An Introduction to

Forming

Change by Grace



An Interactive DVD Course
in the *Connexus* series
from Life Model Works

What is *Forming*?

Forming is a fresh, life-giving approach to spiritual growth and restoration that may be very different from what you have tried before. What makes *Forming* unique is that instead of relying on your willpower and self-effort to bring about change in your life, we help you build a relationship with God that is vibrant enough to change you from the inside out.

Most Christians experience a significant period of growth immediately following their conversion that includes new insights, making new friends, perhaps changing some behaviors and learning about the Christian lifestyle. After a few years down the road, however, most find themselves in a place where their growth is slowing down and a level of discontent is setting in. Some even experience burn out from too much volunteer work.

The reason for this stagnation is that while there are some things we can change by simply making a decision to do so (like a New Year's resolution) there are many areas of our heart that we cannot change by an act of our will alone. The harder we try to make those changes, the more discouraged we become. Sometimes people even give up hope of life-long on-going spiritual growth, because they see so little movement.

This is precisely where *Forming* offers a way to move forward again. To use a metaphor, instead of trying to row against the current of our inner life in an effort to do what we think is right, *Forming* teaches us how to align our sails with the wind, engaging with the Spirit of God to change the direction of our heart, so that we can go places we could never get to by rowing alone.

If you are tired of performance-driven, “row harder” approaches to spiritual growth, then join us in learning how to align your “sail” with the Spirit of God for the kind of change you always believed should be possible.

Forming consists of twelve 90-minute sessions, each with a particular focus intended to jump-start your spiritual life and help you develop greater intimacy with God. Insightful teaching is provided on DVD's, and relevant exercises are included in a workbook to help participants internalize the material and actually experience more of God. In fact, nearly two-thirds of each session is devoted to exercises and group discussions.

Both seasoned believers as well as those new to the faith who have taken this course report that it has been one of the most important experiences of their entire Christian journey. We invite you to read the following pages to learn more about this exciting new course.

Session 1 – Changing Our Minds About Change



How does change really happen? All throughout the New Testament, the Holy Spirit paints a picture of life with God that far exceeds what most of us have known experientially. When we try to make those things a reality in our own life, we usually discover a substantial disconnect between what we see in the pages of the Bible and the life we actually have.

In this session we will explore why this disparity exists and why spiritual growth seems to slow down to a crawl for so many people. What we find is that most discipleship models are unwittingly based on faulty assumptions that simply do not line up with how God changes lives. So while these approaches may seem to work for some people some of the time, they do not offer any lasting hope for on-going life-long transformation.

Once we understand how to to engage with God and how to receive life from him, it changes everything we ever thought we knew about change.

Session 2 – God is Relational



How do we develop a relationship with God that has enough substance to change us from the inside out? If we accept the truth that real transformation comes out of an authentic relationship with God, we are then faced with two major problems.

First, very few of us have ever been shown how to engage with God in a way that is really worthy of the term *relationship*. What most of us have would be more accurately called an *arrangement* with God – we try hard to do the right things for him because of what he has done for us.

Second, a majority of Christians have perceptions of God that would make a life-giving relationship with him very difficult. Many consider God to be so critical and judgmental that they find it hard to believe he really wants to be their source of life and give them what they need. But once we begin to discover how much God loves us and longs to come alongside us and mentor us in the ways of the Kingdom, everything changes.

Sessions 3 and 4 – Developing a Conversational Prayer Life



How do we receive this life from God? One of the most incredible things about God is his desire to speak into our lives and teach us the ways of the Kingdom. Learning to hear his voice and have conversations with him can literally transform our hearts and minds.

In order to develop a personal relationship with God and to live as God meant for us to live, we need to be able to have conversations with Him about our life. This means learning how to engage with the Spirit of God directly and listen to his voice. According to the New Testament, this is the birthright of every child of God.

In these two sessions we will describe in detail how to listen to and discern the promptings of the Spirit. Great emphasis is placed on how to remain humble and teachable in this process so that we remain open to his leading at every point in our lives and in our conversations with him.

Learning how to have conversations with God allows him to mentor us in the ways of the Kingdom, just as he said he would (John 14-16). We can then build the kind of relationship with him that will change us from the inside out.

Session 5 – Grace is Actually a Means for Transformation



What does grace have to do with transformation? Next to love, *grace* is perhaps the most broadly applied term in the New Testament in regard to God's action in the lives of his people. Learning to live in grace is absolutely foundational to receiving life from God.

Unfortunately, while most of us associate the term *grace* with what happens to us at the time of our conversion, relatively few Christians have a clear understanding of what grace has to do with growing as a Christian. We tend to think of conversion as God's job and the Christian life as our job. This is a very weak understanding of both grace and the Christian life.

As we learn how to engage in the work that God wants to do in our hearts, and sort out what part is God's job and what is ours, we find that renewing the heart and mind is truly a work of grace in which we participate with God both consciously and actively.

Sessions 6, 7, and 8 – Ways to Engage With God for Change



How does this all work, and what do we need to do? During these three sessions we will explore a variety of practices that allow us to engage with God for change. Historically, some of these practices have been referred to as *spiritual disciplines*. We almost hesitate to use these words, however, because there is so much baggage associated with this phrase. People have often found spiritual disciplines to be difficult and dry, or even legalistic in nature. But once we understand the reasons for this difficulty, these spiritual practices open up a wide array of possibilities for focusing our desire to be with God.

Session 6: Balancing God's Part and Our Part

Our goal in Session 6 is to explain the true life-giving nature of spiritual practices, and how to avoid going through the motions of a dead practice and instead experience the goodness of our life-giving God. How we understand and engage in these spiritual practices makes a tremendous difference in the kind of fruit they bear in our life. This is not just about having a different attitude as we engage in these practices, but having a fundamentally different focus and purpose as we make a space to engage with God.

Session 7 – What to Expect When Engaging With God

Knowing what we can expect as we engage with God will help us anticipate God's gifts to us and his work in us. We can actively look for those things we have come to know to be characteristic of the way He interacts with us. These expectations increase our faith in him, giving us even more desire to invest our whole self in the process. We listen better, pay attention more closely, and focus our participation in the right directions.

Session 8 – Barriers to Engaging With God

Connecting with God is not always easy. Sometimes He feels like a million miles away. Other times it seems like we are hemmed in by a brick wall and nothing gets past it, either way. Many times we think our only recourse is to hang on and hope the problem goes away.

But because God is relational, we can trust that he knows what to do. His heart is to remove the barriers that keep us away from him, and he knows they are too big for us to remove alone. Learning to participate with God in this area restores both our hope and our connection to him.

Session 9 – Renewing Our Mind



How does change actually happen? Paul tells us renewing our mind will transform our life. But what exactly does it mean to renew our mind? And *how* do we renew our mind? Is it something that God does in us? And if so, what do we need to do in order participate with him in that?

This session will examine the actual process of renewing our mind, including what that really means and how it happens. We will also look at why renewing our mind makes such a big difference in how we live. Along the way, we will discover why traditional approaches to discipleship may not only fail to renew our mind, but how they can actually make life more difficult!

At the core of this issue is the matter of addressing the "head/heart" split with which we are all familiar. We believe one thing in our mind, but our whole body and soul seem to want to go another way. When we understand the true reason for this split and the process by which God changes our heart, we can then deliberately pursue transformation in these areas and become more of who God designed us to be.

Session 10 – Healing Our Identity and Self-Hate



Who am I, really? This session addresses head-on one of the most common and pernicious problems that people face – self-hate. Most of us have thought at one time or another, "If you knew me better, you probably would not like me." And being a Christian generally does very little to alleviate the severity of this painful secret.

Contrary to what some might think, self-rejection is not a Christian virtue. It comes easily enough to people everywhere and leaves a terrible legacy in its wake. Self-hate is truly a result of the broken world we live in, and God does not want us to be held captive all our life by a fractured identity.

Our goals for this session include showing that the sources and consequences of self-hate are truly evil in nature and something God wants to deliver us from. By making use of what we have learned in regard to renewing the mind, we will practice engaging with God in ways that allow him to restore us to our true identity in Christ.

Session 11 – Disarming Our Fears



How do we trust when we are afraid? Fear is one of the most powerful motivators that we have. Unfortunately, it can also be very destructive. Fear clouds our judgment and distorts our perceptions of reality. But the truth is that very few fears can be overcome by more education or willpower.

Jesus wants his followers to learn how to live without the common anxieties that nearly everyone deals with at one time or another. But it does not take long to figure out that we cannot follow his teaching on our own. Not only do our fears refuse to respond to our will, but from where we stand, most of our fears appear to be legitimate. So we are often at a loss as to how we might overcome them.

This session will focus on the core issues that keep us from finding relief and deliverance from our fears, and will show us how to engage with God for our healing.

Session 12 – Two Kinds of Maturity



How do we develop and grow up? Most of us have been taught that *human* maturity is about becoming more and more autonomous, and that it happens more or less automatically as we get older. *Spiritual* maturity, however, is supposed to come from trying hard to be a good Christian. Both of these views are terribly mistaken and cause us a lot of difficulties.

The truth is that human maturity is about becoming more and more *interdependent* by developing the ability to relate to others with joy and competence in increasingly complex relationships. And this growth is *achieved* through hard work as we learn a broad spectrum of relational skills.

Spiritual maturity, on the other hand, is mostly *received* through engaging with God in ways that are life-giving. This will lead us to become more and more *dependent* upon him as we continue to grow.

This session will offer a truly workable understanding of maturity, and how our human development and spiritual development can be integrated so that we can become more and more the people God created us to be.

Where to get *Forming*

To run the course you will need the *Forming* DVD's, facilitator training DVD's, and the Facilitator Workbook. Group members should each have their own Participant Workbook.

Forming course materials are distributed exclusively by **Life Model Works**. You can access their web store from **JoyStartsHere.com**. Choose the 'Connexus' category of products, and then the 'Forming' group.

You can also link to the web store from **KingdomFormation.org** where you can find out even more about the *Forming* course. We provide an example video clip, an introduction video, reviews from former participants, a number of resources you can use to promote *Forming* in your organization, and dozens of interesting articles on Christian Spiritual Formation.

The *Forming* course is based on the book *Forming: A Work of Grace*, also by David Takle. At 400 pages, this book is comprehensive and yet highly readable, providing both pastors and laypersons alike an important re-orientation to Christian Spiritual Formation that is much needed by the Christian world.

About the Author



David graduated from Fuller Seminary with a Masters of Divinity and concentration in Christian Formation. He has written several other books on Christian living, including one on conversational prayer, *Whispers of my Abba*, and another on renewing our minds, T*he Truth about Lies and Lies About Truth*. He and his wife, Jan, currently live in North Carolina.

Please visit David's website at www.KingdomFormation.org.

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