Christian Character Formation and Discipleship

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Part 1: Gospel Foundations of Character Formation

Every religion supports the vision of life with their religious teachings and aspects which help an individual in spending their lives in peace. The Gospel story highlights the aftermath of life since the very sin of Adam. Hence, the story helps individuals determine the characteristics important for character formation. Character formation in an individual is formed on the basis of different elements, as described in the gospel story. Most of the elements of character formation fall under the category of spiritual formation. Some of the researchers refer to the connection between character formation and spiritual formation as sanctification (Adams, Brock, Gordon, Grohs & Kirk, 2014). Towards the end of the Gospel story, it is highlighted that spiritual formation is important for the experience of character formation (Brown & Reimer, 2013).

Till now, seven elements have been assessed as a vital part of the spiritual character formation of a person based on literature, biblical as well as theoretical survey of nature. These seven elements lay a foundation for an effective lifestyle for an individual looking for ways of achieving the mission and community formation. Moreover, these elements are an important means for the purpose of character formation and impact the spiritual development of an individual as well. These elements include increasing spiritual knowledge and learning, working on establishing relationships, developing a community with positive influence, and growing into an image of God (Coleridge, 2003). This essay will highlight important elements related to character formation along with the idea of discipleship. Towards the end of the essay, an analysis of my personal spiritual disciplines will be highlighted.

The gospel story unfolds the truth about the reason behind the death of Jesus along with its association with the Likeness of God. With the help of the Gospel story, it was found that Jesus died on the cross so that the fallen man could be restored. Keeping in view this perspective, every individual is obligated to work hard so that he/she can try to possess the character of Jesus. Some of the literature suggests that focusing on possessing the character of Jesus is a process and a part of an individual's lifestyle. While focusing on possessing the strong virtues of Jesus, it is necessary that individuals assess the presence of God in their daily lives. As it is mentioned, "He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart (Psalm 15:2 KJV)." With this reference, individuals can infer how identifying the presence of God is important not only in the big things but in routine life as well. This is termed as "living the Christian Story". When a person fulfils the perspective of living the 'Christian Story,' he is more likely to be transformed and become like Christ in terms of virtue so that the individual can carry out the mission of God on the face of the

earth. The attempt to carry out the mission of improvement is another face of improving an individual's life (LEWIS, 2010).

Being missional is another element of the journey of an individual towards the spiritual self. The gospel story highlights that being missional originates from one of the scriptural concepts of shalom. The concept of shalom is actually the plan proposed by God as a way of redeeming his own creation. However, this concept of shalom involves certain aspects such as sharing the life of Jesus (highlighting the idea of love in action), being the observer to the Holy Spirit (depicting the concept of hope in action) as well as stating facts about the Kingdom of God (depicting the idea of faith in action) Love, hope, and faith are the key aspects in the concept of shalom. All these aspects are added in the Gospel tale. As it is mentioned, "He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake (Psalm 23:3 KJV)." With the help of this biblical reference, it is hence obvious that the task of transforming into Jesus turns out to be the source of a renewed aspect and becomes a part of the life of an individual. The important aspect is the involvement of the people, living as the people of God and as the persons who work to implement the plans of God (Rakow, 2013).

Character formation of a man is associated with his progress made in the spiritual journey. Keeping in view this perspective, the Gospel story highlights the importance of the aspect of enhancing spiritual learning for one's own individual development. Enhancing spiritual learning is about the learning resources and how an individual utilizes these resources (Adams, Brock, Gordon, Grohs & Kirk, 2014). With the help of this element, the Gospel story highlights that the individuals, as well as the church, should be wholeheartedly willing to learn more from the Bible for their spiritual journey. The knowledge of individuals, as well as the church, can be elaborated and improved by following the Holy Spirit. Hence, the idea of spiritual learning helps the individual to grab concepts of Bible centeredness along with giving the individual an aspect of critical thinking which is important for character formation (Schubert, 2012). As it is mentioned, "Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me (John 14:6)." Enhancing spiritual learning helps an individual in his journey of relating to society positively. Hence, a developing community is yet another aspect of character formation. Developing a community depends on the basis of commitment, time, and effort put into it. Literature suggests that the aspect of developing a community involves incorporating elements of spiritual foundation as well as loving relationships.

The majority of the letters written by Paul were focused on the communities and not the individuals (Coleridge, 2003). Even though most of the pieces were written as a part of solving the issues for the communities, however, with the help of these written pieces literature was able to highlight the collective advice about behaviour and relationship in epistles. Hence, the epistles literally highlighted that the beliefs developed by Christian Individuals should eventually lead them to building faithful communities, which brings them closer to their own faith along with helping one another in their own spiritual journey (Brown & Reimer, 2013). The last and most important element in the character formation of an individual is the aspect of building relationships. Building and having relationships with other human beings impact the spiritual formation of an individual. The relationships of spiritual formation are impacted with the help of different aspects such as the knowledge and love for the

neighbors, the knowledge and love for one own self, and eventually the love of God (Schubert, 2012).

Part 2: Discipleship and Character Formation

In the ministry of Jesus, several terms are used as a part of an individual's spiritual journey and the aspect of character formation. One of the standard terms which is most frequently used is disciple. The term disciple is often used for the followers of Jesus. In the Book of Acts as well as in the gospel books, the term discipleship is frequency. However, this name is not frequently used as a part of the Old Testament. The initial time of the discipleship began with the calling of God. At the beginning of time, the impression of disciple-ship was initiated from the very agreement between the Jews and God. It was an actual agreement between Abraham and his offspring. As a result of the agreement between Abraham and his offspring, the offspring of Abraham was termed as a blessing of God for the people in the world. In the Old and New Testament, the theme of God was fulfilled eventually with the message of coming towards Jesus. All those believing in Jesus responded to his call by instilling their belief in him, and there was a price to pay. The worth of believing in Jesus was listening to his summons so that their belief gets stronger with every passing day. Responding to the call of Jesus highlighted that people are supposed to leave their old lives and find a new life. The new life found by the people should be more focused on fulfilling the beliefs highlighted by the teaching of God. People answering his calls and in search of a new life should work on obeying God's will by obeying Jesus. As it is mentioned, "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me (Matt 16:24KJV)." With the help of this biblical reference, it can be inferred that the disciples of Jesus followed him everywhere and tried copying the ways of his life so that they learned about his teachings in an effective manner. Moreover, this biblical reference highlights that discipleship highlight that this term refers to the total allegiance to Jesus. Hence, the disciples are to leave everything and follow Jesus for the new life they are searching for (Míguez, 2017).

In the quest for new life and in the quest to become disciples of Jesus, people have to leave everything, including their families, any materialistic possessions, and professions, as well so that they can take up the cross of Jesus (Brown & Reimer, 2013). For the purpose of character formation, an overlap is observed between the spiritual formation and discipleship of all the disciples of Jesus. As mentioned earlier, discipleship involves the will of God, which helps the person live a life of obedience based on God's will. Hence, an evident relationship exists between discipleship and spiritual formation. The element of spiritual formation eventually helps in the character formation of an individual (Adams, Brock, Gordon, Grohs & Kirk, 2014). Gospel story highlights that Christians can live a life that is a combination of their worldly lifestyle along with the obedience of God.

Christians can live a lifestyle where they do not drift away from God (LEWIS, 2010). They can achieve this lifestyle by observing certain spiritual habits as well as disciples, which keeps them connected to their God. Discipline is defined as an activity performed by an individual that eventually makes him close and intimate with God (Coleridge, 2003). Studying the Bible on a regular basis, spending enough

time for prayer, and many more are some of the disciplines that can help an individual to remain focused on the right path (Adams, Brock, Gordon, Grohs & Kirk, 2014). Towards the process of grace in an individual's life, the development of spiritual discipline is an important part of the process. God grants individuals with grace, which can end up being a result. Disciplines are one of the ways a great way of developing great habits that have been highlighted to Christians for the development of their own growth, nurturing them, and eventually becoming the disciples of Jesus.

The focus of an individual should be more inclined towards becoming the followers of disciples. Even though the early attempts might prove fruitless for the person, hence everyday practice will eventually help in the growth of the person. Literature suggests that Christians do not have enough monopoly on virtue ethics. Some of the studies highlight that Christian virtues are not merely isolated from moral principles or emerged from the laws extracted from the Bible. Many different scriptural values are joined in narratives of God with his own people. The followers of Jesus, more frequently termed disciples, virtues cannot be separated from the idea of the gospel narrative, which leads through the passage of Galilee and Judea to the crucifixion and resurrection. Stanley Hauerwas mentioned that Christian ethics is not the first of all the ethics and values, but the ethics demand the attention of the individual in particular (Cherry, 2016). Moreover, the literature highlighted that Christian virtues are related to the missions of God and their achievement with the help of the disciples of Jesus in the world. Every human being serves a purpose in their human life, which brings them closer to the relationship and mission of God. Virtue is defined as a way of expressing how people understand God, how they perceive his calling, and how they serve their purpose in the world. However, to fulfill the mission of God in the world requires some basic virtues such as humility, service, and compassion. The process of development of character or the virtue of a person is similar to a journey followed by an individual. People are changed by their association with God; however, in this journey, they face challenges that test their integrity and dedication. Strong faith helps in passing through hardships easily. The need for individuals for a community (more often called the church in the Bible) is a way of encouraging and nurturing Christian virtues. The supportive community and positive surrounding is a way of making discipleship with Jesus strong along with encouragement in the long journey of faith-testing and dedication.

Part 3: Character Formation in Daily Life

In my personal experience, virtue ethics and the elements of character formation is a helpful approach toward moral decision-making. Even though generally, people would argue that people with a strong set of virtues have a strong character as well since they will be able to sort through moral issues and make better decisions. The emphasis on the long journey of character formation matches my understanding of Christian discipleship as well as the transformation. I believe that Pastors and teachers should be encouraged more to focus on the gospel virtues to preach in their discussions and lectures. Some of the times I believe that with the broad marketplace, I feel like I am challenged to find ways of representing my virtues in the name of faith in social contexts, such as the idea of competition and prosperity. In practical life, many people face issues while distinguishing cultural

virtues from the idea of gospel virtues, even though both are essential for the development of discipleship and mission in the life of an individual. I have one major concern about virtue ethics how people assess one another as virtuous or non-virtuous. A person unfaithful in his marriage but good with his kids might be termed a virtuous person. However, I somehow believe that there are some rethinking and critical thinking challenges in terms of virtues, especially in the Christian church. No matter what mission is carried out by an individual in today's broken world, the definition of basic virtues will remain the same. However, I believe that people need to understand that God is always concerned about the individuals working in the path of their mission. Virtues are a way of moving us towards the margins and, in some cases, towards the borderline. Hence, the discussions and conclusions related to virtue ethics will play an important part in the future of the churches as well as the nation.

Practising spiritual disciplines has different methods that have progressed with the passage of time. I believe in practicing spiritual disciplines with the help of prayer. Prayer is one of the basic ways used more often by me. To establish a strong relationship with God, I try to focus more on developing a daily routine of prayer by setting patterns in my life. I believe prayer is a way of getting close to God and talking to God. For many of the new Christians, it is hard to believe that the unseen God can be talked to, and it's unusual to have a conversation without the physical presence of a person. However, with the help of prayer, I have learned more about the spiritual relationships with God and the peace that develops within the life of a person. Even though the path towards peace is not as easy, the daily routine of prayers is filled with the hurdles of learning and practicing the discipline of prayer on a daily basis. The primary issues in praying are the main issues that keep us away from praying and developing a daily pattern of prayer. The worldly demands we face every day take up much of our time. Initially, I went days, sometimes weeks, and even months without offering a prayer. However, with enough Human effort and trust in God, I was able to develop a pattern useful for the development and practice of spiritual discipline. A daily reminder about prayer being the priority solves things in the long run.

To conclude, each religion highlights the idea of living within its own boundaries and teachings, which help people spend their lives in harmony. Gospel story features the result of life since the very sin of Adam. Henceforth, the story helps the people in deciding the qualities significant for character formation. Character formation in an individual is framed based on various components, as portrayed in the gospel story. A large portion of the components of character formation falls under the classification of profound development. A portion of the specialists allude to the association of character development and otherworldly formation as a blessing (Schubert, 2012). Towards the finish of the Gospel story, it is featured that profound development is significant for the experience of character formation (Schubert, 2012).

In the service of Jesus, a few terms are utilized as a piece of a person's otherworldly excursion and part of character formation. One of the standard terms that are most oftentimes utilized is the term of discipleship. The term disciple is frequently utilized for the devotees of Jesus. Discipleship was a real understanding of Abraham and his posterity (LEWIS, 2010). The cost for putting stock in Jesus was by

tuning in to his summons so their conviction gets more grounded as time passes. Reacting to the call of Jesus featured that individuals should leave their previous lifestyles and locate another life. Personally, my spiritual experiences started well with the introduction of the teaching of the Bible as they helped me in the development of virtue ethics.

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