

As followers of Jesus we are all in the process of being conformed as the people of God to the image of Christ by the working of God's Spirit for His glory and the transformation of the world.

I think I've always been fascinated by the idea of formation, which is why I chose to major in Human Development in University - the stages we go through as we press on towards maturity. When I was introduced to the spiritual stages of faith, through my mentor Carolyn, Teresa of Avila and Janet Hagberg, it was a delightful continuation of discovery in these different stages or seasons.

How we are formed, how we grow, how our environments shape us? I thought I had a pretty good grasp of this, and maybe I did in my mind, but throughout my life there have been different challenges that have deeply formed me: from living overseas, going through infertility, adoption, parenthood, etc.

Liminal space (a threshold space or in-between) has been a theme in the past 5 years. Formation happens most in letting go. Letting go of what my expectations of how I believe things should be and at the same time knowing God is for me and on my side. His love contains suffering and death, joy and loss and He can be trusted.

One of the first steps in *'being conformed as the people of God'* is a severing, I suppose, of the old root structure you once had. The same nutrient sources aren't there anymore and you are trusting God to provide in different ways for your life. His steady voice continues to say, *"Trust me my daughter, rest in Me, I love you, I'm with you."* This process is so similar to learning to live in our new self as we discover more about our story and the patterns of our old self. (Colossians 3:9-10, Eph 4:22-24, Rom 6:6, Gal 5:16-18)

God is forming me into the image of Christ. I'm so thankful that He continues to tell me that there is nothing that has happened to me that cannot be redeemed and then walks me through the redemption process. He is working and invites me to this 'formation' process too.

Jesus's words from Mathew 11 continue to be a comfort to me in the liminal space.

*"Come to me dear ones, get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me - watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."*

How I long to learn to live freely and lightly.

As I've journeyed with Jesus He's helped me discover areas that I'm stuck and have been hard to understand in my story. Instead of pretending they weren't there He provided an amazing counselor in Florida from 2017-2019 who prompted me with curiosity towards these areas and 'unstuck' them so they too can move more freely and lightly. We are all in the process of healing and spiritual formation helps move us there- kind of like physical therapy for an injury :)

I believe that anyone pursuing formation should have a counselor and spiritual director to help guide and navigate this great process of being conformed to the image of Jesus.

To conclude, spiritual formation *does* contain the delightful disciplines of silence, solitude, examen, lectio divina and more. It also includes darkness, severing, weeping, lament, wailing at times and that is ok. You are on the right path. I've been a horse-trainer for most of my life and there is a saying that 'slow is the fastest way to go' with a horse. When you push them and they aren't ready it will set you back. There are times when you just need to lightly place your arm over

their back and breathe with them. Feel the ground beneath your feet and join their rhythmic breath. There is formation in this too. Breathing together might just be the 'real rest' Jesus mentions in the verse in Mathew?