

UNTIL CHRIST IS FORMED IN YOU



connect to reflect

INTRODUCTION

welcome
what to expect ahead

course overview

The course is made up of four main sections. They are as follows:

SECTION 1

Introduction

The first section explores why communion with God and reflecting Jesus is so important to us personally, and critical to our mission as a church.

SECTION 2

The process of communion with God

The second section explores a blueprint for spiritual growth and intimacy with God. How do we develop a communion with God that will really change who we are? This process will reveal why we often seem to hit spiritual brick walls on our spiritual journey. We will look at the part God plays in the change process, and what God calls us to do.

SECTION 3

habits for communion with God

The third section focuses on the habits that shape our lives. Intimacy with God that re-forms our hearts does not happen by accident. It happens as we begin to live differently. In one sense, we are our habits. We will see how different spiritual habits impact the different areas of our intimacy with God.

SECTION 4

light for communion with God

The fourth section considers some important doctrines which shape the way we think and live. We will also see how different doctrines impact different parts of our communion with God.

In the mid 1600s, Henry Scougal wrote some letters that are said to have cause the conversion of George Whitefield—one of the greatest preachers the world has ever witnessed. In his early years, Whitefield, along with John and Charles Wesley, struggled with a legalistic Christianity that seemed to promise much, but delivered little. Scougal began to redefine true religion. He wrote that people who experience genuine Christianity

know by experience that true religion is a union of the soul with God, a real participation of the divine nature, the very image of God drawn upon the soul, or, in the apostle's phrase, "It is Christ formed within us..."
(*The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, 38)

So being a Christian is not just about what we believe or think. Nor is it just about what we do. Most of all, it's about who we are—it's about character. Such character is only formed by a connection with God himself.

Dwight L Moody famously said that "character is what you are in the dark". My personal favourite definition of character is that it is the "thoughts and feelings combined". When I first read that quote I was shocked that character was mostly about the things that only I and God see. I like to think of myself as good. It's easy to give a good impression by the way I behave. But when I test my inner thoughts and feelings—well, that's another story!

Here's another challenge: the character I want to reflect is not simply a better version of the one I have, but the character of Jesus. That's my aim, but a question we all have to face is this: how in the world will our lives reflect the character of God in Heaven—a God we have never personally seen?

One of the dangers we face as Christians is trying to focus on looking good on the outside by obeying "the rules" and making sure that we have "correct" doctrine. Living by external rules is natural to us. It's easier to do—but the rules don't have any power to change our hearts. Consequently, we can find ourselves very busy being a Christian, but with little to show for it. Indeed, some of the most energetic Christians can also be the most critical and harsh. So how do we avoid going that way? How do we avoid the frustration of trying as hard as we can to change, but seeing nothing happening, thus becoming frustrated and discouraged? How do we keep focused in the right direction, and not find ourselves giving up? That's what this course is all about. It is about having a connection with Jesus that will automatically bring the re-formation of our lives in the image of God.

The apostle Paul reveals that the re-formation of Christ in our lives is God's priority, "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers." (Romans 8:29), going on to explain that "we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." (2 Corinthians 3:18). He also wrote to the Christians in Galatia, "My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you" (Galatians 4:19). Notice two things in

this verse. Firstly, that the focus of Paul's ministry was formation, or more specifically, the re-formation of the character of Jesus in peoples lives. Secondly, that this work can be so difficult sometimes, that it can feel like the spiritual equivalent of giving birth! But like Paul, we agree that this ambition that is worth all the effort, for in the middle of what is a dark and painful world, there is nothing greater than reflecting the character of Jesus as a witness to those who have yet to glimpse the goodness and amazing grace of God!

Ellen White comments on the the significance of this work of re-formation in the character of God,

The greatest work that can be done in our world is to glorify God by living the character of Christ. (6 Testimonies, 439)

To restore in man the image of his Maker, to bring him back to the perfection in which he was created, to promote the development of body, mind, and soul, that the divine purpose in his creation might be realized—this was to be the work of redemption.
(*Education*, 15-16)

My hope is that this course will encourage and direct your connection with God that you will reflect his character. This has become the supreme goal of my own life, and I would love for you to join me in this great ambition, and travel together.

