
3. Recognize Non-exemplary aspects of Jesus' life (4 item checklist) & aspects that are (1 point);
(not in relation to his Messianic ministry, etc., but is exemplary in his common humanity)
4. *Jesus e.g.* --lived predominantly in humanity, depending on the divine ability of the Father, and the Spirit---his **dependence on the Spirit**, is mostly exemplary [bulk of chapter on this claim]
Possible Options; 3 areas Scripture: Depended on Father, Faith in God, Depended on Spirit
5. Questions about Dual Nature
6. Practical section—Holy Spirit as mentor/partner—analogy, as co-pilot
7. *Spiritual Practice* –Paul's Trinitarian prayer, Eph 3 (Father's family, Christ's love & empowering Spirit); *Pause Button*—Iverson chorus, Spirit of the Living God

Chapter 6: Scripture: Divine Revelation of Reality & a Jesus Lifestyle (Mt 5 Jesus' words)

1. *Spiritual Practice*: Participative Meditation (and Study)
example "Wow" poem, Jesus blesses children
2. Scripture as legitimate source of truths (Willard quote); *Jesus e.g.*, -- steeped in Scripture
3. What's "humanly" possible for us in our Christian living?
Jesus e.g.,—Suggestive list of exemplary Practices & Character (Table 6.1)
 - A. Breadth/Range with 6 Themes of the Sermon on the Mount
 - B. Exemplary Practices (Mission-related, Character-Affirming, Relational)
 - C. Exemplary Character (Knowledge & Competencies, Virtues, Relational indwelling)
4. Kingdom Already and Not Yet—(Table 6.2) 4 illustrative options on spectrum
Discuss two exemplary aspects from Table 6.1: answered prayer & sinless life;
Four options across a spectrum within Kingdom Already to Not Yet (Option 4)
Jesus' Option 4 lifestyles as Messiah to demonstrate Kingdom living potential available in next age, to grow into partially now
 - a) Jesus' answered prayer (Jn 14:12), and
 - b) Jesus' sinless life—(1 Pet 2)—two paradoxical trajectories toward sinning less and less, growth involves: (optimistic deep life change potential supports the main theme of this book)
 - 1) more deep life change, but also along with
 - 2) more awareness of deep sinful compulsions, wounds; (God with me in my gaps)
5. Five Formation Gaps (review)—(Table 6.3)
introduce 5th one: Disconnected Gap—Jn 15—Abiding, without me you can do nothing
(added "Abiding" to summary box of 4 steps—Abiding undergirds 4 steps)
Disconnected Gap, Distressed Gap, Dismissive Gap, Discrepancy Gap, Distracted Gap
6. *Spiritual Practice-Pause Button*—Jesus Prayer

Part 3: Following Jesus Daily in The Gaps

Ch 7—**Three Exemplary Jesus-Practices About Our Relationships** (Jn 13:34-35 love)

1. The Problem--Barna research—Christians viewed as judgmental, hypocritical by outsiders;
Jesus' goal to grow us experientially as a new family/kinship, as brothers and sisters; what is already objectively the case, but not yet fully in practice.
2. Practice 1: Forgiving one another, *Jesus' e.g.*, forgave many, (Mt 18 parable King & slaves)
Suggested Framework: Robert Enright research
Prayer Projects
3. Practice 2: Peacemaking in Conflicts---Jesus as the Mediator, e.g., --own conflict with Peter
Suggested Framework Ken Sande/Peacemakers/ 4 steps
Prayer Projects
4. Practice 3: Developing Closer Friendships (thus nurturing Christian community)
Jesus' e.g.,--with 12, inner circle of 3, and Mary, Martha, Lazarus,
Suggested Framework-- Two key concepts: Confession (honest transparency), and Candor (speaking truth)
Close Friendship as a school of love (Meilander)—so can extend love/hospitality to others
Prayer Projects

Ch 8 –Three Exemplary Jesus-Practices About Our Money (Mt 6:24, serve God or Money)

1. Attitudes about Money an important character formation topic for Jesus

[need to set a context for Money discussion by discussing “work” a means we make money to meet our material needs]

2. Practice 1 (A) Doing Work Well (as we earn money)

Cosden definition of work: ontological, instrumental, relational aspects

3 work sectors, US workforce: For-profit (79%), not-for-profit (6%), public (govt; 15%),
(Table 8.1); Jesus’ e.g.:-- was a builder for 18 yrs (table 8.2)

Jesus’ Parables with business-related contexts (Table 8.3)

Jesus (and Paul) affirmed each sector; work in any sector is valued by God; no hierarchy

“Sunday-Monday” Gap; for-profit business people feel like 2nd class citizens in the church; No

NT view of “calling” to a particular job; no hierarchy);

Formation approach to work (Eldred)—ministry at, in, and to work

Prayer Projects

3. Practice 2: (B) Money--Trusting God for material needs; (non-attachment of possessions)

Jesus’ e.g.:-- implied, through 5 principles from Matt 6:19-34/ Lk 12:22-34);

1 Tim 6:17-19 summarizes apostolic teaching to wealthy Christians (e.g. of Zacchaeus)

“Money is Worldly” Gap; doing financial planning does not equal “worrying”;

Matter of Christians in debt can limit giving;

Questions: zero sum economics not applicable; profit; *isotes* in 2 Cor 8; usury;

Interpreting Classic Rich Young Ruler case,

Wide range of financial lifestyles possible

Need for seminaries to train pastors about personal finance and business economics, so

Christians can include these areas as important aspects of formation and Christian lifestyle

Manage our Affairs faithfully /Present life preparation for Next Age,

Prayer Projects,

4. Practice 3: Generous Giving

Jesus’ e.g.:--Jn 13:29, his life; [Acts 20:35],

Examples of giving—businesses can be structured to do good and be generous

Global poverty—Development through Savings, Microfinance loans, Business as Mission (BAM);

Recent global economic progress significantly reducing number of extreme poor in world;

Pastors/churches to train those with surplus to use money for Kingdom purposes (Willard);

Wesley’s dictum, edited by Willard.

Prayer Projects

Prayer of Recollection