

## SPIRITUAL GROWTH IN CHRIST

You cannot imagine what it was like to be a young pastor, supposedly knowledgeable about spiritual things, and yet not even knowing how to grow spiritually himself!

That was me for my first eight years as a pastor. Then I met Dr. Dallas Willard. FINALLY, someone who had answers for my heart-aching questions.

Here was my dilemma. Hypocrisy was a great fear. Yet, how was I to progress in Christlikeness not knowing how?

Even worse, others were looking to me for answers I myself did not have. I sincerely wanted to be a GENUINE disciple of Jesus, but did not know how to do so.

My evangelical friends preached "be more committed." Well, I was a pretty committed Christian, but still not very successful at Christian virtue.

My charismatic friends preached "receive more of the Spirit." Well, I already had experiences with the Spirit, and was happy to have more, but how?

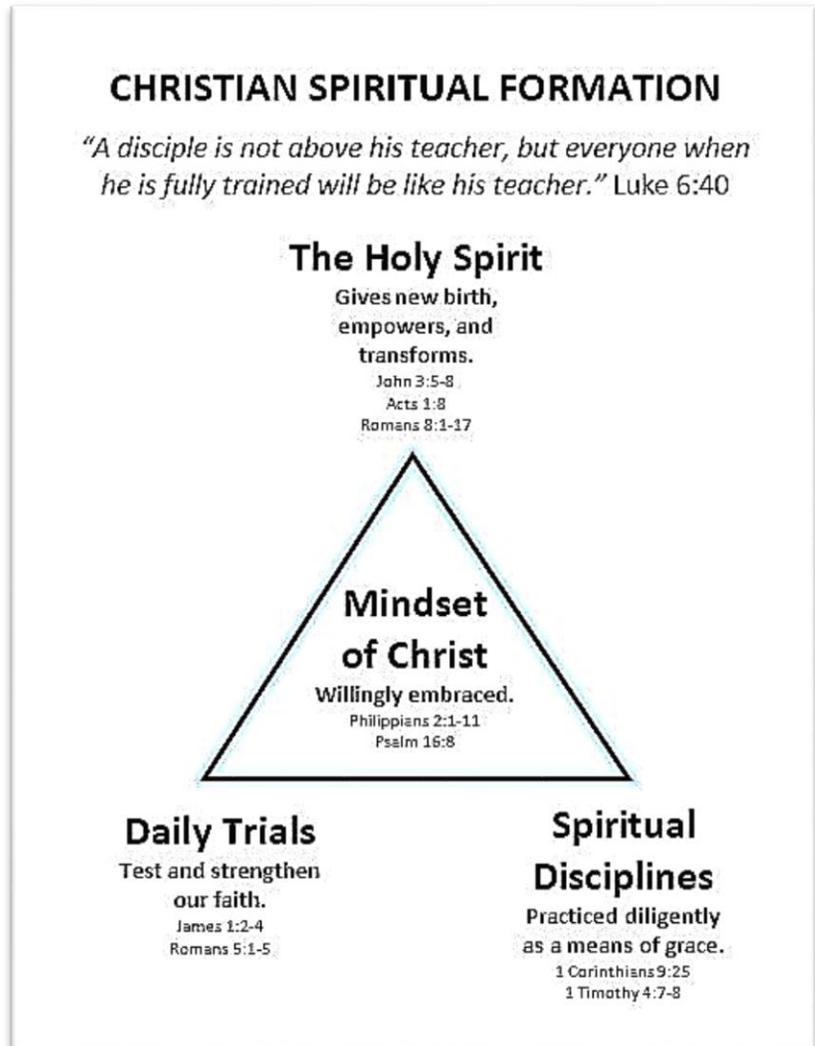
At the time, Dr. Dallas Willard (now deceased) was a professor of philosophy at University of Southern California. It was my GREAT privilege to get to know him personally and spend some time with him.

His writings and lectures on Christian living were food for my famished soul. Finally, because of Dallas, I came to understand how spiritual formation in Christ might come about.

The diagram pictured below explains the process.

At the CENTER is the willingness of the disciple to take upon himself the mind and attitude of Christ Jesus himself. Adopting Christ's mindset of self-abnegation (Philippians 2) kills the fleshly thirst for glory, pride, grumpiness over lack of human applause, concern over what others think, and having-to-have-it-my-way.

Once this central desire is established, spiritual formation in Christ occurs by the SIMULTANEOUS effects of three powerful forces:



(1) THE HOLY SPIRIT creating the INNER changes (the tree must be made good if it is to bear good fruit).

(2) THE DAILY TRIALS OF LIFE which test our faith. Many of these we fail, yet the failures enable us not to “just try harder,” but to examine WHY we failed (not having sufficiently practiced the discipline of silence to gain righteous control of the tongue, for example).

(3) The diligent practice of HISTORICALLY PROVEN SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES. I cannot make myself good on the inside. Only the Holy Spirit can do that.

But it is WITHIN MY POWER to practice solitude, silence, study and memorization of Scripture, contemplative prayer, fasting, private worship, hidden acts of service, and so on.

These disciplines act as “means of grace” which open the inner self to God’s influences.

I’m a LONG way from where I want to be – but I am a LOT further along than I used to be. I can testify, having practiced this process of Christian Formation for many years now – it WORKS.

To find out more about this, I recommend you read a copy of Dallas Willard’s, THE SPIRIT OF THE DISCIPLINES.