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SF770: Soul Care

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Rule of Life

Over the past year, my goals and ambitions in life have been getting increasingly crushed. In the past, I did not recognize these goals as sinful or necessarily bad. I would and still have dreams to greatly impact the world and fight against poverty, build houses of worship, equip the saints, and leave a Kingdom-sized footprint before my death. However, in my heart, these desires were ultimate; if I didn't do this in my life, I realized I would view my life insignificant. The Lord has been helping me put these goals and ambitions on the altar. They will no longer be the ultimate desire in my life. I'm learning that the true yearning of my heart is to be with God. I've been meditating on Psalm 27:4; "One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple" (NIV). My ultimate life goal is to abide in and walk with Him. Whatever else I have and do in life will flow from this.

To abide in and walk with Him, I have set some spiritual practices in place to maintain vital union. One practice I've implemented daily is stillness. Although I am trying to do this first thing in the morning, I usually end up doing it within the first hour of the day right before I begin work. I take time to just silence my thoughts, still my heart, and be present with the Lord. I do not pray my prayer list at this time, but I just carve out a few minutes to let Him know that I am available and here. I usually get a deep sense of His presence and peace. I'm reminded that no matter what I do in my day, the most important thing is being in step with Him. Naturally, I have

also been practicing silence as well. Stillness and silence tend to go hand-in-hand for me. As I get still, I silence my inner voice and other thoughts to fully dial in on the Lord. I need to engage in this activity on a daily, weekly, monthly, yearly basis. I know how much these two practices especially anchor my life. In my walk, I have generally been able to hear His voice well and walk in step with the Spirit. However, through these practices, I've been even more in tune with Him. I claim pockets of my day to just be still, especially when I sense busy thoughts or stress arising. Doing this helps me not react to the circumstances of life but to be preemptively grounded against whatever goes on around me. I don't need to fight, defend myself, or prove anything because the Lord is with me. In so many ways, this has even helped with my road rage and ability to bless those who curse me (or who in the past, I would get angered by). I've been experiencing His favor through dialing in to His thoughts. In many important decisions, I lean in to Him and discern more clearly the right path and what He is saying. For example, I recently got a new job about 7 months ago. This new role wasn't received through striving. I was not the most qualified candidate nor was I in a desperate position to look. But what I did recognize was that in my current role, I was not being treated and compensated fairly and I strongly needed a new role that would give me more hours back in my day. I asked the Lord to guide me in His timing to the right position and I asked for a specific salary amount that would cover all my family's bills. Praise the Lord, I was able to receive my current role and the Lord gave me the exact dollar amount that I had asked for. Practices like this tune me more in to His voice, His leading, His provision, His victory and favor. Also, older sin habits or temptations are easily brushed off these days. As I tune more in to Him throughout my day, and am sensitive to what choices will lead me away from Him, I have learned to walk the straight and narrow. Boundaries have been established that I do not cross.

In addition to these two activities, I've also applied meditative studying of the Word, fasting, and physical exercise. In the past when I would read the scripture, I would read it quickly and gloss over chapters. Recently, I have learned to slow down, read and re-read passages that the Lord highlights to me. Sometimes I'll sit on it for the week, think about and chew on it. This has allowed me to more deeply digest the Word and understand Him more deeply. Fasting is my way of clearing out the junk that I don't need and telling the Lord I want and need Him more. This can be food or even setting time limits on social media apps; fasting has been adjusting my appetite for more of Him and what benefits my life. Physical exercise has also helped me be more in tune with Him. Stewarding my body and maintaining my physical health has lowered my stress levels, cleared my mind, and sharpened my will and thoughts to be more cognizant of everything around me. I've been running 20-25 miles a week and lifting weights 3-4 times a week. During these times, I don't listen to music that feeds my ego or that is filled with expletives. I generally listen to no music and just tune in to exactly what I'm doing in the moment, and also reflect on what the Lord is saying. If I choose to listen to music, I mainly choose music that's edifying to my soul. Meditative scripture reading, fasting, and physical exercise are activities that are deeply spiritual to me and that I plan to implement for the rest of my life.

In the future, in addition to the spiritual activities of silence, stillness, study, fasting, and physical exercise, there are other activities I would like to implement. I want to implement a quarterly personal retreat where I intentionally take a day to go out in nature and just be still and silent with God. I currently work a full-time job, serve at my church, and am building a business. These responsibilities do not leave me as much personal times of stillness and silence as I would appreciate to find deeper rest. A retreat for me would help remind me to rest in God. I am

learning to Sabbath throughout my day when I can, but I would enjoy a more extended day of truly resting in the Lord. Initially, quarterly would be amazing, and eventually, weekly would be desired. I'm still asking the Lord the best, practical way to implement this while being faithful to what I have on my plate right now.

Other than implementing new activities like retreating or resting more deeply, I would also like to delve more deeply into the spiritual activity of fasting. Fasting has always played a large role of purification and acceleration in my life. The Lord delivered me from alcoholism when he told me to fast alcohol for a year. He gave me this assignment on two separate occasions, both years of which I was faithful to. By the time he told me to stop drinking alcohol for good, I was freed from it. (I do not believe drinking alcohol is a sin. However, in the way that it has affected my life, I do think it's best that I simply do not drink to not give any foothold for the enemy. This is not coming from a place of fear but wisdom for myself, personally. I do not hold nor care to hold others to this standard). The Lord also told me to cut smoking of any kind and delivered me from drug use. Fasting was crucial to the rewiring of my mind and renewal of my heart. Fasting expedited the process of reorienting every aspect of my life towards Him. I believe the Lord will be calling me to longer, extended fasts of food and other things over time. One of my faults can definitely be gluttony. Whether it's junk food or other indulgences, when I'm in, I'm 100% in. Fasting has shown me that only He satisfies the longing of my soul. Practically, I want to choose one aspect of my life that I can fast on a monthly/yearly basis to keep myself in a perpetual state of fasting. This helps remind me of my hunger for Him.

Lastly, going forward I would also like to delve more deeply into studying the Word and reading in general. As I've stated above, I have a large appetite for whatever I'm fixated on. And I've been learning that there are some choices I make that can increase my appetite and satisfy

me, and there are others that will decrease my appetite. There is some content that I can read and study that would increase my longing for the Lord. There is other content that I can read that would decrease my hunger. The latter is a waste of time. I want to begin reading books more consistently that feed my hunger for the Lord. I want to find books that mentally stimulate and challenge me to see the Lord in new (not heretical) ways. There is so much I don't know that others have learned. But more than head knowledge about the Lord, I want to read more books that make my heart burn for Him. I believe this will be key in helping sustain the fire and dwell in the River. Practically, I want to aim to read a new book every two weeks. Doing this would obviously be another large time commitment and would likely require me to cut down on other activities like watching TV or scrolling through my phone. But I expect this to naturally happen as I delve deeper in to these practices.

I'm training for a half marathon currently and the lessons learned have been quite profound. When training, it's good to take the easy days very slow and the harder days fast. Most people tend to run their easy days a little too fast and their harder days slower. Doing this causes a constant state of strain and disallows adequate recovery. Rest is key. Diet also matters; what I fuel my body with will affect my training and ultimately, my race performance. I need to be conscious of what I'm consuming. Also, consistency is key. Improvement takes time, but the most important thing is being consistent with the planned activities and over time, progress compounds. I've learned to trust the process and choose the right daily, weekly, monthly activities for growth. I know that these same concepts apply to spiritual activities as well. I look forward to the compounded growth and intimacy that I will have with the Lord all the days of my life.