

# Personal Spiritual Growth Lesson 1 – Introduction

Welcome to our personal spiritual growth course offered by Global Training Network. My name is Pastor Mike Edelman. This course is the first of more than 10 courses that we offer in Senegal and Gambia to pastors and leaders.

This first course is a series of lessons that will strengthen the understanding of our identity in Christ and how we can continually be growing spiritually. This is wonderful for pastors to be refreshed, but it's also great training to offer to every member of our churches. You have a handout that goes along with this recording. Please turn to page 2.

Let's review the table of contents. There's an introductory lesson. Lesson two will focus on a life centered on Christ, and then lesson three will focus on the obedient life in Christ, the spirit-filled life.

These first three lessons focus on identity, our identity in Christ. Lesson four has two parts. We'll focus on our vertical relationship with God through the word of God and prayer.

Lesson five will focus on our horizontal relationships, how we love others within the church, and how we love those who don't know Jesus yet through evangelism. As we begin, I came across a helpful definition that is good to review as we begin any training. The goal of any training, spiritual training, is spiritual transformation.

You can see this at the bottom of page two. The goal of all spiritual training is transformation, and it's meant to impact a number of different areas. It's in the life of every believer, into the likeness of Christ, by the grace of God, through the word of God, by the power of the Holy Spirit, in fellowship with the people of God, and for the glory of God.

I think you'll find as we go through each of these lessons, some aspect of these elements will be reinforced throughout each lesson of this training. As we begin lesson 1, please turn to page three in your handout. Each lesson has one or more images or pictures that help to reinforce the training.

Here you can see there'll be at least two in this first session. One is of a butterfly, so keep that in mind as we go through this session. You'll notice on page three that there are three verses that I'll read.

I'd ask you to listen as you read along from the handout or your Bible. Listen for any common themes, consistencies across these three verses. The first one is 2 Cor 3:18. "And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."

The second verse is from Romans 8:29-30. "For those God foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called, and those he called, he also justified, and those he justified, he also glorified".

And the third verse is 1 John 3:2. “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”

Now, when you reflect on these three verses, there's a theme throughout all of them, and it's focused on this theme of transformation, of being conformed to the likeness of Christ, of becoming like Jesus, not becoming Jesus, but becoming like him, taking on more and more of his character.

What is God's plan for every follower of Jesus? God's goal for every believer is transformation into the likeness of Christ. It's to know that spiritual growth is a process that he brings us through. Philippians 3:12 -14, give us a flavor of this.

The apostle Paul had one goal. He was forgetting about what was behind. He was straining towards what's ahead. He was pressing on. And there was one thing that was driving him. And that one thing was to become more like Christ, to be conformed, to become transformed into the likeness of Christ.

Now you can see at the bottom of page three, a picture of the transformation that a butterfly goes through. It starts as a caterpillar and it goes into a cocoon. And then over time, out comes a butterfly.

I often will ask people, when you look at this picture, how is this picture similar or different to the spiritual transformation process that any believer goes through? And one of the similarities is that it's a process, a process of transformation. It takes time. And over time, the end result is not a bigger or better caterpillar. It's something completely different. There's a transformation. There's a new creation that takes place.

And what's different is that in the life of a Christian, when we put our trust in Jesus, we are transformed. We become a new creation. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, “therefore, if anyone's in Christ, he's a new creation. The old is gone. The new has come.”

So, we have been transformed, yet we don't stay that way. God continues to transform us. We're being transformed, continually being transformed into the likeness of Christ.

Whereas once a caterpillar turns into a butterfly, it just stays a butterfly. When we put our trust in Christ, we become a new creation. And then we're being transformed day by day with ever increasing glory into the likeness of Christ.

You can see a picture of that in 2 Peter 3, 18. It says, “but grow, continually be growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior. To him be glory, both now and forevermore.” Truth #1: when we trust Jesus we are transformed! Truth #2: we are also being transformed day-by-day into the likeness of Christ.

Experientially, we're being transformed. And as you turn to page four of your handout, you can see that God intends for us to grow towards Christ's likeness. We're not merely to wait for this transformation to take place. We don't wait until we become holy. We're commanded in 1 Peter 1:13-16, to pursue it. Those verses say, “therefore, prepare your minds for action. Be self-controlled. Set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when

Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do. For it is written, be holy because I'm holy."

That's God's desire. He desires us to be transformed into holiness. When we trust Christ, we are made holy in God's eyes. We take on the righteousness of Christ. But we are also being transformed, we're growing in holiness as well. And there are some practical things that we can do to pursue holiness.

We can continue to focus on knowing God's character in a more intimate way, through the Word and through our personal relationship with him. We can know and trust what the Bible says about our identity in Christ, who we are in Christ, all that Jesus has accomplished for us. We can know the promises of God.

Much of our spiritual growth is grounded on the truth of the Word of God. And this is not just head knowledge, but having it applied to our heart and then living it out in our lives. There are many spiritual disciplines of grace that can help us grow in holiness through the Word and prayer and worship.

As we serve, as we give generously, as we witness and share the love of Jesus with others. Even disciplines like silence and solitude, being alone with God, stepping away from the world to reflect on God's Word and to listen to him and how He's telling us we can be growing and being transformed.

Now, you'll notice on this page, there are two more pictures. There are pictures of a group of people running, and then there's an individual running. And this will bring us into the second main thought of this introduction. Transformation is important for us to understand, but the process of being transformed is just as important.

The second emphasis in this lesson is the importance of training ourselves for godliness. Look at 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, where the apostle Paul is writing and he's speaking about himself. He says, "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the game goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last. But we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore, I do not run like someone running aimlessly. I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave. So that after I have preached to others, I myself might not be disqualified for the prize."

Paul is referring to the rules of the Olympic Games and the Isthmian Games. There were rules for those who compete. And if you win the race, but you do not follow the rules to compete fairly and in a proper way, you would not receive the wreath or the crown that says you were the victor.

How you train, how you compete, was just as important as the end result. And that's the same in our spiritual life. How we live for the Lord is just as important as the end goal.

There's another passage on this page, 1 Timothy 4:7-8. It says, "have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives tales. Rather, train yourself to be godly, where physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come."

Being conformed to the likeness of Christ is the goal. The process of bringing about that transformation requires training, spiritual training, discipline.

Ephesians chapter 4:11-16, tells us that everyone in the body is being equipped for works of service. And there's a purpose, so that we all would reach unity in the faith and knowledge of the Son of God and become mature. And every member is part of this body, and we're all each doing the work that God's called us to. We're all training and spurring others on to grow in the Lord.

That's a picture of training in a group. There's real value in being in community, of reading and studying the Word of God together, of serving together. Yet there's a personal responsibility we have as well, to be growing in a personal way, and that's a picture of the individual runner.

Think of yourself as an athlete. If you are a football player, there are many things you can do to train yourself and discipline yourself to be the best player possible. You'd be thinking of your diet, getting enough rest. You're conscious of what you're putting into your body. You're focusing on practicing all the basic skills. You're looking at training with others who are better than you, and they'll develop your skills in a better way as well. You're looking at the long-term view. You may not see change take place from day to day, but by just trusting the process and knowing when you train well, transformation is taking place, even if you can't see it. And the same thing is happening in a spiritual manner.

On the top of page five, you can see that there are a number of pastors and authors who have talked about some of these disciplines. We call them spiritual disciplines. Spiritual disciplines of grace that help us to grow in our relationship with Christ and to participate in this transformation process.

Donald Whitney says that "spiritual disciplines are the God-given means we are to use in the spirit-filled pursuit of godliness."

Richard Foster says "God has given us the disciplines of the spiritual life as a means of receiving his grace. The disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so he can transform us."

John Ortberg says "spiritual disciplines are any activity that can help you gain power to live life as Jesus taught it and he modeled it."

So, this whole topic, this course, is focused on a number of spiritual disciplines that will help us grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior that will flow out of our understanding of the identity of who we are in Christ. And some of these disciplines are listed on the middle of page five: intake of the word of God, prayer and fasting, worship, thanksgiving and celebration, confession, silence and solitude, serving, generous giving,

witnessing, and then even journaling, taking notes and writing down things that God is teaching us in our quiet time and our time in the Word.

Look at the picture on page 5. There is a roadway. We'll call this roadway the path of grace. On either side of this roadway there are two danger zones and you can say these are swamps on either side of the roadway.

One side there's the swamp of legalism. It's trying to follow God's Word in such a way, even adding to God's word, thinking that when we obey, we're earning something from God, we're earning favor from God. And when we disobey, he loves us less. This is legalistic thinking.

On the other side of the road, the other swamp is the swamp of liberty, thinking, oh, I put my trust in Jesus. I have a ticket to heaven. I can live any way I want because God's grace is going to cover me. And to that, the apostle Paul said, no, that's not the way you should think, by no means. When we are captivated by the grace of God, we realize God has called us to be holy. He's called us to walk in a manner that's worthy of the calling that we received. And he's called us to obey as well. But it's all in this pathway of grace and that's the emphasis of this entire course.

God's grace will strengthen us. It will give us what we need to live a life that Jesus has called us to. In Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus said, "come to me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your soul. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

We are called to be follower of Jesus, to be yoked, to be connected to Jesus.

And that takes humily on our part to draw near to him, to not think we're carrying the load all by ourselves, but we're learning from Jesus. We're walking along with him. He also said, "if anyone wants to come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me."

And this is done by God's grace. There's a sense of humility, of surrender, and then saying, I'm going to keep my eyes on Jesus. I'm going to walk in step with him.

And then God gives us these disciplines, these spiritual disciplines of grace that enable us to follow Jesus, enable us to walk closely with him, enable us to be yoked with him. And I think there's a very important verse. It's in Titus chapter 2:11-14.

It says, "for the grace of God, the grace of God is not just a thing, it's a power. There's a power of God that's connected to his grace. The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and it's also then training us or teaching us to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ."

God's grace is teaching us to say no to sin, and it's teaching us to say yes to walking in holiness. That's a wonderful blessing, and we should never lose sight of the power of the grace of God. Grace says we've received things that we don't deserve, so whatever we do in our spiritual life, we're never earning something from God.

But the spiritual life does require effort on our part. There's a mystery. God says, work out your salvation in Philippians chapter 2:12-13. "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling because it's God who's working in you to will and to act."

We're not to work for our salvation, but to work it out, and it's God's grace that's strengthening us. When we make the choice to obey, the Holy Spirit of God is there giving us all we need to carry out what his Word commands, and all of this is by the grace of God.

Through this course, we'll focus on a helpful tool called the wheel, and you can see this on page six. This was developed by the Navigators Ministry. It's a simple little tool that has transformed my life over the past 20 years or more, and there's six elements, and you can see they're all described on page six.

In a wheel, you can see that the center of the wheel, the hub, is a life focused on Christ. Galatians 2:20 says, "I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. In the life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself up for me."

Also, a reminder in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "therefore if anyone's in Christ, he's a new creation. The old has come, the new has gone. The old has gone, the new has come."

We are called to abide in Christ. We're going to be centered on Christ. He's going to be the center of our life.

The rim of the wheel is the obedient life, the obedient spirit-filled life in Christ. The Holy Spirit, we keep our eyes focused on Christ, and then the Holy Spirit empowers us. He teaches us. He encourages us. He strengthens us. He convicts us of sin.

When we yield to him, he enables this transformation that's taking place day by day in our lives. There's a vertical relationship we have that we should be thinking about and a horizontal relationship. See, the vertical relationship focuses on our relationship with God. All of this comes from the first and second greatest commandments.

The greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, your soul, your mind, your strength. So, there's a relationship with God focused primarily on the Word of God, how we take in the Word of God, and prayer, how we communicate with God. That strengthens our vertical relationship.

Then the horizontal relationship is focused on love your neighbor as yourself. True love for God will be demonstrated in how we love others. The Word of God in John in 1 John says, "if you say you love God, but you hate your brother, do you really love God?"

So, it's important how we live out our faith – this is demonstrated in our love for others.

We call it fellowship within the body of Christ, how we're serving, how we're caring for people, how we're encouraging them, how we're using the gifts God has given us to build up the body.

We're also called to show love to people who don't know Jesus yet. We call this witnessing through mercy and compassion. God will open doors to share the love of Jesus with people who don't know Him yet. And this wheel will be the focus of this course. Each lesson will focus on a different aspect of this navigator's wheel.

Turn with me to page seven. In summary, there's a box at the top of the page that you could write in some of your thoughts of the key points from this lesson. I put a couple there in your handout.

Number one, Christlikeness is the goal.

Two, transformation happens at a point in time when we trust Christ, we are transformed, and it's something that happens over time. We're being transformed and conformed to the likeness of Christ.

Third point, effort. Spiritual transformation requires effort on our part, but effort is not in conflict with grace. Earning is in conflict with grace, but effort fed by the grace of God is what's required for true spiritual transformation to take place.

Point four, spiritual disciplines of grace help us to pursue holiness. There's not a checklist of things that we're supposed to do. These are gifts from God to be in the Word, to be praying, to be serving, to be giving, to be confessing our sin, having thankful hearts. They're all really tools that God's given us to grow in our relationship with Christ.

The next point, the wheel is a very helpful tool to assess our spiritual development.

Maybe the most important is for us to know the character of God and to know what does the Bible say about who God is, what does the Bible say about what Jesus has accomplished, and what does the Bible say about who we are in Christ, what our identity is when we put our trust in Jesus. What we'll try to do in each lesson is emphasize a verse or two to begin to meditate on and to memorize.

In this lesson, you can see on page seven, two verses that reinforce the idea of transformation and then reinforce the thought of spiritual training.

Topic 1: Transformation, 2 Corinthians 3:18, "and we who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory which comes from the Lord who is the Spirit." That's transformation. It's happening through the Spirit of God and it's happening day by day, whether we feel it or not.

I encourage you to write that verse out in the box there, begin to meditate on it, to memorize it, and it'll be something that'll come back to help you as you grow in your relationship with Jesus.

Topic 2: Spiritual training, 1 Timothy 4:7-8. "Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales. Rather, train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value. Training for godliness is value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come."

The Greek word for training is *gymnasia*. It's where we get the word *gymnasium*. And throughout the scriptures, as we grow in our relationship to Christ, it's to work at it with all of our heart, to train our bodies, to train ourselves for godliness with a reminder that it's all by the grace of God and through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Then you'll see on the final page, on page 8, at the end of every lesson, there is a summary chart. Throughout this course, we will build a one page summary, of all the different lessons, the key points from every lesson. So here, we can see there's a picture of the butterfly for transformation. There's a picture of the runner for spiritual training.

You have in the center of the picture, the navigator's wheel, which is a reminder of these six different elements that can help us to grow in our relationship with Christ. And then off to the side, there are some helpful summary points.

Hopefully, they'll be helpful for you to stay focused on the key points we're making from this introduction.

Philippians 3:12-14, just remember that Paul, he focused on one thing. He was forgetting what was behind. He was pressing on to what was ahead. He was looking to be transformed in the likeness of Christ.

Titus 2:11-4, it's God's grace that is teaching us to say no to sin and yes to godliness. So, God's grace is at work in us.

Philippians 2:12-13, is telling us we're to work out our salvation. We'll put effort into it with fear and trembling, and it's God, by the power of the Holy Spirit, who's working in us. What are some of the things that come out of these verses?

Transformation and training, require faith. Believing that God started a work, he's going to be faithful to complete it.

- Requires effort on our part.
- Requires God's grace.
- Requires the power of the Holy Spirit.
- Requires humility on our part. There's no place for pride in this area of spiritual training.
- Requires time. Time that we put into it, and time, a process of time, to allow God to grow us from day to day, month to month, and year to year.
- Requires time to be alone with God.
- Requires community with others.
- Requires perseverance. When things are hard, it's to trust in God and to keep pressing forward.

- Requires the right perspective, and we're not going to see change all at once, but to have the end goal, like, this is the goal is Christlikeness, and God's going to accomplish that, and we have to keep that perspective.
- Requires good knowledge of identity, our identity in Christ, understanding God's identity, who he is as well.
- And it requires an understanding that this journey is not going to be finished in this life. However, whatever progress we make in our walk with Jesus, when we die and we're in his presence, there'll be a transformation that will take place, where he'll bring us to complete holiness, to perfection in eternity.

The life we're living will be a powerful witness to the world around us. So, this is meant to be just the introduction to personal spiritual growth, and in lesson two, we'll begin to take a look at the center of the wheel, the hub. It's a life centered on Christ.

So, take some time to review the handout, the scriptures, and we'll continue on with lesson two.