

Attentiveness to Grace

I. Introduction: Attentiveness to Grace - Living the Gift of Vocation

Every Christian vocation begins not with human initiative but with God's gracious initiative. Before we chose God, He chose us (cf. Jn 15:16). Before we responded, He was already at work, calling, preparing, guiding, and loving us. Vocation is therefore first and foremost a gift of grace before it becomes a human response. Whether called to Christian discipleship, consecrated life, priesthood, or missionary service, we can only say "yes" because God first says "yes" to us.

The history of salvation reveals this divine pattern repeatedly. Abraham did not seek a great mission until God called him. Moses did not volunteer to lead Israel; God met him at the burning bush. The prophets were chosen before they felt ready. Mary became the Mother of the Lord because she first received God's gracious invitation. The apostles were ordinary men whom Jesus called by name, and St. Paul himself recognized that he had been "set apart before I was born and called through his grace" (Gal 1:15). Every vocation is therefore the unfolding of God's loving initiative.

Recognizing vocation as grace changes the way we understand formation. Formation is not primarily an effort to make ourselves worthy of God's call. Rather, it is a gradual learning to recognize, receive, and cooperate with the grace already at work within us. The task of formation is not to produce a vocation but to help the formandus discover, embrace, and faithfully live the vocation that God has already planted in the heart.

This is why attentiveness to grace becomes one of the most important dispositions in missionary formation. Grace is never absent. God is constantly speaking through Scripture, prayer, the sacraments, community life, relationships, daily responsibilities, successes, disappointments, and even failures. The essential question is not whether God is acting, but whether we have learned to recognize His action.

In today's fast-paced and noisy world, this attentiveness is easily weakened. Constant activity, digital distractions, and external pressures can dull our spiritual perception. We may overlook God's gentle invitations to conversion, forgiveness, generosity, deeper prayer, or courageous service. Formation therefore seeks to educate not only the mind but also the spiritual senses, enabling formandi to recognize the quiet movements of the Holy Spirit within ordinary life.

The story of St. Paul beautifully illustrates this mystery. Long before his dramatic encounter on the road to Damascus, God's grace had already been preparing him. His education, zeal, intellectual gifts, and even his mistaken convictions became part of God's mysterious preparation. His conversion did not mark the beginning of grace but the moment when he finally recognized and surrendered to the grace that had been accompanying him all along.

The same is true of every vocation. Looking back, we often discover that God was quietly preparing us through our family, friendships, education, moments of suffering, unexpected opportunities, and even painful experiences. What once seemed accidental gradually reveals itself as part of God's loving providence. Such awareness fills the heart with gratitude and deepens confidence that the One who began the good work will continue to bring it to completion (Phil 1:6).

For formandi, attentiveness to grace means learning to read their own lives through the eyes of faith. It is the habit of asking each day: *Where has God been present? What invitation is He extending? How is He shaping me for His mission?* For formators, it means helping those they accompany recognize God's action already present in their lives rather than simply providing answers or solutions.

Ultimately, attentiveness to grace nurtures a spirituality of gratitude, trust, and availability. Those who recognize that their vocation is entirely a gift become free to offer themselves generously in return. Like Mary, they learn to respond each day with openness: *"Let it be done to me according to your word"* (Lk 1:38). Thus, attentiveness to grace becomes the foundation of lifelong vocational fidelity and joyful missionary discipleship.

Formation Insight: Every vocation begins with God’s initiative. Formation is not primarily about becoming worthy of God’s call but about becoming increasingly attentive to the grace that has always preceded, accompanied, and sustained our journey. The more we recognize vocation as gift, the more freely and joyfully we respond to God’s invitation.

II. Theological and Spiritual Foundations

Attentiveness to grace is grounded in the very heart of Christian theology. To grow in this capacity, formandi need to understand *why* grace is central to their formation, *how* God works through grace, and *what* our response should be. This section lays the spiritual groundwork.

1. Grace as God’s Initiative: The Foundation of Every Vocation

The first and most important truth is that **God always makes the first move.**

- **Scriptural Foundation:** “When it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me...” (Gal 1:15-16). Paul’s story illustrates that grace is not earned or deserved; it is God’s sovereign choice and loving initiative.
- **Theological Insight:** The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that “the preparation of man for the reception of grace is already a work of grace” (CCC 2001). Even the desire to seek God, the restlessness that drives us to conversion, is itself God’s gift.
- **Formation Implication:** Formandi must learn to trust that God is already at work in their lives, preparing them step by step. This reduces anxiety and fosters a spirit of surrender.

Formation Insight: Every authentic vocation begins in God’s heart before it is recognized in the human heart. Formation therefore begins by learning to recognize the grace that has always preceded us.

2. Prevenient, Accompanying, and Sanctifying Grace

Grace is not a single event but a **continuous flow** through a person’s life.

- **Prevenient Grace (Grace that Goes Before):** God’s preparing work — forming personality, guiding life circumstances, and placing people and events in our path to dispose us toward Him.
- **Accompanying Grace:** God’s presence walking with us in daily choices, sustaining us in trial, and prompting us to good.
- **Sanctifying Grace:** The permanent gift of God’s life in us, first given in baptism and renewed through the sacraments, enabling us to grow in holiness.
- **Formation Implication:** Helping formandi recognize that *all* these graces are part of a single divine plan allows them to see life as a unified story rather than a series of random events.

Formation Insight: Every stage of vocation unfolds through these forms of grace. Prevenient grace prepares the person long before vocational awareness; accompanying grace sustains daily fidelity; sanctifying grace gradually conforms the disciple to Christ. Formation is therefore learning to recognize this continuous work of God.

3. Grace and Freedom

Grace does not bypass or overpower human freedom — it **elevates and perfects it.**

- **Theological Insight:** St. Augustine famously said, “God who created you without you, will not save you without you.” Grace invites a response.
- **Discernment Principle:** Not every impulse or feeling is grace; attentiveness is needed to distinguish between what is of God and what is not.
- **Formation Implication:** Formandi should learn that attentiveness to grace is active cooperation — a “yes” that allows grace to bear fruit.

4. Christ as the Full Revelation of Grace

Grace is not an abstract concept but a **person** — Jesus Christ.

- **Scriptural Foundation:** “From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace” (John 1:16).
- **Spiritual Application:** Every grace leads to Christ and unites us to His Paschal Mystery. Whether through consolation, suffering, or insight, the purpose of grace is to form Christ in us.
- **Formation Implication:** Encourage formandi to ask: *How is this experience shaping me to be more Christ-like?*

5. The Holy Spirit as Teacher and Guide

The Holy Spirit is the interior instructor who awakens us to grace and teaches us how to respond. The Holy Spirit gradually forms an interior sensitivity that enables the formandus to distinguish passing emotions from authentic invitations of grace. Over time, the Spirit educates the “heart” to recognize God’s voice with increasing clarity.

- **Scriptural Foundation:** “The Advocate, the Holy Spirit... will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you” (John 14:26).
- **Spiritual Practice:** The Spirit gives “spiritual senses” — the ability to notice movements of consolation (peace, joy, hope) and desolation (fear, discouragement, self-absorption).
- **Formation Implication:** Cultivating a relationship with the Holy Spirit through prayer and invocation (“Come, Holy Spirit...”) is essential for becoming sensitive to grace.

6. The Sacramental Dimension

Grace is mediated through tangible signs — the sacraments — which make God’s invisible life perceptible.

- **Eucharist:** The daily bread that sustains attentiveness, deepens gratitude, and strengthens mission.
- **Reconciliation:** A privileged place of encountering transforming grace, freeing the heart from sin so it can perceive God more clearly.
- **Formation Implication:** Encourage regular sacramental practice as a concrete way of staying “plugged in” to the source of grace.

7. The Ecclesial Dimension

Grace is never purely private — it is **given within and for the Church**.

- **Theological Insight:** Our personal growth in grace is meant to benefit the whole Body of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 12).

- **Formation Implication:** Formandi should learn to see their own experiences of grace as connected to the mission of the community. This prevents spiritual individualism and fosters a sense of shared responsibility.

8. Grace and Human Experience

Grace often works through ordinary events — work, relationships, suffering, restlessness.

- **Pastoral Insight:** God uses our desires, disappointments, successes, and failures as the raw material of holiness.
- **Formation Implication:** Formandi must be taught to interpret not only moments of obvious spiritual consolation but also moments of struggle as possible invitations from God.

This theological and spiritual grounding helps the formandi see that attentiveness to grace is not merely about “feeling spiritual,” but about participating in the ongoing story of salvation. Grace is real, present, personal, and transformative — and it calls for an intelligent, free, and grateful response.

III. Core Formation Objectives

By the end of this module, the formandi should:

- Be able to recall moments of prevenient grace in their personal history.
- Develop a daily habit of reviewing God’s action (awareness examen).
- Learn to interpret struggles, desires, and even delays as possible instruments of grace.
- Respond actively through prayer, gratitude, and concrete acts of conversion.

IV. Practical Guidelines for Formandi

Attentiveness to grace is learned through consistent practice. These guidelines help formandi gradually sharpen their spiritual awareness, notice God’s presence in ordinary life, and respond in freedom and gratitude.

1. Daily Practices

a) Morning Offering

Start the day with an intentional act of surrender, placing yourself under God’s loving gaze. Before beginning the day’s activities, ask: *Lord, help me recognize today the graces through which You are forming me for my vocation.*

- **Why:** This sets the tone of receptivity and reminds you that the day is a gift.
- **How:** A simple prayer like: “Lord, I offer You this day — my thoughts, words, and actions. Help me to recognize Your presence and cooperate with Your grace.”
- **Tip:** Say this while still in bed or as soon as you get dressed, to align your first thoughts with God.

b) Awareness Examen (Evening Review)

This is a 5–10 minute spiritual “check-in” at the end of the day.

- **Why:** Grace is often noticed only in hindsight.
- **How:**

1. **Ask for light** — “Lord, let me see this day as You see it.”
 2. **Review the day** — Walk through the events of the day, paying attention to moments of joy, consolation, challenge, or restlessness.
 3. **Identify graces** — Notice where you experienced God’s presence, help, or invitation.
 4. **Express gratitude** — Thank God for even small signs of His love.
 5. **Ask for healing and help** — Where you resisted grace, ask forgiveness and strength for tomorrow.
- **Practical Example:** “This morning’s conversation with my classmate gave me unexpected joy. I now see that as Your encouragement to be more open to community life.”

c) Periods of Silence

Carve out 10–15 minutes daily for stillness.

- **Why:** Grace is often missed when we are rushed or distracted.
- **How:**
 - Sit quietly, breathe slowly, and repeat a short prayer (“Speak, Lord, your servant is listening”).
 - Simply notice your thoughts and feelings without judgment.
- **Result:** Over time, you’ll develop a habit of interior listening, making it easier to spot God’s invitations throughout the day.

2. Journaling

Keeping a **Grace Journal** deepens attentiveness by giving concrete expression to God’s action in daily life. Writing helps transform fleeting experiences into lasting insights and gradually reveals the pattern of God’s guidance over time. Rather than simply recording events, organize your journal under four simple headings:

- **Grace Received:** Record moments when you experienced God’s love, guidance, strength, protection, or consolation. These may be significant events or simple daily blessings.
Example: “I experienced unexpected peace during prayer despite feeling anxious about my studies.”

- **Grace Resisted:** Honestly acknowledge moments when you sensed God’s invitation but hesitated, ignored it, or chose another path. This is not meant to produce guilt but to foster greater awareness and openness.
Example: “I felt prompted to apologize to a community member but postponed it because of pride.”

- **Grace Discovered:** Reflect on events that, in hindsight, reveal God’s hidden presence or providence. Many graces become visible only after prayerful reflection.
Example: “What I initially saw as a disappointment has helped me become more patient and trusting.”

- **Grace to Be Embraced:** Identify the grace you feel God is inviting you to receive or cooperate with in the coming days. Conclude with one concrete response.
Example: “This week I will intentionally spend more time listening before speaking during community conversations.”

Why: This simple method helps formandi recognize not only the graces they receive but also the opportunities they overlook or resist. Over time, it develops a deeper awareness that God is continually present and inviting a generous response.

Tip: Do not aim for lengthy reflections. A few honest sentences under each heading are often enough to reveal how God is shaping your vocation day by day. Regularly reviewing previous entries will

help you recognize recurring themes, deepen gratitude, and strengthen your cooperation with God's grace.

3. Listening to Interior Movements

Attentiveness includes becoming aware of your **inner world** — thoughts, emotions, desires — and asking where they lead.

- **Desires:** Which desires bring you closer to Christ (peace, generosity, hope) and which pull you away (fear, self-pity, resentment)?
- **Restlessness:** Sometimes dissatisfaction is grace urging you to change or grow.
- **Promptings:** Pay attention to sudden inspirations — an urge to pray, call someone, or act charitably — these may be nudges of the Spirit.
- **Example:** If you suddenly think of a person who needs encouragement, pause and pray for them or send a message.

4. Community Sharing

God's action often becomes clearer when shared. Invite participants also to identify moments when God's grace came through another community member—a correction, encouragement, shared prayer, or ordinary act of fraternity.

- **Small-Group Sharing:** Once a week, share one concrete experience of grace with your community or spiritual companion.
- **Benefits:**
 - Confirms that what you noticed was indeed from God.
 - Strengthens gratitude and mutual encouragement.
 - Helps others become more attentive to grace in their own lives.

5. Sacramental and Liturgical Life

- **Eucharist:** Participate actively in daily Mass if possible; before Communion, recall specific graces and unite them with your offering.
- **Reconciliation:** Regular confession sharpens spiritual senses by clearing away obstacles to grace.
- **Liturgy of the Hours:** The rhythm of psalms and prayer tunes your heart to God's movements throughout the day.

6. Gratitude as a Daily Attitude

Gratitude is the natural response to grace and also the best “training ground” for attentiveness.

- **Practice:** List at least three things you are grateful for each day — even simple ones like a conversation, a moment of rest, or good health.
- **Effect:** Gratitude rewires the heart to look for God's presence, even in difficulties.

7. Active Response

Grace calls for a concrete “yes.”

- **Ask Each Day:**
 - How can I respond to what I noticed today?
 - Is God asking me to reconcile, to serve, to step out in faith, or to wait patiently?
- **Example:** If you sensed grace inviting you to forgive, take one small step — pray for the person or write them a note.

8. Regular Spiritual Direction

Bring your experiences of grace to your spiritual director or formator.

- **Purpose:** To discern whether what you noticed truly comes from God, and to learn how to cooperate with it more fully.
- **Benefit:** Provides accountability and helps prevent spiritual self-deception.

This section helps formandi not just “think about grace,” but practice noticing it in their concrete reality, step by step. Over time, these practices cultivate a habitual awareness that transforms their relationship with God and their availability for mission.

V. Tools for Self-Reflection

Self-reflection is essential for growing in attentiveness to grace. It is not merely a mental exercise but a prayerful dialogue with God about one’s lived experience. These tools are designed to help formandi recognize the presence of grace, interpret its meaning, and respond with freedom and gratitude.

1. Life Review: Tracing the Hand of God

Purpose: To see one’s personal history as a story of grace rather than random events.

Method:

- **Create a Timeline:**
 - Draw a line representing your life from birth to the present.
 - Mark key events (family background, friendships, turning points, struggles, moments of joy, times of failure).
- **Vocational Memory:** Invite the formandus to reflect:
 - What first attracted me to Christ?
 - When did I first sense God’s call?
 - Which people helped my vocation grow?
 - Which difficult moments purified my vocation?
 - Which original graces do I need to remember today?
- **Prayerful Reflection:**
 - Ask: *Where was God present? How did this event shape me?*
 - Identify moments of prevenient grace (God preparing you even before you knew Him), formative grace (lessons learned through circumstances), and transforming grace (conversion moments).
- **Outcome:** This exercise often leads to gratitude, healing, and deeper trust that God has been guiding your story.

Tip for Formandi: Repeat this exercise periodically — new graces become visible as you mature.

2. The Daily Awareness Examen

The examen is not just a routine but a sacred space for self-discovery and recognition of grace.

Five Steps (Ignatian Model):

1. **Gratitude:** Recall and thank God for 2–3 specific blessings of the day.
2. **Petition:** Ask the Holy Spirit for light to see the day as God sees it.

3. **Review:** Walk through the day hour by hour, noticing interior movements (peace, joy, unease, restlessness). How has today's grace helped me become the missionary God is calling me to be?
4. **Contrition:** Where you resisted grace, ask forgiveness and healing.
5. **Resolution:** Make a concrete commitment for tomorrow to respond better.

Deepening the Practice:

- Pay special attention to subtle moments — a smile that encouraged you, a quiet conviction to avoid gossip, a stirring of compassion.
- Note “missed graces” not to feel guilt but to grow more responsive next time.

3. Grace Mapping Exercise

Purpose: To visualize patterns of grace over time.

How to Do It:

- On a blank page, draw circles or symbols representing important events.
- Connect them with arrows showing how one led to another.
- Use colours to mark different types of grace:
 - **Green:** Growth or consolation
 - **Blue:** Protection or prevention from sin
 - **Red:** Painful experiences that became turning points
- Prayerfully look for patterns: Is there a recurring theme (trust, perseverance, generosity) that God is forming in you?

4. Reflective Journaling Prompts

Write prayerfully about the following questions:

- When today did I feel most fully alive and connected to God?
- When did I feel far from Him, and what drew me there?
- What situations stirred joy, peace, or hope in me? (Signs of consolation)
- What situations left me anxious, empty, or resistant? (Signs of desolation)
- Which experiences seem to be God's invitations to growth?
- Where do I feel called to respond tomorrow?

Formation Tip: Encourage writing once or twice a week if daily journaling feels overwhelming. Even brief notes can reveal significant patterns over time.

5. Consolation & Desolation Tracker

Purpose: To sharpen spiritual sensitivity by noticing interior movements.

Practice:

- Draw a simple two-column chart in your journal.
- **Left column:** Record moments of consolation (peace, clarity, love, hope, sense of purpose).
- **Right column:** Record moments of desolation (fear, sadness, confusion, self-absorption).
- Reflect: What triggered each? Where was God inviting me?
- Over time, look for recurring triggers and responses to learn how grace works uniquely in you.

6. Grace Dialogue Prayer

Turn reflection into conversation:

- Imagine Jesus sitting with you and ask:
 - “Lord, where were You with me today?”
 - “What do You want me to see about this event?”
 - “How are You shaping me through this?”
- Listen in silence and note what surfaces — words, images, memories, a sense of peace or conviction.

7. Gratitude Practice

Gratitude is the most basic and transformative tool for recognizing grace.

- Each night, write down three specific things you are grateful for.
- Push yourself to go beyond generic items (“family, food, health”) to name small, concrete graces (“the encouragement I received in class,” “the unexpected time to rest,” “the laughter at dinner that lifted my mood”).
- This rewires your perception and trains your heart to look for God in all things.

8. Peer or Group Reflection

Sometimes others can spot God’s action more easily than we can.

- **Small Group Practice:**
 - Each person shares one experience where they felt God’s presence.
 - Others listen and reflect back where they see grace at work.
- **Benefit:** Builds humility, strengthens community, and confirms what might otherwise remain unnoticed.

9. Questions for Deeper Discernment

Use these periodically for more extended retreats or monthly days of recollection:

- What events in my life most clearly show God’s providential care?
- Which struggles or wounds have become channels of compassion for others?
- What graces have I resisted or neglected? What fears keep me from responding fully?
- How is God inviting me to grow right now — in faith, hope, charity, trust, forgiveness, service?

10. Formative Review with a Spiritual Companion

Regularly share these reflections with a trusted formator or spiritual director.

- They can help you see blind spots, affirm your growth, and challenge you when needed.
- Over time, this becomes a school of discernment — learning to see life through God’s eyes.

These tools help transform self-reflection from mere introspection into a **dialogue with grace** — where memory, prayer, and discernment work together to form a deeper awareness of God’s presence and action.

VI. Practices to Cultivate Attentiveness

Attentiveness to grace is not a single insight but a lifelong habit that grows through regular practice. These exercises help formandi move from occasional awareness to a **habitual spiritual posture** — seeing, hearing, and cooperating with God’s action moment by moment.

1. Lectio Divina (Sacred Reading)

Lectio Divina trains the heart to notice God's word not just as text but as a personal message.

- **How to Practice:**
 1. **Lectio (Read):** Slowly read a short passage of Scripture (e.g., the Gospel of the day).
 2. **Meditatio (Reflect):** Notice what word, phrase, or image speaks to you.
 3. **Oratio (Respond):** Speak to God about what you have noticed — gratitude, questions, fears.
 4. **Contemplatio (Rest):** Remain in silence, letting the grace of the word sink in.
- **Formation Tip:** Encourage journaling after Lectio Divina: "What is God saying to me? What grace is being offered?"
- **Why It Works:** It sharpens the ability to recognize God's voice in other areas of life, not just during prayer.

2. Nature Awareness & Contemplative Walks

God's grace is also revealed in creation, which St. Francis of Assisi called "our first catechism."

- **Practice:** Take a slow walk once or twice a week, focusing on sensory awareness — sights, sounds, smells.
- **Questions for Reflection:**
 - "What does creation reveal about God's care today?"
 - "What beauty or detail caught my attention and why?"
- **Benefit:** This develops the habit of slowing down and noticing subtle signs of life and renewal — a transferable skill for interior attentiveness.

3. Sacred Pauses Throughout the Day

Attentiveness grows when we punctuate the day with short moments of recollection.

- **How:**
 - Pause for 30–60 seconds between tasks, take a slow breath, and whisper a prayer ("Lord, help me see You here").
 - Use natural "transition moments" (before meals, before entering a meeting, when hearing a bell or phone chime).
- **Why:** Grace is often hidden in transitions; pausing makes us available to receive it.
- **Example:** Before starting work, silently offer the task for a specific intention.

4. Listening to the Holy Spirit

During each pause ask:

- What movement is growing within me?
- Does it lead to greater faith, hope and love?
- Does it draw me toward Christ?
- Does it make me more available for mission?

5. Practicing Gratitude Intentionally

Gratitude is a "lens-cleaner" for the spiritual eye.

- **Daily Gratitude Journal:** Write three specific things each night for which you are grateful — even small ones.
- **Weekly Thanksgiving Review:** At the end of the week, re-read your entries and thank God again for recurring themes.
- **Verbal Gratitude:** Express thanks to others as a way of naming God's grace publicly.

6. Active Engagement with Community

Grace is often mediated through others.

- **Practice:** Intentionally notice God in the words, gestures, and needs of those you live with.
- **Concrete Step:** Choose one small act of kindness daily as a response to grace received.
- **Reflection Prompt:** “Who was God for me today through this person? How was I called to be Christ to them?”

7. Contemplation of Life Events

Take time to sit with key moments (joys, losses, transitions) and let God reveal their meaning.

- **How:**
 - Recall the event vividly, relive the feelings.
 - Ask: “Where were You, Lord, in this?” “What grace was hidden in this moment?”
- **Benefit:** Over time, even painful events are reframed as moments where grace was preparing, protecting, or teaching you.

Not every grace appears immediately. Many experiences become understandable only in hindsight. Periods of dryness, confusion and waiting often become privileged places where God purifies motives and deepens trust.

8. Fasting from Noise and Distraction

Attentiveness needs space.

- **Practice:**
 - Dedicate at least 30 minutes daily to digital silence (no phone, music, or screens).
 - Consider a weekly “technology Sabbath” for deeper silence.
- **Benefit:** Creates inner space to perceive gentle promptings and movements that might otherwise be drowned out.

9. Artistic Expression and Creative Prayer

Creativity can unlock a new level of spiritual awareness.

- **Practice:** Draw, paint, write poetry, or compose a short reflection about a grace received.
- **Why:** Artistic expression often bypasses rational filters and helps you see grace more deeply and personally.

10. Service as a Laboratory of Grace

Grace is often revealed in action, not just contemplation. Grace is rarely given only for ourselves. Every grace carries within it a missionary dimension and becomes complete when shared in service of others.

- **Practice:** Engage in acts of service — visiting the sick, tutoring a child, helping a struggling peer.
- **Post-Service Reflection:**
 - “Where did I see Christ today?”
 - “What moved me most during this act of service?”
- **Benefit:** Service sensitizes the heart to grace in the faces of others and turns attentiveness into concrete love.

11. Retreats and Days of Recollection

Longer periods of silence deepen the capacity to notice grace.

- **Practice:**
 - Take half-day or full-day retreats regularly.
 - Use structured prayer (Lectio Divina, guided meditation) combined with free silence.
- **Benefit:** Provides space to integrate experiences, heal unresolved events, and renew vocational clarity.

12. Breath Prayer and the Prayer of the Heart

Simple repetitive prayer cultivates constant awareness.

- **Practice:** Choose a short prayer — e.g., “Jesus, I trust in You” or “Come, Holy Spirit.” Repeat it slowly in sync with your breathing.
- **Benefit:** Trains the heart to remain recollected even amid activity and stress.

13. Attentiveness to Emotions

Grace often “speaks” through feelings.

- **Practice:** Name emotions as they arise (peaceful, restless, angry, joyful).
- **Ask:** “What is this emotion inviting me to?”
- **Example:** Restlessness might be an invitation to prayer, not just a signal to seek distraction.

By integrating these practices into daily and weekly life, formandi gradually become “spiritually awake.” Over time, they will no longer only notice grace during prayer times but throughout the entire day — in conversations, struggles, surprises, and the quiet moments of ordinary life. This transforms their spirituality from compartmentalized religion into a living relationship.

VII. Guidelines for Formators

1. Accompaniment Approach

Formators play a vital role in helping formandi cultivate attentiveness to grace. Their approach should be grounded in active listening, spiritual sensitivity, and discernment.

Key Points:

- **Listen actively and reverently to life stories**
 - Give full attention without interruption or judgment, creating a safe space for formandi to share both joys and struggles.
 - Notice both spoken words and unspoken cues—tone, hesitations, or body language—as these may reveal deeper interior movements.
 - Example: When a formandus recounts a challenging relationship, reflect back their feelings without immediately offering solutions: *“It sounds like that experience was very painful for you. What do you feel God might be showing you through it?”*
- **Helping Formandi Remember Their Call:** During annual reviews encourage reflection on:
 - How has your vocation matured?
 - What original inspiration still burns?
 - Which graces have become forgotten?
 - What new invitations is God placing before you?
- **Help formandi name the graces at work, especially in painful or confusing events**
 - Encourage them to identify moments of growth, resilience, or insight as manifestations of grace.

- Naming grace helps shift perspective from self-focused evaluation to God-centred recognition, fostering gratitude and awareness.
- Example: After a difficult failure, the formator might guide the formandus to see a newfound patience or humility as a grace received, even amid difficulty.
- **Offer Scripture passages that shed light on their experience**
 - Carefully select passages that resonate with their lived situation, providing both encouragement and challenge.
 - Encourage reflective reading, asking formative questions like: *“Where do you hear God speaking to you in this passage?”* or *“Which word or phrase stands out as a guide for your current struggle?”*
 - Example: A formandus experiencing anxiety over future decisions might reflect on Proverbs 3:5–6, considering how trust in God’s guidance can transform their fear into hopeful discernment.

2. Discernment Support

Formators guide formandi in distinguishing authentic movements of grace from disordered impulses. This involves teaching self-awareness, spiritual literacy, and trust.

Key Points:

- **Teach them to distinguish between grace-led desires and disordered impulses**
 - Grace-led desires typically bring inner peace, freedom, openness, and generosity; disordered impulses often provoke fear, pride, compulsive behaviours, or inner tension.
 - Encourage self-reflection and journaling to track patterns over time.
 - Example: A formandus feeling called to serve in a demanding ministry may examine whether this desire brings joy and peace (grace) or stems from a need for approval or fear of rejection (disordered impulse).
- **Encourage trust rather than scrupulosity**
 - Emphasize the difference between healthy self-examination and excessive worry about failing God’s will.
 - Reinforce that attentiveness to grace is relational, not legalistic, fostering reliance on God’s guidance rather than self-condemnation.
 - Example: When a formandus questions whether their prayer was “sincere enough,” remind them: *“Grace is about openness and responsiveness, not perfection. God notices your willingness to listen and follow.”*

3. Patience and Hope

Formation is a gradual process; formators must cultivate patience and celebrate incremental growth.

Key Points:

- **Recognize that God’s timing is unique for each formandus**
 - Avoid comparing one person’s progress with another’s; each journey is shaped by individual gifts, experiences, and spiritual rhythms.
 - Respect periods of silence, struggle, or apparent stagnation as part of God’s refining work.
 - Example: A formandus who struggles with prayer consistency may show subtle signs of receptivity that only surface over months—these should be acknowledged as meaningful progress.

- **Affirm small steps of responsiveness as signs of growth**
 - Celebrate attentiveness in ordinary actions—practicing patience in interactions, noticing God’s presence in daily life, or responding to invitations for prayer.
 - Positive reinforcement fosters hope and perseverance.
 - Example: Recognize when a formandus consciously forgives a small offense, reflecting the grace of interior freedom: *“I noticed how you responded with patience today—that is a real movement of God’s grace in your heart.”*

Additional Practical Suggestions for Formators:

- Maintain a regular schedule of meetings, combining structured discussion with open dialogue.
- Keep notes on spiritual progress to provide continuity and personalized guidance.
- Model attentiveness to grace in your own life; your example is often the most powerful teaching.
- Encourage peer sharing when appropriate, fostering a communal sense of grace and support.

VIII. Assessment Tools

Assessment in spiritual formation is not about judgment or grading, but about **tracking growth, deepening self-awareness, and providing tailored accompaniment**. These tools help both formandi and formators recognize the subtle movements of grace in daily life.

1. Grace Awareness and Response Scale

Purpose: To help formandi become more attentive not only to God’s presence and action but also to their personal response to His grace. Spiritual growth is measured not simply by recognizing grace but by learning to cooperate with it in daily life.

Implementation: Invite formandi to complete the following reflection at the end of each day or week:

1. **Rate your awareness of God’s presence and action on a scale of 1–10.**
 - **1** = I was rarely aware of God’s presence today.
 - **10** = I remained consistently attentive to God’s presence and action throughout the day.

2. **Reflect on one or two significant moments of grace using the following table:**

I noticed God’s grace	My response
I responded immediately.	I welcomed God’s invitation through prayer or action.
I responded after some hesitation.	I eventually cooperated with God’s grace after reflection.
I recognized the grace but ignored it.	I resisted or postponed God’s invitation.
I am still discerning.	I need further prayer or guidance before responding.

3. **Conclude with these reflection questions:**
 - What grace was most evident today?
 - How did I respond to God’s invitation?
 - What prevented me from responding more generously?
 - What concrete step will I take tomorrow to cooperate more fully with God’s grace?

Benefits:

- Encourages formandi to move beyond simply noticing God’s action to consciously cooperating with it.
- Helps identify recurring patterns of generosity, hesitation, resistance, or uncertainty.
- Fosters greater personal responsibility, freedom, and discernment in responding to God’s invitations.

- Provides meaningful material for spiritual direction and ongoing accompaniment.

Formation Insight: Spiritual maturity is not measured only by how clearly we recognize God’s grace but by how freely and faithfully we cooperate with it. Every grace is an invitation, and every invitation calls for a generous response.

2. Journal Review

Purpose: To observe the evolution of the formandus’ interior life, including insight, gratitude, and responsiveness to grace.

Implementation:

- Formandi maintain a **Grace Journal**, recording daily experiences, reflections on God’s presence, and instances where they discerned grace at work.
- Formators may review excerpts **with the formandus’ consent**, focusing on patterns rather than isolated entries.
- Look for:
 - Deepening insight into personal growth and weaknesses
 - Increasing gratitude and recognition of God’s action in daily life
 - Greater discernment of grace in ordinary or challenging situations

Benefits:

- Provides a narrative record of interior transformation over weeks or months.
- Helps formators tailor guidance based on authentic experiences rather than assumptions.
- Encourages formandi to internalize reflection as a daily spiritual habit.

Example: A journal entry noting: *“I noticed that I felt calm and generous even when frustrated with my roommate”* signals the formandus’ growing attentiveness to grace in relational contexts.

3. Spiritual Direction Notes

Purpose: To track growth in key spiritual dispositions, such as trust in God, hope, and peaceful acceptance of life’s circumstances.

Implementation:

- Formators maintain private notes during or after spiritual direction sessions.
- Focus on observing:
 - **Trust:** Increased willingness to surrender decisions to God
 - **Hope:** Openness to God’s providence despite uncertainty or challenges
 - **Peaceful acceptance:** Reduced inner conflict or scrupulosity; signs of interior freedom
- Notes should be descriptive, highlighting concrete examples rather than evaluative judgments.

Benefits:

- Enables formators to monitor long-term spiritual development and tailor accompaniment.
- Provides insight into the efficacy of formation practices and exercises.
- Supports encouragement and affirmation of authentic growth, even in small steps.

Example: During a session, a formandus expresses acceptance of an unexpected ministry assignment: *“I realize that God might be asking me to trust Him even if it’s uncomfortable.”* Formator notes: increased trust and willingness to follow God’s lead.

Integrating Tools for Holistic Assessment

- Combine **Grace Awareness Scale**, **Journal Review**, and **Spiritual Direction Notes** to obtain a multidimensional understanding of growth.
- Use assessment **not to compare formandi**, but to guide personalized accompaniment and celebrate gradual progress.
- Periodically review trends with the formandus, fostering **self-awareness, accountability, and motivation**.

Tip for Formators:

- Maintain confidentiality and respect boundaries. Share observations in a supportive, nonjudgmental manner that highlights strengths and encourages further openness to grace.
- Highlight qualitative signs (peace, freedom, generosity) as much as quantitative ones (scale ratings).

Assessment Tool	Purpose / Focus	Formation Practices / Exercises	Indicators of Growth	Example / Reflection
Grace Awareness and Response Scale	Daily awareness of God's presence and cooperation with His grace	- Daily reflection; - mindful pauses; end-of-day review; - response journal	- Greater awareness of grace; - quicker and more generous responses; - increased discernment; - recognition of patterns of hesitation or resistance	A formandus notices an invitation to reconcile with a brother. Instead of postponing it, he takes the first step toward reconciliation, recognizing his cooperation as a response to God's grace.
Journal Review	Observe interior growth, gratitude, and discernment	- Grace Journal entries - Reflective prompts (e.g., "Where did I see God today?") - Gratitude listing	- Deeper insight into personal growth - Recognition of God's action - Expressions of gratitude	Entry: "I remained calm and generous even when frustrated with my roommate" – shows growth in relational grace awareness
Spiritual Direction Notes	Monitor spiritual dispositions: trust, hope, peaceful acceptance	- One-on-one spiritual direction sessions - Discussion of prayer experiences - Sharing challenges and discernment	- Increased trust in God's guidance - Openness to providence - Peaceful acceptance - Interior freedom	Formandus expresses trust in an unexpected ministry assignment: "God might be asking me to trust Him even if it's uncomfortable."

Quick Reference Tips:

- **Integrate tools with exercises:** Encourage formandi to link reflections directly to daily practices for tangible awareness of grace.

- **Highlight trends, not perfection:** Use observations to celebrate growth and guide accompaniment.
- **Encourage dialogue:** Share insights in accompaniment sessions to reinforce self-awareness, hope, and discernment.
- **Balance qualitative & quantitative data:** Combine scale ratings, journal reflections, and spiritual direction notes for a complete picture.

IX. Conclusion

Attentiveness to grace is more than a spiritual exercise; it is **the lifeblood of authentic formation**. When formandi cultivate the habit of noticing God's presence in ordinary and extraordinary moments, formation transcends structured programs and becomes a **dynamic, personal encounter with God**.

1. Transformation of Formation

- Formation is not simply the acquisition of skills, knowledge, or routines. Attentiveness to grace transforms it into a **living relationship with God**, where each experience, challenge, and success becomes an opportunity to recognize divine action.
- By learning to discern and respond to grace, formandi develop **interior freedom**, recognizing where God's call intersects with personal desires, fears, and strengths. This freedom allows them to act not out of obligation or habit, but out of love, generosity, and discernment.

2. Growth in Gratitude and Awareness

- Attentiveness to grace nurtures a **profound sense of gratitude**, as formandi begin to see God's hand in the small, daily details of life: a moment of peace in conflict, unexpected kindness, or clarity in decision-making.
- This gratitude is not superficial but **interiorized**, shaping attitudes, choices, and relationships. It deepens self-awareness and fosters a disposition of openness, humility, and receptivity to God's guidance.

3. Mission Readiness

- Formation aimed at attentiveness to grace naturally equips formandi for **mission and service**, because it aligns human action with divine purpose.
- As they become more attuned to the Spirit's promptings, they are better prepared to discern how and where God is calling them to act in service, ministry, and everyday life. The result is **missionary presence rooted in discernment and love**, not just activity.

4. Formation as a Journey of Discovery

- Formation becomes a journey of discovery, **an unfolding recognition of God's loving presence in all circumstances**.
- Like St. Paul, who acknowledged, *"By the grace of God, I am what I am"* (1 Cor 15:10), formandi learn to see their identity and actions as a collaborative work between God's grace and their response.
- Each moment becomes a chance to witness, respond, and cooperate with God, transforming ordinary life into a continuous dialogue with the Divine.

5. Encouragement for Formandi and Formators

- For **formandi**, the conclusion is an invitation to continue practicing attentiveness: noticing grace in joys and challenges, reflecting on its movement, and responding with freedom and generosity.
- For **formators**, it is a call to accompany with patience, hope, and sensitivity, nurturing the spiritual growth of those entrusted to their care, recognizing that true formation is **incremental, relational, and grace-filled**.

Final Thought: Attentiveness to grace does not end with formation; it establishes a lifelong rhythm of **openness, responsiveness, and gratitude**. In cultivating this awareness, every formandus and

formator participates in the ongoing work of God in the world, making each day an opportunity to say with conviction: “*By the grace of God, I am what I am.*”

Key Takeaways: Attentiveness to Grace

1. Formation as a Living Encounter

- Formation is more than training; it becomes a personal encounter with God.
- Every experience can reveal God’s presence and action.

2. Growth in Freedom and Gratitude

- Noticing and responding to grace cultivates interior freedom.
- Gratitude deepens as God’s hand is recognized in daily life.

3. Mission Readiness

- Attentiveness to grace aligns human action with divine purpose.
- Formandi grow prepared to serve with discernment, love, and generosity.

4. Formation as a Journey of Discovery

- Life becomes a continuous dialogue with God.
- Identity and actions are understood as a collaboration with divine grace: “*By the grace of God, I am what I am*” (1 Cor 15:10).

5. Role of Formators and Formandi

- Formandi: Practice noticing, reflecting, and responding to grace daily.
- Formators: Accompany with patience, hope, and sensitivity, celebrating incremental growth.

6. Lifelong Practice

- Attentiveness to grace establishes a lifelong rhythm of openness, responsiveness, and gratitude.
- Every day becomes an opportunity to participate in God’s ongoing work in the world.

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