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12/3/2020

The small group meetings this semester were an extreme supplement to the spiritual formation course. At the end of each class it was more than just reiterating what was being taught in the lecture. We were applying what we have learned in our discussions concerning issues that are going on in our actual lives. As I have previously stated, this was all entirely new to me to speak of my struggles and brokenness to a group of individuals I just met. Nevertheless, after getting through all the uncomfortability, I experienced true freedom. As a matter of fact, I surprised myself in the way I was opening up to them!

One of the first things that I remember being discussed in the small group meetings was opening up about where we see ourselves in the future in terms of ministry and applying our degrees. I think this was a groundbreaking question only because it was being discussed in the beginning of the first class, and I recall me saying that I wanted to work with young adults and mental health. The fact that I repeated that in the small group meeting made me feel more confident in what the Lord was leading me into, and I was able to be stronger in my identity and who I'm becoming. There was also a lecture in which Professor Reimer was talking about intimacy with God, and the different ways to get in tune with Him (prayer, fasting, deliverance, worship, reading the Word of God, meditation, sabbaticals/retreats). I don't talk much about my time being spent with the Lord, but in the small group meeting I found myself opening up about having moments of solitude with God, how I love to worship and how I can easily get lost in worshipping God with songs. I realized that the Lord was sharing something with me at that moment. As much as I love to worship Him in secret, I feel Him calling me to a place where He'll be cultivating and using my gift to minister to others so that they'll be drawn to Him also. I emphasize that this all stemmed from opening up to others.

In the next class, I valued the small group so much because of what Professor Reimer was discussing in lecture that day. He was talking about the concepts of “pseudo community” and “real community” in the church. During that time there was a major transition going on in my life in regards to me switching churches because I felt like I wasn’t getting enough in my current church. The transition was difficult because I was conflicted in leaving the church I was born and raised in (25 years), and I was waiting for the right time. Throughout the time I was seeking the Lord and gaining constant confirmation, especially when Professor Reimer said at some point we have to stop playing the victim and pick up responsibility. I spoke about my struggling decision in the small group, and my mentor Nestor spoke in alignment with what Professor Reimer said earlier in class. He sensed my zeal for wanting to be in a spirit filled church. In that instance I felt the Lord giving me the green light to leave the church (on top of all the other confirmations) and bring me to a place in which I will get impartation, love, and empowerment on a consistent basis, and to a place where He will always be there.

There were two small group meetings that were the most uncomfortable out of all, and that’s because I was coming into realization of the ugly traits of myself. In one meeting we were coming off of a lecture of having healthy relationships and relational maturity. That was impactful for me as this year I learned a lot from the relationships I had with people, and the brokenness that manifested in these relationships was from the undealt wounds of my past, namely with my mother and my father. I was being fully transparent in explaining this to my peers and my mentor, because in that moment I felt the Lord using my transparency for good and true healing from my past. What made it difficult was the fact that as I was reflecting, I felt the Lord saying that the next step would be to make it right with these people and express my hurt. This is a necessary process in order for me to receive holistic healing as opposed to partial

healing where I still carry pain in my heart, and I only feel healing for just a moment. The next difficult discussion for me was after I received my deliverance in one of the final classes. After being delivered I felt such a major freedom, but nonetheless felt vulnerable and out in the open. Therefore, to discuss my experience from the deliverance was difficult at the moment even though all of my peers witnessed what took place. Nevertheless I knew that the deliverance was necessary, and I let my peers and mentors know that this was a pivotal moment in my life where I felt the Lord releasing me of so much baggage that I've been carrying for all of my life.

One of the final discussions that I had with my small group was the concept of my giftings and the results from my assessments concerning spirituality, emotions and personality. I found it to be surprising when I spoke to my mentor about me being an emotional adolescent, and how comfortable I was in saying so. I told him that this was a step forward from being the emotional child that I was, and so I have made tremendous progress. I said that there was still more progress to be made. I also let my mentor know about the fact that my spiritual gifts assessment told me that I have a pastoral gift, which was in line with what's been prophesied to me years prior. My other gifting included me being a visionary and someone who can learn quickly from taking a hands on approach. I was being open and honest to my group when I told them that using the result of one assessment in conjunction with another made so much sense to me, and that it's interesting for the Lord to reveal things to me in the moment of not only seeing the results, but from discussing them with my mentor and peers.

The Lord pointed out several issues just from sitting around with my peers and mentor in the small group meetings. Issues such as holding things in as a form of pride and my lack of true relationship with others which stemmed from brokenness that tracks back to my childhood were apparent and recurring in most of my meetings, even the one after the deliverance session. I

believe I received many forms of healing, hope and direction from the discussions that took place in the small group. First and foremost, it was really encouraging not only for my peers and mentors to be so welcoming of me sharing my story, but for me to hear their stories as well. I couldn't help but think that this process may have been uncomfortable for them as well, and for them to have the courage to speak of their brokenness and areas in which they need healing was a major help for me. I found immense hope in our mentor sharing his experiences and how he overcame his struggles in his journey with God. Even his prayers and the prayer of others gave me hope and let me know that with the strength of God through the prayers of others I can continue to endure. Although there may have been some degree of uncomfortability in speaking of my issues, these factors mentioned prior didn't make it that difficult for me to open up to my peers and my mentor, because they made it a safe place for me. It was through speaking in confidence with them from my reflections that I feel confident in where I am going. Their affirmations gave me courage in continuing to seek the Lord concerning my future in seminary and thereafter. There is only one major action step that the Lord gave me in moving forward, and that is to embrace the uncomfortability. Usually I am in a closed shell and to myself in all things, but I realize that won't be the case going forward. Aside from certain assignments concerning ministry, the Lord is calling me to community, and this small group made me realize that. This is what's necessary for my continual growth and healing, and as it is said in "Celebration of Discipline", being with others and expressing as well as celebrating with them is a discipline that's required for our emotional, mental, and spiritual growth.