

Week 1

Introduction

...then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.

Genesis 2:7

There is a good chance you have never heard of spiritual formation, much less thought about it. The truth is, you wouldn't be alone, as most churchgoers have not. But Christ calls us to be his disciples, and discipleship is a process and a relationship unique to each of us. Events and previous relationships greatly influence how we live as disciples. They influence how we hear God and respond to him as well as interact with others. In this first session, Joshua provides an overview of spiritual formation, and he discusses some of the issues individuals encounter along their spiritual journey.





DISCOVER

1. In general, what do you think about when you hear the word “spirituality”?

2. You heard Joshua define biblical spiritual formation as:

“A process that begins with the understanding that each person is a sinner separated from God. It accounts for one’s unique design, life experiences, and Christ encounters that lead one into a personal saving relationship with Jesus Christ. Biblical spiritual formation recognizes that the Holy Spirit uses one’s unique design and experiences to transform them into the image of Jesus Christ. Biblical spiritual formation describes the complete process that encompasses the recognition of one’s sin, repentance of that sin, and the redemption, regeneration, and sanctification of the saint.”

When you consider this definition, what stands out to you most?
Based on what you know so far, can you relate to it in any way?

3. Besides the third truth that we examined in its expanded form in the previous question, Joshua defines two other truths:
 1. We are all spiritual beings
(Genesis 1:26-27; John 4:24; 1 Corinthians 2:14-16; 6:17)
 2. Spiritual formation begins at conception
(Psalm 51:5; 139:13-16; Jeremiah 1:5)

Consider those two truths and decide whether you agree or disagree. Depending on whether you agree or not with each, how does your position impact your spiritual growth?

4. Joshua shares five major issues surrounding spiritual formation that one may encounter throughout their lives:
 1. The struggle to find meaning and wholeness
 2. The crisis of values and identity at midlife
 3. Questions about the spiritual journey
 4. The quest for self-actualization
 5. The healing of early religious experiences

Which one resonates with you the most? Why? How has that issue affected your relationship with God? With others?

READ

- Genesis 25:19-34
- Genesis 27:1-28:9

 CONSIDER

After nearly twenty years of being barren, Rebekah finally delivers twin boys, Esau and Jacob. However, as we see, it was not necessarily a gentle pregnancy. The struggle between Esau and Jacob begins in the womb. When Rebekah inquires of God concerning the difficult wrestle she's feeling within her, God speaks an oracle to Rebekah, informing her that there are two nations within her and that they will be divided. Furthermore, God tells her that one will be stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger.

While the context does not tell us which of the two is ultimately the stronger, we do read that Jacob was the second to be born. Therefore, we know that Esau will eventually serve Jacob. Let's consider a few things. First, as far as we know, Rebekah is the only one who heard this oracle, and we don't know if she shared it with anyone. There is a good possibility that she's the only one who knows this prophecy.

Second, as we read this passage, we see a clear show of favoritism that Rebekah gives to Jacob. Was this favoritism due to the oracle? Did Rebekah *choose* to favor Jacob because she knew the outcome? Or did God know that Rebekah would favor Jacob over Esau, setting off a natural chain of events leading to Jacob's rise and dominion over his brother?

We cannot be sure of anything except that Rebekah clearly loved Jacob more than Esau. We gain a small glimpse into how this affected the dynamic between the two brothers, and we can only speculate the depth of its actual impact throughout the lives of each.

The writer of Genesis tells us very little about the childhood of the two boys apart from their birth episode. Notice that Esau is named by his appearance (i.e., "red," "hairy"), while Jacob is named by his actions (i.e., "grasping the heel"). Today, parents often choose names with significant meanings for their kids. In many cases, these names influence the character and demeanor of the child. We must consider how the boys' names influenced each of them as they matured. Additionally, Jacob is described, in what almost all translations present, as "quiet" (25:27). However, the Hebrew

word typically means “innocent, upright.” So, even here, we capture a small peek into Jacob’s somewhat moral character before the birthright sequence.

When Esau (and Jacob) is forty years old (26:34), Isaac calls Esau to his tent to receive a blessing. However, Esau must first go, kill, and prepare Isaac’s favorite meal. Rebekah overhears and calls Jacob to devise a plan for stealing Isaac’s blessing. (Jacob has already stolen Esau’s birthright.) From what we read in chapter 27, verses 11-12, Jacob shows some apparent hesitation. Was this because he was still trying to maintain his innocence and uprightness, or was he afraid of getting caught? We don’t know, but Rebekah assumes responsibility and the resulting curse should they be discovered. The writer of Genesis then shows Rebekah’s explicit leadership in the deceitful plot. They tell us three times that Rebekah put on, in, or into the ingredients to this fraudulent plan (best garments of Esau – v. 15, skins of young goats – v. 16, delicious food and bread – v. 17). In a way, though he’s complicit, Jacob retains some semblance of righteousness.

The result of all this is that Esau’s hatred toward and desire to kill Jacob causes Jacob to flee to Laban, Rebekah’s brother. However, Jacob does not leave in the dark of the night. Instead, Isaac sends him in peace and with the blessing intact (28:3-4).

REFLECT

1. How much do you think the meaning of Jacob’s name affected his self-perception?

2. Consider the five spiritual “issues” discussed in this week’s session. Which one(s) do you think Jacob struggled with the most? How do you think they impacted Jacob’s life?

3. Considering Rebekah’s role in the deception, how do you think this affected Jacob’s other relationships?

4. Regarding Esau, what effects does his hatred toward Jacob have on Jacob’s life up to this point?



ADDITIONAL NOTES
