

Personal Timeline

Joanne Cheung

Masters of Intercultural Studies

SF703: Spiritual Formation Capstone

Dr. Wanda Walborn

February 8, 2023

Personal Timeline

Childhood

- Born into a first-generation Chinese immigrant family as a middle child of three. My younger brother was born when I was nine, and it was the highlight of my childhood. I loved getting to be an older sister
- Also moved to a new house at nine years old and found it exciting
- Started finding value in my performance at nine as well. Sought approval from parents for good grades and developed a strong work ethic
 - Competed in school spelling bees in 4th and 5th grade
 - Voted as class president in the 5th grade
 - Selected as salutatorian in the 5th grade
- Strict, overbearing mom and lax dad. Rarely received love through quality time or touch
- Obedient child, dutifully did my chores without complaining
- Spent lots of time at tutoring centers for test prep for standardized exams

Teens

- Tutoring on the weekends continued during formative teen years – parents pleased when I got accepted into a specialized high school
- Not many opportunities to explore hobbies that interested me (i.e. violin, rowing, etc.) because my parents worked blue-collar jobs and spent money on expensive prep fees
- Parents imposed a strict curfew; started to rebel
- Valued friends over family
 - People-pleasing behaviors intensified; wanted to fit in
 - Gave into peer pressure (i.e. bullying, fighting, stealing)
 - Got caught shoplifting at 14; my father blamed himself for not raising me better – I was riddled with guilt

- High school years heavily focused on academic achievement, community service, etc.
- Got accepted to my first-choice college on a full scholarship – incredibly elated! Felt proud I wasn't a financial burden to my family. Parents also proud.

College

- Grateful for free rein to choose my major – no pressure to fulfill expectations
- Moved out of home at 18 years old and lived in a dorm in Manhattan
- Studied abroad in Florence and Tokyo, which sparked my love for travel and exploring
- First relationship during sophomore year, failed after one month – the breakup left me disillusioned about relationships and the meaning of life
- Met Christ around this time via a campus ministry (KCCC) – realized my relationship with God would never fail
 - Confessed to my family about my new faith, met with resistance, disappointment, and skepticism. I was disheartened but firm in my convictions
- Quickly found my home church and got baptized one year after accepting Christ
- Found love and acceptance in new church family
 - Discovered joy in working with children through serving in ministry (i.e. volunteering at a basketball youth camp, nursery, children's home)
- Second relationship as a new Christian – not Christ-centered and toxic. Broke up and became wary of relationships. Stayed single for seven years
- First missions trip to Thailand post-graduation, and witnessed God's global heart
- First trip to Urbana and was moved by God's call to abandon familiarities, get out of my comfort zone, and let God surprise me

Career

- Moved back home. Struggled to find a job post-graduation and finally landed a job in advertising. Worked at an agency in NY for four years

- Became a workaholic, vying for approval from bosses/clients vs. parents
- Received lots of recognition and promoted quickly (also made parents proud)
- Second missions trip to Thailand; increasing restlessness to move away from NY
- Moved to Singapore for another advertising role; lived there for two years
 - Took a pay cut; grew in self-sufficiency; plugged into a life-giving community; experienced radical hospitality; rarely struggled with loneliness
 - Volunteered with children's ministry and reading programs for kids
- Long-distance relationship with my husband; both expressed a burden and calling from the Lord to work with vulnerable children and education
- Officially quit my job in the corporate world – relief and excitement to finally pursue God's call on my life. Stepped into obedience despite the uncertainty
- Moved to Bangkok
 - God opened the door to work as a teacher, but then COVID-19 hit and I got laid off. Learned to trust in the Lord to provide for my every need
- Got married during the pandemic, with my family joining on Zoom – both a joyous and heartbreaking day
- My husband and I started ministry in missions and sent out our first prayer letter to friends and family to raise support
 - Grew immensely in faith; experienced God's providence and care in tangible ways; learned to entrust our finances completely to the Lord; gratitude
- Currently partnering with two missions organizations, one serving the urban poor and the other young professionals/university students
 - Not feeling like I'm walking in the fullness of my calling with either ministry
 - A growing interest in family-strengthening ministries and desire to develop in this area

Patterns in My Life

1. Seeking approval

Throughout my life, I've had a tendency to define my value based on whether certain people loved me or liked me. As a child, I'd seek approval from my parents. As an adolescent, it shifted to my peers and friends. And as a young professional, I'd seek to please my bosses and clients. Over the last few years, I've done a lot of soul-care work to grow my self-awareness, especially regarding my true identity. Whenever my people-pleasing lie starts to manifest, I can now identify it and actively shift toward my secure foundation in Christ.

Even so, I still struggle with not being able to honor my parents by being with them physically and tangibly caring for them in their old age. Living on the opposite side of the world has made this challenging, and my parents have voiced their disapproval of my living far away, which has caused me to feel guilty and inadequate. I am a work in progress. God is teaching me that it is an ongoing process and a conscious choice to reject the lie of needing people's approval, and to walk fully in God's destiny for me, His beloved child.

2. Tendency to perform

I think my tendency to perform is intimately linked to people pleasing. If I perform well, I please people, and when I please people, they are happy and I feel loved and valued. This started at the tender age of nine years old when I discovered that good grades led to positive attention from teachers, classmates, and most importantly, my parents (who rarely showed affection). Being part of a school system that rewards the top percent of students and glorifies competitiveness only exacerbated this longing for recognition. I carried this tendency to perform from school to work, church, and ministry until the Lord revealed this faulty foundation I was standing on.

Working closely with my ministry partners over the past few years, I've received an unwavering sense of love and acceptance despite my mistakes and failure to measure up. I am

not judged. I am not shamed. I am not condemned. They speak truth, but their response is gentle and tender. I see a lot of Jesus in them and have learned that my value is not dependent on how well I do, but simply because of who I am. Not surprisingly, receiving criticism continues to be challenging – I still tend to view it as negative feedback about my character. It was apparent that this is still a struggle when I read the syllabus for this class and shuddered at the thought of having to ask others to identify my blind spots!

3. Stepping outside of comfort zones

My childhood was highly sheltered – I dutifully met my parents’ expectations and rarely veered off their path for me, until I started college and tasted independence for the first time (i.e. lived alone, studied abroad on my own, etc.). Being in new environments continues to excite me and feeds my curiosity for learning. Moving to Singapore meant taking a big pay cut, but it was a small sacrifice for the adventure that lay ahead. Moving to Bangkok meant leaving family and friends behind yet again, building new relationships, and living more modestly, but God has given me peace that I am exactly where I am supposed to be. I have no doubt the Lord is shaping me to become adaptable, flexible, and open-handed with whatever He has in store.

How God Has Used Me to Minister to Others

1. Peacemaker

On several occasions over the last few years, people have pointed out that I have a sense of peace even in the midst of chaos. One co-worker said, “Joanne! Don’t you ever get stressed? Why are you so calm all the time?” Inner and external peace is essential to me, which makes me more sensitive when conflict arises. I instinctively want to restore harmony and resolve the conflict as soon as possible. At the same time, instead of rushing into a solution, I find it especially important to understand different viewpoints before reaching a

conclusion. During difficult discussions, I've seen God open up opportunities for me to point out fresh perspectives that my ministry partners and friends may not have been aware of.

2. Planning and organization

My strength in planning/organization complements people who excel in vision casting but need help executing concrete next steps. This has been true all throughout my advertising career as a media planner as well as in my various ministry roles as an English teacher, small group leader, and Sunday school teacher. I consistently enjoy devising strategic plans and find deep satisfaction in seeing them come to life. Especially when working on a team with vastly different giftings, it is mutually encouraging to see our different strengths highlighted as we soldier on toward the same God-given goal.

3. Good listener and attentiveness

Multiple friends or even new acquaintances in the past have confided in me about things they've never shared with anyone else, and they often can't put their finger on why they are disclosing private information. I'm learning to constantly ask God what to do before, during, and after meeting with someone – oftentimes, the Spirit will prompt me to stay silent, and other times to offer an encouraging word. God has been revealing to me that when I listen more than I talk, I'm able to create a safe space where the person sharing feels they can freely unload their innermost thoughts and feelings without judgment.