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SF503: Initiation in Spiritual Formation

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LE 4: Integrative Paper with Spiritual Growth Plan

In coming into this class called Initiation of Spiritual Formation, I truly did not know what to expect, except that it would have something to do with me learning more about God's word, grow closer to God by studying His word, and in doing so that I could be a more rounded Christian and minister of the gospel. That's what I thought! What I did not realize was, in order for me to be a more rounded Christian, I have to first start with working on me. Needless to say, I was totally ill prepared for this class, but was so pleasantly surprised, and utterly appreciative of this class, because it is through this class I have come to see how much of me, I needed to learn about, and how much of a Spring cleaning this "me" needed, and it all started from day one. We are now almost at the end of the semester, and I feel like there is still so much work that I need to do, but I also realize that it is a continuous process.

Class Lectures

From the first day of class, I learned that this process of a deeper relationship with God is actually, much more painful than I thought, but in order to get closer to God, "The Only Way Is Through". Through the trash, through the pain of resurrecting the living things that I had buried, through the process of the "Spring cleaning" of self. But if I truly want to say, "Father Draw Me", I will have to be willing to say that I will do "What Ever It Takes" to get closer to you Lord.

I learned that for most of my spiritual journey should be about seeking, about the "Wandering", and you will only seek that thing that you have lost, which is about seeking to find that which we love and have lost. That connection with God and the love of God.

So, we go to His (God's) word, the Bible. For years I had read the Bible. I started "studying" the Bible in the early 2000s and although I have learned a lot about the word from my studies, in this Spiritual Formation class has taught me a different way of studying the word, that would not only help me to build knowledge of the word, but would also help to strengthen my relationship with God. I learned to allow the word to "pierce me" using three (3) methods:

1. Ingestion: Meditate, chew, ponder, ruminate on the word.
2. Repetition: Commit to writing out the verse or verses for a week or more on 3x5 Cards
3. Insertion: Insert yourself into the story as you read.

Studying the Bible will take on a different meaning for me moving forward.

Textbook Readings

Reading the required textbooks have been even more enlightening. Reading Jeanne Guyon's book, "Experiencing God through Prayer", I have learned about different forms of prayer. I learned that meditation, is about praying and then spending time in silence, to hear what God may or may not say to you in response to your prayer. Scriptural meditation, where you meditate on God's word as you study. Scriptural meditation helps in the ingestion, repetition, digestion and retention of the scripture. In reading Guyon, I learned that as much as there can be much reward to be gained from silence, we also have to know that one can and may experience dry periods, or times when, as much as you might pray, fast and meditate, you may not get a response from God, or hear from God, and that is not something that is abnormal. According to Jeanne Guyon, during the dry periods, "You must await the return of the Beloved with patient love, humility, peace, and silent worship."¹ I was reminded that the simplest conversation with God is prayer, the different facets of prayer and the benefits of practicing those different sides.

¹ Jeanne Guyon, *Experiencing God Through Prayer* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1984), 41.

I've learned that some of the things that we do in our everyday spiritual walk, like prayer, fasting, studying actually have a title, they are called Spiritual Disciplines according to "Celebration of Discipline, The Path to Spiritual Growth" by Richard J. Foster. These Spiritual Disciplines comes under three categories, "The Inward Disciplines", "The Outward Disciplines" and "The Corporate Disciplines".

The Inward Disciplines:

- **Fasting:** My experience with fasting is either through direct instructions from God, or through instruction from leadership (Church or School) to do a corporate fast. Directions from God usually comes with instruction as to duration and point of focus. My outlook and focus when fasting has been changing as I grow more in the Lord.
- **Study:** My study discipline, I can honestly say have decreased a whole lot from where it was many years ago, and even then, I could see from reading Richard Foster's book, that I have to be more sensitive when studying to include two additional steps, repetition and reflection to my study time.

The Outward Disciplines:

- **Service:** I recognize that I am first a servant of God and in His kingdom. The act of service to others is one of the most humbling experiences one can have as a Christian. My most memorable experience serving on Holy Thursday night in 2017. I had joined the Missionary Board, before joining the Ministerial staff at my Church. On Holy Thursday night we would do feet washing, and that was my first experience doing feet washing. It was the most humbling experience I have ever had. That moment I felt the move of the Holy Spirit in the room.

- **Solitude:** Solitude is something I relish, as I find that it is in those moments of quiet aloneness, I can think and clear my head, or talk to God, or read a book in a quiet space where I can concentrate on what I am reading or go into worship. Other times, I just want to be alone. What I need to work on however is improving my listening skills during those moments of solitude.

The Corporate Disciplines:

- **Worship:** I have learned over time that there is a difference between praise and worship. I have also learned that people can experience two kinds of worship, surface worship, where you may be in a place of worship, eyes closed, singing your heart out and the whole nine yards, but your mind is so far from God, because you are thinking about everything and everyone else but God. Then there is “True Worship”, where you empty yourself of everything else and your sole concentration is on God, worshiping Him, just for who He is. I have experienced both.
- **Confession:** I have never experienced confession as the Catholics do, but I have confessed my sins to God, and I have had numerous experiences of confessing my sins or short comings to friends. Not friends that would just say, “It’s ok, God will forgive you,” but friends who would give both words of correction and show grace by also giving words of encouragement. Confession is never easy for, weather I are confessing my sins to friends and especially when I’m confessing my sins to God, then it is also embarrassing. The one thing that confession is for me is liberating because then the enemy cannot hold it over my head.

I completely understand and see clearly where, these disciplines are extremely instrumental in one’s growth as a Christian.

In addition to learning about the different aspects of prayer and the Spiritual Disciplines, Peter Scazzero let me know about the importance of having an “Emotionally Healthy Spirituality”. Peter Scazzero said that, “It’s impossible to be Spiritually mature while remaining Emotionally Immature.” Scazzero started by showing me how “Something is Desperately Wrong”, by showing how when we come to Christ, we address surface issues, the things on the surface that can be visible to the eyes, but like an iceberg, “the roots of who we are continue unchanged and unmoved.”² Peter then let me know that, I need to get to truly know myself so that I may know God because, “Awareness of yourself and your relationship with God are intricately related.”³ Part of having an Emotionally Healthy Spirituality, breaking the powers of the past, and the only way to do that, you have to go back, in order to go forward.

Silent Retreats

During my Silent Retreats, I learned about myself, why I do what I do, why I feel how I feel, how I came to have the personality that I have. I was able to identify the living things that I thought was dead, that I had buried like old hurts, some unforgiveness and anger, just to name a few was resurrected during my Silent Retreat. This process started with Bobb Biehl’s book, “Why You Do What You Do”, it started when I had to face my true childhood feelings of being ignored, unloved and rejected, which then developed into my dominant adult phobia, which is a fear of failure, not being good enough to achieve certain goals, and be more than what I think certain people expect of me, which then transformed into My dominant emotional need became one where I needed to be loved unconditionally and accepted and respected for who I am. I felt that the best way to get that need met was to try to please those who I most wanted that love and respect from, which then blossomed into me becoming an enabler (My surest safest style). In

² Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014, 2017), 17.

³ *Ibid.*, 39.

order to please, I didn't mind helping others (My single greatest strength), because it enabled me to be noticed, to be seen by who I wanted to see me, so I would do my best to do everything with perfection (My backup style). N.T. Anderson took me through the process of calling out the sins of my family, and just as I thought that I didn't know what they were, the Holy Spirit started calling them out me, and I was able to pray and denounce them. That is one of the biggest thing that I learned during my Silent Retreat, that God does not only speak to me when I am asleep, but if I am attentive, I can hear when God is speaking.

Spiritual Growth Plan

As I go through Seminary, I plan to create a schedule in which I can incorporating the Spiritual Disciplines that I have learned about.

Monthly:

- **Prayer and Fast:** Seek God through Prayer and fasting at least once per month, identifying a "What", e.g. those living things that I had buried.
- **Solitude:** Create time where I can practice at least one day of solitude.

Weekly:

- **Studying:** Choose at least one passage of scripture to ingest, digest, meditate and chew on.
- **Service:** Apart from Sunday services, to identify and implement one form of service.

Daily:

- **Meditate:** Set aside at least 10 minutes daily (preferably in the morning), to practice meditation and moments of silence.
- **Prayer:** Spend time in prayer daily.