



Integrative Paper with Spiritual Growth Plan: How will I develop spiritually in Seminary.

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SF 503: Initiation of Spiritual Formation

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Class Lectures:

I found 3 *Types of Spiritual disciplines* to be very impactful. I came to this conclusion because I was able to see in very concrete, and tangible ways areas in my life that I was already practicing some of these disciplines. On the other hand, I became very aware of disciplines that were not being practiced. In each area that was discussed (inward, outward, and corporate), I saw that I was very heavy on most of the disciplines or had done anyone of them at one time or another: however not consistently. To be honest, I saw that fasting is a discipline I have not practiced in recent years, because of health issues. I have chosen abstaining as my way of fasting, instead. I felt convicted in our class on fasting, and I have started to make some adjustments that will allow me to engage in this spiritual discipline. It has been a joy to be reminded that spiritual disciplines are not the end goal, but rather the fruit they produce.

Reading the Bible for Transformation was also a very powerful topic. I like the methods that were introduced to us. I found this very helpful since I enrolled in New Testament Reading this semester. I am getting a chance to use these tools that were presented in this class. I was ushered back to my early church years, and the way reading the Bible was introduced to me. In church, scripture application was given without understanding the context. We were not invited to ask meaningful questions. Scripture was often interpreted by the preacher or teacher. We were not given the opportunity to ingest, repeat, and insert ourselves into the story. This lesson was a great reminder of “rightly dividing the word of truth.” (2Tim 2:15[New International Version])

Additional Reading

Dark Night of the Soul by Bill Hybels was thought provoking. Before reading the *Dark Night of the Soul*, I cannot recall having heard those words. It was an invitation to look over the pages of my life to see where I had had dark night of the soul experiences. I concluded that I could be in one at this current moment. As a minister to college students, I have watched the chapter move from close to 90 students over the years to less than 9, more recently. The pandemic has made student ministry seem impossible, as students have learned the art of isolation. Yet God has given me a word of encouragement: “the glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house.” (Hag 2:9[New International Version]) I have not seen it yet. Instead, it feels like we are closer to a replant. Yet God keeps saying “be faithful.” *Dark Night of the Soul* has allowed me to put into perspective the experience that I am undergoing.

Textbook Reading

I have been on a journey with spiritual formation for several years now because of the nature of my job. The disciplines that I have learned and incorporated in my life have made dramatic changes. Reading *Water from a Deep Well* has transformed my way of thinking and has given me a genuine appreciation for those who have gone before me. I was captured by the martyrs, those who gave their life for what they believed in, and the desert saints, who were willing to live in isolation to get away from corruption that was seeping into the faith. I gained so much knowledge that has catapulted me into a more conscious way of living. When I walk past stained windows of a cathedral or see pictures of famous saints hanging on a wall, I take a moment to pause and reflect. I thank our early brothers and sisters for practicing ascetics and giving us a roadmap that we can incorporate in our lives. I know that their ways may have been unconventional or even extreme in some cases, but their love for God has captivated me.

Reading these stories have touched me to the core of my being. It has given me an earnest desire to truly love God, and to be intention about my lifestyle with new optics.

Celebration of Discipline has been a good way of giving me more in-depth information about spiritual disciplines, especially the ones that I did not know were disciplines. For example, I did not know that celebration was a spiritual discipline. I was blown away. When I had to practice nine spiritual disciplines for this class, I only chose my birthday as a time of intentional celebration, as celebration. Now that I have a better understanding that celebration is a spiritual discipline, it became clear to me that I was already practicing that discipline. It is more my ignorance of not knowing that celebration is spiritual.

Knowledge and Insights gained from Silent Retreats

Insight number one: I must admit that I have done silent retreats before. In fact, as an Intervarsity staff worker, we attend two spiritual formation retreats twice a year. Part of that retreat involves 8 hours of silence. We call it- “The Big Silence.” Those times have been refreshing for sure. However, the 24-hour retreat was a huge step in the right direction. As I went through Biehl’s book, the findings were astounding. Doing the exercises on the patterns was very helpful. It gave me a much better understanding of why I do what I do. I was able to sit with God and see truths I had not seen before. Then I began to make a list of different areas of my life. Some of them I needed to submit to God, so that I could let go off baggage that I had brought along the way. I did. Being able to see my parents for the humans that they are, was very healing. Becoming more self-aware has been very helpful in how I now live everyday life. I try to stay away from my backup style, with the help of the Holy Spirit. I am learning gratitude, and I am

slowing down to appreciate all the good my parents have done. I am a work in progress. I want to really implement this practice in my life, even if it means going away once per year to meet God in the silence and solitude. He wants to meet with me.

Insight number two: I found *Steps to Freedom* in Christ to be very informative, and useful. There were many topics and prayers that I had never thought of. As I went through the six steps, chapter 3 really grabbed my attention. - Forgiveness vs Bitterness. That night in my dream, God met me. I saw in my dream a woman whom I had forgotten about. I had never had a dream with her before, and I have not seen her in 6 years. God reminded me, that there was bitterness between us. God is unbelievable. I was so grateful to see that he was there in the process with me. There are many other places in those chapters that could not be worked out in 24 hours. I have written them down, so that I can have further discussion with my spiritual director. I realize that there are prayers that I have not prayed to break some of the bondages off my life. Moving forward, I will be using these prayer tools in my personal life, my ministry life, or just life in general.

Times of Stillness and Mentoring Discussions

Stillness: My time of stillness has been hard, yet fruitful. I discovered that while I spend a lot of time in solitude (not isolation) and even in silence, I still had a hard time sitting in stillness for 8 minutes. I was very surprised by that. I have mostly seen myself as someone who enjoys silence and solitude, and I do. The conundrum that was revealed was the internal noise. It was very difficult to control the internal noise. I became aware of how noisy I am. When the noise was minimized, God met me. He met me in songs that played in my mind. These were songs, I had not conjured up. My mind was at peace with the Lord, and so was I. There were other times

that God showed up with a visual picture, pertaining to an area of life or ministry that I was concerned about. Today, he showed up as a friend, and put his arms around my shoulder. My hope is to grow in this area by continuing to practice after the semester comes to an end.

Mentoring Discussions

On the 1st session: *dealing with sin patterns*, I was blown away by how God can reach into all the deepest places, that I would not think of looking. We sometimes forget that we are a combination of all of what has influenced our lives. Sometimes, to get to the truth, we need to uncover generational strongholds. In that session, we discovered the role that slavery has played in the Jamaican culture, and how much I have been affected by that. It was mind blowing. At the start of our four sessions, we had no idea where God would take us. I had no idea where God would take me, especially since the questions were very specific, and I would not have thought of them myself. I was nervous about what we would be revealed if anything at all. God, who is rich in mercy, showed up, and really met me. I am an advocate for mentorship because there is so much that gets exposed, processed, and prayed about. Sometimes we have difficulty leading ourselves to Jesus. It is beneficial to have members in the body of Christ, gifted in various areas, who can help brothers and sister to navigate vulnerable spaces.

Integration of Practiced Spiritual Disciplines: Solitude, Prayer, and Fast

Solitude: I will practice solitude once per month, beginning at the end of the semester. I will continue this path throughout the summer and adjust as needed.

Prayer: Although I pray on most days, I will incorporate a time of extended prayer on Wednesday evenings from 6:30- 7pm. My hope is to go beyond that, as it becomes a regular practice.

Fasting: While this was not one of the disciplines that I practiced in this course, it is an area in my life that I became convicted of in one of the lectures. Since then, I have decided to fast every 1st Sunday of the month from one meal/snack. I will do 6hrs fast. I am not able to go beyond that, but it's an area in my life that I am developing.

Spiritual Growth Plan

Spiritual Direction: I will continue to meet with my *spiritual director* monthly. We have been meeting for the past two years. Now that I have gone through Bobb Biehl's book, there are a lot more areas to work through.

Sabbath: I will continue to honor the sabbath from Saturdays 6pm- Sundays at 6pm, at least two times a month as a reminder that God is on the throne, and I need to entrust him with what is yet undone. This will continue to foster my dependence on God.

Small group: I will continue to be involved in my small group community at my church. This will enable me to be in communion with other sisters, and brothers. It is a place where we can bring our joys and sorrows. We pray one for another. It is a place that nurtures the love and care we need as we pioneer together towards the promised land.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I was nervous about pursuing seminary, and I still am. I am grateful for this class that has been foundational for me. It has brought me back to the basics of what life in Christ is about. My hope is that this reminder will propel me towards a life that bears good fruit.

