

Spiritual Formation – what is it?

Our base verse is **Romans 8:28** but it is not an easy verse to translate with so many variations:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. (NIV)

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. (NKJV)

And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. (NLT)

We know, in fact, that God works all things together for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. (NTFE)



Health & Safety Warning – it is not the Christian equivalent of ‘it will work out all right in the end’ or ‘things will eventually come good.’

What exactly is God doing (or not doing)?

- He is a **determining** agent (NLT)
- He is an **active** agent (NIV & NTFE)
- He is seemingly a **passive** agent (NKJV)

Perhaps it is right that there is mystery to what exactly God does!

What does ‘good’ mean?

Have you ever thought about this word and what it means?

Out of context we will interpret it in the way we commonly view good, e.g. good meal, good day, good time (i.e. good according to what I like/want).

Perhaps then **it is what God sees as being ‘good’**, but what is that?

The answer is in the next verse which almost never appears alongside Romans 8:28 (not good!)

28 And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. 29 For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. 30 And having chosen them, he called them to come to him. And having called them, he gave them right standing with himself. And having given them right standing, he gave them his glory. (NLT)

V29 tells us exactly what spiritual formation is.

- It is not becoming the best version of yourself (horrible thought!).
- It is becoming like Jesus!

That is what God is doing – ‘conformed to the likeness of His Son’ (NIV) – perhaps in ways we cannot fully understand or discern (i.e. the mystery part of it) but his purpose is clear.

Where does this formation occur?

... In a **broken, battered (but yet beautiful!) world**, within which we will experience troubles and suffering.

18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. (NIV)

Notice that this also links into the end of v30 – ‘he gave them his glory.’

... In the **hard places of life.**

35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword ... 37 No in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. (NIV)

Jesus Himself linked these two thoughts in John 16:33 – “I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.” (NLT)

What are the agents of change?

... The **Holy Spirit** is with us and in us to help us navigate this broken, battered world in which we face suffering, hardship and sorrows.

26 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. 27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God. (NIV)

His work in us is at a level that is ‘too deep for words’ (ESV), i.e. in our depths. We can perhaps add this to our ‘mystery’ box!

... The **Holy Spirit** (and **Jesus** – powerful combination!) are interceding for us.

The Holy Spirit’s intercession is within us (deep groanings, v26).

Jesus’s intercessory ministry however is shown to be within the Godhead itself and is seen to be the response to the condemnation, doubts and all the awful thoughts that can flood in and seemingly take residence when we are going through difficult times.

34 Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. (NIV)

... The **truth** of who God is and what He has done for us and in us (v31-35).

If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? (NIV)

It is as if Paul is saying let me directly confront the big doubts and the bad thoughts we have when we’re in the middle of awful stuff or in a totally messed up state.

How is Paul growing through this process of spiritual formation?

... Through **revelation** – ‘I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us’ (v18).

God is opening up some of the inner workings to Paul and times of hardship are often when God is dealing and speaking to us at a deep level as we call out to Him as the psalmists did.

You can find more of this in 2 Corinthians 4.

... Through **experience** – chapter 8 concludes with one of the most powerful statements in scripture. Its power and force undoubtedly come from Paul having proved it in his experience.

38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (NIV)