Personal Retreat

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SF735- Spiritual Authority
Professor Rob Reimer
Due: 2/21/23

(1) How did you prepare to meet with God? What spiritual clutter did you need to clear up so you could still your soul?

Personally, I find the way that I connect with God the best involves being in nature. Therefore, I decided to spend the majority of the time of the retreat in the Apshawa Preserve in West Milford, NJ. I saw only 1 person during my whole time, so I had the mountain basically to myself.

During my morning drive to Apshawa Preserve, I worshiped God in order to prepare my time with the Lord. However, I sensed a lot of "spiritual interference" and confusion. It was hard to focus my attention upon the Lord. Various thoughts, even doubts about the retreat location, were flooding my mind. However, shortly after I started the hike, I concluded this was the enemy and fear speaking. I was reassured that location didn't matter, as God is everywhere, which gave me peace. As I continued the hike, I kept at the front of my mind staying connected with the Lord was the priority. Completing the loop, or anything else was secondary. I continued to worship God along the way, from that mindset. On one of the ridgetops before the summit, I shouted out loud, "Jesus is Lord," as an exercise of humility, but also declaring that He is Lord over all, the mountain, the world, and my little life.

(2) What did you sense God saying to you? What did you receive from the Lord?

I came across a beautiful waterfall and decided to engage the Lord there by reading Matthew. The Holy Spirit touched me undeniably when my eyes fell upon the verse, "do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit."[1] Being unmarried, I was tempted to scroll through Facebook to see which Mary the Lord was talking about. (mostly kidding :) Rather, as I have been praying for a wife more than usual this season, I knew the Lord was trying to highlight a particular fear in the area. What specific fear was yet to be determined. I continued down the trail, and, (caution - raw honest moment) after going to the bathroom, I sensed the Lord confirm, "It feels good to eliminate waste." I knew he was talking more about, "the waste in my soul," particularly fear.

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[1] Matthew 1:20 (NIV)

On top of the mountain, I looked out over a valley of bare trees. It was still beautiful to see, and I asked the Lord why is this beautiful to Him? Being impatient, I answered for Him, citing how trees continue to grow their roots during the winter season (except when freezing). God responded, "yes, that is true" but He had something else in mind. Then, when my eyes fell on 2 Evergreen trees in the middle of the valley, He said, "Life that is visible in the midst of winter is all the more beautiful." Wow. I knew what he was saying. In the spring and summer, I would have barely noticed those pine trees, as they would have been washed out in a sea of green. But now, they stood out, and their beauty made me smile. Through this, God was speaking to me about the winter in my own life. Recently, a pastor prophesied that I have been in a long winter season, but that this is a good thing, as in the winter our roots can still grow. God was encouraging me, that the life He sees in my winter, is beautiful. The Lord also reminded me about a prophetic dream I had, but that's not relevant to this narrative.

I was completing the Green Trail loop towards my car when I passed the entrance to the White Trail loop, which was a different way path. In my mind, I had the thought the Green Trail was the more beautiful one, and was satisfied with my loop choice, while the White Trail was inferior. I sensed the Lord interject there and said, "I made it [though]," and therefore questioning my judgment. I replied, "you did make the dirt and rocks and everything on the trail…" And God interjected again, "It is beautiful." In my mind, I was going to compare it to the incredible beauty I just experienced on the Green Trail. Then God said, "Whether it is a valley, a mountain top, a plain field, there is beauty there." Then He said something that surprised me, "Even in darkness, there is beauty because I am there." I had to stop and write this down to process it, and as I did, I thought out loud, "So beauty is… where You are. You make things beautiful." The moment I said that, I saw the sun shine on the mountain side and it glowed. It was as if God was confirming this point. But even if the sun didn't shine, it still would have been beautiful because God was there.

As it became quite cold, I went to 2 coffee shops. God continued to press into this theme from Matthew 1:20, but through the suggested passages in the assignment guide. At the local

Starbucks, I read / prayed through 2 Cor 4. Verse 6 jumped out at me, as it describes light shining out of darkness, and ties beautifully with the darkness metaphor earlier. It is His light in us, these jars of clay, that makes us beautiful. Then I read Isaiah 40, and coming to verse 6 again, it states how "all flesh are like grass, and its beauty is like the flower of the field." I looked up the hebrew word for beauty here, and it is Chesed - חֶסֶד. Professor Bryan Widbin described Chesed as one of the highest and rarest forms of love, perhaps once in a lifetime. It would drive one to give the ultimate sacrifice, like a soldier jumping on a grenade, or the love of Father in giving His Son to die on the cross (John 3:16). However, verse 8 states that the human display of such love, or "beauty" will fade, and only the word of the Lord will stand. That was a really humbling realization. Essentially, the very, very best a human can offer to any other human, or God, will fade. The only thing that is eternal is God himself. Therefore, this point expresses once again the theme that true, lasting, eternal beauty is where Christ is.

(3) How did you benefit from the retreat? How will you incorporate spiritual retreats into your ongoing spiritual development?

Through this journey, the fear God was highlighting at the beginning of the retreat began to come into focus. I was afraid that God would pair me in marriage with someone that I would not find beautiful. Hard to admit it, but it's true. Historically, I wrestled with sexual sin since I was 5, and struggled with lust into my adult years. By God's grace, I am walking in freedom from sexual sin. However, the old Obed worshiped attractive women, the beautiful image. The Lord was highlighting this idol still lingered, and a strong fear associated with it. As I went to a Turkish cafe, I processed Psalm 63, from the first verse, it was a struggle. "O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water." The Lord convicted me that I wanted this image more than Him, and yet, I really struggled to yield. I didn't want to. In the end, I finally prayed, "Lord, help me *to want to want to want* to give this idol. Sounds redundant, but it was honest. And gratefully, God met me there. I felt something release from my stomach, and I felt freedom, a genuine longing for God, and the nearness of the Holy Spirit.

I need to incorporate retreats into my spiritual rhythm. It was so life giving and liberating to give God this block of time. Realistically, a 24 hr retreat every 2 months. Next one is planned for April 21, after Easter. But in between those times, I will plan a 6-8 hour mini retreat away. Next one will be on March 3rd.