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Reflection and Growth Plan

Rather than my role in ministry as a youth director, I'm reminded that my identity is primarily rooted in being a woman of God. While learning the skills necessary to communicate effectively is valuable, my impact in ministry is determined more by my character and personal relationship with God. Since the very first class, I've been reflecting on two questions. What kind of person do I need to be in order to be used by God to give transformational talks? What disciplines feed my soul and am I engaging in them regularly? As a people pleaser, I struggle to maintain healthy boundaries in work that I end up neglecting putting in the work for my personal relationship with Jesus. In my ministry's context, I find myself leaning towards constantly doing even on days off because rest can be seen as laziness, but our first class in September reminded me to focus more on my anointing rather than my competence.

As a woman of God, one of my goals is to become more familiar with God through His Word. To regularly read through all of Scripture so that I can better grasp the big picture of His redemptive plan from difficult passages to lesser known passages to all of the prophets. I want to have more Scripture memorized so I can direct people to specific verses as needed. I want to read the entirety of the Bible in different life stages so that I may glean different insights depending on my own experiences. I want to read the Bible in different translations to notice and research the differences. And as I grow in understanding the depths of Scripture, God's heart and character, I want to be the kind of communicator that has the freedom to make sudden tweaks based on how the audience is receiving a message.

I desire to grow in self-awareness so that I am cognizant of what condition my soul health

is in and am familiar with my rhythms. I often operate out of insecurity as I try to maintain a busy schedule eager to prove to others that I'm doing enough that I fail to miss the warning signs of my tank running low, but I need to operate out of abiding in Jesus alone. I struggle with fear at the thought of giving my calendar to Jesus as I can only think about all the things I'm not doing. I need to shift my perspective to see that running on an empty tank is far less effective than prioritizing those disciplines that feed my soul. Journaling and writing out prayers has always been one of those disciplines, but in the busyness of virtual ministry I've constantly pushed it aside as it takes too much time. I'm reminded that it's not about what's easy or preferred, but rather what's necessary. If I abide and am secure in Jesus, I'll be able to set and keep healthy boundaries.

I also desire to grow in knowledge and experience by reading more. I can happily and easily waste hours watching TV shows or videos, and much prefer that over reading books which can bear more fruit. I was taken aback by the wide range of books you read, Dr. Reimer, so a goal is to just watch less and read more. I've gained quite a long list of books to read for ministry and communication, but I also want to be mindful of including books of all perspectives and genres. I'll start with the goal of reading at least one book a month as well as trying audiobooks.

As an inexperienced communicator, I'm thankful for the practice and feedback this class has given me. Some positive feedback includes being able to connect with the audience and show that I genuinely care. I mainly speak with the youth in the context of Bible studies, and I've developed my style of communicating which is not very different from a typical conversation I would have in a casual setting. This can be good as it helps me connect rather than create distance if I were to use a more authoritative style, and this style also displays my personality which allows for building a stronger connection with the audience.

I'm thankful to be in a position where the youth know I genuinely care for them, but as a weak communicator I fear that while they are willing to listen at first, they slowly lose interest as I struggle to clearly communicate. I often experience a disconnect between my hours of preparation and being able to express it in a clear manner. I've been able to better handle my nerves, but am left still scrambling to reorganize all my prepared thoughts from time to time as I'm delivering the information. Anderson's TED Talks has been helpful in organizing my thoughts and knowing how to use visuals. At first I thought I wanted to master scripted talks, but I realized the limitations to address impromptu questions from the youth, especially in a more casual environment than service. I'd like to develop the gifts to have unscripted talks with my main point, purpose, and outline ready on my belt as I preach.

In the future, I plan to preach more regularly in youth services, and this class has shaped my understanding of how to prepare sermons so I can grow as a communicator. The passage analysis assignment made me aware of how I become fixated on what I believe the passage's main point is based on what I've learned in past sermons or Bible studies. Searching for the subject and complement helped remove those influences so that I can examine the passage objectively with fresh eyes. I am practicing that exercise along with answering the 3 developmental questions to ask mentioned in H. Robinson's Biblical Preaching (What does it mean? Is it true? What difference does it make?) as well as the practical tools in C. Anderson's TED Talks for explaining, persuading, and revealing in a talk.

Another thing I did well was give information on the context of my in-class sermon, 1 Corinthians 8. Being well aware of the types of questions the youth would ask about the original audience and the historical background allowed me to prepare that information accordingly. I desire to go even deeper by looking at various translations as well as with word studies,

especially as I learn Hebrew for the Old Testament texts. My hope is that the youth will see how the Bible is a gold mine that requires digging.

An area of improvement is proving the truth of the Word, especially as I lack knowledge and interest in science and history. I tend to gloss over this part if possible, but if I'm to be a faithful communicator, I need to be able to address those in the audience who have hard questions and those who may be wrestling with doubt. I'm also aware that in my few decades on this earth living a rather sheltered life, I don't wrestle with Scripture in the same way others do. I fail to recognize the gaps that exist for some whose experiences don't match the truths of God's character and promises described in His Word. These limitations push me to read from science and history experts. Also, to read authors with opinions and experiences different from my own in order to widen my perspective and knowledge so I can communicate more effectively.

I find tackling the application of the text to be the most interesting as it creates space for the text to come alive in the lives of the readers who desire to obey God. However, there are some concerns that Robinson explains and application has become complex as modern day lenses can be very different from the original intent of the author and how it was perceived. There are so many modern day situations that aren't addressed in Scripture because they simply didn't exist, so as the communicator, I must be very careful about examining and understanding the main idea of the passage. This year has highlighted how polarized we are as a nation, and sadly even as the Church. The Church has become divided in topics of wearing a mask, and the decision to be socially distant as ministry moved to the virtual world was a hot topic of debate. The communicator has the privilege and responsibility to lead the local church in obeying God in these grey areas.

In Timothy Keller's Preaching, I was struck by the chapters explaining how to preach the

Gospel every time and how to preach Jesus in all of Scripture. I find these two goals to be incredibly difficult as I rarely see it executed well. In a given audience, there is such a unique mixture of various cultures, socioeconomic backgrounds, and faith journeys. With youth, I believe sharing the Gospel should be done in a space that allows for conversation and asking questions. I rely on small group Bible studies or 1-on-1 times to communicate the Gospel or at least further discuss what's mentioned in a sermon. In the long run, I believe the continual studying of Scripture from cover to cover will help me with the two as I learn to see the connection between the Old and New Testament along with how all roads lead to Jesus.

Within the youth group each year, there's a small group of student leaders that I work closely with. The student leaders help me in the weekly gatherings of our youth group from leading activities to facilitating discussions. These are the teens I disciple more closely; I get to know them a little more than the others and vice versa. These are the teens I can go to for honest feedback areas I can improve on, especially in terms of communicating, and whether or not I am improving. By working closely with these teens keeps me humble and honest about how I lead. I have a spiritual mentor and ministry partner that I regularly pray with and she checks up on my soul health. She encourages me to slow down when I need to in order to seek God rather than ticking things off my to do list.