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## **Class Lectures**

Prayer: “The simplest and most elegant of disciplines.” What stood out to me is what was told to pray, which was “Father, what is on Your heart?” It reminded me of a time in middle school and I don’t remember if it was during a Sunday sermon or a retreat but a pastor told us to stop talking to God if we want to feel something. I think they kept hearing people say that they couldn’t hear Him or feel Him, so the pastor says “then stop talking at Him and start listening.” They told me that I should be like a child. “Childlike” was a new term to me in the Christianity context. So I took that advice. So I started to ask God, whenever I remembered to, “What’s up, God?” And sometimes I would just sit there in silence, not expecting anything really that special, maybe just a word or something. Slowly, in time, there would be a tugging on my heart. I would maybe feel sadness, loneliness, a heaviness, and I never knew why I felt that way whenever I asked God how He was. But now that I’m older, I ask Him differently. I ask Him what I should pray about or ask Him to put things on my heart that are on His heart and He does exactly that.

Something else that really stuck out to me is I wrote down, in all capital letters, “CULTIVATE THE ENTRANCE OF HIS PRESENCE.” I forgot how important this was. I grew up with a charismatic pastor middle to high school and even in undergrad, so Him entering the room was just something that was so natural to me; it was so normal. But now that my current pastor is more reformed and less charismatic, I forgot for a second that we need to invite His presence before we do anything. My pastor just goes straight into it, so the congregation will just go straight into it. The charismatic is in my DNA, I can feel it. It’s how I’ve experienced God this whole time. As I am here in this church, I am reminded not to forget my charismatic background and how close I feel to God in this way.

Offensive Spiritual Warfare: “Breakthrough is activated by our obedience.” I love this.

Sometimes obedience can be the hardest thing for a Christian to do. It takes realizing that no matter what I think is the best for this situation, God knows better. Obedience takes humility. You put your desires at the feet of Jesus. You put all your fears at the feet of Jesus. You put all your childish ways behind and follow the teachings of our Teacher. And these are not the easiest teachings either. Jesus says to love our enemy. Jesus says to turn your cheek. Jesus says to eat of His body and drink of His blood, which many of His disciples could not do and lead them to leave Him. These things in today’s world are scandalous ways to go about situations. Obedience to God is saying that God is worth more than anything in this world. I hope and I pray that I can obey God when I feel another tugging on my heart to do something, no matter how scary it may seem. Even if it would mean I could lose everything and everyone that I love, to just keep moving forward because I know that God knows better.

Simplicity: This lesson caught my attention so fast. It also made me want to look away and turn away from it. I grew up in a family of hoarders. In my family, every little thing has some kind of use, some kind of meaning, some kind of value. When Dr. Walborn said “every time I buy clothes, I also throw away clothes,” something in me felt uncomfortable. But I know why. It was because I have never thought of doing that in my life. I always think “maybe it’ll come back in style” or “maybe I’ll fit in this shirt once I lose weight.” So, to ask God “what is enough” feels so scary to me. Maybe it’s generational? Throwing things away for the sake of discipline, better quality of life, and a new kind of closeness to God. I can feel it in my spirit that it would be so good for me. But I don’t know why it’s so scary to me.

“Simplicity of heart can flourish only in the fertile soul of trust.” This. It’s interesting how things come to me just as I am reading my notes. And “dependence births obedience” also explains why

I always tremble in fear when God asks me to over Him. It also explains why He doesn't often tell me to obey. It's because I don't obey with joy, but with literal fear and trembling.

Lord, I am led to repentance in my academic paper. I'm sorry for not trusting You. I realize how careful You have been with me. Thank You for Your kindness and love. Help me to trust You more. Mold me, break me, consume me, Lord. Give me more things to obey, make me uncomfortable with myself and my situation because more than anything, I want to be close to You. This is the prayer of my heart. I pray all this in Jesus' Holy Name, Amen.

### **Textbook Reading**

Experiencing God through prayer: Chapter sixteen is titled "Sacrificial Praying." On location 551 in my kindle, it says "self-interests have been destroyed, you have, in the truest sense, acknowledged the supreme existence of God." I think lines like this always catch my attention, because it's what I want. I want to acknowledge "the supreme existence of God." I want God. But in order to know God, to experience God, to be close to God, I need to die to my flesh. I need to start "pouring myself at the feet of Jesus in sacrificial prayer."

Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: Chapter two "The Top Ten Symptoms of Emotionally Unhealthy Spirituality." Number seven, "Spiritualizing away conflict." I remember when I was writing notes for my first silent retreat, the first thing I wrote in my notebook was "THIS IS ME!" in big letters and underlined three times. As an enneagram 9, I am aware of my conflict avoidant personality and as a wing 1 I can be quite passive aggressive. I am quite the feeler, so when I was in middle school, I probably did everything Scazzero mentions that people who spiritualize away conflict might do. It was once I became aware of my inability to face conflict and the importance of facing conflict that I was able to put effort into change.

Celebration of Discipline: “The Discipline of Fasting.” Page 48, what stood out to me was “[during fasting] every other purpose must be subservient to God.” When have I ever, besides my silent retreat, fasted with a focus on God? I remember when I was in high school, I was really hungry for God. So, I fasted entertainment which meant I didn’t watch anything on the screen. So, I started blogging and reading the Bible, because I basically bored myself into reading the Bible. But maybe that was the problem? This basically told me that entertainment is fun and reading the Bible is boring, so of course it didn’t last long and it took me a much longer time to enjoy reading the Bible again. I’m convicted even more after taking this class, though to fast food and this time to really focus and center myself on God. I hope and I pray that fasting more and more will help me to “be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ.”

### **Additional Readings**

Prayer: “Simple prayer.” On page 13, “Even in our prayerlessness we can hunger for God. If so, the hunger is itself prayer.” And then Foster quotes Mary Clare Vincent, “The desire for prayer is prayer, the prayer of desire.” This gave me so much peace and is fueling my hunger to pray. I’ve been praying more these days. Little prayers, simple prayers. Prayers that ask God to remind me. Prayers that ask God to hold me in times of anxiety. Prayers before bed, prayers in the morning, prayers before eating, prayers to remind me to pray. This chapter was so encouraging and I’m grateful to now know the beauty of hunger and the potential of prayerlessness.

Your God is Too Safe: “Holy Habits.” On page 125 Buchanan writes that the average Christian says “I really want to live for Jesus. I really try to live for Jesus. I really admire those who live for Jesus. I’m really sincere about living for Jesus. But I just keep messing up.” This is truly the story of my life. I want to live for Jesus, but I keep messing things up. But Buchanan

says that God says something like “Just bloody stretch” (181). “Holy habits are that: the disciplines, the routines by which we stay alive and focused on Him. At first we choose them and carry them out; after a while they are part of who we are. And they carry us.”

Father God, help me to start small, in order to one day be doing more difficult and advanced things. I need Your help. I have lived almost 27 years trying to figure out what works for me. Thank You that You do not love me any more just because I am spiritually disciplined. Thank You for loving me now and with everything even before I even know if I’ll be able to do great things in the future. Thank You for Your love. In Jesus’ Holy Name I pray, Amen.

### **Knowledge and Insights gained from Silent Retreats**

Thoughts from my first silent retreat: While I was going through the steps, I was so sure that my highest would be number 1, but really the first one was my second highest and my highest was actually number 8. I didn’t realize how important it is for me that I am socially accepted. I thought this kind of person would look a certain way. I didn’t expect that this person could also look like me. Maybe it’s because I didn’t get much relational or emotional depth at home. The first time I felt truly accepted was with my friends. I knew I was a people pleaser, but I didn’t know it was to the extent that it would be the highest number. Out of 60 possible points, I got 54. But that was because I went back to really see if I put some numbers too low. My concluding thoughts of my first silent retreat was “Your family will fail you. Your friends will fail you. You will fail yourself. But God has promised to never fail you. Put your trust in God.”

The second silent retreat: In my notes, I wrote that step five in “The Steps to Freedom in Christ was probably the hardest to admit. Could this be a religious spirit? I am guilty of “thinking I am more humble, spiritual, religious or devoted” (pg 15). I am also guilty of “having feelings of inferiority appearing as false humility” (pg 15). Since I grew up with the concepts of forgiveness

and repentance, for which I am grateful for, step five was the hardest to go through. The concepts of pride and false humility are not technically new to me. However, I was so wrong to think that I didn't have to worry about these. I didn't worry about it until I mentioned something about the other bible study teachers to my friend asking why they don't believe that God will move. When she said "I think they believe that God will move." I felt something gently put pressure on my heart. It was the feeling of my pride being crushed. Though it was painful in the moment, and I felt so much like a fool, I look back with joy to know that I am more aware now that believing in God doesn't have to look like every seminary student at ATS.

### **Insights from small group**

My small group with Tanya and Jennifer was quite refreshing. They were probably closer to my mother's age and yet I was able to be an adult with them. I don't feel that way often. I think because of my experiences with adults in my life, it was always hard to see adults as people. They were always people I had to listen to, submit under, help out, take advice from, and even be willing to be scolded by. Adults were always right. But being in the same small group with Tanya and Jennifer may have healed some of that. Them talking about their worries, their families, and having them also listen to me was a healing experience. I loved that they were willing to look human in front of someone probably closer to their kids' ages. They didn't come as adults that had it all together, they came as students, they came as people, and it was an amazing experience.

### **Integration of Practical Spiritual Disciplines**

Over the semester, I integrated prayer and service. The hunger to pray had been growing within me this semester, and though I did not pray every day perfectly, prayer has become something that I love to incorporate into my day. Reading Gullon's "Experiencing God Through

Prayer” really helped me love praying even more. It also made me appreciate being silent before God.

I am a bible study teacher at my church, so I see it as my obligation to serve. However, I never let go of an opportunity to serve. It is my joy to do things when no one is looking. I sometimes can feel God shining His face on me. It is my joy to give my friends rides home no matter how far they live from me. What a privilege it is to have friends to serve. There are things I would like to keep between God and I, but serving is definitely something I have realized is something I love to do. I have absolute joy knowing that my Father is pleased with the posture of my heart before service.

### **Spiritual Growth Plan**

I think I mentioned before that I am not naturally a high-functioning human being. Habits take a long time to develop and my old habits die hard. I really want to integrate more bible reading into my life. I once overdid it and it took me a long time to go back to the Bible. So, something practical would be, to look for ways to have a bible verse be sent to me daily. There is a website called “Bible SMS.” I put in my information and it will send me a text message with a random daily bible verse. As I open my phone first thing in the morning, I can now be reminded by text messaging to eat my daily bread.

I also want to integrate fasting into my life. First, I will pray. That sounds so spiritual, but I truly believe God will give me the strength to fast. Since I already don’t eat breakfast, it would be more beneficial to me that I do a full day of fasting. I’m going to take it really slow. I will put in my calendar and set aside every first Monday of the month and dedicate that day to fasting and centering my fast on the Lord.

Last but not least, I want to integrate the discipline of simplicity. I have already started, but I put a paper bag next to my closet readily available for me to throw something out or donate. I will make a list of things to “simplify” and go from there. Starting from the clothes in my closet, the shoes I don’t wear, the trinkets in my drawer, the half-filled notebooks, so on and so forth. Although it makes me nervous, I am also excited, to clear my mind of the things on earth and to have more space to focus on the things above.