

## Lessons in Spiritual Formation

The following is a list of suggested points to cover as we teach young people the spiritual principles involved in living the life in Christ. Our goal is to communicate these principles in language appropriate to teens, with concrete examples and illustrations, activities that would support the lessons, and plenty of opportunities for questions and discussion:

- Our identity is found in Christ, who shows us what it is to be fully human: made “in the image” and “according to the likeness” of God. In particular, we find in Christ what being in God’s image means for both our souls and our bodies, and how we become truly who we are as we grow in likeness to God.
- Our identity in Christ is revealed to us within the context of our belonging to the Body of Christ, the Church. Our identity is not something individualistic, but is related to the community of the Church, and is clarified in particular through our relationship to the Saints.
- Knowing ourselves in Christ requires knowing Christ through His activity in the world; thus we must come to know and appreciate Christ’s saving work. In particular, this includes what is accomplished by His incarnation, His suffering and crucifixion, His death and resurrection, His ascension into Heaven and His glorious second coming. Also, this includes appreciating the complimentary work of the Holy Spirit in the descent at Pentecost and in everything that follows in the history of the Church and especially in the Sacramental life.
- Recognizing the existence of sin, which acts to deform our true identity and causes spiritual illness in us, we are called to make purity of heart (which is spiritual health) the immediate goal of our life, through which we realize our true identity in Christ and ultimately experience the eternal joy of the Kingdom.
- With purity of heart as our goal, we embark on the path of repentance. This path requires an ascetical effort, which is a God-inspired rising to the challenge (adventure) presented by the presence of evil in the world and sin in our life. We overcome this challenge not by our efforts alone, but rather by cooperating with the grace of God available to us through baptism and the whole of the Sacramental life.
- The soul is healed and the heart made pure through the three chief spiritual disciplines (almsgiving, fasting, and prayer) which correspond to the three powers of the soul: zeal, desire, and the mind (cf. St. Maximus the Confessor, Chapters on Love I.79).
- The process of spiritual healing requires us to be growing in self-knowledge, which leads to the act of repentance and confession of sin, and the resulting purification. For this self-knowledge, a basic understanding of the existence and dynamics of the spiritual virtues and corresponding vices (passions) is required, and especially an understanding of the dynamics of pride and humility and the need to move from sinful self-love to divinely-inspired love for God and others.
- We must make a connection between the Cross of Christ and the life of repentance to which we are called, and how we find joy in embracing the Cross as it is presented to us in our lives.

- A course of presentations and discussions on the above-mentioned principles might take the form of an in-depth study of the Beatitudes (as found in St. Matthew's gospel), following an outline designed to be used over the course of a school year. Such a study could draw from patristic commentaries on the text of the Beatitudes, as well as reflections from contemporary Orthodox authors that are available.