
Introduction to Spiritual Formation

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What Blocks us from Encountering Jesus Christ?

In the next nine studies we will be taking a look at the causes and motivations that block our spiritual growth. This subject is often called “Christian Formation” or “Spiritual Formation,” or the “Ecology of Faith Development.” This subject is an aspect to sanctification meaning our growth in Christ, this encompasses how and why we grow in our faith. Why do some people grow in their faith and maturity while others go about it very slowly or not at all? This is what “our part” is in our relationship with Christ. As His Work and the work of the Holy Spirit saves us and our part is responding by faith and obedience. We will be looking in the Book of John at three characters in particular, a Pharisee, an outcast woman, and a sick man who may not even wanted to get well. By looking in the lives of these people who met Jesus Christ face to face, we can see the barriers they had to overcome to accept Christ. Perhaps we can learn a thing or two to help our growth in Him and know what those barriers are and how we can overcome them.

If you have spent any significant time in the Christian faith, you will have observed that all of us are not on the same playing field of faith and maturity. We Christians have all had different experiences in life, different reactions to those experiences, and different ways of understanding and applying our faith to those situations. These experiences and the decisions we make concerning them all converge to shape us into who we are today and who we will be tomorrow. Coupled to this is the Work of the Holy Spirit, guiding and molding us, seeking to penetrate the barriers of our stubborn pride and will. The Holy Spirit does not, although He can, overwrite us; He works within us as a gentle change agent, a voice of meekness, as strength under control, desiring us to respond to our life’s circumstances in character and maturity. Yet, we tend to form barriers to His leading and call. We form barriers, causing our spiritual growth and our relational endeavors with others to stagnate. Perhaps, if we learn what these barriers are and how these barriers block our spiritual progress, we will be able to advance further in the faith. We will be able to tackle more for His Kingdom and be better examples of His Character.

As human beings, in relation to our world and God, we have four main life experience themes that we have to learn how to relate to, so we can grow beyond our sinful selves into His grace and the sanctification. These are the themes of life that we begin to deal with as babies, and continue to deal with until we are called home. First, we have a relationship to ourselves. This is who we are, how we see ourselves, if we are comfortable being “me,” our personality, our experiences, and the way we handle the world around us. This is all the stuff we learn in life, coupled with our genetic makeup, that tells others who we are. From discovering that we have feet at four months of age, until we make a decision to accept Christ as our Savior and how we handle life all facilitate our personality and worldview. All comes from what we have

been through, and how we learned and grew from it. Sometimes it is determined because what we have been through caused us to chose to retreat behind a barrier—in fear, bitterness, or perhaps indifference. Then, we come face to face with three other life experiences: how we relate to the environment around us—from nature to the things that happen to us—how we relate to other people, and finally, how we accept and relate to God. The barriers in our life are what stop us from becoming “whole” and “successful” in these relations.

What we will look at is our relationship to God, ourselves, to others and to our environment and how these affect us. This will take some self reflection, a lot of prayer and being willing to confront our sins and things that distract us from Christ. Then how we learn and grow from our experiences and the knowledge we gain from His Word and Spirit. How we relate to His percepts and our daily life, what blokes us and what helps us to mature as Christians.

GOD AS OUR SAVIOR

John 3-5; 14-15 Barriers??

What God Desires

Verses

Others ↑ ← ← ME → → ↓ Self

Our Environment and Experiences

One of the ways to look at these barriers to our Spiritual Growth is through the eyes of “developmental psychology”, or otherwise said, through the seasons of life we all experience and how we process life and our environment as it comes to us. At each stage of our life, we all face decisions, and these decisions form our determination that makes us who we are. God transcends these barriers to offer us His grace and life; we have to arise and step forward to receive His work and then apply it to our life. But, what stops us? Our will! Let us look at some of these barriers by examining how three people in the Gospel of John handled these. By knowing these barriers, we can see what is ahead, where we have been, and be open to His work through His Spirit. That way, we can grow in our faith development, maturity, and character, which is a part of our sanctification.

What do you think that God expects? Do we do as the Pharisees and cloud God’s love with meaningless traditions, or perhaps do the opposite, and really dilute it down to just being a good person? *I lived a good life! That is all I need to do—do my best to obey the Ten Commandments, to live life as best as I can, to try hard to do what the Bible says.* If we read it at all, perhaps this will please God and we can be accepted by Him. Or, you are a committed Christian, but that commitment only goes so far... Maybe this is not a problem, but what

perceptions and presumptions do you have that keep you from growth in His sanctification?

Jesus asks us to listen and heed His precepts. We are to allow the flow of the Spirit, and to be Spirit-led, not self-led, especially with how we lead our lives and His Church. An individual Christian or a local church can only be successful as long as God's Fruit, as in love, is penetrating them and thus flowing out from them. Thus, it is all about how we grow in Christ. So we can model Christ, all from how we *seek Him first*. And as a church we are to model to all, all from its leadership and members flowing from the Spirit Himself. When love is lost, so is the Christian and as well as the local church (Matt. 6:33; John 3:30; 1 Cor. 13; Gal. 2:20-21; Phil. 3:1-14)!

Discovery Questions

1. What do you think are some reasons that keep most people from accepting Christ as their Savior?
2. What causes one person to be more mature in his or her life than someone else in the same age range and life experiences?
3. How would you explain what "your part" is in your relationship with Christ?
4. As Christ's Work and the work of the Holy Spirit is in you, you feel and do what?
5. What causes some people to have more virtue and character than others?
6. What do you think are some reasons that keep most Christians from growing in Christ?
7. What has been your response to Spiritual growth?
8. What do you think that God expects?
9. Read Galatians Chapter 5, notice the two sets of Fruits. How do these correspond to you and your spiritual growth?
10. What do you need to do about your response to God?

Look over the "What Blocks us from Encountering Jesus Christ?" chart. Where are you in this chart? Where do you need to be? [Barriers to Discipleship Chart](#)