

# V-I-M

## The Vision, Intention, and Means of Christian Formation

A model based on the work of Dallas Willard.

This is an excellent overall model of how we go about engaging with God in ways that are transformative.

- Vision** Things we need to understand clearly  
**Intention** Values we need to commit to and decisions we need to make  
**Means** What we can do to foster transformation (our part)

One of the biggest challenges of spiritual development is balancing our part and God's part. If we assume too much of the job, we end up with a works-oriented form of sanctification that leads to self-righteousness, burn-out, or legalism. If we assume too little, we fail to engage sufficiently to have a genuine relationship with God and/or bring about change. Virtually any imbalance in this area severely impacts our spiritual growth. As it turns out, most of us lean fairly heavily toward one end of the spectrum or the other, often unaware of how we are affecting our own lives, or what is needed in order to perform a course-correction. And the more dedicated we are to an out-of-step paradigm, the worse it is for us.

Proper balance and participation with God in this matter of growth is precisely what the VIM model spells out so well. In order to engage effectively in this process, there are certain things that we need to re-envision and understand well, there are some values that we need to commit to, and there are certain means available to us by which we can deliberately open ourselves up to the kind of relationship with God that is transforming.

### Vision

Even among Christians who are good students of the Bible and heavily committed to their Lord, we find that after just a few years of dedicated devotion to their walk with God, they often seem to run out of steam and their growth slows down to a crawl. What we now know is that there are actually quite a few reasons why these traditional approaches to Christian discipleship have often had good initial results but are unable to assist us in our development beyond a certain point. And if we will stop long enough to revisit some of our assumptions about what we have thought was the right way to proceed, we can find our way again and move on. I have listed a few of the more significant items here for further reading.

- Restoring the continuity between Salvation and the Christian Life (article)
- Understanding the true nature of Grace as a means to live by (article)
- Developing an authentic relationship with God, not an abstraction based on knowledge alone (article)
- Learning how to engage with God for both healing from the past and initiating new growth (article)

### Intention

Many Christians hope that given enough time, just showing up in church week after week and engaging in various Bible studies will eventually change them into the persons they are supposed to be. Some even put in

considerable effort, learning how to teach others, and taking part in various ministries of the church. But as good as these things are, there is only so much impact that they can have on our souls. Getting beyond the reach of our will, to transforming our hearts and minds and becoming different people from the inside out requires direct participation with the Holy Spirit. And in order for us to engage with God sufficiently for change to occur, we have to make sufficient space in our lives for that relationship.

Wanting to be different is not enough. We need to actually make the space necessary to engage with God, and then spend time speaking and listening to the Holy Spirit. That's the point of the practices we now refer to as spiritual disciplines.

Please note that these disciplines may or may not be related to whatever you may have called a "Quiet Time" or Devotions in the past. If your Quiet Time felt more like eating dust than drinking living water, or more like studying for a test than being cared for by a mentor, you can be sure that something important was missing. And that important something was the Holy Spirit.

The point is that we need to develop a working relationship with God that goes beyond study and "obedience." We need arrange our lives to make space for a real connection that feeds our soul and changes our minds and hearts.

## **Means**

Making a space for God can be done many ways. Over the centuries certain practices have emerged that have proven to be more effective than others in opening up a space for engaging with God. But before we talk about what those look like, there is one very important truth that we must nail down in order to prevent our practices from falling into legalism or lifeless behaviors. And that truth is this .....

### ***Spiritual Disciplines do NOT change us !***

This is so important! What we need to understand is that spiritual disciplines have no merit or power in and of themselves. We are not better than other Christians because we practice them. We do not become better by practicing them. What they do for us is make a space for us to engage with God. That's all. What happens when we engage with God is an entirely different matter. And having that distinction firmly planted in our minds is crucial.

Setting aside time every morning for prayer and meditation is an important thing to do. But the act of sitting down with our Bible, and even the act of reading our Bible is not what develops our character. Our understanding might be improved, and our appreciation for the things of God might be stirred. But when we open up to the Holy Spirit directly and personally, and receive his words into our hearts and minds, we encounter Life itself that is able to change who we are. Our part is to make a space for listening to God. His part is giving us the words of truth and life that penetrate deep into our soul. This is why learning to discern the voice of God is so foundational to life in the kingdom and why developing a conversational prayer life makes the difference between practicing dead rituals and experiencing the power of God to change lives.

### ***Spiritual disciplines do not change us, they only make a space for engaging with God.***