



Being formed in the image of Christ

by Godfrey Mmagawo

Two questions that I often wrestle with, are: “Who am I becoming?” and “How are other people being influenced or impacted by who I am becoming?”

I recently had the privilege of taking time to reflect on my own process of spiritual formation. I must confess that this was not driven by anything, other than the fact that I started noticing some things in me that simply didn't reflect Christ well. The second day into this exercise, I felt a prompting to make a list of big events, good and bad, that have shaped me to be who I am today. I got down to 54 events and immediately started seeing links between events and behaviours that arose throughout my life as a child, teenager and now young adult. This stirred up gratitude in my heart as I realised the restoration and healing work that God has done in me. It was also an invitation to open up my heart to God, through His Spirit, to continue to do the work that He wants to do in me. This experience reminded me of Paul's words to the Galatians, that he was again in the pains of childbirth for them until Christ is formed in them (Galatians 4:19 NIV).

Robert Mulholland defines spiritual formation as “a process of being formed in the image of Christ for the sake of others”. ‘A process’ implies that this is something that happens over time. ‘Being formed’ indicates that there are different factors, internally and externally, that contribute to our formation. ‘In the image of Christ’ speaks to the fact that we are not being formed to be the best version of who we think we should be, but rather, are formed to be the image-bearers that God has made us to be according to Genesis 1:26. Lastly, ‘for the sake of others’ points to the fact that this formation is not self-centric, but it is something that God produces in us, so that we can be a blessing to others.

There are many different elements that play a part in our formation process. Whether we realise it or not we are constantly being formed. We are formed by our relationships with God, family, friends and colleagues. We are formed by what we consume through social media, television and radio. We are formed by good and bad life events, by our jobs and even politics. We are formed by the church, our ministries, organisations and business. Who and what we expose ourselves to, plays a huge role in our formation. That's why it's important as leaders to take time out to pause and reflect on who we are becoming as we journey through our lives.

I want to invite you to reflect on the following verses out of Paul's letter to the church in Corinth. As you reflect on this, think about your own journey of spiritual formation:

"But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit." - 2 Corinthians 3:16-18 ESV

READ - Read this scripture slowly several times. If possible, read it out loud.

REFLECT - Reflect upon the words being read. Listen carefully. Is there one word or phrase which stands out to you? Focus on the words. Repeat them. Allow God to speak to you.

RESPOND - Respond in prayer to God. Tell Him what you think about what you've read. Tell Him how it makes you feel. Tell Him what comforts you and what challenges you. Ask for His help to live out the truths you've uncovered.

REST - Stop. Be still. Stop talking, stop asking and rest. Spend some time in silence sitting with God. Invite the Holy Spirit and allow Him to transform you from within.

Here are a few questions for you to reflect on further:

- What do you spend time beholding? How is this forming you?
- In which ways is Christ forming you in this season?
- Are you being formed into the same image of Jesus Christ, or are you perhaps holding on to an image of who you think you should be?
- How is your family, organisation and others being impacted by who you are becoming in your leadership?

Lastly, I want to invite you to pray this prayer:

"Gracious and loving God, you know the deep inner patterns of my life that keep me from being totally yours. You know the misformed structures of my being that hold me in bondage to something less than your high purpose for my life. You also know my reluctance to let you have your way with me in these areas. Hear the deeper cry of my heart for wholeness and by your grace enable me to be open to your transforming presence in this reading. Lord, have mercy."

- Robert Mulholland