

Preparation for Formation

This covenant group session is based on the October *Touchstones* themed ministry material, *Formation*. This essay is in part based on the *Touchstones Introduction to the Theme*, by Rev. Kirk Loadman-Copeland, the editor of *Touchstones*.

At birth, it is as if we are immediately thrown onto a potter's wheel, and there we remain throughout life. We spin, just like the earth spins, and we are formed into a vessel, for that is what it means to be human: to be capable of receiving what comes to us, and of giving some or all of it to others. *Rev. Kirk Loadman-Copeland, Touchstones Introduction.*

Loadman-Copeland asks the question, "How did you find your way to today?" Sharing our "formation" stories is one way to get to know each other, and we often introduce ourselves by sharing the "outer" elements that have shaped us: where we have lived, family, religion, education, jobs. The influence of other "outer" forces like class or ethnicity may be a little more challenging to share, but they are no less a part of who we have become. "Inner" forces have shaped us as well. Many of our "inner" shaping forces may have a significant genetic component, like personality characteristics (introversion or extraversion, for example), talents like music or athleticism, or physical limitations. Other "inner" characteristics may be harder to describe, but still have worked to shape our lives: our sense of identity or our passions and sense of a calling.

We discover ourselves as we share our stories with others. Loadman-Copeland notes that part of us comes into awareness as we tell "our story yet one more time to a friend who listens us into awareness." This is sometimes called the magic of covenant groups.

Does each of us have an essence, an inner core, a soul? How we have been molded and formed? Have we always had a notion of who we were becoming? Or have we made it up as we've gone along, never sure what the next turn would bring forth? "We are always a work in progress, always evolving," states Loadman-Copeland. He adds, "Composing a life involves both self-invention, creating ourselves anew, and self-discovery, coming to know our own voice, as we stride deeper and deeper into the world."

Mary Catherine Bateson (as quoted in the *Touchstones Intro*) sees our formation as art: "I see the way people live their lives as, in itself, an artistic process. An artist takes ingredients that may seem incompatible and organizes them into a whole that is not only workable, but finally pleasing and true, even beautiful. . . . you are creating a piece of art called your life."

You may wish to explore *Touchstones* further; the entire issue has been sent along with this Preparation. These are some of our favorite essays: *The Introduction to the Theme* and *Formation & Letting Your Life Speak*, both by Rev. Kirk Loadman-Copeland, the *Velveteen Rabbit* excerpt on "becoming real" in the *Family Matters* section, *When We Grow*, by Alice Walker, and *Make the Road by Walking*, by Brian McLaren. Many quotes are from the *Common Bowl* section.

Here are some quotations you may wish to consider as you think about the topic of formation.

Clay is molded into a pot,
But it is the emptiness inside that makes it useful.
Tao Te Ching, Lao Tzu, English interpretation by John R. Mabry

Before you tell your life what you intend to do with it, listen for what it intends to do with you. Before you tell your life what truths and values you have decided to live up to, let your life tell you what truths you embody, what values you represent. *Parker Palmer*

In the process of telling the truth about what you feel or what you see, each of us has to get in touch with himself or herself in a really deep, serious way. Our culture does not encourage us to undertake that attunement. Consequently, most of us really exist at the mercy of other people's formulations of what's important. *June Jordan*

Choice forms the divider which is responsible for the formation of all futures that can be possible. *Stephen Richards*

Each of us is an artist whose task it is to shape life into some semblance of the pattern of our dreams. The molding is not of self alone, but of shared tomorrows and times we shall never see. So let us be about our task. The materials are very precious and perishable. *Arthur Graham*

Spiritual formation is for everyone. Just as there is an "outer you" that is being formed and shaped all the time, like it or not, by accident or on purpose, so there is an "inner you." *John Ortberg*

Questions to Ponder

1. What were the most important "outer" forces (such as family, class, where you lived, ethnicity, religion, friends, education, jobs) that have shaped your life?
2. What are some "inner" forces (such as personality characteristics, sense of identity, talents, limitations, passions or sense of a calling) that have shaped your life?
3. What choices have you made in your life that have shaped who you have become?
4. Describe a transformative experience in your life – an experience from which you emerged changed. This experience can be either brief or an extended one of months or a few years.
5. What forces, whether inner or outer, are working to transform you now? How do you see yourself changing in the near future?
6. In what ways are you becoming and in what ways have you arrived in terms of who you are?
7. Where have you found community and companions for the journey of becoming your best self?

Words of the Day

Think of a phrase that describes how you view your current formation process. In what ways are you becoming? The prompt for the Words of the Day activity will be to complete this sentence: "I am becoming"