

*becoming*



*v Group Study*



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Becoming: vGroup Study

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# THE VEHICLE OF BECOMING

Before we dive into this study, let's think about the following questions, and discuss each one.

- What is education? How would you define it? (there is no wrong answer here)
- How do we assess that someone has been educated? How do we know that someone has learned a lot?
- Now answer this: How many times were the words “knowing,” “doing” and “skills” (or other similar words) used in the discussion?

According to theologian James K. A. Smith, behind our views of education lie hidden assumptions about the nature of human beings.<sup>1</sup> For many of us, our identity centers around what we know and what we do. In like fashion, we sometimes divide people into two types: thinkers and doers.

Historically, Christians have thought about education in very different terms because Christians have had a radically different vision of humanity. According to the Bible, humans are not defined by what we think or what we do—we are defined by who we are becoming. According to the Apostle Paul, we are all being made in the image of Christ (Romans 8:29). Likewise, in Colossians 3:10, Paul tells us that we are being “renewed in knowledge according to the image of our creator,” Jesus Christ. This knowledge isn't about what we know—it's about who we know, and whose image we are growing into.

- How might a Christian vision of humanity change the way we see personal growth and development?
- If we think of education as spiritual formation, how might we know we are learning?

- In your own words explain what you think is the difference between “education” and “spiritual discipline.”

Spiritual formation requires spiritual discipline. After using Christ’s incarnation and crucifixion as a model of Christian formation, the Apostle Paul reminded the Philippian church that God’s Spirit helped them to grow into Christ’s likeness.

*<sup>12</sup>Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,*

Philippians 2:12

This verse is often misunderstood to mean that Paul wanted the Philippians to prove to themselves their own eternal security. But as the Reformers, like John Calvin and Martin Luther, rightly understood, salvation is by Christ alone, faith alone, and grace alone. We don’t do anything to earn salvation, nor do we work hard to keep it. What Paul is saying here is that salvation brings with it certain responsibilities. In context, the Philippian church had grown spiritually sick and Paul wanted them to be restored to healthy Christian living.<sup>2</sup>

- The church of Philippi was characterized by selfish-ambition (Philippians 2:3). In context, to whose example did Paul point to encourage them to be humble?
- Explain how Christ’s incarnation and crucifixion model humility.

According to Richard Foster, the discipline of service is “the most conducive to the growth of humility.” He explains that when we go out of our way to serve others, especially when our service is hidden from others, a deep change occurs in us; “nothing disciplines the inordinate desires of the flesh like service, and nothing transforms the desires of the flesh like serving in hiddenness.”<sup>3</sup>

*<sup>13</sup>for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*

Philippians 2:13

The habits are the tools that the Spirit uses to fashion us into Christ’s image. Think about it this way: The Father has a model for how he wants us to be shaped; Jesus is that model, and the Spirit is the chisel that chips away at us as we are “brought up to spec.” This process is called “sanctification” in 1 Corinthians 6:11.

- What part of sanctification is God’s role, and what part is ours?

Spiritual habits take time and practice. One habit that takes time and practice is the study of God's word. We often neglect the reading of God's word because it is hard, or we don't understand it. Discipline, however, is long obedience in the same direction. The plain reading of Scripture is easy, but the consistent study of God's word requires diligence and patience.

- How often do you prioritize the reading of Scripture?

According to Scripture, humans are spiraling out of control and bound for destruction and death. Humans are no longer who we are meant to be because of what was lost when Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden. When Jesus put on human nature, he restored to us what we lost. Because of Jesus' perfect obedience and death on the cross, Jesus tipped the scales of death and destruction, moving us back into the direction of what God always wanted for his creation. Sanctification is "christ-directedness," and it is the Spirit who accomplishes this in us. Without the Spirit we could never become like Christ, no matter how hard we tried.

- Reflect for a moment on the idea that you are being made in Christ's image. What are ways in which we can let the Spirit "chisel" us into this image?

Another spiritual discipline is silence. According to Ecclesiastes 3:7, there is a time to keep silent and a time to speak. The verse speaks to silence not for silence sake, but for moderation sake. As Thomas á Kempis wrote, "It is easier to be silent altogether than to speak with moderation."<sup>4</sup> According to James 3:6, the tongue is a fire, and we often use it destructively. The discipline of silence aims at curbing our desire to speak when we shouldn't.

- Can you name a time when your tongue got you in trouble?

We often think of sin as individual acts of disobedience. In Romans 7:5, however, Paul speaks of sin as something that infects our bodily passions—in other words, our sins are usually ingrained habits. Richard Foster wrote, "there is no slavery that can compare to the slavery of ingrained habits of sin."<sup>5</sup> We can't overcome the habits of sin through our own effort; that is why we need the Holy Spirit. As we pursue the Spiritual Disciplines, we join with the Spirit as we conform closer and closer to the image of Jesus Christ.

- In the past, how have you seen spiritual habits transform you?

- Spend some time listing some of the spiritual habits (if you need more: meditation, prayer, fasting, solitude, confession, worship, prayer, rest, etc).
- What is one spiritual habit you need to incorporate into your life? What is the first step you need to do to incorporate this spiritual habit?

Make a commitment to practice one spiritual habit this week. At this moment, find someone (in your group, or text someone) who can hold you accountable.

## REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup>James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 27.

<sup>2</sup>Gerald Hawthorne, *Word Biblical Commentary: Philippians* (Waco: Word Books, 1983), 98; Richard Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1991), 110.

<sup>3</sup>Richard Foster, *Celebration of the Disciplines: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1998), 130.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 4.