

# THE LIFE SERIES



## full life

KEYS TO SPIRITUAL FORMATION

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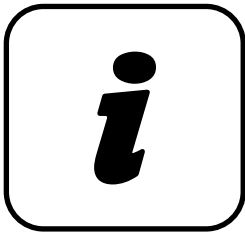
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## full life

– introducing spiritual formation

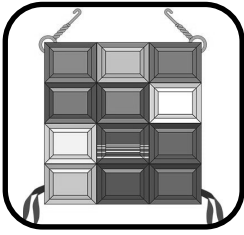


This is the third book in the **life** series. The original book, **life**, introduces the Good News of Jesus with an invitation to receive true life. Building on this, **new life**, presents some essentials to help us establish our new found life in God.

In this third book, our attention is on discovering a **full life** through *spiritual formation*. Even the best intentions of discipleship can become overly cerebral and almost detached from encountering the living

God. In contrast, *spiritual formation* focusses on the ongoing process of transforming a believer's life and character toward the life and character of Jesus, which is primarily accomplished through the ministry of the Spirit within the context of a biblical community – such as a local church.

I believe language shapes culture. So in this book, the language of key terms and concepts are introduced, but the limitation of space restricts the extensive unpacking of these biblical ideas. The books in my *School Series* will help the reader to go deeper – details on pages 26 & 27.



## Naked – Washed – Clothed

Then bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance to the tent of meeting and wash them with water. Take the garments and dress Aaron with the tunic, the robe of the ephod, the ephod itself and the breastplate. Fasten the ephod on him by its skilfully woven waistband. **EXODUS 29:4-5**

In the book of Exodus, God is establishing His nation based around the centrality of worship. From out of the twelve tribes of Israel, Levi is chosen to be servants in God's presence, and the specific family of Aaron are to become priests. Special garments were made for these positions.

However, before they're clothed, their old clothes are removed, the priests are then ceremonially washed, ready to be re-clothed. Paul talks of believers being clothed in Christ (Galatians 3:27) and in Ephesians 4:22-24, he encourages us to take off the old-self and put on our new-self shaped in the image of God. Becoming a Christian disciple involves a transition of values, ethics and purposes.

In 1 Peter 2:9 and again in Revelation 1:6, believers are described as priests - we all have a God ordained calling upon our lives to re-present Christ on earth and help others to encounter His grace and salvation.

The priestly clothing included a breastplate consisting of twelve semiprecious stones, which represented the tribes of Israel. Therefore, across Aaron's chest and over his heart, he 'carried' God's nation in prayer. In this booklet I want to present twelve truths, in the form of four triplets, to aid our spiritual formation as effective disciples.

## **Reflection**

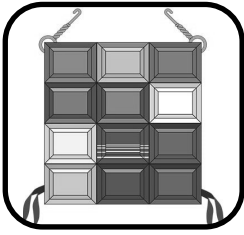
Before we address the subject of spiritual formation, we need to metaphorically strip ourselves of our cluttered agendas, preconceived ideas, and subtle prejudices. In an internet world of information overload, steeped in fake news, and deliberately provocative clickbait, let's lay down both our *entrustments* and *enticements* to allow God space to clothe us afresh in His robes of praise and righteousness (Isaiah 61:3 & 10).

Enticements are all those distracting and often 'good ideas' that can so easily and subtly pull us away from God's best. Enticements are not necessarily sinful, just a corrosive interest that consumes our limited resources, time and even health.

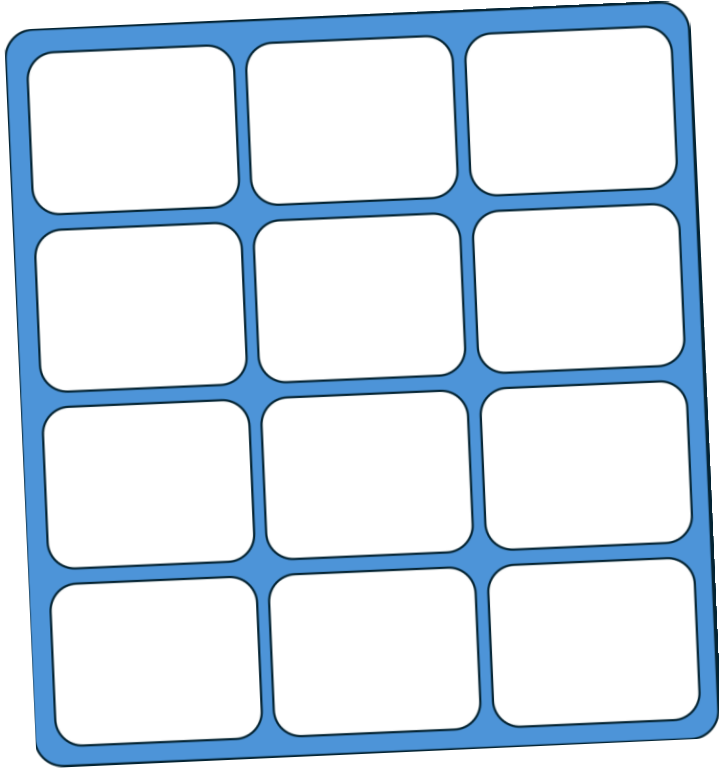
Truly God-given entrustments (spiritual assignments) can be neglected through unguarded enticements. Yet laying them down in an act of worship is not dangerous. If they are truly from God, they'll be entrusted back to you.

***Can you detect your entrustments and enticements?***

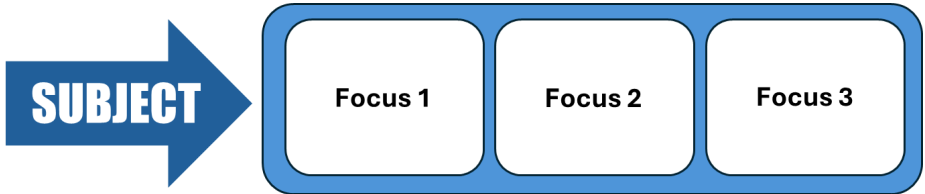
***Are you willing to stand unpreoccupied and open-minded in God's presence?***



## Spiritual formation breastplate



The ***spiritual formation*** breastplate consists of TWELVE spaces, made up of FOUR rows of THREE. We will complete the breastplate one row at a time.



Each of the four rows will focus on a specific subject, expanded into three components. It will all make more sense as we progress.

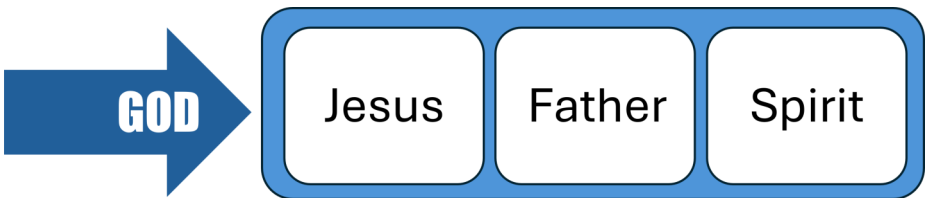


## In the beginning God... **GENESIS 1:1**

Obviously, we start with God.

The blessings of Christ's sacrifice, death and resurrection involve our reconciliation with the Holy Trinity (Matthew 28:19).

This is not a theological exercise in explaining the doctrine of the Holy Trinity<sup>1</sup>, the focus here is on exploring a genuine relationship with the Triune God.



The Trinity order of, Jesus, Father and Holy Spirit, reflects Paul's prayer from 2 Corinthians 13:14, which forms a journey of spiritual development.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you always.

**2 CORINTHIANS 13:14**

<sup>1</sup> Not that we should shy away from such disciplines, but it did take the Early Church 300 years to formulate their doctrine. Though in the first century, Jews *already* had a fourfold manifestation of the One God<sup>2</sup>—so Paul (as a trained Pharisee) had no problem writing about what later became known as the Holy Trinity.

<sup>2</sup> Yes, I am leaving that just hanging in the air, as a tease. You can do your own research later.



Our salvation and proceeding discipleship,

1. begins in grace, so no one is disqualified, and no one can boast (Ephesians 2:8-9). Then hopefully, that encounter of God's grace, forgiveness, healing, restoration, etc...
2. leads us to catch a glimpse of the Father's enduring and lavish love (1 John 3:1, John 3:16 & 2 John 1:3), a truly relational revelation that leads to...
3. the tangible privilege and delight of fellowshiping with the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:28, 1 Thessalonians 5:19, Ephesians 4:30, 5:18 & 6:18, and Revelation 1:10).

Discipleship involves,

- becoming more like Jesus — 1 John 2:6
- discerning the activity of the Father — John 5:19
- keeping in step with the Spirit — Galatians 5:25



### **Reflection**

Consider your relationship with God — Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

***How is the Trinity acknowledged in your devotional life?***

***How do God's attributes of grace, love and fellowship (friendship) shape your discipleship, worship, & lifestyle choices?***

Look again at the threefold Trinitarian summary of discipleship. ***How are these disciplines evident in your life?***



## The Kingdom of God has come near... **MARK 1:15**

Mark's Gospel is generally recognised as the first Gospel written, therefore, the words that form this page's title, are Jesus's first 'gospel' words.

Note how the 28 chapters of the Book of Acts (Luke's sequel to his Gospel) are bookended with teaching about the Kingdom of God.

After his [JESUS] suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. **ACTS 1:3**

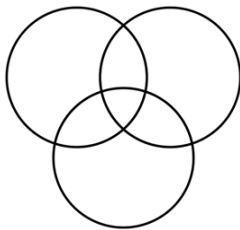
He [PAUL] proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ – with all boldness and without hindrance! **ACTS 28:31**

The Kingdom of God dominated Christ's ministry. The Kingdom is not to be understood as a geographical realm, but wherever God's rule and reign are evident. It's a vast biblical subject, so for now, let's unpack it into the three components we can detect from the Gospel narratives.



In alphabetical order,

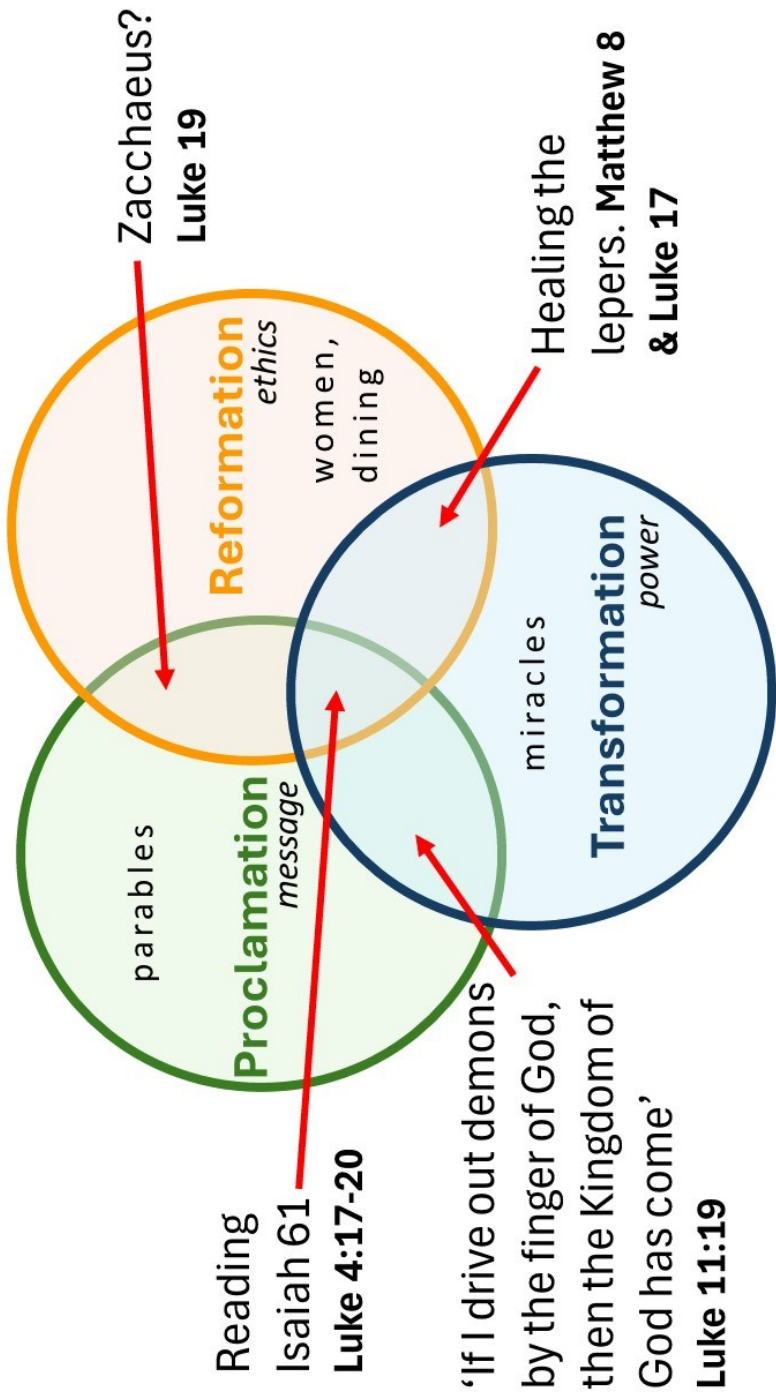
- Proclamation – the *message* of the Kingdom
- Reformation – the *ethics* of the Kingdom
- Transformation – the *power* of the Kingdom



A three circle *Venn* diagram can often help to show how three components overlap, especially when they represent a single entity. We could have the Father, Son, and Spirit overlapping in their particular ministries yet remaining unquestionably One at the centre. Similarly, we could represent ourselves as *body*, *soul*, and *spirit*, to gain a better understanding of how each of these components interplay and interact upon the other two.

Likewise, the Kingdom of God, as Jesus announced it and modelled it, needs to maintain its three components for us to be genuinely Christ's Ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20) — seeking to re-present the work of God on earth.

A possible overlapping three circle diagram is shown on the next page. By all means, add additional Scriptures or change the ones suggested. The areas of overlap are particularly important for it is here that the holistic outworkings of the Kingdom of God are made evident.





For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.  
**1 CORINTHIANS 4:20**

**Reflection**

***Is the local church you attend calling for God’s Kingdom to manifest on the Earth?***

It’s biblical, Matthew 6:10— it’s how Jesus taught us to pray.

***Is your local church doing Kingdom work?***

Proclamation	✓	Our Sunday sermons are biblical.
Reformation	✓	We help with some social needs.
Transformation	✓	We offer prayer at the end of the service.

The question isn’t about ticking the right boxes, but how these three components deliberately overlap to present a single manifestation of God’s glorious ***Good News!*** (Mark 1:15).

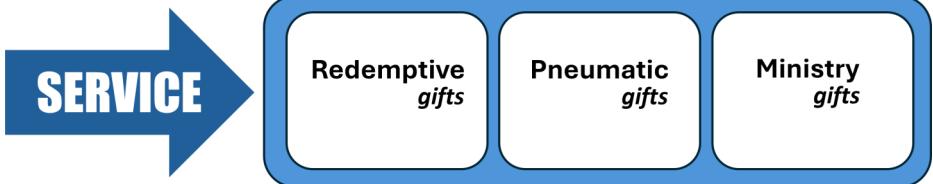


Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. **1 CORINTHIANS 12:1**

Our ability to serve is often a natural gift or a deliberate act of worship. Even Jesus, as He equipped His disciples, ministered to the needy, and knew of His coming sacrifice, saw His messianic role as one of serving (Mark 10:42-45). God's gifts equip us to serve.

For ease of understanding, I've conveniently grouped the gifts into three categories,

- Romans 12:6-8, sometimes referred to as the *redemptive* or *motivational* gifts.
- 1 Corinthians 12:7-11, the *pneumatic* or *charismatic* gifts.
- Ephesians 4:11-13, Christ's *ministry* gifts.



## **Redemptive gifts**

The 7 gifts referenced here by Paul are all natural abilities. Though the possible exception of prophecy needs to be understood within its everyday Ancient Near Eastern pagan context.

God glories in the business of redemption (Joseph, Naomi, and us!). Therefore, our natural abilities can be redeemed for His Kingdom ministry. A worship leader, who was already a professional musician, once stated, “When Jesus saved me, He converted my guitar as well.”

Our natural abilities, passions, and skills can often become our ministry focus. The trained and zealous ‘Saul of Tarsus’ obviously used some of his skills as the ‘apostle Paul’ emerged.

## **Pneumatic gifts**

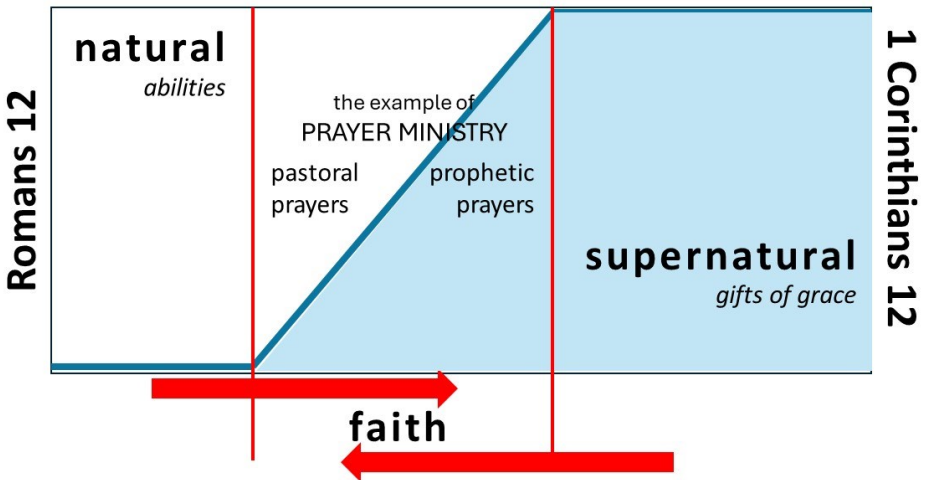
The phrase ‘spiritual gifts’ doesn’t actually appear in the Greek text. Paul in 1 Corinthians 12 uses two Greek words.

*Pneumatic* — something spiritual

*Charismata* — gifts of grace

English translators do a linguistic mash-up resulting in ‘spiritual gifts’. Here, in 1 Corinthians 12:7-11, the gifts are all *supernatural*, they are *pneumatic* not natural skills— including *God-initiated* prophecy! Plus, for our benefit, they are *graciously* given. The presence of these gifts stops Christianity from becoming religious, and maintains a beneficial spiritual link with God.

The following diagram shows how *faith* is an active ingredient in both *redemptive* and *pneumatic* gifts. Paul encourages believers to operate in proportion to their faith (Romans 12:6), like a sort of ‘stepping out of the boat’ moment of trust. Often, it’s our inability to trust (and accept) God’s grace, that leads to a lack of personal faith, thus seriously restricting our ability to operate in the *pneumatic* gifts.



The process (or discipline) in seeing a natural ability redeemed for God, can’t be formulaically captured. Spiritual concepts such as worship, surrender, humility, hunger and compassion, all come to mind. Like the greatest commandments (Matthew 22:36-40), the focus must always be on God *and* loving others. Ministry is all about serving, therefore, spiritual gifting will only develop when God, and *His love for others*, becomes our prime focus too.





Follow the way of love and eagerly desire the gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy.  
**1 CORINTHIANS 14:1**

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. <sup>11</sup>If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen. **1 PETER 10-11**

### *Reflection*

*How have you become aware that some of your natural skills are being used in God's Kingdom?*

*What experience do you have of operating in the 'pneumatic' gifts of 1 Corinthians 12?*

*Language shapes culture* — the words used on our *spiritual formation* breastplate need to become 'everyday' in our Christian walk, and also in how we choose to express our personal and corporate spirituality. If God, His Kingdom and His gifts are ignored in our language (prayer, worship, teaching, fellowship), they will remain neglected in our ministry too.

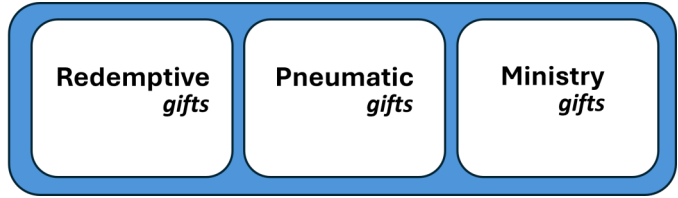
And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ; **EPHESIANS 4:11-12 [NASB]**

This third grouping of gifts, are Christ's gifts 'for the building up of the body of Christ' — His church. In Matthew 16:18, Jesus declares, '*I will build my church*', and here in Ephesians 4:11 we see the spiritual gifts He's using to fulfil that task.

Note I've used the NASB translation, in later English translations the repeated Greek word *some* is removed. Perhaps to stop *some* people using Ephesians 4:11 as a proof-text to avoid evangelism. "*See, it only says, **some** evangelists—and I ain't one of them!*". In the original Greek, *some* is not present before the word *teachers*. Does this imply a joint role, a pastor-teacher? Or, as Greek grammar would allow, does it relate to all four of the previous gifts, hence making greater sense of the word *some*. The four gifts are *all teaching* gifts, teaching the entire church to be apostolic<sup>1</sup>, prophetic, evangelistic and pastoral. And like at a high school, *every* student will be taught maths, but only *some* will become maths teachers. Christ is equipping *some* to be gifted teachers in order to equip the *whole* church in a breadth of mandatory spiritual ministries.

The question is not, '*Which of these gifts do you have?*', but rather, '***Does your local church equip you in all four of these Kingdom ministries?***'

<sup>1</sup> The Greek word apostle simply means, *sent*. Though often historically, *sent* with the authority of the *sender* to be a representative, like an ambassador (2 Corinthians 5:20).



### **Reflection**

Once we've grasped the purpose and the mechanics of Christ's ministry gifts there are some questions to reflect upon.

***Have you been trained in Christ's mandatory ministry subjects of being apostolic (carrying the culture of God's Kingdom), prophetic, evangelistic (bearing Christ's good news), and pastoral?***

***How do you draw on this breadth of equipping in different environments, such as, work, leisure, church involvement, parenting, etc.?***

***On Sunday, who has the pulpit — a general 'all-rounder' Bible teacher, or the recognised teaching-apostles, teaching-prophets, teaching-evangelists and teaching-pastors?***

***How might your discipleship, witness and personal spiritual growth change if these four ministry gifts were taken more seriously week-on-week throughout the entire life of the church?***



## Spiritual formation



Just like most houses are connected to various supplies, water, gas, electricity, we too as disciples need to be connected to God. It's the vital difference between a thermometer and a thermostat. One is a stand alone piece of precision equipment that can read the temperature of a room. However, the other, is connected to an external power source, which gives it the ability to *change* the temperature in a room. Spiritually speaking, metaphorical 'thermometers', though able to discern, often just nag, complain and criticise, but they are rarely part of the solution. Whereas a spiritual 'thermostat' can bring *change* — due to their external supply!

For our *spiritual formation* we need some key supplies.

- *Training*— where Scripture is unpacked, along with applied teaching, and space to reflect and encourage one another.
- *Gifting*— where biblical equipping is Spirit-empowered.
- *Anointing*— an awareness of God's specific presence, at that exact time, upon your life to bless those you're ministering to.

Whereas *training* is accumulative, and *gifting*, an awareness, often affirmed by others, *anointing* ebbs and flows linked to the reality of our relationship with God. In 1 John 2:26-28, the apostle talks of an abiding anointing within, but adds the condition, to 'remain in him' and 'continue in him'. This echoes Christ's own teaching from John 15:1-8.

Gifted ministers are not always anointed. Often due to their own lack of discipline, or the spiritual hardness of the environment. Even Jesus's ministry was limited when faith was lacking in others (Matthew 13:58).

Finally, therefore, do not neglect your training, do not neglect your gifting, and do not *presume* God's anointing— seek it, thirst for it, earnestly desire it. Remember,

**The Holy Spirit is within you for your benefit,  
and upon you for the benefit of others.**

Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you. **1TIMOTHY 4:14**

For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. <sup>7</sup> For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline. **2TIMOTHY 1:6-7**



I am the Lord; that is my name!  
I will not yield my glory to  
another **ISAIAH 42:8**

Let's get personal. Over the years my devotional life has taken many forms. My prayer life is rarely set, though some valuable structures keep returning, such as the Lord's Prayer, which I pretty much use every day in some form or other. Regarding prayer, don't forget that both praise and prophecy come under that heading—so don't neglect these disciplines in your personal and corporate prayer life.

Along with my Bible reading, I always have at least one Christian book on the go, often recommended by a trusted friend, or simply by the author of the previous book I read.

Now, read the verse at the top of this page again.

When I was shown this verse in a personal counselling session, my blood ran cold. In the same way we're told not to cast our pearls before swine (Matthew 7:6), God will not willingly share His glory where there is indiscipline, an untidy spiritual life, or where our motives are compromised with other 'glories'.

*I'm just saying...* so I'll let *you* meditate on that, and apply it to *your* own life.

## **Reflection**

Ponder the subjects of, *training, gifting* and *anointing*.

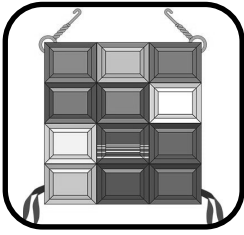
***How do these manifest when you pray with others, witness, teach, counsel, etc.?***

(Matthew 7:28-29; Mark 1:27; & Acts 14:8-12)

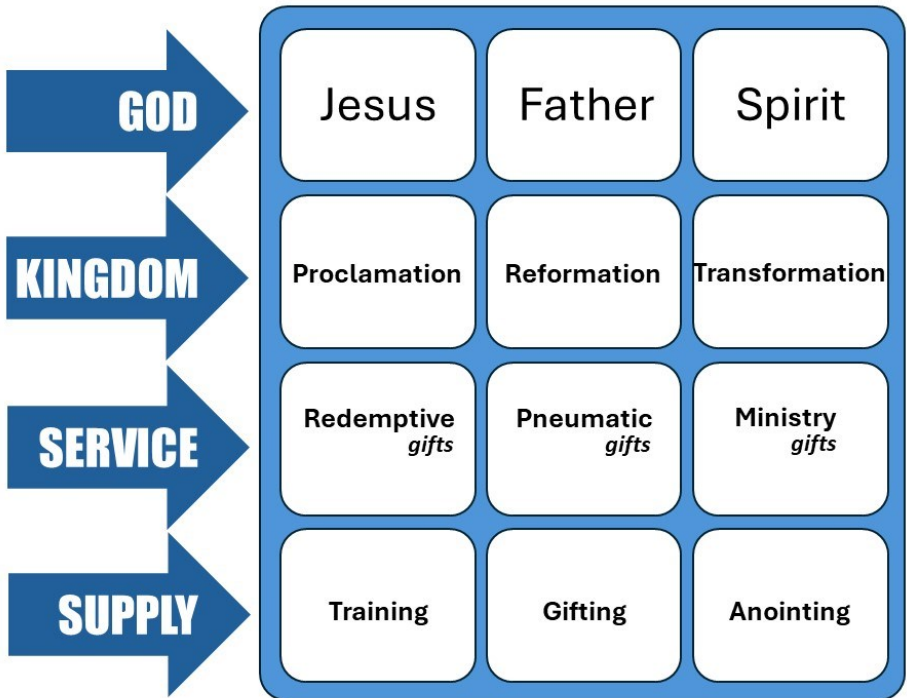
***Share about those times when you have noticed (in a church setting or a conference), training, gifting and anointing on others.***

If you're involved in some form of church or para-church ministry, ***have you ever detected, within yourself, the difference between being gifted and being anointed? Have others noticed these spiritual qualities on you?***

We may have read our Bibles many times over, yet still something resonates, or comes to us fresh. Such is the anointing on our Spirit-breathed Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:16). If you enjoy eating bread, you're probably happy to have it every day, but ideally, you'd want it to be fresh. If you're involved in any form of upfront public ministry, learn the disciplines to keep it fresh — and we'll all be happier! Thank you.



# Spiritual formation breastplate





## Attempting a conclusion

### ***Be reminded...***

Spiritual formation involves acknowledging and surrendering to the ministries of the Triune God, to effectively equip and sustain you as an ambassador for His Kingdom. This is a broad multifunctional and multi-disciplinary task, so to help us retain this calling, we can reduce it to one phrase, ***keep in step with the Spirit*** (*Galatians 5:25*).

### ***Be warned...***

Once regular prayer, the discipline of personal praise, your insatiable hunger for more of God, and the earnest desiring of spiritual gifts is reduced or compromised – your effectiveness in the Kingdom of God will diminish. In addition, once your motivation to love and serve is eclipsed by duty and obligation, the spiritual value of your ministry will be neutralised. Sadly, others will most probably notice this before you—such is the subtleness of the enemy's schemes.

### ***Be amazing...***

*What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ... in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.*

Romans 8:31 & 37

*I can do all this through him who gives me strength.* Philipians 4:13

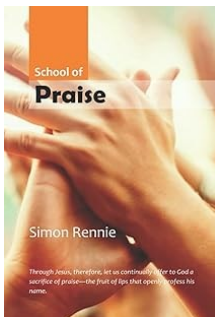
These are powerful Bible truths (along with many others) that once experienced will set you free (John 8:32), and allow you to function (without restriction) for the glory of God. Amen.



## Resources by the same author

The *School Series* contains three titles, all of which are available online. The books take a similar shape, answering common questions, and unpacking biblical texts with insightful and practical applications linked to over thirty years of ministerial experience.

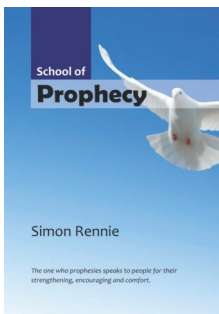
### School of Praise



- Why do we sing songs?
- And why do we *repeat them!*?
- What's the difference between praise and worship?

Welcome to the ***School of Praise*** – where questions like these and many others will be answered. If you're involved in church worship, especially as a worship leader – then the ***School of Praise*** is a must for you.

### School of Prophecy



- What is prophecy?
- How do I know it's God and not just me?
- What's the point of prophecy when we have the Bible?

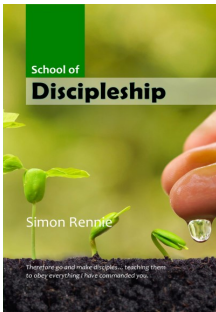
*Yikes!*—prophecy *without* the Bible, now that would be dangerous. Learn how to develop a prophetic ministry without endangering your church.



Use the QR code,  
or the links attached  
to the book titles.



## School of Discipleship



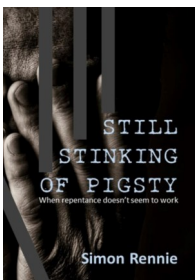
What is discipleship?

- Becoming more like Jesus
- Discerning the activity of the Father
- Keeping in step with the Spirit

Biblical throughout, ***School of Discipleship*** places its emphasis on *spiritual formation*, where Scripture and prayer are among the tools that God's Spirit can use to shape and develop our new lives 'in Christ'.

## STILL STINKING OF PIGSTY

— ***when repentance doesn't seem to work***



What happens when a Christian, a godly 'mature' Christian, is trapped in an area of sin? In tears and prayer, with guilt and shame, captivity takes hold. It's as if repentance doesn't seem to work.

Simon Rennie presents the stark problems and offers insightful biblical solutions. An honest and compassionate resource for the frustrated 'repeat-offender'. [also available on Kindle]

## THE LIFE SERIES



This **FULL LIFE** booklet contains key truths to aid your *spiritual formation*. Although its size restricts the contents, much of the information is expanded in Simon Rennie's *School of Discipleship* and the other books in that series.

See inside (pages 26 & 27) for more details.

**KINGDOM** | ACADEMY

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