



What is the Form of Your Faith?
Psalm 51:10; I Thessalonians 1:1-10
September 9, 2018
Diane Christopher
Linda Freeman

I knew a woman who was a disciple. She was a disciple of...Barry Manilow. She had one room in her home dedicated to Barry Manilow. Pictures all over the wall. She had every album. She went to every concert she could. She knew all about his life. If you came to visit her, at some point in that visit, she would bring you to her Barry Manilow room, and tell you about him. She was a follower of Barry Manilow.

During Jesus' time, it was very common to see rabbis and teachers walking the roads with their disciples, the rabbis pouring their knowledge and life into their followers. Jewish boys grew up learning the Torah (first 5 books of our Old Testament); in fact, they had to memorize it. As they became older, rabbis would pick the smartest and brightest boys to be their disciples. Those who weren't picked went back to the family business, such as fishing or carpentry.

By the time Jesus was picking his disciples, he didn't pick the smartest or brightest; he chose the rejects – those who had gone back to the family business. Or, taken on questionable careers. These rejects, these disciples followed Jesus three years, and their hearts and minds and lives were changed forever.

What is the form of your faith?

When I first came to this church, my original job title was "Associate Pastor of Christian Education and Outreach." As time went on, we decided to change the word Christian Education to Faith Formation. The reason is I didn't want you to

have just head knowledge of God and your faith (which is what Christian Education suggests); I wanted it to move from here (point to head) to here (point to heart). I wanted your knowledge of faith and God to form you, to mold you, to transform you as a person, as a disciple of Christ.

In our scripture passage today, the Apostle Paul writes to his church in Thessalonica. He prays for them and thanks them for their faith. Apparently, their faith is famous: "your faith in God has become known everywhere."

They are model followers of Christ, not only because they have faith in God, but because they live it out. Their faith has produced work for God, and it is done out of love. They have suffered for their faith, but they endure with hope and joy. In other words, their faith has changed their lives, and everyone knows it.

What is the form of your faith?

I came across this definition of spiritual or faith formation (Dallas Willard): "It is the process through which those who love and trust Jesus Christ effectively take on His character."

Faith formation is a process, a life-long process, of becoming more like Christ. Paul acknowledges to the Christians in Thessalonica: "You became imitators of the Lord." In other words, they were becoming more like Christ.

The forming of your faith is the inner transformation of the heart. Of course, it is Christ who transforms our heart, but we in the Faith Formation ministry provide ways to help form your faith. We provide the education (point to head), but we also help you move it to here (point to heart) with God's help. It is not just about the transformation of vital information to your head, it is the transfer of the very life of Christ to your heart.

Yes, you need the knowledge, for how can you respond to God's love if you know nothing of it? But you also need the heart transformation. God takes our time of

learning and uses it to transform us into people we were previously unable to be. It is the way of the head, the heart, and the hands.

What is the form of your faith?

Let me give you two examples.

It was New Year's Day, 2008. A man named John Kralik was living in a one room in Los Angeles, separated from his wife. His law practice was sinking into hard times. He took a walk into the mountains, thinking about taking his own life. It was then he heard a voice, "Until you learn to be grateful for the things you have, you will not receive the things you want."

So he decided to begin writing thank-you notes, one every day. He started with his son, then other family members, then on to his clients, friends, and even the barista at the local coffee shop.

He did this for one year, and it transformed his life. It formed his life so much that he didn't stop after a year; he kept on. And wrote a book about it: *365 Thank You's: The Year a Simple Act of Daily Gratitude Changed My Life*. His life began to thrive. He became a judge of the Los Angeles Superior court.

Now, I tell you this story not so that you start to write thank you notes (although it is a great idea). I tell you this because writing thank you notes became woven into the fiber of his very being. And as it did so, it changed not only his life, but those around him because he kept doing it and doing it...until it transformed his heart.

I invite you to learn as much as you can about God and Jesus and your faith, and do it over and over again, so that your faith moves into your heart and becomes woven into the very fiber of your being.

Just like writing thank you notes changed John Kralik, continually learning about God will form your faith into something beautiful. We, in Faith Formation, offer

you classes and small groups and Bible studies and devotionals, so the characteristics of Christ are formed in your heart.

Here is what we offer this Fall:

- A class on Moses, a man who walked 40 years with God in the wilderness while leading a bunch of ruly people. Certainly we can learn from him to form our faith. This class begins this Thursday. Books on sale today.
- An Adult Confirmation class –a year-long weekly class whereby you learn the beautiful truths of our faith. These truths form our hearts. Class begins tomorrow.
- The History of the Bible: for those of you who like to go really deep, and wonder how in the world did the Bible get into the form we have today. Begins a week from Friday.
- Adult Sunday School class meets before worship and discusses that day's scripture passage for the sermon. What a beautiful way to enter worship by studying God's message ahead of time.
- The list goes on – 2 men's Bible Studies. The women's circles start their yearly study at the end of this month.

All of this information and more is in the Valley Voice (our newsletter), in your worship bulletin. We also have a brochure that outlines everything, all on one piece of paper, and you can find them on the Welcome Centers today.

What is the form of your faith?

I invite Linda Freeman to come up and answer that question for her life.

Sermon – September 9, 2018
Linda Freeman
What is the Form of Your Faith?

When Pastor Diane mentioned she wanted members of the Faith Formation committee to participate in the worship service, the call to worship, reading scripture, taking part of the sermon time - I was the only one to volunteer to share my faith journey.

The form of my faith is a **Sphere** like the sun; a bubbling, bright, constantly changing sphere with solar flares reaching millions of miles into the universe.

How literal. I need to go a bit deeper.

At the core of this sphere, this center of light, is the knowledge that **God loves me**. I learned it in Sunday school – Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so.

And through reading the Bible and attending classes and discussions about **what this means**. Well, God accepts me for who I am, no matter what I have done, or haven't done, or think, or believe. God continues to accept me, encourage me, comfort me and I think smiles at me whenever I turn my attention to him.

Like the Psalmist wrote – whenever I feel anxious or upset or I'm discouraged or unhappy – I can repeat: **Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within in**. I can ask God for a "do-over" – and he says "ok!"

I can return to joy. I have Shalom – that state of complete peace when all things, people creatures are in harmony.

Because my faith tells me that **God is in charge**. Not me. Even though I have spent quite a little bit of time informing God about a situation – or person – who needs attention. When I've been in meetings – because you know Presbyterians do EVERYTHING through committees, task forces and other groups. We try to remember that God is in charge – and it is important for all sides of a question be shared and discussed to discern God's will – that it not be the responsibility of just one individual. God's perspective isn't limited to just one person.

So often the things produced through a group effort reflect the words in our second scripture – I love the poetic truth of Paul's words:

Work produced by faith
Labor prompted by love
Endurance inspired by hope

And the third point of what is contained in my circle, is that **God loves the other guy, too**. This is one of the hardest to live out. Because people can be so mean – present company excepted, of course! So impatient, so boring, so self-absorbed. Hmmm. Just think on that a bit.

I challenge you to think about what you would answer to the question what is the form of your faith? What has gone into building up your belief system? How would it relate to my sphere with it's core of:

God loves me
God is in charge
God loves the other guy

Amen?