

Identity in Christ (Week 1, September 20)

1. Issues

The immediate issues that stood out in this first meeting were found in the honest parts of the conversation. I started to meet with a group of college students in the new church that I started working at this month, and I quickly recognized how distant these students were from a genuine understanding of Christ. A couple of words that stood out were “optional,” “unimportant,” and “tough.” It was clear that the students had a negative impression of God overall from their days in youth group, and many of the ones gathered were clearly hoping that this would be an experience that helps to turn that around. That dependency alone showed me how distant they really were from God.

2. Growth as mentor

I just had to listen. Though some of what the students shared bordered heavily on venting and rambling, I knew that I had to listen. While I had an agenda with questions to ask, where these students went with their stories and experiences in church are clear reflections of their identity in Christ. The answer was clear from the get-go that there are precious few evidences of that being the case. They needed someone to hear them out for the first time instead of correcting them, and they were able to share with clarity.

3. Growth of mentees

There were genuine tears cried this evening. This conversation immediately involved into one of deep processing by night's end. One student commented that “I finally can see the difference between a Christian and God.” While that sounded ambiguous, I knew that it was to interpreted as knowing that God was truly good and that He has always been above the circumstances that they experienced.

Interests and Passions (Week 2, September 27)

1. Issues

The most significant issue in this conversation really pointed at the sheer reality that the students are not fully interested in anything related to God. Their interests were either found in activities like working out or playing games or in investing into their futures. It became clear that coming to church has always been a weekly responsibility since their childhood as opposed to finding a genuinely redemptive quality about church.

2. Growth as mentor

It became clear that I was asking the right leading questions to the students that facilitated this discussion in a non-judgmental way. The students admitted that they were able to share much of what they were able to knowing that this was already a safe space, which was something that they never experienced in church before.

3. Growth of mentees

The students were clearly growing in vulnerability in this group setting. They also started to understand the difference between communal condemnation of the activities that they already found some shame in and understanding the biblical reasoning behind this gray area.

Hearing God's Voice (Week 3, October 11)

1. Issues

Hearing God's voice was never part of the church's DNA. It was already clear that the voice was interpreted to be the pastors' sermons or the leadership's prayers and advice, so these students got to this pivotal age of their spiritual lives without knowing that they could genuinely hear from the Lord themselves. Helping them process this particularly difficult as this subject of

spirituality was so foreign to most of them that they did not share much. In this case, they were clearly afraid of being marked as ‘wrong.’

2. Growth as mentor

Where I saw growth in my own mentoring was in allowing for the silence. I usually like to fill in silent gaps as I am an extravert, but I knew that the silence was less a matter of not knowing about the subject but in their unease in addressing this topic. The students started to share after about 30 seconds of silence that we embraced as a group, so it proved that my discernment was right at that moment.

3. Growth of mentees

Though this does not apply to the whole group, some students definitely found breakthrough with the gift of hindsight. When we discussed what does truly qualify as hearing God’s voice, some realized that there were moments where they did hear from God. While they believed that this was solely supposed to be audible, they realized that God had truly shown them a lot through even the smallest things. They left the meeting very encouraged and empowered.

Spiritual Instincts (Week 4, October 18)

1. Issues

There were not many particular instincts in this conversation. If there was one thing to note, it is that the students were not as socially engaged in this meeting as they were in prior weeks. They were more easily distracted by stimulants, and they took more bathroom breaks than ever before. This was particularly noticeable when I regressed back to my habits of filling in gaps in dialogue again, so it was clearly correlated.

2. Growth as mentor

In this case, it was clear that I was able to explain the variety in ways to connect with the Lord with clarity. Given that this church is a mainline denomination, there were some strong traditions in establishing a connection with the Lord, but the students truly left the meeting more aware of their synergy with God in ways they never expected before.

3. Growth of mentees

The growth this week was shown most in the excitement level by meeting's end from the students. They even started to ask questions wondering if some of what they did are real ways to connect with God. They reintroduced their interests in order to see if it was truly God-given, and they were surprisingly ecstatic to find out that their hobbies were real ways to connect. There was even the connection that a tie to God was already in the works.

Fear (Week 5, October 25)

1. Issues

There was definitely a lot of fear in talking about fear. A lot of it came largely from this fear of gossip that the students kept in mind. They were realistic to merely trust that "nothing leaves the room," but that definitely prevented people from sharing to their full extent. The group admitted that this particularly subject would have been easier with a group that was smaller.

2. Growth as mentor

This particular meeting helped me to grow in discernment. Seeing the course that this discussion was taking, I did not choose to just blaze through the questions that I had prepared while ignoring the situation at hand. Instead, I listened to the Holy Spirit and discerned that what we needed to do was pray together.

3. Growth of mentees

After praying together, one student shared that he has long been struggling with a crippling fear of failure when prompted. His face grew pale from having confessed, and we actually made this a space to have the students pray with him. This actually gave everyone a space to minister to one another without publicly counseling.

Anger (Week 6, November 8)

1. Issues

Anger is particularly difficult for Korean Americans to compartmentalize. Culturally, Koreans have normalized anger to the extent that they cannot really imagine a life without anger. It was difficult to have the students admit their tendencies with anger because many have resorted to passive-aggressiveness by “sweeping it under the rug.” It did not really seem like a conversation starter.

2. Growth as mentor

This was the perfect opportunity to break things down slowly for the group. Panning out what qualifies as anger by transparently using my own life gave the students a better understanding of what anger in the family could really resemble. It was helpful to have come to them with this piece having processed this area of my life already as well.

3. Growth of mentees

The students began to understand that some of their coping mechanisms (namely sarcasm, passive-aggressiveness, and depressive tendencies) were largely from roots of anger. No one had spelled it out for them before, but they were able to start thinking bigger and tracing certain tendencies back to their own family patterns.

Competition (Week 7, November 15)

1. Issues

In this particular meeting, the students largely became talkers all of a sudden. After generally being relatively shy throughout, it was clear that everyone became comfortable. Gauging the degree to which how comfortable they were and to lose the platform of mentorship granted to me was complicated.

2. Growth as mentor

I facilitated this particular conversation well and kept all parts of it moving well. There was significantly more participation this time around, so I had to interject at key moments several times. However, the timing was good and no one felt rudely interrupted at any moment, so I can tell that it was for the best for everyone.

3. Growth of mentees

The students were definitely better at reading the room and understanding the benefits of processing openly in this group setting. Trust was afforded all around, and the conversation became livelier and more edifying because of it.

Takeaway (Week 8, November 22)

The students felt that the goal was accomplished: to connect more with God and to understand more of what it feels like to be a part of a kingdom-minded community. They grew up feeling judged for just slightly falling out of line in this church, so it was a huge point of victory to see that they were able to show up weekly and moderately excitedly. The group as a whole felt that this was a very refreshing group since accountability, transparency, and teachability were never really offered as a combination beforehand. Considering the circumstances, it is clear that the students grew a lot not in terms of knowledge but in understanding the nuances of God that previously felt out of reach.

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