

The Christian life is first of all a life. It is not merely something to be known and studied. It is to be lived.” Thomas Merton

Ours is too often a professed but unpracticed faith. So to begin our journey of formation in the Christian life we must break away from some long held beliefs that it merely believing in and adhering to certain beliefs or doctrine about Jesus is the same as knowing him. It is not. As important as right doctrine is, Jesus did not come to give us a new belief system. *He came to give us himself.* So we can't make ourselves grow in Christlikeness by acquiring more information about Jesus or by willpower of trying harder to conform to a standard of behavior. Our temptation- always- is to try to control spiritual reality or harness divine favor. We like “tools” that promote and bring about the kind of change the Gospel promises.

The danger in all this is that we try to harness, manipulate or manage spiritual reality through mechanical means. This is the danger of such a “tool” as Spiritual Formation Pathway. Spiritual formation by its very nature, however, is not something we control; it *involves a mysterious partnership with God* in that it is a *God-initiated, God-guided* process which we cannot control or bring to fruition by our own wisdom or our own striving.

All that to say...*The danger is our predisposition to want to follow a “map or tool”...instead of Jesus himself.*

Further, “maps,” such as this and the many other “discipleship plans” that we have used in our “pursuit” of God, can become ways of avoiding being relational. But God, by his very nature, is relational, and he will have none of it. In reality, God pursues us in a living, interactive, relational way. Real transformation into Christlikeness happens in this kind of deeply-help friendship with Jesus. We have to face that there are no shortcuts in relationships. They only flourish over the long haul, with much messiness, and without formulas. They can never be minimized, overly-simplified or computerized.

We have to ask ourselves the question: *Do we really believe we have a living Christ, or just a map of Christ?*

The good news is...Once we recognize that God is more interested in relationship with us than we are with him, what we **can** do...and what **this** Pathway is for...is train our hearts to be open, receptive and attentive to God's initiative in our lives. By placing ourselves in environments that create space for God to do what only he can do, we cooperate with God's Spirit in bringing about real change.

Spiritual transformation is a rich and deeply personal...lived experience. Spiritual transformation begins with understanding that our transformation is God working and living in us and among us for his purposes. At times it may seem slow and inefficient to submit to the gradual process of real transformation. It may challenge and frustrate us to have to wait on God for the work that only he can do in us. By making space for God in our lives, however, through real-life practices, relationships and experiences we grow in love -- incarnating the presence of Christ in our world.