

The Integrative Paper

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DML 811: Spiritual Formation for Leaders

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Introduction

After reading Thomas Ashbrook's *Mansion of the Heart*, I realized that my relationship with the Lord was not close enough. Last January, when I attended the "Spiritual Formation for Leaders" class, I assumed that through this course, I would learn more ways to develop my inner life and deepen my relationship with the Lord. But when I listened to Dr. Reimer's lecture on soul care and reading the textbooks of the class, I realized that more than one of my spiritual problems were preventing me from experiencing a joyful life in the Lord. The first was my lack of awareness of my own identity, the second was my sabbath rule disobedience, and the third was my doubt of God's forgiveness.

Self-Awareness

Dependance on Performance

In my 16PF coaching session, Dr. Reimer said: "Linh, you are a workaholic guy!" He encouraged me to say "no" more often and warned: "if you want to be a leader you have to slow down and think more." Dr. Sanders exhorted me: "No more people-pleasing! You are a leader, lead." These exhortations indicate that I did not know whether my identity was totally in Christ or through my ministries. One indicator is that I am easily upset when someone criticizes even one detail of my ministry. The roots of my people-pleasing behavior also cause me to be burnt out and unable to perform any small tasks or assist anyone afterwards. I believed a lie, telling myself: 'To be the best pastor, you must finish at least one project to offer to the Lord before He returns, or you meet Him.'

The second indicator shows I keep trying harder in my ministries and at times do not feel confident in my true foundation on which my value and identity stand. At times I did not believe my identity had been given through Christ. Dr. Reimer reinforced the teaching that if I want to gain the true, unshakable foundation and receive freedom, I need to “hold fast to what the Lord teaches.” Moreover, “life change is a byproduct of living right relationship with God.”¹

Solutions

Reading Dr Reimer’s *Soul Care: 7 Transformational Principles for a Healthy Soul* chapter on “Identity” and listening to Dr. Reimer’s lecture on this topic in the class, I identified that my defensive reactions and my easily-upset reaction to criticism, all came from my unclear identity. During the time of cleansing, Dr. Reimer reminded me to be still and receive the grace of the Lord. Then Dr. Sanders laid hands above my head and Dr. Reimer held his hand in front of my chest while I knelt in front of our cohort. I felt a warm fire from Dr. Reimer’s hand which transferred into my chest when he prayed for me. I realized the power of the Holy Spirit working through these two professors helped to cleanse my doubt, fear, and my identity confusion away. I stood up and realized that I needed to keep this state of renewal going.

Keeping My True Identity

Richard Foster in his *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, challenged those who want to break the spiritual bondage take time to practice meditation. Since I returned home to Austin, I started practicing listening through prayer: being still and quiet for five

¹Rob Reimer, *River Dwellers: Living in the Fullness of the Spirit* (Franklin, TN: Carpenter’s Son Publishing, 2015), 129.

minutes to listen to what the Lord is saying to me. I must practice humbly receiving the Lord's confirmation of my true relationship with Him every time I come to Him. This practice of silence first is difficult but I gradually it becomes habit which I would like to increase the time of silence till the day I can plan a one-day retreat monthly and a three-day-retreat each quarter. I believe that my time of silence will increase as the Lord leads me to set aside more time with Him. By His grace, I should seek time for solitude and the practice of silence so that I can listen to his voice and discern His will for my life and my ministries. I cannot value my identity, which is based upon my constant desire to please others and without listening to my Lord. The false identity leads me to be upset, resentful and defensive because without Him I cannot enjoy the God-given peace. My identity is in Christ alone. From now on I should keep reminding myself of this truth.

Sabbath Rest Issues

Roots

It was not comfortable for me to find out that my two burnout experiences had roots in my disobedience of the Sabbath rule of the Lord. Through reading Dr. Peter Scazzero's *The Emotionally Healthy Leader*, I also realized that this workaholic issue happened because I thought that as a pastor, I must try hard to complete all the tasks and responsibilities of ministry while forgetting the sabbath rest. I sacrificed my time and my energy to keep the ministry moving. Dr. Peter Scazzero reaffirmed that I "disobeyed the rule of Sabbath." I did not take weekly sabbath

seriously and the Lord let me learn “keeping the Sabbath is the *core* of a spiritual discipline”² which will help me to get closer to the Lord and become a fruitful person for Him.

Solutions for Keeping the Sabbath

By the grace of the Lord, I have scheduled my weekly sabbath rule to keep 24 hours of rest every week. During this weekly rest I will study the meaning and ways to keep the Sabbath by reading Dr. Peter Scazzero’s suggestions of these two books: Wayne Muller’ Sabbath: *Finding Rest, Renewal and Delight in Our Busy Life* and Abraham Joshua Heschel’s *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man*.³ I decided that on the day of rest, I will spend time focusing more on the love of God for me and for my family. I will count God’s blessings which he has bestowed. By the helps of the LORD, I will give thanks and praises the Lord as ‘His calling to those who He chose (1 Peter 2: 9). During the time of Sabbath rest, I will learn the work of the Lord through walking in parks to enjoy God’s creation and meditate on God’s care through the nature. I will also stop using technological devices during this time to break the addictive habit which prevents me from developing closer fellowship to the people around me.

Doubting God’s Forgiveness

The sins which I confessed to a missionary during my time in a refugee camp in Thailand forty years ago still sometimes reappear and cause me to wonder what will I do to erase these bad memories, the sins of my past?

Roots

²Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 156.

³Peter Scazzero, 166.

I learned that the root of some of my doubting the forgiving promise of the Lord, through the lecture on soul care, especially the “deliverance” section. It is related to the confession. Dr. Reimer repeatedly emphasized “updating your confession” so that you can be assured that you were delivered from the sins which you confessed and bring them to the light in confessing to a third person. You must believe that these confessed-sins were forgiven. You must believe the promise which says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1: 9).” I realized that the root of my doubt is that I did not hold fast my faith in believing God’s promise of forgiveness for my own sins! This is a promise which I taught many times to new believers but have not always done myself.

Dealing with My Doubting

I went home writing these sins down on the paper, one more time, reading the promise of God’s forgiveness, and then burning the paper written all the sins which I remembered. In front of my eyes, the burning paper gradually became black ash in the bowl. I told myself that God promised that “He is just and faithful, forgives my sins and purifies me from all unrighteousness (1 John 1: 9).” I prayed that God would help me to trust totally in all His promises, especially the promise of forgiveness of all my sins. I continue to set up time for re-examining my activities and to update my confessions. I long for the Lord’s affirmation that I am a clean instrument in his hands daily.

To Keep Living in the Light

Reading Dr. Reimer’s *River Dweller: Living in The Fullness of The Spirit*, one principle to keep me closer to the LORD and others is to become a “full-time river dweller” by practicing

solitude and silence. Dr. Reimer emphasizes that “if we do not cultivate that inner quiet by being alone with God, then we never put ourselves in a position to be available to the Spirit. It is hard to develop sensitivity to His still, small voice if we are constantly living in inner noise.”⁴ He also shows readers how “to cultivate inner stillness in the midst of chaos by intentionally fixing our eyes on Jesus,” by “taking ten-minute retreats, sitting in silence alone with God or meditating on one Biblical verse in the day.”⁵ All these spiritual disciplines aim to cultivate the presence of God among our busy activities. They cause us to enter the ‘divine activity,’ which is restful, reparative, and restorative.” I believe that these time-tested-spiritual disciplines would help me to guard my heart which is “the wellspring of life”(Proverbs 4: 23).

“Rhythms of Life”

After identifying the weaknesses in my spiritual life, I decided that these are the spiritual disciplines which I will engage to grow deeper and closer with God.

Daily

- Studying the Bible with the theme “fear not.” One verse which has one command “fear not” for the next 365 days
- Reminding myself that Jesus Christ might return today and to keep my life priorities straight
- Studying the books of Daniel, Revelation, and the Gospel of Matthew
- Setting aside a ten-minute retreat each day to cultivate the presence of God among my activities

⁴Rob Reimer, 138.

⁵Rob Reimer, 105.

- Listen to one sermon podcast on the healthy Christian soul to learn ways of strengthening my relationship to the Lord
- Exercising in the gym to keep my body healthy and clean as the temple of the Holy Spirit
- Re-examine daily activities, confessing and repenting in the evening to update my confession

Weekly

- Taking a day of Sabbath (resting) to know more the Lord. I will walk in the park and enjoy God's creation
- Preparing my sermon at least two hours in the morning of three weekdays
- Reading books on the Sabbath, specifically how to keep Sabbath in ministry life
- Re-reading my confessions to pray for change and adjust my walk with the Lord's teachings
- Researching mentoring, preparing the materials related to Discipleship Making for young leaders of the Austin Alliance Church in Texas

Monthly

- Practicing silence and solitude for one weekend, without digital connection through phone or internet, to listen to the Lord's guidance for growth in my inner life
- Reading one book on spiritual formation (choosing from the book list of "Spiritual Formation for Leaders" course)

- Spending two hours per month to assess my growth in eight areas: identity in Christ, rest, family, friends & relatives, time with the Lord, financial spending, following Bobb Biehl's formula of life accessing
- Assessing key activities relating to my relationship with the Lord. then imitating these key activities, "change pattern of pray, checking my heart's desire" in the stage the "fourth mansion" which Thomas Ashbrook discusses in his *Mansion of the Heart*, I will evaluate myself by asking these questions: "Do I live more on the responsive level which is drawn forward by loving God and neighbor? Do I depend more on God's love and the gifts of the Spirit? Am I growing little by little in all virtues?" during my first year of personal spiritual formation plan. Then afterward by the helps and the grace of the Lord I will learn to step up on my spiritual journey objectives.

Quarterly

- Taking a three-day retreat to listen to the Lord, preparing next year's spiritual goals.
- Attending leadership training with the Vietnamese District of Christian and Missionary Alliance
- Attending ministry boot camp

Yearly

- Attending Vietnamese District Conference
- One-week retreat to listen to the LORD, refresh my spiritual life, prepare the goals for the next year
- Taking a vacation with my family (my wife and children)

Means of Assessment for Spiritual Growth

To assess the growth of my spiritual inner life, I will create a checklist of all the disciplines in my “rule of life” which will consist of the daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, and yearly measurable goals. I will try to track how many hours which I spent for each of disciplines in my notebook and observe which area I have growth to the objectives I set. I will create an indicator checklist which bases on Thomas Ashbrook’s key activities, changing behaviors to send to my resource person or mentor so that he can help to check on my development in my rules of life.

Conclusion

Spiritual Development is a long-term process which can sometimes feel like spiritual warfare. Only by depending on the Lord’s strength and His grace, a follower of Christ can stand firm and grow little by little one day at a time. I pray that the Lord will help me to deepen in His love and inspire me to fix my eyes on His example so that I can follow His steps each of my days on earth and dedicate my life like His instrument.

The Lord Jesus Christ did not merely save me, but he wants to use me for others as well. To response to this call this is my “spiritual formation reproduction plan.”

Spiritual Formation Reproduction Plan

Target Group

Serving in the local churches of the Vietnamese Alliance Congregations, I would like to focus on training Vietnamese local church leaders in the areas of Spiritual Formation. Why do I choose local church leaders? Ministry is not a one-man plan and Spiritual Formation has been not a emphasize among the District leaders and local pastors. Even Lord Jesus Christ had trained the twelve to expand His ministries during his three years on earth. His relationship with His Father is natural matter but not for human beings. Moses felt exhausted in leading three million people, not counting women and children. Fortunately, he listened to his father-in-law, Jethro, who suggested he better appoint more group leaders to share his loads.

To become an effective and faithful leader, one does not depend only on the pastoral skills and Biblical knowledge but also the inner spiritual relationship with the Lord. Church leader is expected to also have a healthy spiritual life. This Spiritual Formation Reproduction plan incorporates information which I have learned from this course and the experiences I have gained through my pastoral care. I would like to share these experiences with young local church leaders in the Austin Vietnamese Alliance Church and Vietnamese District as well.

The following information is the one of the teaching plans for a Spiritual Formation training for local church leaders to develop their inner life as a leader.

Theme: How to cultivate your inner life effectively

Textbook:

Reimer, Rob. *Soul Care: Seven Transformational Principles for a Healthy Soul*. Franklin, TN:

Carpenter's Sons Publishing, 2016.

Reference Reading:

1. Reimer, Rob. *River Dwellers: Living in the Fullness of The Spirit*. Franklin, TN: Carpenter's Son Publishing, 2015.
2. Boa, Kenneth. *Conform to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001.

Learning Objectives:

- To gain more knowledges on our true self in Christ
- To know spiritual disciplines and how to apply them in our daily walk with the Lord
- To know how to choose daily, weekly, and monthly spiritual disciplines as one's "rule of life"
- To create ways to evaluate the personal spiritual development/growth to continue growing spiritually

Format for Learning:

- Read assigned chapters before each class gathering
- Small group discussion during class

Group project: outside class (in groups of two or three)

- Find biblical examples of:
 - a) mentoring and coaching in ministry OR
 - b) the ways man communicated with God and God communicated with man
- Small group prayer for each other

- Individually:
 - Keeping journaling
 - Regular self-examination and confession
 - Keeping quiet time with God, practicing of silence, cultivating in the presence of God.

Time Frames of Learning:

- One-day retreat (first and second quarters of the year)
 - Introduction: Theological foundation of spiritual formation
 - Assessing where you are in the relationship to the LORD
 - Practice of individual silence & solitude
 - Practice ten-minute daily retreat
- Two-day retreat (third and fourth quarters)
 - Repentance
 - Forgiving others
 - Family sin patterns
 - Healing hurts
 - Overcoming Fears
- At the end of each retreat, each participant will do an evaluation for themselves to keep and a copy for the trainer to track improvement.

Individual Evaluation:

1. What is your reaction to the plan? positive or negative?

2. Do you think it will be effective or ineffective?

3. What did you learn?

4. How is your growth in:

1 = no growth, 10= most growth

1___ spiritual discipline (skills)

2___ your relationship with God

3___ your relationship with others

5. What are the changes in your spiritual formation from this retreat?

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