

Personal Retreat

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CD 735 Spiritual Leadership

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Dr. Reimer asked us to go on a retreat. He suggested spending a day in a high church if we couldn't get out of town, so I booked a hotel near several churches. For a silent retreat, I had stayed in a hotel, and it went well, so instead of praying about this retreat, I just booked it. I was concerned about fitting it into my busy schedule. That lack of prayer and attention would become a focal point of my retreat.

After I checked into the hotel and dropped off my bag, I went to Iglesia De Los Santa Inocentes and sat in a pew for over an hour. It was then that I wished I would have reread "God Initiated Conversations" before I came. I couldn't focus - the minutes were so slow. After a liturgy, I tried to "start." "What do I ask? What do I confess? What do I think about? What do I not think about?" I confessed a cocky attitude in a situation with my Field Ed ministry. I rehearsed some conversations I'd like to have and asked Jesus if any version was okay, but when I found myself saying, "And Michael Henderson can shove...", I knew I was getting off track from my confession. So I surrendered to Jesus. The front of the church has a huge mural of him hanging on the cross. He and I don't usually spend time together in that atmosphere, with the high ceiling and the ornate decor; I questioned if he even likes that space. But as I sat longer, I felt peaceful and quiet. I could just sit there - not talking or solving - and BE in his presence. That was fun. And reverent. Jesus likes reverent. Jesus is holy. He can get his hands dirty, *and* he is holy.

I was totally unprepared, but as I sat there longer in the quiet, I had some revelations. In my difficult conversation with Michael Henderson, be nice. Be honest, but don't tell him to shove anything. Then I realized that I had lost hope for my church for 2023. The hope I had had in January slipped away as I looked at all the practical reasons why we won't grow; I realized that I had been looking at the waves instead of Jesus. I think Jesus wants to resurrect my hope for my church.

I am also trying to decide what kind of minister I am. The staff at my Field Ed ministry are one way, and the staff at my church in China are another way. It makes sense that an international college-student ministry would emphasize evangelism, but when all these eager evangelists take the banner and run ahead, a lot gets missed in caring for people's souls. I know I need to grow in evangelism, so I submit to my mentor, but I find myself resisting. Bridges is not a bad ministry (I love the staff, and I'm thankful for our friendships), and Solomon's Porch isn't perfect (though I prefer ministry within a church to a ministry that emphasizes one aspect of church). The word from Jesus was still a little cloudy, but I think he affirmed my submission to Bridges and reminded me that I can bring the slow and the quiet.

During the pandemic, I loved my quiet daily rhythms. Now that things are getting busier, I am not sure how to maintain the quiet. One thing I heard in the chapel is to take a break from my tv show. The quiet of the church - the simplicity of Jesus' presence - reminded me that he isn't far off if I would be quiet. I need to do my work and get my hours for Field Ed. *And* I need to say "No" sometimes. My

soul matters, and I feel myself drifting from my soul. Be present. Learn. Be myself. Slow things down for me and for Bridges. Watch. Listen. Be humble. Be honest.

When I left the church, I popped in to get noodles from a Uygher restaurant because I thought I heard Jesus tell me to. The conversation with the owner proved honey to my soul. I went back to the hotel and journaled and read a book and slept. I needed to squeeze in the call with Michael, and the only time that worked for both of us was the next morning. I didn't want to put it off, so I agreed to take time from my retreat. I spent the early morning prepping: praying, writing down all the points, rehearsing. I had some extra time before the call, so I read Dr. Reimers notes about God Initiated Conversations. How I wished I'd read them sooner! The call was rough; I was quite disappointed in how little was resolved. Since I still had a few hours of my retreat time, I decided to start fresh. I worshiped with Maverick City for a long time. Then I read Psalm 25, silently and out loud. Verse 14 says, "The LORD confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them." David responds to God in verse 15 with, "My eyes are ever on the LORD..." With my eyes fixed on God, I ended my retreat with hope and quiet.

In some ways, my personal retreat was a disaster. Why did I think I would figure it out and fall naturally into a rhythm without preparation? Why did I plan to have a difficult conversation in the middle of it? I learned that in my new daily routines, I do not naturally fall in line with Jesus. I need to intentionally get quiet in my weekly sabbaths and in a regular retreat. That means I need to remove some of

the noise from my routine and replace it with rhythms of prayer and listening. Dr. Reimer's instructions to prepare proved to be the key to quieting my chaos.