

Six Themes to Guide Spiritual Formation Ministry Based on Jesus' Sermon on the Mount



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Abstract: What key themes for spiritual formation ministry and Christlike living does Jesus identify? From a study of Jesus' central Sermon on the Mount (SM) emerged six broad formation themes. Further support for these six themes was then sought in relevant ways the Holy Spirit ministers to believers today. This six-theme model of Christlikeness may serve as an initial fundamental framework for assessing the scriptural correspondence within the varied goals for Christian formation offered by Christian leaders. As an illustration, the six themes were compared with Robert Pazmiño's five-task model for the church. Finally, some suggestions for practical implications of the six themes are offered. Future studies may confirm, amplify, revise, or replace these particular six themes in order to establish a robust evaluative framework as one means to address the problem of "sanctification pluralism."

What is our conception of Christlike living that guides educational ministry of spiritual formation? Our Lord Jesus Christ's summary of the Hebrew Scripture may offer a good framework: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Deut 6:5, New International Version). This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev 19:18). All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Matt 22:37–40). Yet Christian leaders wish to provide more specificity, and we tend to do this with slightly differing emphases. Philosopher/theologian Steven Porter (2002) uses the term "sanctification pluralism" to highlight "the problem of the many"—the diversity among the various evangelical proposals of the goal or *telos* of sanctification. Over two pages of his *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* article Porter briefly surveys nine differing conceptions from well-known evangelical authors (e.g., Foster, Packer, Willard, Mulholland). Porter's explains his point:

My intention is not to critique the above presentations, but rather to show the perplexing array of motifs that can be found in contemporary

writings on sanctification. The concern is not that these different emphases are inconsistent and incommensurable, but rather that we do not have a theology of sanctification which shows in what manner they are consistent and commensurable. For as they stand, these distinct views of the Christian life can begin to generate conceptual confusion amongst those digesting the burgeoning spiritual formation literature. (p. 419)¹

The purpose of this article is two-fold. The first is to explore one way to develop a New Testament-supported response to the question of what key themes for spiritual formation and Christlike living Jesus identifies. The article identifies six broad themes that emerge from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (SM) and supportive elements throughout the Gospel of Matthew. Confirming lines of evidence for these particular themes come from the ministry of the Holy Spirit within the Epistles. The Third Person of the Trinity had a predominant role in Jesus Christ's own life and ministry (e.g., Luke 4:1, 14; Acts 10:38; see Issler, 2007b), and Jesus taught that the Spirit would indwell and empower his disciples (John 7:38–39; 14:6). In the final section some suggestions for practical implications of the six themes are offered.

The second purpose of the article relates to Porter's (2002) insightful comment:

Confusion reigns when there is no meta-theory which deals appropriately with divergent theoretical voices. Furthermore, unless there is a more fundamental framework for an evangelical doctrine of sanctification, the congenial assortment of perspectives I gathered above will balloon into an unmanageable and inconsistent set. (p. 420)

As one contribution toward a fundamental framework, these six broad themes from Jesus' teaching may offer one way for assessing proposed models of the goals of the Christian. As an illustrative example, the emerging themes from Jesus' teaching will be compared with one particular five-task model of Christlikeness developed by Robert Pazmiño that receives continuing support in the Christian education/formation literature (model described later). So, what themes can be discerned from the SM?

The Discourse on Discipleship

In contrast with the other Synoptic Gospels, Matthew records five major discourses of Jesus, each ending with the same formula: "when Jesus had finished" (7:28, 11:1, 13:53, 19:1, 26:1). Due to the inclusion of these five discourses and the distinctive closing of the book—"teaching them to obey

everything I have commanded you" (Matt 28:20)—Matthew's gospel has been viewed as a "manual on discipleship" (Nolland, 2005, p. 20; Wilkins, 2004, p. 200) or as R.T. France (2007) labels it, the "Discourse on Discipleship" (p. 153). The SM is first in order and the longest discourse in Matthew. Most agree that Jesus' SM is a distillation of the major themes of Jesus' teaching about the Christian life. Michael Wilkins (2004) notes, "A majority of interpreters, however, with some variation, understand the SM to be Jesus' declaration of the essence of life in the kingdom that he has announced. . . . The kind of kingdom life elucidated in the SM is the foundation for each Christian's personal discipleship to Jesus" (pp. 197, 199).

But when we get to other hermeneutical issues, there is more diversity. Who unified the sermon, was it Jesus or Matthew? Some scholars regard the unity of the sermon as resulting from Matthew's editorial work under the inspiration of the Spirit. According to this view, Matthew brought together into this one sermon isolated teachings from Jesus throughout his teaching ministry (e.g., Hagner, 1993, pp. 83, 156; Keener, 1999, p. 162). Such a view limits for the exegete reliance on contextual clues one normally uses to interpret difficult sayings. But I agree with those who see evidence for Jesus preaching a unified sermon, at one time, though perhaps it may be the gist of key parts of a longer sermon (reading it takes only 30 minutes) (Carson, 1984, p. 125; Wilkins, 2004, p. 191; Willard, 1998).²

Another issue concerns the practical applicability of the sermon. For example, is it an impossible ideal or a message for a future time period? Keener (1999) notes, "Jesus himself apparently expected full compliance with his teaching, not in the legalistic or ascetic ways he condemns . . . [but as] expressions of submission to God's reign over the lives of his followers" (p. 161; cf. Matt 7:24–27). Along these lines we must appreciate Jesus' shock to jar and elicit a response style of teaching. To challenge his listeners for an immediate reaction, Jesus occasionally used exaggeration, which could arouse one's attention. We must avoid literalistic applications such as gouging out one's eye (Matt 5: 29), hating one's parents (Luke 14:26), or never inviting relatives or friends for a meal at one's house (Luke 14:12) to respond to Jesus' main point.

Structure of the Discourse

A final area of difference among Matthean scholars is the general structure of the sermon, although a consensus is evident for most of the discourse. The outline below includes seven basic units of thought, adapted from the structural units identified by France (2007, p. 155), Wilkins (2004, p. 38), and Nolland (2005, pp. 45–46), although these summaries are mine.

- 5:3–10 A. *Kingdom Blessedness*: Fortunate—blessed by God—are those entering the kingdom, now able to live the truly good life, although not one honored by society (cf. 4:17 “Kingdom is near”; 4:23 “good news of the Kingdom”).
- 5:11–16 B. *World Influence*: Be aware that the disciples’ distinctive kingdom lifestyle of following Jesus will collectively and noticeably impact society, yielding persecution, praise to, and reward from God the Father.
- 5:17–48 C. *Inner Righteousness*: Genuine kingdom living yields an abundant righteousness and is sourced in an inner heart of righteousness, instead of a sole focus on external compliance.
- (5:17–20) C1. Genuine kingdom living actually fulfills the Hebrew Scriptures’ teaching yielding an abundant righteousness that differs greatly from the inadequate righteousness practiced by the religious leaders “today.”
- (5:21–48) C2. Kingdom living involves an inner righteousness that naturally issues in outward obedience and cannot stem from external compliance only (e.g., cases of anger in relationships, respect for women, promise-keeping, generosity in justice, and extending grace to enemies).
- 6:1–18 D. *God-ward Activities*: Genuine kingdom living is primarily carried out before God in secret, which God rewards, not as external performance of image-making before the community as hypocrites do (e.g., three cases: giving to needy, prayer, voluntary fasting).
- 6:19–34 E. *God-confidence About Physical Needs*: Regarding money and possessions, genuine kingdom living involves a decreasing worry about and a deepening confidence in God’s provision for basic material necessities (“daily bread,” food and clothing), a generous use of money for kingdom purposes (not hoarding it or being stingy), and a genuine heart commitment to eternal investments in God’s kingdom project, its righteousness, and treasures that last.
- 7:1–12 F. *Respect*: Regarding our interactions with others, genuine kingdom living involves treating others with respect and dignity in a posture of invitation and request rather than of domination and presumption, without judgmentalism, hypocrisy, or trying to fix others. Thus, we relate to others as we ourselves want to be treated. (The principle is also applied to our prayer relationship with God).

- 7:13–27 G. *An Enduring Wise Lifestyle*: Practicing Jesus' teaching of kingdom living yields a wise lifestyle of evident good character and good deeds that ultimately withstands all assaults against it. But when we or others neglect to follow Jesus' teaching we act like fools and will suffer great loss.
- (7:13–14) G1. Entering and following the narrow kingdom living way leads to life, yet few find this path; the wide and popular way leads to destruction and life apart from God.
- (7:15–23) G2. Since these two ways of living yield vastly different results, you can discern true prophets (and Christian leaders in general) by their continuing genuine kingdom character/ lifestyle *and* personal intimacy with Jesus, from false prophets (and leaders broadly) by their continuing bad character and lack of personal intimacy with Jesus, even though they may say the right Christian words and do effective Christian ministry.
- (7:24–27) G3. Genuine kingdom living as practicing Jesus' teaching (cf. Matt 28:20) is a wise endeavor with a promise that such a lifestyle can withstand all assaults against it, whereas those who ignore and do not practice Jesus' teaching are foolish since their life will certainly end in disaster and great loss.

Broad Themes Identified in the Discourse on Discipleship

The following six themes, which Jesus seems to emphasize, emerged from the study and meditation on the SM. First we focus on the dominant theme in the SM and then identify a pervasive theme of units "B" through "G" of the discourse ("A" is included within the following discussion of the dominant theme of the SM).

Inner Heart Formation

The dominant theme in the whole sermon is that of inner heart formation. Early on Jesus offers a comparative statement: "For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (5:20) [C1]. Jesus ends his sermon with a promise that if one puts into practice his teaching—our lives ("houses") being built on this strong foundation ("the rock")—then we will withstand all the storms of this life (7:24–25) [G]. Jesus would be very fa-

miliar with building standards of his day, having been a builder in the family business for probably 20 years of his life (if apprenticed at age 10). Wilkins (2004) notes that it may have required digging down 10 feet into the alluvial sand near the Sea of Galilee before reaching bedrock to establish the foundation for a house. “The audience of the SM would readily understand the surface meaning intended in the parable, because they would know how foolish a person was who would choose the easy way and did not build on bedrock” (p. 327). Furthermore, in this final section, Jesus uses another analogy to refer to the deep structure of character: “Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit” (7:17–18).

Particular emphasis on inner heart formation occurs throughout two particular sections, in 5:3–10 [A] (Beatitudes, e.g., “hunger and thirst after righteousness,” “pure in heart”), and in 5:21–48 [C2] (e.g., anger is behind murder, lust equals adultery “in his heart”). Within the remaining sections Jesus makes some points related to this theme: in 5:11–16 [B] (e.g., rejoicing when persecuted for Jesus’ sake), in 6:1–18 [D] (i.e., doing God-ward activities “in secret” to be seen primarily by God), in 6:19–34 [E] (e.g., do not worry but trust in God’s provision for basic material needs), and in 7:1–12 [F] (e.g., first take the plank out of one’s own eye).

Now we will examine the pervasive theme of each remaining unit, starting with “B.” Additional support for each theme will include a reference to the remaining four discourses recorded in Matthew, and other gospel books as well.

Missional Participation

In 5:11–16 [B], Jesus highlights the mission and calling of the disciples as “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world.” Nolland (2005) explains that “the only discipleship Matthew recognizes is a discipleship in mission” and that “a mission perspective” is “quite explicitly [stated] in 5:13–16” (p. 210). In his second discourse in Matthew 10:1–42, Jesus commissioned the 12 disciples: “These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions” (10:5). Later, Jesus sends out the 70 (Luke 10:1, 17), and then all believers are sent out with the Great Commission, recorded in the final two verses of Matthew’s gospel (28:19–20; cf. John 17:18). Part of Jesus’ final discourse in Matthew 24:42–25:46 is an encouragement for his disciples to remain faithful in ministry until Jesus returns.

Scriptural Saturation

In 5:17–20 [C1], Jesus launches this first discourse by clarifying that his new kingdom program actually fulfills all that the Hebrew Scriptures taught,

to the smallest stroke and letter. He praises as great in the kingdom “whoever practices and teaches these commands” (5:19) to stress a “commitment to the will of God in all its breadth, depth, and detail” (Nolland, 2005, p. 223). It was important for his disciples to know Scripture and interpret it correctly to be able to follow its genuine teaching (“you have heard that” “but I say to you” Matt 5:21–22 [C2]; see also Matt 22:29; Luke 24:27, 45). Jesus concludes this first discipleship discourse with an important promise for those who “hear these words of mine” and put “them into practice” (Matt 7:24) [G3]: their lives will withstand all storms. Ignoring Jesus’ words will bring great peril.

Jesus’ own life was bathed in Scripture. “It is written,” or a slight variation, occurs 23 times on his lips (excluding parallel references). Satan uses the same phrase, copying Jesus, in his second temptation (Matt 4:6). Jesus was conscious that his life and ministry were a specific fulfillment of Scripture (Luke 4:21; 24:44, 46).

Seeking/Loving/Depending on God (Above All)

In Matthew 6 [units D and E], the theme of our relationship with God is dominant. Section 6:1–18 [D] begins with the general principle that our acts of devotion to God should be done “in secret,” primarily directed to God, and we will be rewarded accordingly. The hypocrite’s performance for image-making receives no divine reward. Following a discussion of prayer performance, Jesus offers a model prayer for his disciples, directed to “Our Father in heaven” (6:9–13).

Section 6:19–34 [E] concludes by highlighting our priority to seek God above money and anything else: “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (6:33). We can grow in our walk with God to worry less and trust God more for our basic necessities (6:30–31). A personal relationship with Jesus is a non-negotiable criterion for kingdom entrance, not necessarily just saying the right words and/or doing effective ministry (7:23) [G2].

Relational Attachment as Jesus’ Church

In 7:1–12 [F], Jesus teaches the Golden Rule, “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets” (7:12), a paraphrase of the command, “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt 22: 39; Lev 19:18). Rather than being judgmental and making self-righteous pronouncements to others, Jesus guides his disciples in how we can be of help to each other. Willard (1998) explains,

When we stand thus in the kingdom, our approach to influencing others, for their good as well as ours, will be simply *to ask*. . . . *Asking* is indeed

the great law of the spiritual world through which things are accomplished in cooperation with God and yet in harmony with the freedom and worth of every individual. (p. 232)

One key aspect of loving our neighbor involves forgiveness, mentioned both within the Lord's model prayer—"Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (6:12)—and after the end of the prayer (6:14–15) [D].

Furthermore, Jesus teaches that in the kingdom his disciples are joined as family members, beyond ethnic or blood lines, as a new surrogate kinship group. Joseph Hellerman (2009) argues, based on an understanding that the closest family bond of first-century culture was sibling loyalty, that "Jesus intentionally employed sibling terminology ['brother'] in order to encourage His disciples to treat each other like members of a Mediterranean kinship group" (p. 66).³ Jesus uses the term *adelphos* ("brothers") eight times in the SM. The clearest teaching on this fundamental relational concept is in Matthew 12:48–50: "[Jesus] replied to him, 'Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?' Pointing to his disciples, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.'" The fourth discourse of Jesus in Matthew 18:1–35 is all about community relationships and includes the two of the three uses of "church" by Jesus (2x, Matt 18:17; the other is in 16:18). This deeper level of devotion to one another can effect a unique missional impact on the world: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34–35).

Two Kingdoms Discernment

Finally, in 7:13–27 [G], Jesus clarifies that there are but two paths to follow in life: the narrow, wise way that leads to life and the broad, popular way that leads to destruction. But even for disciples following the narrow road, Jesus warns to watch out for false prophets (or perhaps any *leader*—any person in a position of authority) who could influence and mislead disciples away from Jesus' teaching (7:21–23; cf. also 24:11–12, 24). Jesus poses his tree and fruit analogy teaching us, "Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them" (7:20). Discerning any "wolves" among the "sheep" is not easy, for we must look at the leader's lifestyle and character over a period of time for evidence of kingdom inner heart values, since words and ministry activities cannot by themselves guarantee a genuine disciple (7: 21–23). One line of the Lord's Prayer reads, "but deliver us from the evil one" (6:13) [D].

Ultimately, two kingdoms are now operative: Jesus' kingdom and Satan's kingdom (Matt 12:26). Furthermore, we must resist the influence of Satan as Jesus did. Satan, "the prince of this world" (John 12:31), is alive and well on

planet earth. Jesus, in his third discourse in Matthew 13:1–52, offered a series of parables about the kingdom of heaven, some of which describe the work of the enemy, Satan (13:39). In the parable of the sower and soils, the devil is portrayed as actively diminishing Jesus' teachings among some of his hearers (13:19). Jesus evidences the ability to discern the movements of Satan (e.g., in Peter, Matt 16:23; in Judas, John 6:70; in the Pharisees, Matt 12: 34; discussions with some Jews, John 8:44). Part of Jesus' ministry involved resisting and diminishing the activity of Satan (e.g., Luke 10:18; healing a woman held in bondage by Satan, Luke 13:16; prayer for Peter and disciples due to Satan's sifting, Luke 22:31; the 70 reported demons were cast out, Luke 10:17–18; see also Matt 7:22, 1 John 3:8). In his final discourse in Matthew 24:1–41, Jesus warns of coming wars, tribulation, and of false prophets who will attempt to mislead believers. Yet we must not shrink back for Jesus promises that "the gates of Hades will not overcome [my church]" (Matt 16:18).

Identifying an Ordering Among the Six Themes

Now that the six themes have been identified, a further task is to locate any particular priority Jesus might give among them throughout his teaching ministry. As was noted at the beginning of the article, two themes stand out when Jesus summarizes the teaching of the Hebrew Scriptures into two basic commands, first loving God and then loving one's neighbor. Thus the central theme involves our loving and seeking God above all else. In Jesus' final prayer following the upper room discourse in John's gospel, these two themes are also given precedence and developed further.

This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. (John 17:3)

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. (John 17: 20–23)

As Jesus anticipates his departure back to the Father, he prays for a relational unity among believers that is similar to that between the Father and the Son.

More could be said but let this survey suffice. Table 1 gathers the support for these themes from the SM and the Gospels. As was mentioned, the key

emphases of the remaining discourses recorded in Matthew offer additional support for most of these themes. The two themes without such discourse support are given important attention throughout Jesus' ministry. For analysis purposes, the themes can be discretely identified, but they need not be regarded as mutually exclusive categories, but as aspects of a unified formation into Christlike living. Table 2 offers a summary statement for each theme.

Importance of the Spirit and the Six Themes

Transitioning from the Gospels to the rest of the New Testament, is there a way to discern any support for these six particular themes of spiritual formation in Acts and the Epistles? I believe the ministry of the Holy Spirit offers a strong foundation, the "Spirit" in spiritual formation. As our Lord anticipated his death, resurrection, and ascension to the Father, Jesus promised not to leave his disciples—or us—as orphans.

I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor *to be with you forever* [italics added]—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, *for he lives with you, and will be in you* [italics added]. I will not leave you as orphans. (John 14:16–18)

From Pentecost on, believers now live in the age of the Holy Spirit as God's empowering presence in our lives and in the world (Grudem, 1994, p. 634).

God promised this miraculous divine association about 2,500 years ago as a key component of new covenant blessings. "And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws" (Ezek 36:27). Our Lord Jesus Christ inaugurated this New Covenant (cf. Luke 22:20; 2 Cor 3:6; Heb 9:15). Post-Pentecost believers are beneficiaries of this special blessing. In a mysterious way, Jesus' departure from this earth made available to the disciples and to us the ministry of the Spirit that he experienced. "But I tell you the truth: It is to your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you" (John 16:7).

Elsewhere, I have attempted to show the essential role of the Holy Spirit in the life and ministry of Jesus: "The work of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' birth, growth, life, ministry, and death was significant, without which Jesus would not have succeeded and accomplished his mission" (Issler, 2007b, p. 223). For example, during Jesus' own struggle in the garden of Gethsemane, he gave his disciples the key to his own resolve to battle Satan and his dark kingdom. "The Spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matt 26:41; Mark 14:38). A traditional understanding is that Jesus' statement to the three sleeping

Table 1

Six Key Themes to Guide Spiritual Formation into Christlikeness from the Sermon on the Mount (SM) and Jesus' Life and Ministry

Our Lord Jesus Christ's summary of the Old Testament commands: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind' [Deut 6:5]. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself' [Lev 19:18]. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Matt 22:37-40).

Thus, Jesus gives priority to these two commands in the following six themes:

Six Themes	Support in SM Discourse	Theme in Jesus' Five Matthew Discourses	Theme in Jesus' Life & Ministry
1. Seeking/Loving/Abiding in God Above All	D&E: 6:1-34, esp. 6:33	(Great Commandment 22:37-38)	"That the world may learn that I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me." John 14:31, cf. Matt 17:5
2. Relational Attachment as Jesus' Church	F: 7:1-12; (also 5:23-24, 28, 32, 44-38; 6:14-15)	4th Discourse: Matt 18 (Great Commandment 22:39)	"Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." John 13:34-35

(Table continues)

Table 1

Continued

Remaining Themes, listed in order themes appear in the SM Discourse:

3. Missional Participation	B: 5:11–16	2nd Discourse: Matt 10 5th Discourse (Pt 2): Matt 24:42–25:46	“I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do.” John 17:4, cf. John 17:17
4. Scriptural Saturation	C1: 5:17–20; (also 5:21–22, 27–28, 31–32, 33–34, 38–39, 43–44; 7:24–27; 25:35)	(Great Commission: 28:19–20) (3rd Discourse: Matt 13:3–23, 52; 24:35)	“It is written . . .” recorded of Jesus 23 unique times in Gospels (e.g., Matt 4: 4,7,10; 11:10; 21:13; 26:24, 31)
5. Inner Heart Formation	C2: 5:21–48 (also 7:3–5)	1st Discourse: Matt 5–7 (also 12:33; 15:19–20; 18:8–9; 23:25–26)	“Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered.” Heb 5:8, cf. Luke 2:52
6. Two Kingdoms Discernment	G: 7:13–27 (also 5:13–16; 6:13)	3rd Discourse: Matt 13 5th Discourse (Pt 1): Matt 24:1–41	“But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.” Matt 12:28

Table 2

Summary Principle for the Six Themes of Christlikeness

Themes	Summary Principle for these Ideals Toward Which Jesus is Calling Us
1. Seeking/Loving/ Abiding in God Above All	Jesus' disciples seek first after God and God's kingdom priorities. Loving God above all, we seek to please God sincerely, not hypocritically, praying for and genuinely depending on God's provision for all needs, and, with a heart of generosity not driven by anxiety, sharing our possessions for kingdom purposes.
2. Relational For- mation as Jesus' Church	Jesus' disciples love one another as they are being transformed into a Trinitarian-like unity. We treat each other with respect and dignity, inviting responses rather than being demanding, graciously forgiving without judgmentalism or hypocrisy, recognizing our own harmful actions to others and God's forgiveness to us with a sensitivity for the effects of our actions on "weaker" disciples (although not necessarily on "pharisaical" disciples), and with God's heart of love humbly reconciling and restoring disciples to kingdom wholeness.
3. Missional Participation	Jesus' disciples, relying on the Holy Spirit, distinctively impact the world. As "salt," "light," and "witnesses," we proclaim the good news of the kingdom through our kingdom lifestyle and doing kingdom good works, which will result in praise to and reward from the Father.
4. Scriptural Saturation	Jesus' disciples respect the complete Word of God as the standard and guide for life. We interpret it within Jesus' kingdom perspective, relying on it as wise truth, living it out daily—which yields a lifestyle that can stand firm against all opposition—and teaching other disciples to obey all that Jesus commanded.
5. Inner Heart Formation	Jesus' disciples eagerly seek Christlike <i>inner</i> heart wholeness through transformation by the Holy Spirit from the inside out, rather than a focus on external religious behavioral conformity. We realize that from within our heart come all our words and actions, cognizant of the "log" in our own eyes—such as anger, lust, selfishness, deception, lack of love, people-pleasing, unforgiveness, worry, judgmentalism, hypocrisy—that needs to be removed and replaced with genuine righteousness if we wish to help others more effectively.

(Table continues)

Table 2

Continued

Themes	Summary Principle for these Ideals Toward Which Jesus is Calling Us
6. Two Kingdoms Discernment	Jesus' disciples eagerly and faithfully continue on the "narrow" path of kingdom life and wisdom and actively oppose the "broad" path of destruction from Satan's kingdom. God's kingdom appears small and hidden but is continually being enlarged, as God incorporates our missional participation as light and salt in bearing fruit as we actively resist the popular and foolish "broad" path of destruction and God's future judgment, discerning and resisting actions of demonic agents, doing good works, and rescuing and restoring human agents from Satan's delusion where possible so they will glorify God, and enduring evil trials with God's help, persevering to the end of the age.

disciples was emphasizing an internal conflict, between the human spirit and the weakness of one's physical body. If this were so, Jesus' preceding words ("stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial") would then be a challenge to stir up more human effort to override their bodily weakness so they could pray.

A better interpretive approach is to see this contrast as a more lofty notion—a distinction between relying on the supernatural power of the Holy "Spirit," instead of relying solely on human resources ("flesh"), which can never stand alone against the assaults of Satan. Jesus made similar contrasts between the divine sphere and human sphere elsewhere (John 3:6; 6:63). Such teaching has precedent in the Hebrew Scriptures in Isaiah 31:1, in which an Egyptian alliance ("flesh") is contrasted against relying on the Lord God ("spirit"). Oswalt (2003) notes, "They [Israelites] have chosen to trust [Egyptian] men and horses instead of the 'Holy One of Israel.' They have chosen to trust the creation rather than the Creator" (p. 358). Lane (1974) comments on Mark 14:38:

Spiritual wakefulness and prayer in full dependence upon divine help provide the only adequate preparation for crisis. . . . Jesus prepared for his own intense trial through vigilance and prayer, and thus gave to the disciples and to the Church the model for the proper resistance of eschatological temptation. (pp. 520–521)

Jesus' counsel to the disciples offers the most explicit reference to his own dependence on the Holy Spirit, and for Mark's readers, an important teaching for all believers for all times.

Thus, in his shared human life with us, Jesus' example and teaching offers believers today an essential component for Christlike living—dependency on the Holy Spirit. In his commentary on Ephesians 3:14–19, Peter O'Brien (1999) draws attention to the Spirit's role in our formation: "The implication of the apostle's prayer, then, is that the more the Spirit empowers their lives the greater will be their transformation into the likeness of Christ" (p. 259).

For New Testament believers since Pentecost, at the moment of regeneration, the Holy Spirit indwells each believer forever (John 14:16; 1 Cor 6:19), baptizes us (1 Cor 12:13), seals us (Eph 4:30), and inaugurates regular prayer for each believer (Rom 8:26). As we walk with the Spirit (Gal 5:16, 25), the Spirit fills (Eph 5:18), teaches (John 16:12–15), guides (Rom 8:14; Gal 5:18), assures us of our adoption and relationship with God (Rom 8:15–16), and sanctifies us (Titus 3:5).

How does the Spirit's ministry to believers relate to the six themes? Space limits a full study. Table 3 suggests some of these connections.

Relating the Six Formational Themes and Pazmiño's Five-Task Model

In his first edition of *Foundational Issues in Christian Education* (1988b), Robert Pazmiño introduced Rev. E. V. Hill's (1967) four-factor baseball diamond image and adapted it as a model of *five* central themes of the church suggesting particular implications for Christian formation. Pazmiño's (1985) initial foray into biblical models included seven "criteria for excellence in Christian education" (p. 50), based on Deuteronomy 30–32 and Matthew's gospel, which were then developed further in *Foundational Issues*.⁴

For the five-factor model, each task is associated with a distinct New Testament Greek term and Christian virtue⁵ (within brackets English equivalents for the Greek term is supplied).

In the center of the baseball diamond, Pazmiño added a pitcher's mound, "Education for/of Worship—*Leitourgia*" [service to God, e.g., Luke 1:23], associated with the Christian virtue of joy. Then as we move around the bases, the other four tasks are as follows:

(3 o'clock position) "Education for/of Proclamation—*Kerygma*" [proclamation by a herald, preaching, e.g., Rom 16:25], associated with truth. [Hill's original term "evangelism" appeared in Pazmiño's first edition and "proclamation" appeared in the second (1997, p. 45) and third (2008a, p. 46) editions.]

Table 3

Six Themes and the Ministry of the Spirit

Six Formational Themes	Related Ministries of the Holy Spirit to Support Formation	
1. Seeking/Loving/ Depending on God Above All	Regeneration Adoption Indwelling Filling	“The love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us” Rom 5:5; 1 John 4:19; “The fellowship of the Holy Spirit” 2 Cor 13:14; Rom 8:9, 11, 15–16; Eph 5:18
2. Relational At- tachment as Jesus’ Church	Unity, Love	“Be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit” Eph 4:3; Phil 2:1; “The fruit of the Spirit is love” Gal 5:22
3. Missional Participation	Spiritual Gifts	“To each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” 1 Cor 12:7 11; “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses” Acts 1:8; 1 Cor 2:4
4. Scriptural Saturation	Illumination, Guidance	“Take . . . the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” Eph. 6:17; John 16:13; 1 Cor 2:12; “the Spirit of truth” John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13
5. Inner Heart Formation	Fruit	“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” Gal 5:22–23; Rom 8:13; 2 Cor 3:18; “Holy” Spirit
6. Two Kingdoms Discernment	Of the Spirit vs. of the “Flesh”	“Walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh” Gal 5:16; Rom 8:5–6; “By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error” 1 John 4:6 [NASV]; Rom 14:17

(12 o’clock position) “Education for/of Community—*Koinonia*” [fellowship, participation, e.g., Acts 2:42], associated with love.

(9 o’clock position) “Education for/of Service—*Diakonia*” [service, e.g., Eph 4:12], associated with faith.

(6 o’clock position) “Education for/of Advocacy—*Propheteia*” [prophecy, utterances of a prophet, e.g., Matt 13:14], associated with hope. [For this

final task, Hill's original terms appeared in Pazmiño's first edition, "Kingdom Consciousness and *Basileia*" (royal reign, kingdom of God, e.g., Matt 6:33).]

Other colleagues employ this particular model or a variation. Maria Harris (1989), who developed her model independently of Pazmiño, looks to Acts 2:42, 44–47 for the grounding of the five tasks: "There we find in one place the most detailed description of the first Christian community doing what will in time become the classical activities of ecclesiastical ministry" (p. 16). She develops the five tasks in the second half of her book in this order: Koinonia, Leiturgia, Didache, Kerygma, and Diakonia, substituting "Didache" (teaching) for Pazmiño's *Propheteia* (advocacy), which she includes within her development of "Kerygma" (proclamation).

Ronald Habermas discusses the Pazmiño model up front on pages 13–14 in his *Introduction to Christian Education and Formation* (2008). The model is then used to organize chapters 14–18 as "Applications of Global Tasks for Every Church" with one chapter for each task. Likewise, James Estep, Michael J. Anthony, and Gregg R. Allison (2008) briefly refer to Pazmiño's first edition model in their chapter on "Ecclesiology and Christian Education" (p. 253). Gary Parrett and Steven Kang (2009) suggest a seven-theme model, grouping each theme within three clusters: "We continually engage the Truth," *Didache* [teaching, e.g., Acts 2:42] and *Apologia* [defense, e.g., 1 Pet 3:15]; "the Life," *Leiturgia* and *Kerygma*; and "the Way," *Koinonia*, *Diakonia*, and *Propheteia* (pp. 81–82, 132–134).

Syntheses along slightly different lines have been offered by, for example, Mark Lamport and Darrell Yoder (2006), and Paul Bramer (2007). This overview suggests that, regardless of the particular model proposed, conceptions regarding the goals of the Christian life and tasks of the church require a *multi-theme* approach.

We can now employ the six formational themes and compare them with Pazmiño's five-factor model of tasks for the church. The selection of Pazmiño's model for comparison was done after the study of the SM had been completed. To what extent is there a substantive or limited overlap? Space limits a detailed comparison but Table 4 offers an initial assessment. All of five of Pazmiño's tasks relate in an important way to one or more of the formational themes from Jesus' SM. Thus, I conclude that Pazmiño's model offers a robust synthesis of formational, Christlike themes based on Jesus' teaching.

Some Implications for Christian Ministry

Finally, what guidance can these six formation themes offer for ministry practice? By focusing on the area of relationships, it is possible to suggest some action points that connect with each of the six themes. Why consider

Table 4

Comparison of Six SM Themes and Pazmiño’s Model of Biblical Tasks

Pazmiño’s Model of Five Biblical Tasks	Relation to the Six SM Formational Themes
Central Hub: Education for/of WORSHIP — <i>Leitourgia</i> (Joy) Seeing the Sovereign God as Lord of all, worthy of worship, honor, glory and praise	1. Seeking/Loving/Abiding in God Above All
Base 1: Education for/of PROCLAMATION /Evangelism— <i>Kerygma</i> (Truth) Knowing, responding to, and sharing the basic content of the Christian faith	4. Scriptural Saturation 3. Missional Participation 5. Inner Heart Formation
Base 2 : Education for/of COMMUNITY — <i>Koinonia</i> (Love) Feeling at one/Reconciled with God, others, and creation: Training, Instruction, and Nurture	2. Relational Attachment as Jesus’ Church 5. Inner Heart Formation 1. Seeking/Loving/ Depending on God Above All
Base 3: Education for/of SERVICE — <i>Diakonia</i> (Faith) Doing Jesus’ transformation ministry within the local church and in homes, work-places, communities, societies, and the world	3. Missional Participation
Base 4: Education for/of ADVOCACY — <i>Propheteia</i> (Hope) Advocating countercultural kingdom values and hope: correction of injustice, positive pursuit of justice, and prevention of injustice	6. Two Kingdoms Discernment 3. Missional Participation

relationships? As was noted, Jesus gave a priority to our relationship with God and our relationships with God’s family, highlighted in themes 1 and 2. Furthermore, the very being of our God is relational, three Persons existing within an eternal fellowship of love. And believers have the capacity to experience in some measure this same unity of love with each other (John 17:19–21)—a unity that also offers a key apologetic for the gospel to the world, which relates to the missional participation theme 3 (cf. also John 13:34–35).

The following three-part framework offers one way to guide the list of practical implications. There seem to be at least three distinct arenas for integrating our Christian faith for reality and life: (a) *conceptual integration*, that

is, Christian ideas or worldview perspectives; (b) *personal integration*, that is, each individual living an increasingly Christian lifestyle according to Christian ideals; and (c) *corporate integration*, that is, Christians increasingly practicing Christian ideals within their relations with each other (e.g., local Christian church, Christian college).

In the conceptual arena of integration, although community formation receives attention (e.g., the classic *Life Together* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, NY: HarperOne, 1978/1954), we need more attention regarding a theology and practice of friendship as one key component in the formation of community. Friendships, as dyads, offer a differing relational dynamic and actually may have a key role toward growing and sustaining healthy community. Notice that from among the 12 disciples, Jesus selected two sets of brothers (Peter and Andrew, Matt 4:18; James and John, Matt 4:21). These four also had a previously existing relationship as business partners (Luke 5:10). Was the rationale for such a selection to help “jump start” the formation of community among the Twelve?⁶ Further biblical study of community and friendship connects with theme 4, Scriptural Saturation.

Regarding the arena of personal integration, close friendship relationships can actually help us move toward greater maturity. From another whom we deeply trust, we are more able to receive constructive feedback (“the wounds of a friend,” Prov 27:6) about our blind spots so we can move against our compulsions with their support and God’s empowerment. Paul Wadell (1989) notes, “The moral life is the seeking of and growing in the good in the company of friends who also want to be good. Friendship is the crucible of the moral life, the relationship in which we come to embody the good by sharing it with friends who also delight in the good” (p. xiii). Also let me note the benefit along these lines of meeting monthly with a spiritual director, which I have done for 8 years. Deepening these close relationships carries the potential byproduct of growing our character, which connects with Inner Heart Formation, theme 5.

Finally in the arena of corporate integration, our church fellowships could give a greater emphasis to the importance of our relationships for the health of the local and universal body of Christ. Along with “open” groups—where anyone can join at any meeting—in which relationships can begin, we also need to sponsor “closed” groups, in which membership remains the same for a period of time so that deeper community and friendships can be nurtured and sanctioned by the church. In addition to teaching on such relational topics as interpersonal communication, conflict management, and forgiveness, we also need to be intentional about healing relationships. The ministry of mediation teams could initiate the resolution of varied conflicts, such as within families, between families, between leaders, and between business partners (e.g., Matt 18: 15–35; cf. Peacemakers Ministries: www.peacemaker

.net). Since the enemy of our soul desires to distract us from God's kingdom ways, we must be alert and offer means to help each other continue to seek the narrow path, which relates to theme 6, Two Kingdoms Discernment.

Furthermore, if we wish to attend to relational aspects of God's ways, then it will require the resources of both men and women leaders in planning, teaching, and serving. Western culture tends to overemphasize a radical individualism in which task and achievement always seem to trump relationship and community. On this particular continuum within a Western context, men tend to be on the task side and women on the relational side according to sociolinguist Deborah Tannen (1990): "Though all humans need both intimacy [connection and consensus] and independence [status and telling others what to do], women tend to focus on the first and men on the second. It is as if their life-blood ran in different directions" (p. 26). Without women's significant joint engagement in leadership and teaching regarding this crucial emphasis on relationships due to their distinctive expertise, the Western church may make little headway in moving against our cultural tendency that inhibits deep community and friendship. Such working together ("as each part does its work," Eph 4:16) connects with theme 2, Relational Attachment as Jesus' Church.

Finally, I refer to Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:14–21, which I have been meditating on and praying through the past several months almost daily. It is a rich Trinitarian passage mentioning the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, requesting a deep experiential knowledge of Christ's love for us, and the empowerment from the Holy Spirit in our "inner being" without which it will be impossible to live in these kingdom ways. Furthermore, it is through our increasing faith or God-confidence that Jesus may dwell in our hearts. As Peter O'Brien (1999) notes, "As they trust him he makes their hearts his home" (p. 259). Here is the foundation of our lives in Christ, connecting with theme 1, Seeking/Loving/Abiding in God Above All.

As a way to remember the themes, Table 5 suggests how each theme might relate to the key petitions of the prayer Jesus taught his disciples—a prayer that has been prayed daily for centuries among his people.

Conclusion

The article explored Jesus' central SM within the context of the Gospel of Matthew and identified six broad themes for spiritual formation into Christ-like living:

1. Seeking/Loving/Depending on God Above All
2. Relational Attachment as Jesus' Church
3. Missional Participation

Table 5

Six Themes and the Lord's Prayer Matthew 6:9-13 (NIV)

6:9 This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,	4. Scriptural Saturation 1. Seeking/Loving/Abiding in God Above All
6:10 your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.	3. Missional Participation
6:11 Give us today our daily bread.	1. Seeking God Above All
6:12 Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.	1. Seeking God Above All 2. Relational Attachment as Jesus' Church
6:13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."	5. Inner Heart Formation & Two Kingdoms Discernment

4. Scriptural Saturation
5. Inner Heart Formation
6. Two Kingdoms Discernment

Further support for these six themes was sought in relevant ways the Holy Spirit ministers to believers today. This six-theme model of Christlikeness was then compared with Robert Pazmiño's model of the five tasks of the church, evidencing significant overlap and affirmation. Formation into Christlike living involves a variety of themes, yet, as Jesus has summarized in Matthew 25:23-27, a focus on our relationship with God and with each other is primary. Future studies may confirm, amplify, revise, or replace these particular six themes in order to establish a robust evaluative framework as one means to address the problem of "sanctification pluralism."⁷

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¹Consider also which other major doctrinal category has two "five views" books from evangelical authors except for sanctification: Donald L. Alexander. (Ed.). (1988). *Christian spirituality* and Stanley E. Gundry. (Ed.). (1987). *Five views on sanctification*. We are confused!

²A minor issue is whether or not Luke's Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6: 20-7:1) is the same sermon or a different sermon.

³Hellerman (2009) applies the same significance to Paul's frequent use of the term *adelphos* ("brother," pp. 77-79).

⁴The model I am proposing also comes primarily from Matthew's gospel.

⁵Bob Pazmiño kindly responded to my inquiry for clarification on December 8, 2009 and May 5, 2010. Connecting the five tasks with specific virtues is made in Pazmiño's *Basics of Teaching for Christians*, (1998a, p. 77). Discussion of each virtue is available in *Basics of Teaching for Christians* (1998a) and in his *So What Makes our Teaching Christian?* (2008b).

⁶One helpful study on friendship is by Paul Wadell (1989). Some of my thoughts on a theology of friendship are available in *Wasting Time with God*, Chapter 2 (2001), and in "Valuing Close Friendship Dyads" (2007a).

⁷Any feedback on these topics would be appreciated; the article will be developed further as a chapter in a forthcoming book, *A Dynamic Spiritual Theology* (Broadman & Holman).

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