

The Indian Bible College's Use of "Spiritual Formation"

The Indian Bible College (IBC) has developed an intensive discipleship process titled "Spiritual Formation." It was given this name by IBC's previous president (Richard Standley) before the school became aware of the negative connotations of that terminology. In recent years the school has been slandered and falsely accused of heresy by those who have not taken time to really understand what we mean by those words. The following is an explanation of IBC's spiritual formation process.

IBC is VERY careful to avoid New Age tendencies or Eastern mysticism.¹ We are still (and always) committed to God's Word as our sole foundation. The Spiritual Formation (SF) material we use has been developed by President Dr. Jason Koppen specifically for Native people, designed with the assistance of staff, students, and Native ministry leaders. Martha Gushee, Coreen Esplin (Seneca), Dan Fredericks, Irvinson Jones (Navajo), and Huron Claus (Mohawk) all contributed to the design of the process and materials. Its purpose is to help the students grow in their walk with Christ through being part of an accountability and shepherding group. In the fall semester we emphasize intimacy with God through prayer and application of basic necessary disciplines (such as submission, solitude, and simplicity). We also talk about our identity in Christ, according to Scripture, emphasizing the value God has placed on us by the fact that He paid for us with the life of His Son (rather than building up their "self-esteem"). Then we deal with the issues of forgiveness, humility, accepting one another in Christ, working through disagreements rather than burying them and letting them fester, and other interpersonal issues as members of the Body of Christ. In the spring semester we talk about integrity (honesty, faithfulness, purity), stewardship (of time, talents, treasures, and our bodies), and spiritual warfare (believing the truth of God rather than the lies of Satan).

We communicate these concepts through an introductory chapel every five weeks, followed by the students working through devotional material individually and then coming together as a group three times to discuss the theme. Then the spiritual mentors meet one-on-one with each student. The goal is to work with the students personally and individually so that we are able to address specific sin and spiritual growth issues. In this way the students are encouraged to not only study God's Word but to apply it to their individual lives. The desire is that any outstanding sin--anything that would hinder their effectiveness as servants of God--will be addressed before the student graduates. In fact, we are committed to not graduating a student if he or she continues to be unrepentant and does not demonstrate growth in an area that has been a stumbling block.

The SF groups usually become intensely personal, where students can share their struggles of depression, addiction to sinful escapes, the hurts of past abuse, etc. Most students have never experienced Christ-like grace and truth to such an extent. The goal of the process is to disciple students for the first two years and then, the last two years, train students to be disciplinators, ultimately resulting in mature students leading their own SF group their senior year.

We intend to make this material available to Native ministries and churches but we are still working on some editing and formatting matters. There is no heresy or false teaching in any of the material. We can make the materials available upon request.

¹ IBC's Spiritual Formation process does NOT teach contemplative prayer.

Further inquiries can be made by contacting the school at 928-774-3890 or info@indianbible.org.