



Research article

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**BIBLICAL TEACHING ON JESUS' SPIRITUAL FORMATION AND ITS IMPLICATION TO BELIEVERS LIVES**

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**ABSTRACT**



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Spiritual growth requires believers to focus on God through various activities and discipline. Jesus Christ was the ideal God and human who showed us how to practice spiritual habits. His family had an impact on his development of beliefs and values. It allowed Him to approach God with a pure heart and clear thoughts. It's important to become more like Jesus by working on our spiritual growth. This article looks at how Jesus Christ became spiritual, how we can do the same, what Jesus did to become spiritual, and what this means for believers today.

**Keywords:** *Spiritual Growth, Formation, Believers, Jesus Christ.*



## **Introduction**

Spiritual formation is the process of directing one's attention to God through practices and discipline for inner growth. It leads to God's presence and renews our hearts through the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ lived 2000 years ago and was the perfect God-man. He was fully human and grew in wisdom and favor with God. Jesus had a strong bond with God, taught by His parents from childhood. He was a perfect man who modeled spiritual discipline and practices for intellectual and spiritual growth. Believers must develop good habits for spiritual discipline by rejecting the acts of the flesh and cooperating with the Spirit to be like Jesus Christ. This paper discusses Jesus' spiritual formation, including how He was influenced by His parents and the principles He followed with reliance on God. It explains Jesus' spiritual discipline and its relevance to local churches.

### **I. The Background of the Spiritual Formation of Jesus Christ**

Jesus Christ was fully human and He did not lack anything. He had a complete human body and developed mentally, physically, spiritually, and socially. Robertson says, "He grew in self-awareness and social skills."<sup>1</sup> Again Kenneth writes that, Jesus' mind was intellectually, physically, spiritually, and socially well-developed<sup>2</sup>. One can write that Scripture teaches about Jesus Spiritually. He developed in Spiritual life, and it lucidly identifies his spiritual relationship with the His heavenly Father. As a human being, Jesus was spiritually grown, for He loved God and others that proved his spiritual growth beyond any doubt.

#### ***His family***

Jesus Christ was the Son of Mary and Joseph. Here, people should not think that He was born to Joseph, instead Jesus was born to Mary through the Holy Spirit. Jesus' Spiritual formation was influenced and controlled by his family because Joseph was Jesus' foster father. He was a righteous man (Luke 1:19) and committed to the word of God, and that is why he was chosen to be the human father of Jesus.

Joseph B. Modica says that "Mary was a powerful spiritual influence. She knew the Scripture and knew the hope for Israel."<sup>3</sup> She had the favor and grace of God upon her. As a spiritual woman, she took responsibility for her life for the Messiah, because she had confidence in Messiah (John 2:28). Thus, Jesus Christ had a close relationship with His family.

One can find that Mary and Joseph were righteous and godly people. They were influenced by the spiritual life of their Son Jesus Christ. William Barclay writes, "Mary and

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<sup>1</sup> A.T. Robertson, *Word pictures in the New Testament*, 6 vols (Nashville: Broadman, 1930), p. 36.

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth L. Faught, "The Spiritual Formation of Jesus Christ", *The Theological Educator* 56 :( Fall 1997) 10, in *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials* (database online), Ebsco; accessed June 5, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph B. Modica, "Jesus' Guide to Spiritual Formation", *Christianity Today* (April 2005): 105, in *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials* (database online), Ebsco; accessed June 5, 2017.



Joseph took their responsibility seriously and provided religious training for their children.<sup>4</sup> The writer can see from Scripture that Mary and Joseph went to Jerusalem to observe the feast of the Passover. Jesus' parents taught him the culture and traditions of Israel from his childhood. John A Martin says that when Jesus entered the temple, He interacted with teachers of the laws, listening and asking intelligent questions.<sup>5</sup>

The Spiritual formations of Jesus have been learned from His parent. His parents showed their true discipleship. Mary was faithfully and painfully present at the execution and heard words of tenderness and concern from her son.<sup>6</sup> One can say that the Spiritual formation of Jesus was influenced by His parents. Jesus was a human being and on a mission on the earth. He was willing to do the will of God. All human knowledge came from his parents.

### ***His Religious Background***

Jews were noted for their Torah devotion. They were teaching the law at the temple. Since Jesus was a Jewish boy, He learned the law from his parents and temple. He was grounded in Torah teaching. This was the responsibility of all Jewish parents. Jesus Christ attended the Synagogue to worship God. There was a confession of sin, prayer, and scripture reading vindication in their service for worship. Every Jewish person had to recite this. "Hear O Israel: The Lord our God the Lord is one" (Dt. 6:4 NIV). Joseph writes that Jesus also recited these verses twice a day as was the Jewish custom.<sup>7</sup>

Jesus Christ was faithful to God. He was interested in the Old Testament and the work of God. He revealed His zeal for God. If somebody tries to destroy the property of God, He tries to stand for God. One can see from the Scripture that: "make not my father's house a house of Merchandise" (John 2:16). Here, we notice that the "temple" refers to His "Father's House." Temple is a place of worship. He knew the instruction of God from His childhood. His parents instructed Him in all the ways of worship. Jesus did not compromise the Spiritual condition of the world with Him. His family's spiritual influence was active in the life of Jesus. This is paramount in the spiritual formation of Jesus' life.

### ***His Faith***

The Spiritual formation of Jesus Christ is based on his faith. His Spiritual growth was nurtured by his faith. He participated in religious duties and supported the religious rules and regulations in their community. He teaches us that God cannot be confined and limited to any particular place and time. In other words, the worship of God transcends all time and nations

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<sup>4</sup> William Barclay, *The Mind of Jesus* (New York: Hasper and Row, 1976).p.11.

<sup>5</sup> John A. Martin, "Luke" In the Bible Knowledge Commentary: *An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty: New Testament Edition*. Edited by F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck. Wheaton: victor Books, 1983), p.210.

<sup>6</sup> Kenneth L. Faight, "The Spiritual Formation of Jesus Christ",p.11

<sup>7</sup> Joseph B. Modica, "Jesus' Guide to Spiritual Formation",p. 106.



as it emanates from the Spirit. Kenneth mentions that Jesus has a deep respect for the temple. He was careful not to limit the presence of God to a particular location (John 4:21-24).<sup>8</sup>

Jesus Christ constantly read, recited, interpreted, proclaimed, and obeyed the Torah. He insisted that genuine spirituality should be in touch with the Law, Prophets, and writings.<sup>9</sup> One can find from Scripture that He emphasized Scripture. This Scripture applied to His life. He had a close relationship with the Law of God and obeyed it.

Jesus was against adultery because it came from the heart. This attitude should be removed from it even if it included divorce and oath in the name of God because all these practices would never help Spiritual formation. Louise writes that the Lord strongly taught that marriage is viewed by God as an indissoluble unit and that marriage should not be terminated by divorce and oaths that are used to deemphasize the wickedness of man's heart."<sup>10</sup>

One can write that the faith of Jesus makes perfect spiritual formation. He was challenged about legalism because it does not bring goodness to spirituality rather, it brings division and disunity into the society. Jesus encouraged us to give our whole heart to God and condemned the mindlessness of God.

Jesus learned about spirituality from His family. From a young age, they were taught about religion and spirituality. Jesus' parents wanted to make sure he grew up to have a strong spiritual foundation, so they took responsibility for his upbringing. He gained spiritual beliefs from the Torah and God's teachings. He believed strongly in God's teachings and His Omnipresence. He was not ritualistic and dogmatic about following rules but made people realize that they had to practice religion in their daily lives.

## **II. The Principles of the Spiritual Formation of Jesus Christ**

Spiritual formation is the process of God in the heart as Jesus Christ Himself puts this Spiritual Formation at the center of denial. He presented Himself to God for His eternal Kingdom. The Spiritual Formation is life-long to God's grace as long as He was living on the earth. Since He was a perfect human being, He applied some principles of Spiritual Formation on the earth. Jesus loves the Father and obeys Him. This is His Spiritual life and Growth towards the Father.

### ***An attitude toward the inner heart***

The principle of the Spiritual Formation of Jesus Christ is an attitude towards God in the heart of Man. These principles deal with the self and inner being of man. It demonstrates the

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<sup>8</sup> Kenneth L. Faught, "The Spiritual Formation of Jesus Christ", p.13.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp.13-14.

<sup>10</sup> Louis A. Barbieri Jr., "Matthew." In *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty: New Testament Edition*. Edited by F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck. Wheaton: victor Books, 1983), Pp.30-31.



way to establish a holy and spiritual relationship with God. One must examine his or her own inner being. It has to sanctify it. Lovis writes that the Pharisees were concerned primarily with external qualities, but the qualities Jesus mentioned are internal (Matt. 5:1-12).<sup>11</sup>

One can find that this world is looking outward but Lord is looking inward because God is one who sees into our hearts. The Bible says, "All our righteous acts are like filthy rags" (Is. 64:6). Keneeth observed, "An attitude of self, others, life, and God are properly cultivated and protect the heart from violation of the Torah."<sup>12</sup> This mind should be clear and have a fellowship with God. Again Wiersbe writes, "The world wants to control your mind but God wants to transform your mind."<sup>13</sup>

One may say that God transforms our thoughts and hearts because the mind controls the entire body. God uses His word to shape our spirituality. As a result, one must surrender his heart to God in humility (Luke 18:9-14), and a pure human heart must hunger and thirst for purity (Matthew 5:3-6). These attitudes are essential for spiritual formation.

### ***An attitude toward the world***

The Spiritual Formation of Jesus Christ is an attitude toward the world. The attitude of believers towards the world is very important because the world is observing us whereas, Jesus commanded us to bear witness to others. Jesus says that we are the salt and light of the world (Matt.5:13-14). This characteristic feature of salt which produces taste is its unique quality. Kenneth explains that Spirituality and character are inseparably linked. Spirituality is the essence of Christian character.<sup>14</sup> The writer can say that the attitudes of believers should be unique because they are different from this world. Again Louis writes that if salt fails to be salty, it loses its purpose for existence.<sup>15</sup> So, all believers must be make a difference in the world. They should be the "salt" in Spiritual Formation.

They are also the light in the world. Thomas Hale states that, "We are lights to show men and women the way to God."<sup>16</sup> Here, we can say that the main character of light is to shine. The main character of a Believer is to show the way to other believers and unbelievers. Hence, it is important for a believer to live as witnesses in this world as they belong to God. They should share the truth to others without losing their good character, which in turn, emphasizes the need for all disciples to be faithful to God.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.,p.29.

<sup>12</sup> Kenneth L. Faught, "The Spiritual Formation of Jesus Christ", p.14.

<sup>13</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Right: A New Testament Study- Romans* (Secunderabad: Om Books, 2004), 138.

<sup>14</sup> Kenneth L. Faught, "The Spiritual Formation of Jesus Christ", p.14.

<sup>15</sup> Louis A. Barbieri Jr., "Matthew." In *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty: New Testament Edition*. Edited by F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck. Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983), p.29.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Hale, *The Applied NT Commentary* (Secunderabad: Om Books, 2004), P. 166.

***An attitude toward inner righteousness***

The Spiritual Formation of Jesus Christ is an attitude toward inner righteousness. Inner righteousness is not outward obedience. Jesus teaches that sins come from outside and inside. Moreover, James says that man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires (James 1:20). One can say that anger is foolishness because it never solves problems rather it creates more problems. This anger destroys the inner righteousness of believers, which poses a spiritual threat to their spiritual growth.

Adultery is not acceptable for Spiritual Formation. This adultery begins from the heart. Therefore, we need to change our hearts. By changing the heart, we can prevent ourselves from falling into such a sin and this leads to the formation of our spiritual life. Believers should not retaliate against others. Louis says that a Righteous man would be characterized by humility and selflessness.<sup>17</sup> In addition, Roger writes that Jesus bled not to retaliate and he made no threats. Humanly speaking, the provocation to retaliation during Christ's trial and crucifixion was extreme, yet He suffered in silence, committing Himself to God.<sup>18</sup> One can say retaliation cannot build up inner righteousness rather, one has to love his or her enemies (Lev. 19:17-18). This love shows that they are spiritually mature.

***An attitude towards depending on God***

The principles of the spiritual formation of Jesus Christ depend on God. This righteousness act has to do with God and not with man. This righteousness is focused on the relationship with God and our personal life. It should not be used for personal gain. On one hand, man is trying to please man, but the Bible says that pleasing man does not last long (1 Pet. 1:24). Therefore, one has to praise and please God alone.

Spiritual formation is necessary for practical work. Kenneth writes that "Jesus specifically addressed the three primary religious duties of His day: almsgiving, prayer, and fasting."<sup>19</sup> All these three teach us the dependence on God. Klaus Issler writes that "our acts of devotion to God should be done in sacred, primarily, direct to God."<sup>20</sup>

One can find out that almsgiving helps us to express ourselves outwardly. It makes us have the right relationship with God and shows caring for others' needs. This is primarily a command of God to us that believers should love one another. Prayer is necessary for the connection between God and man. When somebody prays to God, they must depend and focus on God. In addition, fasting brings discipline, value, and priorities. It is linked with the

<sup>17</sup> Louis A. Barbieri Jr., "Matthew."p. 31

<sup>18</sup> Roger M. Raymer, "1 Peter" In the Bible Knowledge Commentary: *An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty: New Testament Edition*. Edited by F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck. Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983), p. 848

<sup>19</sup> Kenneth L. Faught, "The Spiritual Formation of Jesus Christ", p.15.

<sup>20</sup> Klaus Issler, "Six Themes to Guide Spiritual Formation Ministry Based on Jesus' Sermon on the Mount", *Christian Educational Journal Series 3, Vol. 7, No. 2 (2010): 372* in *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials* [database online], Ebsco; accessed September 1, 2017.



discipline of prayer for the healthy resolution of our inner struggle.<sup>21</sup> One can add all these religious practices to encourage and express our faith. Moreover, these are helpful in spiritual formation and connection with God, so one must have full confidence in God.

Believers' priority is to seek God because the Bible exhorts us to first seek His Kingdom and His righteousness and all things will be given to us as well (Matt. 6:33), so that we can walk with God and depend on Him more for our necessities since one's own attitudes towards wealth is not acceptable to God.

The principles of the Spiritual Formation of Jesus Christ have to start from the heart. This process begins internally not externally because God looks at our innermost being. Hence, the mind should focus on God. Our attitude and character are inseparable and show the right way to others. These attitudes must come from inner righteousness and we need to control anger and the desire to commit fornication. For this to happen we have to transform our hearts to be in line with the word of God and learn to depend on Him without any doubt. The Believers' acts should be under the will of God and prioritize the Kingdom of God in our lives.

### **III. The Practices of the Spiritual Discipline of Jesus Christ**

As a human being, Jesus Christ engaged with spiritual discipline. He not only taught how to mature spiritually but also practised it for Himself when he was on this earth as a normal human being. He is the epitome of spiritual discipline. Such a discipline has to be an integral part of a believer's daily life so as to experience the presence of God. Kenneth explains that this discipline may be described as exercises or practices that are instrumental in cultivating a keener sense of the presence of God and a deeper devotion to the will of God as revealed in his word, both written and living.<sup>22</sup> One can add that Spiritual discipline is instrumental in achieving eternal truth, but this cannot have authority over spiritual formation. The goal of eternal Spiritual discipline is intimacy with God.

#### ***The Spiritual Discipline of Jesus' Prayer***

Prayer was the key element in the spiritual formation of Jesus Christ. He had the habit of praying. He is an example for the Believers. Prayer is conversing with God because men need to share their needs and know that He is there listening to their petitions. His prayer life was in private. The Bible tells us that Jesus always prayed privately with his disciples (LK 9:18), but at the same time, He also prayed in public (John 11:41). For instance, at the time of His Baptism, He prayed in public to God and the Heavens opened above Him (Luke 3: 21). John A. Martin writes that Jesus prays before many occasion in his life.<sup>23</sup> He also often withdrew to a lonely place and prayed (5:16). Thus, we see that Jesus understood the need to separate Himself from the crowd and pray in secret to His Father in heaven. This is the solitude of

<sup>21</sup> Kenneth L. Faught, "The Spiritual Formation of Jesus Christ", p.15.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p.15.

<sup>23</sup> John A. Martin, "Luke", p.212.



prayer that keeps us away from the noises of the world. In other words, a place where we can speak and listen to God's voice. John D. Granmick observes that "Jesus got up the next morning very early before daybreak and went out to a solitary place where he spends time in praying."<sup>24</sup>

When Jesus chooses His twelve disciples, He spends the night on the hillside praying to God so that God will give him an appropriate person for his Kingdom. (Luke 6:12-16). In another incident related to Jesus' transfiguration before three disciples, he took James, John, and Peter up into a mountain to pray together (Matt 17:2). One can find that Jesus changed his form before the inner circles of His human nature.

In another circumstance, Jesus prays fervently for the trial to pass, but He submitted Himself to his Father because He was alone, praying to God. He entered into the presence of His Father.<sup>25</sup> Here, we notice the intimate relationship that He had with God the Father. However, in spite of this closeness, He had to undergo the suffering of the Cross. Jesus overcame the spiritual temptation with the power of private prayer. Kenneth observed that Jesus' prayer life reflected both Himself and his followers (John 17:6-20).<sup>26</sup> Again David writes that the prayer life of Jesus is a means of fellowship with the Father's guidance for personal decisions and preparation to face the challenges of life.<sup>27</sup>

The Scripture exemplifies Jesus' nature to pray even for his enemies before He finally committed His Spirit into the hands of his heavenly Father (Luke 23:46). He knows that prayer makes a difference in one's life and that was shown in His life, from His birth to His death on the Cross. All this was fulfilled according to the Will of God.

### ***The Spiritual Discipline of Jesus' Fasting***

The practice of the spiritual discipline of Jesus is fasting. He practiced this discipline when He was tempted by Satan (Mk. 1:12-13). The purpose of fasting is a discipline of self-control. It shows that it depends on God and draws near Him for strength. One can observe that fasting is seeking guidance and help from God.

Jesus Christ fasted for forty days and forty nights and then he was hungry (Mt. 4:2). The Bible says that for forty days he endured temptation from the devil. He ate nothing during those days (Mt.4:2). One can understand that during those forty days, He was lonely and totally abstained from food. However, this fasting was not a part of any religious tradition, because Jesus Christ never engaged in such practices. As a part of His human form, He fasted for forty days and forty nights before entering the ministry. This was to show his dependence

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<sup>24</sup> John D. Granmick, "Mark" In the Bible Knowledge Commentary: *An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty: New Testament Edition*. Edited by F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck. Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983), Pp. 110-111.

<sup>25</sup> John A. Martin, "Luke", p.260

<sup>26</sup> Kenneth L. Faught, "The Spiritual Formation of Jesus Christ", p.16.

<sup>27</sup> David L. Mckenna, *The Jesus Model* ( Waco: Word Books 1977), page 80



on God and the need to prepare and submit Himself to the will of God so that He would be able to overcome all worldly temptations through the absolute power of God.

Jesus instructs fasting to his disciples (Mt. 6:16-18) because this fasting gives time for prayer and teaches self-discipline. Chip Bell writes that Jesus instructed His disciples that people completely missed the point of fasting and they only wanted to be recognized as spiritual and religious people.<sup>28</sup> But, this cannot be counted as sincere worship of God.

Louis writes on the instruction of Jesus that fasting emphasized the denial of the flesh and the Lord emphasized that such an action should be done in secret before God.<sup>29</sup> That means, Fasting is a form of worship that is private and exists between God and the believers only. This should be the character of believers' fasting as this prioritizes the presence of God.

### ***The Spiritual Discipline of Jesus' Reading and Studying the Scripture***

Jesus Christ was disciplined in the way He read and studied the Scripture. He stood in the synagogue and read the scripture from the portion of Isaiah 61:1-2 then He rolled up the Scripture, Gave it back to the attendant, and sat down (Lk.4:20). John A Martin writes that Jesus concluded His reading with the words and added today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing. In this portion Jesus claimed that He was the Messiah."<sup>30</sup> Again Kenneth added that Jesus inaugurated His ministry by reading publicly from the prophet Isaiah (Lk.4:16-21)."<sup>31</sup>

Jesus was very familiar with the Old Testament. So, He quoted many times from the OT to teach and explain the word of God. Sometimes, he referred to the Scripture as teaching and writing. From the cross, He uttered the name of Elijah. His mission and identity is found in Luke 22:37. In conclusion, we can say that Jesus not only read the Scripture but He applied it in His daily life. This makes Him disciplined for spiritual formation and provided Him with the will to stand firmly on the Scripture.

The practice of the spiritual discipline of Jesus Christ is very important. His model of spiritual discipline is a motivation for all believers. He was thoroughly spiritual and disciplined as he was always praying to God for his guidance and Will for His life on earth. In other words, he walked and talked with His heavenly Father on a regular basis, even to the point of Fasting. He drew nearer to God with His discipline through fasting and reading of the Scriptures.

### **IV. The Implication of the Spiritual Formation of Jesus Christ for the Local Church**

Spiritual formation together with spiritual discipline is not for the physical but for the spiritual life. This exercise has to do with the spiritual in Christ. Effective spiritual exercise is delightful on the outer side; training and exercise are difficult aspects. All these practices for

<sup>28</sup> Chip Bell, "Grrrr Ohhh (Mt.6:16-18)", 2005, available from <https://bible.org/seriespage/grrrr-ohhh-matthew-616-18>; accessed on August 16, 2017.

<sup>29</sup> Louis A. Barbieri Jr., "Matthew.", p. 32.

<sup>30</sup> John A Martin, "Luke", p.214

<sup>31</sup> Kenneth L. Faught, "The Spiritual Formation of Jesus Christ", p.17.



growth in Christ create a healthy relationship with Christ. Believers' habits are to engage our hearts and mind with God. These disciplines exercise our spirit and emotion so that believers get closer to God.

### ***Spiritual disciplines on prayer***

Prayer is a spiritual discipline for the Christian life. It was practised by Jesus Christ on the earth. Most of the time, he prayed to Heavenly Father. When He prayed to God, His prayer changed his outlook (Lk.9:29). Even believers can change their outlook through prayer. It transforms and renews the believers' life. Norman L. Geisler writes that "Prayer is not a spiritual luxury. It is essential for growth. Prayer is vital to one's spiritual health as breathing is to one's physical health."<sup>32</sup> One can say that prayer is the foundation of spiritual discipline. The believers can get power from God by praying that changes the mind of man.

Jesus spent much of his time in prayer. So, the believers have to do the same and spend much time in prayer because it is equal to talking and walking with God. It is necessary to present our concerns, feelings, and attitudes to God. In prayer, believers share their joys and requests to God. Kevin Gushiken observed that these prayer experiences can be connected with the redemptive work of Christ providing hope for a person."<sup>33</sup>

Every believer must learn from Jesus that He prayed to God before He did anything. He taught his disciples to always pray and not give up (Lk.18:1). This communion with God through prayer brings joy and comfort into our lives and thus, strengthens and develops our spiritual discipline. That is why believers are urged to make daily prayer a habit of holiness in our lives (1Thess. 5:17).

### ***The spiritual discipline of fasting***

Fasting is a spiritual discipline for every believer. It is a part of the spiritual discipline of self-control. This is also asking for guidance and help from God. At the time of fasting, the believers express their sorrows and deep repentance of sin. Moreover, they are also asking for forgiveness of sin in fasting. Furthermore, believers place their requests and petitions before the throne of God. Kent D Berghuis says that "fasting helps believers to identify with Christ in his humility, in his willingness to renounce the privileges of his natural high rank to become and lowly."<sup>34</sup>

In fasting, Christians are imitating Christ. They can learn and follow humility from Jesus Christ. Once again the Bible tells us that Man does not live by bread alone (Lk.4:4) but man

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<sup>32</sup> Norman L. Geisler, "Colossians" In the Bible Knowledge Commentary: *An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty: New Testament Edition*. Edited by F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck. Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983),p.689.

<sup>33</sup> Kevin Gushiken, *Spiritual formation and multi-ethnic congregation*, 2011. Pg. 199.

<sup>34</sup> Kent D. Berghuis, "*Toward A Contemporary Christian Theology of Fasting*", 2007(internet); Available from <https://bible.org/seriespage/chapter-5-toward-contemporary-christian-theology-fasting>; accessed August 13, 2017.



needs the presence of God. Jesus instructed His disciples for fasting so that they should fast in secret before God (Matt.6:18). When they fast for personal needs or for the people, they must give their whole heart and time to God because it will lead to the blessing of God. But, this should not be hypocritical (Is.58:3-6) as it will not evoke the blessings and answers from God.

Therefore, Fasting should be acceptable in the sight of God (Rom.12:1-2). Consequently, believers must fast whole-heartedly and it should not just be a religious ritual followed in a mindless manner. Rather, it should come from the heart. Before taking major decisions, we need to pray so as to know God's will and to learn to depend on Him with all our heart and mind. This develops the excellent virtue of self-restraint so that the Spirit helps us to transform our lives.

### ***Spiritual discipline on meditation and study of the word of God***

Meditation and the study of the word of God is another key element of spiritual discipline. These were practiced by Lord Jesus Christ on the earth. J. Hampton Keathley III writes that "Meditation consists of reflective thinking or contemplation"<sup>35</sup> Even the Bible says, "I shall remember the deeds of the Lord (Ps.77:11). For this reason the believers have to read and reflect on the words from the scripture. One must think about biblical truths and interpretations because God will speak to us through the Scriptures. Such a meditation can affect believers' thoughts, attitudes, and actions.

According to Joshua 1: 8, we are exhorted to meditate day and night on the word of God in order to prosper and be successful as such a habit has a transformational impact on our human nature. God expects such a kind of transformation from every believer. When believers meditate, they should do it continuously and in all kinds of situations because it is not an option for believers, but it is mandatory for every believer. Moreover, God also revealed Himself through scripture (II Pet. 1:20-21). It renews our minds and enables us to walk according to God's plans and ways (Ps.119:15).

Moreover, we can say that believers must engage in the study of the word of God and embrace its life-changing nature. Kevin Gushiken says that "Spiritual formation occurs as an individual submits to God who speaks his truth through the Holy Scripture (II Tim.3:16-17)."<sup>36</sup> They should design their lifestyle on the word of God because this truth is applicable to their everyday life. To support this, Kevin Gushiken added that faith, reading, meditation, and exposition are necessary to create an environment for the word to breathe life into its

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<sup>35</sup> J. Hampton Keathley III, "Biblical meditation", 2004 (Internet); available from <https://bible.org/article/biblical-meditation>; accessed August 10, 2017.

<sup>36</sup> Kevin Gushiken, "Spiritual Formation and Multiethnic congregations," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & soul care* (2011, vol.4, no.2):197, in ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials (database online), Ebsco; accessed July 3, 2017.



hearer".<sup>37</sup> One can find that every believer should seek systematic intake of God's word that includes reading, hearing, studying, meditating, and applying the Bible.

### ***Spiritual discipline on worship***

Worship to God is a spiritual discipline because it can change the compass of human life towards God. This, especially, involves the love of God and a single-mindedness towards following His precepts. This is evidenced in Greg Herrick's words, "Where there is physical life, there is breathe, where there is spiritual life, there is worship".<sup>38</sup> Therefore, the believer has to recognize that in this universe God is worthy of worship. He, alone, deserves our worship and exaltation, and this should be the goal of every believer. This true worship reminds believers that God is the true source of spiritual formation.

The purpose of worshipping God is to glorify, honor and pleased Him. The believer must be loyal to God. Jesus Christ taught us that worshippers must worship Him in spirit and truth (Jn.4:23-24). It is not to be taken lightly. Contrarily, it has to be taken seriously so that our lives will reflect the truth of God's word. In line with this, James urges us to "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you" (James 4:8). Thus, we can conclude that true worshippers prepare for eternal life through Jesus Christ.

### ***Spiritual disciplines on the maturity of the faith***

The maturity and expression of faith is a spiritual discipline because believers must exercise their faith and maturity in Christ (James 1:22-23). This faith has to grow and transform the lives of the believers. It has to be expressed to both man and God. For without regular expression, Faith becomes selfish. Consequently, expression of faith helps the believers to mature in their walk with God. Nevertheless, there is a process to observe this regular faith. It must learn to obey God and walk through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, God alone is the source of growth in spiritual lives. In the same way, James writes that faith without work is dead (James.2:20). So a genuine believer's faith should always be accompanied by work.

Spiritual formation has to go along with discipline in the believer's life. It takes us closer to God. In this process, prayer and fasting are the key elements of discipline because they discipline the flesh and enable us to make time to commune with God. It is mandatory for believers to spend time with God on a personal level in the name of Jesus Christ. This provides them with self-discipline through the process of Worship. Finally, we can say that the ultimate of self-discipline is to glorify and please God.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p.198

<sup>38</sup> Greg Herrick, "Habits Leading to Christlikeness," 2004, (internet); availed from <https://bible.org/seriespage/9-habits-leading-christlikeness>; accessed on July 10, 2017.

**Conclusion**

Jesus was a complete human being on this earth. He grew up in his physical body loving God. As a human being, He respected his parents and had a close relationship with them. The foundation of His spiritual formation was his parents who were righteous men and women in the sight of God. They took him to the Jerusalem temple from his childhood. He went to the synagogue to worship God. In addition, the guidance and help of his parents made him perfect in his spiritual life and the foundation for his faith. He gave his whole heart to God, and His life on earth was shaped by His parents.

The spiritual formation of a believer is a lengthy process. Jesus Christ examined his inner being because he was a perfect human being. God looks at our inner hearts and He does not see the outward appearance of man. The believers must examine their hearts and sanctify themselves every day. Their hearts should be transformed and their bodies presented as living sacrifices to God (Rom.12:1-2).

On the other hand, Jesus Christ's principles and practices of spiritual formation set a great model for every believer to transform himself or herself into the image of God. Jesus' life was perfect and exercised the spiritual discipline on earth. Consequently, believers must take Jesus as their role model and emulate his character and show it to the world because every believer belongs to God. For this reason, they have to change their heart and learn to depend on God. Hence, this highlights the importance of devotion to God that is expressed through an intimate relationship with God. In this devotion, the believers must fast, pray, and meditate on God's word because these are the spiritual precepts and principles to form a Holy relationship with God the Father. These attitudes should emerge from the inner heart by controlling anger and the desire to fall into the temptations of this world.

Furthermore, Jesus Christ also engaged in such spiritual discipline. This is an instrument for the eternal kingdom of God. He practised spiritual discipline to grow in his spiritual life. In this spiritual discipline, Jesus Christ used prayer and fasting as the key elements for communication with God. He disciplined the flesh and exhibited self-control under the will of God. He had the habit of reading the Scripture and applying it to His daily life. In the same manner, the believers must devote themselves to God through fasting, prayer, and reading the Scripture. All these practices should work for the glory of God, and reveal God's truth in our daily activities.

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