

SF 503 : Integrative Paper With Spiritual Plan:

What do I need to covenant with the Lord to continue to grow while at ATS?

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Class Lectures

False self: my fabricated persona was to act indifferent toward difficult predicaments and the individuals who I did not get along with in the course of my life. This in turn made me desensitized to a degree, and I hold the strong conviction that this false self of mine has hindered the highest potentials of my spiritual journey with the Lord. While this persona did serve its purpose for hostile situations, it now proves to a self-induced spiritual obstacle in which time spent in intimacy with the Lord can only heal. The lecture on False Self made me realize that I had indeed started to create this persona in the past without even realizing it.

Wandering in a spiritual journey –: At times, I feel as though the Lord is not speaking to me and telling me what to do when I am on this spiritual journey called life to seek Christ. This lecture has helped me understand that it is acceptable to simply wait for the Lord without a sense of urgency. It had also made it clear to me that I would have to die in a symbolic sense, leaving my personal will and former self behind. This is done in order to take up my cross and follow Christ.

Waiting on God for Guidance: At times when I am expecting for the Lord's guidance, I believe that the Holy spirit is revealing itself to me, when it was simply my thoughts to begin with. This concept relates with the second step in the freedom of Christ called deception versus truth in accordance to the author named Neil T. Anderson. This means that we can take advantage of our faith in Christ intentionally or unintentionally and manipulate it to what we desire it to be, in my case it was accidental. Nevertheless, this lecture made me realize that waiting on God should deliver me from a sense of rushing through the process, elicits a spirit of praise within myself, and should provide me with more confidence.

Textbook Readings

Expressing joy in the Lord with one's heart: In accordance to the book called "Celebration of Discipline", Foster asserts the point that "to elicit genuine celebration, obedience must work itself into the ordinary fabric of our daily lives." (Foster 192). In other words, celebration in the Lord should be considered second nature to myself rather than a religious duty in which I would have to force myself to commit to at times. The reason why this particular reading stood out to myself was that, in order to find a solution to my minor problem of slight desensitization, I thought that the corporate discipline of celebration might be a resolution.

A main purpose of Studying: It was intriguing to read the perspective of Scazzero in light of the Christian practice of studying. "Consider studying not simply for information but for the purpose of formation in Christ." (Scazzero 202-203). While meditation and the act of study can be confused with one another, Foster had implicitly clarified the distinction between the two concepts for me by stating that meditation "heightens our spiritual sensitivity." (Foster 201). Thus, one can conclude that by studying scripture, a person's false sense can diminish once he or she attains the true understanding of who they are in Christ, which is in my case.

Effortless prayer: In chapter eleven, Guyon begins to contend the argument that there is no need for self-effort to perform an effortless prayer. (Guyon 70). This automatically helps me in knowing that self-effort is an unnecessary component of effortless prayer and that I cannot simply rush into the process. It is also implied that only through persistence and patience will one improve immensely in the practice of praying without any existence of self-effort.

Additional Readings

In the reading of "Let God Guide You Daily" by Duewel states that in terms of hearing the Lord's voice, "God may use a verse of a hymn, a passage of Scripture, a memory, or the

counsel of a friend.” (Duewel 81). While to other believers, this statement may have seemed obvious, I always had the impression that in the vast majority of cases the Lord’s voice would be more direct, as in a literal voice such as in the case of God calling Samuel. Nonetheless, Duewel implicitly states otherwise, and that there are various ways in which can directly or indirectly speak to me as a believer.

In chapter eleven called “Wesley’s Guidelines for Reading Scriptures” derived from “Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation,” Robert M. Mulholland asserts that the notion that “Wesley seems to indicate that we should work with fairly small units of scripture. We are reading for formation, not information.” (Mulholland 126). This signifies that when studying, I should focus on a specific passage or verse and should seek the formation of my new self in Christ, rather than for the notion of intellectualized hermeneutics. What I found perplexing was the realization that the practice of studying was less so, in terms of gaining intellectual knowledge but rather, to advance one’s spirituality as I had previously thought it was a combination of both.

In pertinence to chapter thirteen of “Praying the Ordinary” from “Your God is Too Safe,” Mark Buchanan states that “practicing the presence of God is what sustains and deepens us in the holy wild. But what sustains and deepens that practice itself ?” (Buchanan 127). He answers by stating it to be the holy habits otherwise known as spiritual disciplines. This had deepened my comprehension of the very significance of the spiritual disciplines as authentic ways to be intimate with the Lord, as I had previously thought that the disciplines could be a dangerous methodology in and of itself, substituting technicality over practicality.

Insight and Knowledge Gained from Past Retreats

The first insight is that *I could use my competitiveness to my advantage competing with myself*. I personally view this concept as relatively innovative, utilizing one's weakness and transform into a strength. By committing myself to this particular mindset as it is my usually my mindset, I can constantly push and improve myself to become better than myself in terms of my spirituality from a year ago, a month ago, or even a week ago.

The second insight is *opening my mind to the lord is easier than opening my heart*. For a particular reason, I always had no problem with studying systematic theology and hermeneutics, nonetheless, when I pray about a very personal issue, occasionally I do not feel at all comfortable, and feel very vulnerable. Although I know a believer is supposed to feel vulnerable when praying for repentance of a shameful sin or a personal issue, it still does not make it any more reassuring. The solution to this dilemma would be to simply pray about shameful sins or issues much more frequently, in order to acclimate myself to be slightly more open in terms of the heart to the Lord.

The third insight was that *I needed to fear rejection from the Lord more than rejection from people*. While this may seem too obvious to be considered an insight by others, I personally count it as it was a very real eye-opening moment in my life. While my false sense of self had offered me protection by being desensitized, it had only applied to those who were strangers or acquaintances. In other words, I was very much less desensitized when it came to my close friends and I would fear rejection from them for whatever reason. Nevertheless, I had a nightmare in which the Lord had rejected me at the gates of heaven. I would like to perceive this as a vision of warning from the Lord as it would have made more sense to think of it as this way, rather than because of secular psychological reasons. From then on, I had always feared rejection from the Lord considerably more so than that of mere men.

Insights From My Group

Insight number one is that *while I think I am opening my heart out to God, I am actually opening my mind instead*. This interrelates with one of the previous insights from the silent retreats. It differs because it is about me not knowing how to differentiate between opening my heart and mind. Although I can distinguish between the two concepts in theory, when I am actually practicing these concepts, I often believe that I am opening my heart to Christ when I am simply attempting to intellectualize long passages of scripture. It was discussed in my group that Jonah had perceived himself to have an open heart when he only had an open mind due to his later actions of criticizing God for not destroying Nineveh which was an Assyrian city.

Insight number two is that *I should not compare myself to others but enjoy the simplicity of my faith*. It was also discussed about how I should not judge myself negatively in comparison to everyone else, whatever skill it may be, but to enjoy or celebrate my faith as one of few good simplicities in life as it is stated in Matthew 6:27, “Can any one of you by worrying, add a single hour to your life?” This signifies that the Lord will take care of me and that I should take all my negativity and offer it up to Christ and put my trust in Him.

Insight number three is *I need to stop perceiving the concept of humility with a negative connotation*. It was discussed that humility in the Lord is good and that it had meant recognizing and honoring the lordship of God and that I was one of the humblest people my group members had met. At first, I had first perceived these statements as negative, but was reassured that it was a compliment and that humility is much more honorable than pride.

Integration of Spiritual Disciplines

Listen to more Christian music as celebration. I really wish to incorporate the process of celebration to strengthen my faith in Christ in an innovative and natural way. This is accomplished by listening to Christian music whether it be at home or from the radio in the car on a daily basis preferably in the morning or afternoon. This would help me to conquer my false self with the joy of the Lord in the form of praise or even dancing.

Spend more time for prayer in a set schedule. While I do pray daily, I do not do it in a specific timeframe of the day, which I strongly believe I have to do in order to establish a permanent and positive habit of my spirituality in Christ. I will start with not lengthening my prayers, but to really go back to its fundamentals and be truly passionate and sincere one hundred percent of the time in prayer.

Studying scriptures to learn more about myself in my own way. As previously stated, I now know that spiritual discipline of study does not have to do with gaining intellectual knowledge to the extent of gaining spiritual knowledge. I desire to do this, by writing down specific key quotes from the Lord and creating an artistic collage. Every time I would look at it, I would think to myself about how I can apply those biblical quotes into my present life and my life in the future. Therefore, I want to study the Bible so that I may attain revelation from the Holy spirit which can affirm my new identity in Christ.

Spiritual Growth Plan:

Read or watch the news daily for longer durations to pray for the world. I would like to gain more knowledge of the world in which we live in, so that I can better pray about relevant issues affecting Christians as well as non-Christians. I hope that this will have a positive impact, no

matter how small by alleviating peoples' suffering, even to the extent of saving lives, as well as increasing the probability of non-believers becoming evangelized into the Christian faith.

Lessening the amount of screen time in my life. I also realized that in order to grow spiritually, I need to address the time-consuming activities done out of leisure and not out of necessity. In more direct terms, I am willing to considerably lessen my time spent on my computer screen or phone screen for fun, excluding for academic purposes, in order for more time to practice spiritual disciplines, one of them being celebration in Christ.

Write non-fiction or fantasy Christian books. I would lastly like to use my God – given talent of being a decent writer to write non-fiction or fantasy Christian books. In order to accomplish this, I must first read scriptures to understand the themes and morals derived from them to incorporate those same concepts into my book. One example of inspiration is from the Narnia Chronicles written by C.S. Lewis, who had done an exemplary job at combining the scriptures with the notion of fantasy.

In finality I would like to conclude by saying that this class of Initiation to Spiritual Formation is priceless and serves as a basic foundation for improvement and maintenance of our spirituality in the Lord. The spiritual disciplines themselves are not only practical but essential components of performing methods to gain more intimacy with God. They have helped me tremendously with attaining new knowledge and new motivation to commit myself to these practices as well as the beginning of a new kind of faith that is authentic and not superficial.

