

LE2. How can I have a clearer awareness of my spiritual reality?

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Why You Do What You Do (Biehl)

Biehl has been a blessing to read. Typically, I am always a bit skeptical when writers or authors try to tell me things about myself. From experience, authors make generic statements, and some people are so quick take on those generic statements as their truth. Isolating myself from distraction was beneficial to refocus on what God is calling us to do. The idea of a silent retreat felt so daunting for me. The reason it felt daunting was because I know God was going to have so much to say to me. He was going to tell me about how I have allowed society to skew my idea of what success looks like. He was going to remind me that it did not matter what CNN news said about COVID-19 or what the media said about Breonna Taylor but what matters is what I have said in my word.

What Was Your Dominant Childhood Feeling? My most dominant childhood feeling was the feeling of being inadequate. I often felt the need to live up to expectation, especially when it came to meeting the needs of my father. As a child, I was highly active and competed in quite a few physical sports, swimming, basketball, boxing, tae-kwon-do. I competed to the best of my ability to make my father proud. My father had a reputation of being hard as nails and the constant demand of meeting that left me with feelings of inadequacy. I often felt, based off the responses of disappointment felt that I could not do things correctly. This lingers with me even until this day. The constant demand of living up to the standard that was placed over me since I was a child.

My Dominant Adult Phobia? After re-evaluating, my current adult phobia would be the idea of being “invisible” but not to the extent of that word but more so unheard. There is a fire that burns within me when I am dismissed or my opinion or my feelings are expressed. A lot of this stems from my childhood and living in a household that followed dictatorship. Regardless of my feelings or what I felt was right, I was often dismissed and was told how high to jump and how far to the right or left to move. Now that I have more control of my decision making, I refuse to go back to that feeling of being unheard or my feelings being dismissed as unimportant.

What Is Your Dominant Emotional Need? Connecting my previous point into my emotional need, I would say that being recognized is my dominant emotional need. In everything that I do, feeling adequate and feeling valued is something that I identify with. Recognizing this, I have often found myself in positions where I need to adjust this way of thinking. I believe that this emotional need hinders me from achieving humility. I believe that if I were to seek recognition from Christ and Christ alone, I will be able to overcome this dominant emotional need. Spiritually, this emotional need has hindered my growth and is something that I am constantly petitioning for.

Your Surest, Safest Style: Without a doubt, my surest and safest style would be leadership. Growing up, my father had instilled this sense of being a leader. Always setting the tone and always finding your own way. With this ideology being instilled in me from young, I have been able to adapt my lifestyle to it. I have been able to innovate new ways to motivate, inspire, and encourage those around me to accomplish their goals and dreams and is something that I fall back on time and time again.

What Is Your Single Greatest Strength? The art of persuasion. I am convinced that my degree in business, working in the business work, and being able to hold conversations with complete strangers is not something that I was given at complete random. Creating, cultivating ways to mobilize, inspire, motivate, and lead have been tasks that I have taken on. I believe it to be a part of who I am because it has been with me for so long. I have constantly been put in positions where I have been able to mobilize in a company or business setting or to rally the churches morale through difficult times. From a spiritual perspective, the Holy Spirit magnifies this strength, and the authority of God falls upon me.

My backup style: Often I find myself, in disappointing situations, isolating or withdrawing from people. I have found it to be easier to just cut-off anything to do with the disappointment than face the disappointment head on. It has been a problematic coping mechanism and I have not been able to shake it. One of the biggest expressions of this for me is engaging in group video game activities. I have found it extremely seamless to turn on my P.C. and just jump into a whole new world, where my problems are not the most pressing thing in the room.

Spiritual Gifts

I was always so skeptical about finding out what my spiritual gifts are because I did not want to limit myself to only those set gifts so when I had taken the spiritual gift test from Kodachrome, It was like a weight was lifted off of my shoulders. I knew that at some point in my life I would have to identify with my gifts in order to be effective in service.

Gift 1: Administration – Motivational Gift: This gift is identified as the special ability God gives to some to steer the body toward the accomplishment of God-given goals and directives by planning, organizing, and supervising others. My church is a startup church and has been functioning as an independent start up for the past seven years. Although the we have been in our community for seven years, I would personally consider the church to be a “newer church” in the sense that there is still so much growth that needs to happen in order for us to be considered effective within our community. Most of the leaders within my church have come from other independent institutions where a lot of their successful contributions for the community have come from trial and error. I had transitioned churches in a pivotal point of my current churches reorganizational period. Due to burn out, a few leaders have decided to step down which have left a few essential positions empty, primarily the role of a pastor. Fortunately, the music director was able to transition into the role quite seamlessly. However, pastorship had not been something that he was experienced in, the support of the rest of the church made for a smoother transition than it could have been. Due to the lack of experience, our current pastor finds himself relying on leadership for direction and I do not believe that the leadership had been spontaneously chosen. Our leadership consists of borough and neighborhood natives who understand what the community needs. Coming from a role where my primary focus in my old council was finance related, I have been able to contribute to take on the vacant role the teaching ministry. Creating a structure for how things are done within the ministry that I currently oversee, which includes lesson plans, group projects, pantomime collaboration with other churches has allowed for other ministries within my church to benefit.

Gift 2: Faith - Manifestation Gift: This gift was another gift that I was not surprised by. According to the Kodachrome breakdown, faith can be broken down to the special conviction God gives to some to be firmly persuaded of God's power and promises to accomplish His will and purpose and to display such a confidence in Him and His word that circumstances and obstacles do not shake that conviction. I can truly identify with the gift of faith because in any situation, whether it is clear or unclear what God's intentions are with current world or personal circumstances, I believe the word that God has spoken to over the world in Genesis 1:31 – "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good". Everything working together for His purpose. My faith has truly been an inspiration to my church and to my ministry. I have exemplified faith in my darkest personal moments. I believe God had given me the gift of Faith because He knew that as the only light in my household, my faith would speak more than anything that I could say or do. When the health scare begun back in March of 2020, my family and myself had begun experiencing COVID19 symptoms, primarily loss of taste and smell. My mother, being an essential hospital worker, could have possibly brought the virus into our home. My father, being over the age of 60, was probably the most vulnerable to the virus. Immediately, in faith, I had identified the fear within my family, primarily my mother and father, and referred to the promises that He had spoken over Joshua. After the death of Moses, Joshua was fearful because God was calling him to take on the same commission that Moses had just finished living out. Joshua bore witness to the miraculous works that God had done through Moses and now it was Joshua's turn. God commanded Joshua to be courageous, and it was the same charge that I had taken for my family of non-believers. Now, because of my grounded faith in Christ and His works, God was able to ignite a fire within them and commanded that we are to not listen to what the world has to say about current events or our situation, but to always shift our focus on what God had told Joshua – "I will be with you just like I was with Moses". I am happy to say that now my family has begun their walk with Christ. Praise God.

Gift 3: Hospitality & Pastorsip: Both hospitality and pastorsip came back with the same graph score. This gift, in my opinion, comes as a pair. Thinking about hospitality, I immediately think of the word

accommodate. To make yourself uncomfortable or to sacrifice, for someone else's benefit. Meeting someone in their world and easing them into something that seems unfamiliar to them. When I think of the idea of what a Pastor does, I would put those responsibilities under that specific gift. Although, I have not been called to pastor a congregation, I believe that with the two gifts listed above, I have been able to impact those around me, believers and non-believers alike. One situation that reminds me of the urgency of hospitality and pastorship is when new believers come into the church looking for the same hope that they have witnessed elsewhere or even within your church. The hospitality becomes a bridge to the gap between their current circumstance and God's circumstance. In my personal experience, I have been able to help establish a foundation for a newer member of our church who was previously Muslim. Our beliefs being truly foreign for this believer was a difficult task to address. However, through creating and cultivating a safe space for learning and providing a healthy biblical foundation and structure, I was able to help a child of God begin her walk with Christ. I genuinely believe that this situation was one of many circumstances where God can be glorified through the gifts bestowed upon me through the Holy Spirit.

Enneagram: Personality Types

I have taken a personality test a few years back and was interested in how things would be different from the person I was approximately 2-3 years ago to now. As expressed in the 9 types of the Enneagram, each of the nine types has its own driving force which are centered around particular emotions. My three matches were, Type 8: The Challenger (98%), Type 3: The Achiever (91%), Type 7: The Perfectionist (89%), in that order.

The challenger's dominant characteristics are illustrated by those who seem themselves as strong and powerful and seek to stand up for what they believe in. Personally, I believe this to be a newly acquired trait. Although, I have always spoken from a place of morals, I believe that what has magnified my "strong and powerful" traits come from the authority of the Holy Spirit. I had begun my walk with Christ about six years ago and had always been someone who enforced things being done with morality in mind. Becoming grounded in faith and aligning my beliefs with how God has called us to live, I am charged to

stand up for those who cannot stand up for themselves emotionally and spiritually. Intervening in someone's storm with confidence and faith. I believe this personality trait has potential to pulsate like an aura and can be felt in the room.

The achiever's characteristics are illustrated by those who want to be successful and admired by other people and are very conscious of their public image. Since the beginning of this course, I have changed my stance on this. Initially, I have always been one to put my best foot forward and to always be intentional because I believed and still believe that it is important when establishing rapport. I can honestly say that some of this stems from wanting to be admired by man and recognized as an asset. I am in a transition period where I am trying to establish rapport with God and to receive my recognition from God as opposed to this world. The practice of humility is something that has been new to me and has only been revealed to me in the last few years. I identify with this personality trait but believe that this can be used for the Glory of God with the incorporation of humility.

The perfectionist's characteristics are illustrated by those who place a lot of emphasis on following the rules and doing things correctly. I can say that this also stems from faith and is newly found. I have always been one to be hard on myself and that has to do with always striving to please my father. Now, after the truth being revealed to me of what we have been called to do and how we are called to live, the standard shifts. At first, achieving A's and making sure that getting good grades, and ensuring that all my assignments were done to the best of my ability with the proper attentiveness, was my focus and what I used to identify with were a result of this character trait. However, the idea of being a perfectionist has shifted, along with my focus. I am no longer living for myself and even though those things are still important, what is even more important is my service for the kingdom. Unfortunately, in my experience, this has caused a lot of burnout in the length of services and how much effort is put in. This is a result of understanding where I need to be and the steps that are needed to get there. I often get discouraged by the steps taken to get to the end and because there is no end in sight, the time between change gives me a restless feeling. Being a perfectionist with things that are tangible, such as assignments, teachings, etc.

can be rewarded with gratification. The spiritual perfectionist in me strives to bring God all the glory but is accompanied by a form of restlessness. It is a petition that I am constantly placing at God's feet.

Learning Modalities: Finding Your Perceptual Strength

Going through the three perceptual strengths, Visual, Auditory, and Tactual-Kinesthetic, the strength that appeared the most for me was **Visual** (7). The idea that this is the one that appeared most is not something new for me. Each scenario in the Learning Modality illustrated a situation in which I would have reacted with intentionality. For example, question 3 asks if I have a business to conduct with another person, I will schedule a face to face meeting because of my intentions. I believe that if something needs to be discussed, it should be done with clear intentions of both parties. One of the things that I have struggled with is that I have an issue with facial expression and body language expressing what I am thinking before my mind has a chance to think of an appropriate response. It was not until I went through the learning modalities that I had been able to identify that one of my perceptual strengths is visual. I believe the visual strength has traits of efficiency tied into it. **Auditory** has a few intentionality traits within it and I can see how this strength can be useful in scenarios where I am not the one expressing or vocalizing but when someone else is I have often found it difficult to not speak on a topic or about something that in that specific situation my opinion was not requested. Although my response to the learning modalities were more visual responses, I believe that there were situations where auditory responses were remarkably close. For example, how I keep up with current events. Listening to the radio or watching TV are not something I do normally, but more to pass the time. Due to this, it lacks intentionality from me and I understand that these things for me have less of an impact on my day to day. Action speaks and in the case that you are to respond with the most effective way of rewarding a child, I believe that illustrating that you are proud triggers positive affirmation, which **Tactual Kinesthetic** is my response. This particular response is something I rely heavily on when discipling or when teaching. Creating connections between the context of the teaching to their day to day life and solidifying that connection through an action has intentionality in it which lead to efficiency.

Spiritual Well Being Scale:

After taking the SWB and calculating what my score was, 113, it made me realize that there are people in the world that will score higher or lower than I have. That realization alone, charges me to continue to push towards Christ because the great commission has yet been fulfilled. The negatively worded items listed on the scale were things that I could not identify with. Things like God being impersonal and uninvolved in our day to day or not having a satisfying relationship with God are lies that the enemy will illustrate in many ways to suppress spiritual growth. It does not necessarily need to look the way that it is worded above to suppress spiritual growth. Disappointment in your own plans can look like God is neglecting you or being impersonal, when in fact, God is protecting you from yourself. This exercise has allowed me to reflect on how involved He is in my daily life and how my joy truly does come from Him and is renewed every day.

Emotionally Healthy Spirituality (Scazzero)

I believe that Scazzero has pointed out one of the most important things when creating, cultivating, and solidifying your new identity in Christ and that is to have both your spirituality and emotional maturity to grow together. Time and time again, a word can be spoken over my life regarding specific things of either humility or obedience and the word could not be applied properly because of my emotional maturity.

Ch 2: Top Ten Symptoms of Emotionally Unhealthy Spirituality: This one hit hard. Using God to Run from God. Without proper discipleship, doing for God looks like what everyone else is doing. Constantly doing what “we as Christians” have been called to do. When I first began my walk with Christ, my identity had not changed. I was the same person, doing the same things, with a different title. I followed the crowd, put up a front and “followed Christ”. Working for God in my church looked completely identical from person to person and there was no individuality in service. There was always a “look what I’ve done for Christ” mentality within my church and that was something that I had taken with me. I often searched for guidance from man as opposed to going to the throne and trying to incorporate the things

that I did with the things that I now do. I always tried to justify my actions by saying that I am working for God but had lost myself in that motion. As time progressed, I had been able to weed out the bad roots and plant new seeds that would bear good fruit. However, personality traits like sarcasm, being petty, and even going to the extent of cutting people off are things that have remained with me and before identifying that these things are hindering my spiritual growth, I had no intention of changing. The fear of conflict is what drive these traits for me. Understanding that Christ's existence consisted of pure conflict because of who He was. Petitioning for myself and charging myself with emotional growth and recognizing that change is necessary has been something that I am striving toward.

Ch 5: Going Back In Order To Go Forward: The idea of proper discipleship oozes from this chapter. Personally, I have struggled with finding a mentor or someone to help guide me through the things that I struggle with. I consider myself a strong person and often rely on myself for a lot of things. Certain habits and responses come from circumstances that warranted my own response and have stuck with me as such. Going backwards in order to push forward seems so daunting because I am afraid to find the things that need change, whether they would be very minor or something that is rooted in my day to day life. A lot of my Christian routine have implicitly stuck with me based off what I was able to physically see, good or bad. It wrecks me to think that I could have contributed to this cause for someone else. There is so much baggage that one can carry from people, places and things, that can truly hinder spiritual growth. What gives me relief is recognizing that in my imperfection, Christ shines and that we serve a righteous and just God.

Ch 6: Journey Through the Wall: The stages Scazzero listed has accurately depicted the life cycle of a Christian from point stage 1 (Life-Changing Awareness of God) to stage 6 (Transformed into Love).

Relating it to myself, each stage was super spot on. However, personally, I have not transitioned through all the stages effectively and I believe that I am at the "wall". To an extent, I have adapted Christianity as a lifestyle and have gotten lost in the constant service. There are things mentioned in the previous chapters that need to be addressed before I can move on past the wall such as my anger, how impulsive I

can be, and even how I handle disappointment or failure. The journey to the wall and journeying past it has not been something that I have been able to track because I have been so consumed with just doing what every other Christian does.

Ch 7: Enlarge Your Soul Through Grief and Loss: Scazzero refers to being immersed in unreality and immediately made a connection to my life and how I have managed depression, avoiding people and situations. How I have dealt with loss (loss of a significant other) I had focused on Genesis 1:31 and through constant repetition – And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. I know that no matter what circumstance I find myself in, Jesus Christ will be with me through it all and in that I hold on to.

Reflection: From the moment I started spiritual formation, my spiritual life has been flipped upside down. I have disconnected from social media, separated myself from the world, and truly have been focused on spiritual development. I am realizing that serving God for me was something that filled the cracks of my schedule. I believe that the exposure to the six exercises have opened doors that need to be immediately addressed. How can I lead in ministry when I am looking to be led. These exercises have caused me to deep dive into my spirituality and dig up the roots of why I handle situations the way that I do and how I can respond the way Christ would respond. The awareness of where I am spiritually and where I could be was earthshattering for me. I am grateful to serve a God that continues to show renewed mercies each morning.