

How We Use Our Time: A Measure of Spirituality?

By Bob Young

Thesis: Giving God our time requires discipline and is a part of spiritual formation.

We do not very often connect these two—spirituality and time. We talk about time; we talk about spirituality. We must talk about how they are connected.

First, We must talk about time.....

- How do I spend my time?
- Will I give my time to God? What does it mean to give my time to God?
- How did early Christians devote time to God?
- How is my time different than my life?
- If I give my life to God, can I avoid giving my time to God?
- To what will I give my time? To what do I give my time?

How we spend our time indicates our discipline, priorities, opportunities, urgency, what is trivial, how we understand life. The key to getting our time under control is to develop spiritually, to live the spiritual life.

Ages 15-18. Time studies tell us how the average person uses time (Bureau of Labor Statistics. Average Day [2003], persons 15-18)

- 8.6 Sleep
- 5.1 Leisure/sports
- 3.7 Work
- 1.8 HH chores
- 4.8 Other

→96% reported some sort of leisure or sports activity. Men spent 5.4 hours vs. women 4.8. TV accounted for over half of the leisure time for both men and women.

For those age 18 and over. (Bureau of Labor Statistics. Average Day [2003], persons 18 and older)

- 8.8 Sleep and personal care
- 7.5 Employment
- 4.0 Leisure/sports
- 1.5 HH chores
- 1.0 Eating/drinking
- 0.8 Shopping
- 0.4 Caring for others

And, We must talk about spirituality....

When spirituality is not understood, and is not used correctly, it is a problem! Not everyone is enamored with a focus on spiritual formation. Some emphases in spiritual formation intermingle sensual experiences, new forms of worship, contemplative spirituality or Eastern religious practices (religious mantras).

July 6, 2004, Steve Muse, editor of *Eastern Regional Watch* asked whether such is spiritual formation or spiritual adultery. “Is this really the same Christ or the same Spirit or even the same Gospel?” Muse continues, “Psychological and Eastern religious techniques are used in an attempt at a deeper relationship to God, but through occult means.” Evan Howard, in an article in *Christianity Today*, “Three Temptations of Spiritual Formation,” says, “Exploring spiritual formation in mainline churches often means experimenting with a wide range of spiritual and psychological practices.”

What is it? *Christian spiritual formation is the process by which believers become more fully conformed and united to Christ. The source of transformation is the Spirit of Christ. Such occurs in the context of a relationship with Christ.*

Ray Yungen, “A Time of Departing,” gives a helpful model:

- The church is called to be Sanctified, set apart for God’s holy purposes
- The church is called to be Spirit-filled, consumed with his presence
- The church is called to be Surrendered, submitted to his power
- The church is called to Suffering, personally righteous

Why it is important. The church is in the human transformation business. We seek to be spiritually transformed as Christ saves us and matures us; we seek to be spiritual guides for all who are on a journey to Christ-likeness.

Don Whitney, "The Importance of Spiritual Formation in the Training of Ministers," tells of an African minister who told of an influential minister in Africa who lost his ministry to an adulterous scandal. The fallen minister confessed that the beginning of his downfall was being "so busy in the Lord's work" that he neglected to read the Bible and pray. He believed this led to his immorality.

Scandal is everywhere in our lives, ministers and members. Fuller Institute for Church Growth reported that 37% of ministers confess to having been involved in inappropriate sexual behavior with someone in the church. *Leadership* magazine found that 9% of ministers had been unfaithful to their spouse.

As a result, we are seeing the increased emphasis on spiritual formation, quiet time, Bible reading, prayer, experiencing God. Colleges and universities are establishing chairs and professorships to focus on spiritual formation. Glenn Shepherd, predecessor to Henry Blackaby, was first director of Office of Prayer and Spiritual Awakening at the North American Mission Board of the SBC. During my tenure at Ohio Valley University, we were the first Christian university among churches of Christ to offer a Bible elective in Personal Spiritual Development to all of student body. But this focus must reach beyond our Christian universities; it must not be limited to those training to become ministers.

I. The GOAL of spiritual formation is GODLINESS: There is more to spiritual formation than an enriching devotional life. This is a bigger task than establishing a habitual quiet time.

- A. The church must be a training ground for Bible knowledge, the devotional life, and personal holiness.
- B. Most Christians, including ministers, struggle for consistency and depth devotionally.
- C. One professor estimated that fewer than 10% could name 10 Commandments and list books of Bible in order and spelled correctly. We must not neglect Bible knowledge.
- D. Some of what we are called to do in this area will be remedial. We can lament our spiritual foundations, but we must eventually move toward filling the gap and providing the training.

II. TRAINING is essential to spiritual formation. Christians succeed to the extent they are trained and active in spiritual formation.

- A. There is an increasing need in this area because of how we define church activities. The NT emphasis the place of prayer and ministry of the word (Acts 6:4). 1 Tim. 4:16 urges Timothy to watch his life and doctrine. Contemporary trends in the church move us in different directions. We are led to believe we could be more productive if we had executives leading our churches, ministers and elders and deacons, with appropriate leadership skills. We could be more effective if we followed a therapeutic model of ministry.
- B. Expectations of members and the populace pressure the church to devote self to everything but biblical priorities. The church must grow, must be exciting, must expand numerically (much less emphasis on organic, internal, spiritual growth). Too little focus on spiritual depth or grasp of Scripture, what matters is results.
- C. North American religion is a consumer religion. God is a product that will help us live well, or at least live better. We shop for the best deal. Churches start making deals, hardly realizing what we are doing, packaging the God-product so people will be attracted to it, trying to present it in ways to beat the competition. Religion has never in history been so involved with PR, image, marketing, competition. Eugene Peterson has written, "I found gathering a religious crowd pretty easy, provided I didn't get too involved with God.... but to follow this route, one has to abandon the very thing that gives the life of the minister its worth: a passion for God."

III. The RESULT is SURRENDER to God. The word is surrender, not just give. To commit and submit so that we come under God's discipline and instruction and become like him in every way, living out the spiritual life in holiness, godliness, Christ-likeness through the presence of his Spirit.

- A. The first priority of a Christian is to be godly. We must seek spiritual formation that makes us godly.
- B. Our educational processes in the church must move us toward godliness, as we study Scripture, as we seek to apply God's word to life, as we find relationship continual with God. Training the heart, hand, head.
- C. There is a place for spiritual formation classes in the church, especially for the immature and new Christians. Such classes must honor the task we have outlined earlier.
- D. Those who lead God's church must be the first example of surrender and spiritual formation.