

As we grow and mature as followers of Christ we should look to those things, which will challenge our understanding of how to better live for Christ. One of those ways is to explore the differences and similarities between education, discipleship, and spiritual formation (growth) and which of those three is most important for the Church body to focus on in our culture today. These concepts can build upon each other in the order given above while at the same time being dependent on each other to create and grow a fully mature follower of Christ.

First, education in the life of a Christian is a continual learning process, which we are told presses on for a lifetime (Phil 3.14), one that doesn't stop until we are called heavenward. Education can be a formal or informal means of being taught, coached, or trained, and even bridges over into being discipled when we take what we have learned and apply it to our lives. In Paul's second letter to Timothy, Paul tells Timothy to continue in the things he has learned (and from whom he learned) and knows to be true, through two means, his testimony and the Holy Scriptures (2 Tim 3.14). Education in today's culture can be bloated and overloaded with secular or biblical mis-information (or a mix of the two) so we need to be diligent in discerning the type of education we receive.

Second, discipleship takes what the Christian education teaches and prepares you for a lifestyle of becoming a complete and competent follower of Christ (Barna 2001, 17). Some might confuse being discipled with getting an education but one difference is that, an education is a process, where discipleship is creating a lifestyle taught between a student and master. When comparing education and discipleship, education is generally taught in a specific school where discipleship is more often taught by the church.

Discipleship being the one that takes on a more personal growth aspect (lifestyle) than education and when fully trained the disciple will be like his teacher (Lk 6.40).

Third, spiritual formation<sup>1</sup> or spiritual growth as it will be referred to in this writing, is a culmination or continuation of education and discipleship. It could be considered the next step in a greater walk towards living a more Christlike lifestyle. Spiritual growth is an important step that both the church and individual follower might not be fully developing. According to Barna, we cannot reach our potential without spiritual growth, yet few are investing much energy in the pursuit of spiritual growth, and even more alarming is that a majority of believers are not involved in an effort to grow spiritually, nor do they think they need to be (33-35).

Finally, in light of a lack of spiritual growth, the Church body should probably focus more of its attention on the spiritual growth aspect once it has achieved an acceptable level of education and discipleship. Many churches today have focused on spiritual growth while sacrificing discipleship and education. There are many similarities between education, discipleship, and spiritual growth, and they build on each other to create a fully mature follower of Christ. With all the challenges the church faces in our culture today, if one is lacking, it will be difficult to develop the other, so all three are important for those who want to live a lifestyle fully devoted to Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> See John Caddock, *What is Contemplative Spirituality and Why is It Dangerous?*, 1997, <http://www.faithalone.org/journal/1997ii/Caddock.html> (accessed May 20, 2009); gotquestions.org, *What is contemplative spirituality?*, 2002, <http://www.gotquestions.org/contemplative-spirituality.html> (accessed May 20, 2009). Spiritual Formation is also often referred to as *Contemplative Spirituality*, which is a teaching that spiritual growth and true spirituality occur by contemplation not of Scripture or even of scriptural themes, but contemplation of God through emptying your mind, a dangerous practice for any person who desires to live a biblical, God-centered life. Generally associated with the emerging church movement and also used with little association to Christianity, Contemplative Spirituality is centered on meditation unlike what is found in Joshua 1:8 and focuses literally on nothing while in a mystical pursuit of God.