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Introduction to Spiritual Formation  
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This spiritual formation course is wonderful and very useful. Out of all the classes I'm taking, this is by far my favorite. The purpose of it is to allow us to draw closer to God, which is the whole purpose of right education, and is the best thing that could happen in a person's life. I feel I am being blessed through the materials that are being assigned each week. In this essay I would like to share some of the things I've learned so far while doing the assigned readings and meditating on the Word of God.

After reading the first three chapters in the book "Experiencing God Through Prayer," I set a timer for eight minutes to reflect on the words in the book. During those eight minutes I was reminded that I need to pray more than I currently do. I say I was reminded because within the past year I've told myself that I need to pray more than I do. I also was reminded about not having to be worried or ashamed about presenting my sins to God and seeking His forgiveness. God will be faithful to His Word and have compassion on His people. All I have to do is bring my sins to Him, repent, asked to be washed in the Blood of Jesus, and ask Him to give me strength not to repeat those sins. If I do fall again to temptation, then I can go to God, and He will receive me. He knows our frame and that man is but dust as it says in the Bible. I have to stay close to God no matter what happens and by the help of the Holy Spirit walk in the straight and narrow path.

Whenever I do something that is wrong, it is normal for me to feel ashamed, and want to avoid God's presence. It reminds me of Adam and Eve's reaction after

they fell in the garden. However, I've learned that the thoughts and feelings of not wanting to seek God after a failure can be the voice of the evil one who wants to keep me away from the Savior. In these circumstances, I have to do the opposite of what my mind is telling me. I have to trust in the goodness and understanding of the Father who is waiting for me with open arms. It is amazing that God wants to have a close relationship with me. I pray the Holy Spirit can make me acceptable to Christ and worthy to have a close relationship with Him.

I've learned through the readings that meditative reading is fundamental to get close to God. I should not simply read through the Bible just to complete my assignments or read as much as I possibly can. I should take time to reflect on the Word and see what message God has in it for me. When I feel God is speaking through a verse or a story, I need to stop and meditate on what I feel God is trying to tell me. Then if appropriate continue reading. The blessing is not in reading the Word but in allowing it to penetrate and impart its edifying Life into me.

In chapters four through six, I was encouraged to abandon and consecrate myself to God. God wants me to trust Him with all my heart and not to worry about the present or the future. By nature, I am the kind of person who likes to have everything planned and organized. I do not like when unexpected things come up. There is nothing wrong with being that way in the natural but in the spiritual walk trying to follow the Holy Spirit it is different. I am filled with too much of myself and it prevents me from relying on God. I need to allow myself to be emptied and seek to do God's will. An example from my experience is when a problem arises my natural reaction is to look for an immediate solution. That immediate solution might turn out to be not the best option. If I am to move and have my being in God then

my first reaction to a problem should be to bend my knees to God and pray to Him for guidance. The same has happened in times when I needed a job. I would just send my resume to the places where I wanted to work, when I should have asked God first if there was a place where He might want me to go instead. Through the reading of this chapter, I found that I need to depend more on God and be willing to give up my life and pleasures to the will of God.

“Be content with all the sufferings that God may lay upon you,” is a quote from the reading that almost made me cry. How am I supposed to be content when difficulties are ready to drown me or are right outside my door? I have always been a sentimental person, the kind who loves movies with happy endings. I naturally love happiness and want nothing to do with suffering. But in this fallen world suffering is inevitable and sooner or later everyone goes through it. Jesus suffered when He was here on earth and He told His follows they would suffer as well. I must be willing to give my life for Him and follow in His footsteps. As it says in the Beatitudes, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” I want to be happy but that happiness will be granted by God later in life’s journey, and as for now I have to learn to rejoice in times of anguish if called upon.

In today’s busy world it is so easy to get caught up in activities that are distractions to having communion with God. I need to put God first and focus on doing His will. My daily routine is normally in the morning I wake up and then go to either work or school. Then afterwards I do some errands, get home, cook dinner, and by the time I have some free time I am exhausted. This is the devil’s strategy to keep God’s people distracted from taking the time to hear and listen to God’s voice. This will weaken the spiritual life and make someone an easier target for

Satan's temptations. It is of vital importance to carve out time every day for prayer, talking to God, rededicating myself to Him, and reading the Bible.

If I spend more time seeking God's will and doing it then it will turn into a blessing for myself and others. After all God knows what's best for everyone. Seeking God's will and doing it isn't always easy. I need to present myself to God and allow the Holy Spirit to show me things that need to be addressed. I need to allow Him to work with me and overcome the sins and unfavorable characteristics that remain in me. That way I can be grow more into the full stature of Christ.

This spiritual formation class is wonderful. I have read and learned about different aspects of the spiritual life and practices which aid in drawing closer to God. I have also learned about some of the traps that people fall into which inhibit someone from drawing closer to God. In all I've learned more about myself and how to grow as a child of God.