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Spiritual Journey Mentoring Group

Session 1 (2/14/2023)

My group consists of 4 friends from the same church. All members are single and Korean-Americans. The members of the group are: Jin Kim, Jonathan Lee, Sam Park, and Austin Yoon. Each member was instructed to prepare their own learning goals before coming to the first meeting as I learned to do in class from Dr. Walborn. However, I learned that I should state instructions more specifically and clearly as each member brought general ‘christian’ answers such as “I want to get closer to God” or “I want to love God more.” Another aspect of our group that arose as an issue was that each member was too comfortable with each other. I appreciated how our meeting was casual and natural, however, I did need to establish a mentor and mentee relationship. Thankfully, as each member is younger than I and knew my calling as a minister, they followed through with directions right away. As I learned from Anderson’s *Spiritual Mentoring*, I was able to quickly establish that we do not want aimless, evil, or self-seeking relationships.¹ Instead, our goal is to commit to each other and build relationships that “penetrate beneath the surface” and to help each other get ‘unstuck’ in our relationship with God and people.² Although it took some time for the members to settle down and take the meeting seriously, once we did, we were off to a great start. The familiarity of each member actually became a positive.

Because each member knew each other well, they did not need the time to establish trust. Each was more than willing to be there for each other. When I asked the question “Am I worthy

1 Anderson, Keith and Randy Reese. *Spiritual Mentoring: A Guide for Seeking and Giving Direction*. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 34% by Calibre

2 Anthony Fleming. *Transform: A Practical Guide for Men to Take Action and Get Unstuck*, (Austin, TX: The Fedd Agency, 2021), 15% by Calibre.

of love?” from the first chapter of *Spiritual Journey*, everyone began openly sharing with each other. In fact, one of the members shared his fear of making new friends after college. He struggled to be a part of a meaningful group that would invest in him. He felt unloved and uncared for by people in general. As such, our discussions went deeper and longer than I anticipated. I am excited that we will continue to be honest with each other and create meaningful relationships.

Session 2 (2/21/2023)

Austin, who shared his struggle for making new friends, began the conversation today. After pondering on why it has been difficult to make new friendships, he realized that he always had membership in institutions such as school or church that allowed him to make friends within the community. Now that he does not have it, he feels awkward and uncomfortable to engage others outside of an institution. His resolution was that he understood the deep value of his current relationships and to continue to process his thoughts and face his fears by creating opportunities instead of waiting for them. We were all so proud and congratulated him on his journey.

This week, we spoke most about our feelings of worth. Clearly, everyone was finding their value from identifying with things of the world instead of God. Jonathan identified during the discussion that he realized that his “rocky” relationship with God hindered him from acknowledging His love. Others shared that their worth was heavily dependent upon their job or their performance. Only one member of the group actually practiced the mirror moment in chapter 2. After having the discussion, others were challenged to do it themselves so that they may go deeper in their conversation with the Holy Spirit and to bring it to the table next week. I am also learning that I need to spend more time with the Lord. The past week was extremely

busy and I did not get to engage deeper with the material. This week, it felt as if I was participating instead of leading the discussion questions. Today, I am challenged by Anderson's question: "Have you noticed a pattern of God's movement in your life?"³ I am making it a goal to answer this question clearly before the next session.

Session 3 (2/28/2023)

As I am leading a group that consists of all East Asians, shame from chapter 3 was a critical topic. When I opened up the forum to share about what they found interesting in chapter 3, Austin mentioned that the "Shame Cycle" perfectly represented his life. Out of everyone, Austin considered himself to have grown up in a "most Korean household." He learned through the reading that he carries mostly every issue with shame mentioned. He felt that he never had a chance to live within the grace cycle as emotions were not gracefully accepted in his home. Showing and displaying emotion publicly meant receiving shame. Although he knew that his parents loved him, it was clear that the culture of shame was causing wounds. Others shared that they often attempted to flee the cycle of shame by self-medication. They realized that they had emotions that they were fearful of dealing with and suppression felt like the easiest way. One member particularly shared that he still has issues with drinking and he now believes that avoiding shame is the reason why he still struggles with it after many years.

As we were sharing our experiences, I felt that it was important to reinforce trust before moving on further. As mentioned by Anderson on trust, I recognized that it was an important moment for me to display vulnerability in participating in the discussion. I spoke about Jesus' victory over shame, yet my ongoing struggle with it. After displaying myself as a member of the group, I asked, "how can we be there for each other?" Although they did not know how to put it

³ Anderson, Keith and Randy Reese. *Spiritual Mentoring: A Guide for Seeking and Giving Direction*. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 16% by Calibre.

into specific phrases, it was clear that everyone desired a culture shift in their community. I challenged each member (in every area that they serve in at church) to practice vulnerability, grace, and acceptance. To display that they are willing to love and care for others. That when things get hard, get together and share the burden together. In all honesty, I felt like most members doubted that such a culture shift can be a reality in their church.

Session 4 (3/7/2023)

I was extremely thankful and excited to see that everyone did their journal reflecting on their brokenness this week. Furthermore, I was surprised when the group decided that they wanted to read their journal out loud. This clearly displayed that our meeting is a safe place, each person trusted the other, and the deep desire to grow. For the most part, as all the members grew up in the church besides Jin, each member stated that they relate mostly with the older brother in the story of the prodigal son. It was an indication that, instead of living in the love and grace of God, their idea of faith/Christinity was heavily influenced by religiosity. For Jin, he felt that the younger son was a carbon copy of his life.

I am thankful to recognize that each member is now fully brought into what we are doing weekly. They see that there is power in honesty and I have been told multiple times by each person that they have never felt this close to each other as friends. As a leader, I am learning that it is crucial for me to practice and live these lessons first and foremost. In places where I have yet to accomplish, I see that I am in the position of a “researcher” along with my mentees. In places where I have concrete evidence and testimony, I am able to speak with power. Clearly, in times like this, I feel that I am more comfortable and effective as a leader. My prayers are more meaningful and deep. My love, grace, and care for the mentees go deeper.

Session 5 (3/14/2023)

False humility is rampant in East Asian culture. This was clearly the case when we shared lies that prevent us from getting closer to God. Each member had varying reasons why they are not “enough” and what they “need to work on” and it was all deeply wrapped up in shame. After each person shared their thoughts, I asked, “be honest with me everyone, who told you those lies?” Besides Jin, everyone recognized that those lies began from themselves. East Asian culture values perfectionism. There is a word in Korean that loosely translates to artisanship but it is about the value of creating a perfect artisan work of your own life. Extremely high standards. When we spoke about “lies” our language was more about “standards” that were engraved in our minds by others and myself. Each member’s eyes lit up as they identified these lies that were bonding them to shame.

When I noticed that identifying these lies/standards were so effective, I made an active engagement to empower each member. As Anderson writes about empowerment, he spoke about how each person has a “unique voice for ministry.”⁴ Each member of the group, as they serve in church, have the unique opportunity to impact those around them. I challenged them to identify moments of “false voices” at church. When they hear or see cultural implications, take note and if God allows, speak into that moment. Display both grace and truth. Each member was challenged to do so, especially Sam. He is currently a volunteer for the Middle School ministry.

Session 6 (3/21/2023)

Because all the members of my group are men, we all came to the same conclusion on how we overcome fear: avoidance. Instead of understanding that there is a reason for fear and approaching it with self-awareness and Soul Care strategies, we opt to hide it. Therefore, when we begin the conversation about our fears (with trust already established), each person has a lot

⁴ Anderson, Keith and Randy Reese. *Spiritual Mentoring: A Guide for Seeking and Giving Direction*. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 78% by Calibre.

to say. As we processed our fears, we were able to properly normalize that fear is a natural response when we are trying to accomplish something outside of the boundaries of God's love. Jonathan made a powerful statement regarding God's love: "I want to be able to expand the reach of God's love in my life so that I can move without fear at work." As we continued our discussion, we began to acknowledge that there are false preconceived notions about how God views us. Clearly, each person was extremely critical of themselves and, in a certain way, believed that those criticisms were validated by God. However, when we began voicing the criticism, we could not believe how "unkind" and "nasty" we were to ourselves. As we wrapped up the meeting, we went around in circle to pray. We recognized, acknowledged, and received God's love. It was the first time that I saw tears rolling from this group of men. It was powerful.

Through this week's meeting, I felt that God was speaking powerfully through each person. I was able to recognize that God was doing something great. Instead of pushing agendas and trying to end the meeting on time, I let the conversations flow. I chose to get out of the way and allow God to do His work and He worked in power. I am humbled, reminded again that I am partnering with God in ministry. He is the leader and I am the follower.

Session 7 (3/28/2023)

Besides Austin, everyone in my group grew up in a conservative church. Hearing God's voice was not an everyday thing. In fact, for them, a testimony of hearing God's voice was pretty much a testimony of experiencing a miracle. When they read and studied through this week's chapter, it was so foreign to them that they did not know what to do with it. They had a lot of questions and their biggest concerns were about how we can distinguish between God's voice and my voice or even Satan's. This was the same case with me when I first heard about regularly hearing God's voice from ATS. What I struggled with was not about hearing God's voice, but

having faith that God does speak. I did not have a spiritual worldview for it. When I mentioned this, that was the case for them as well. What they feared was expectantly waiting for God to speak because they did not have faith that God would speak. There was a disconnection: they had faith to ask God questions, but lacked faith to hear back from Him.

This week, we could not go too deep into the content I hoped to discuss. Instead, I challenged each member to actually practice what they read and to return to follow up again next week. Finally, we did not set a specific time/date, but I am hoping to do a retreat weekend with my group as I did from the Spiritual Formation course. I hope to teach my group to hear from the Lord.

Session 8 (4/4/2023)

“The way of the kingdom is submission to the will of the king” was a sentence pretty much all of us highlighted before coming for the final session. Looking at each person, it is clearly evident that they have learned and matured through the past 8 weeks. In being honest and sincere with each other, we learned to inturn do that with our Father as well. Austin and Jin even spent extra time to hear from the Lord in the past week. I am so thankful to know that I had the opportunity to work with them and to have had the opportunity to create a relationship of honesty and love unlike any other. In closing, when I asked what was the most important thing that they learned, what Jonathan said really stood out to me, “I tried all my life to expand the kingdom of God without submitting to the King. In doing so, I limited the expansion of God’s Kingdom in my own life.” Through the past 8 weeks, Jonathan believes that he had the opportunity to learn more about God, His will, and His heart. Now, he stated, what is left for him to respond in humble submission. I see that he already is.

I learned so much through this process as a leader. One lesson that was impactful to me than any other was simply speaking less. When each member of the group did their assignment and came prepared, all I had to do was facilitate the discussions. Any more than that would be for me to control the direction of it. By allowing others the platform to speak and process, learning and growth came naturally. Instead of trying to control the learning environment, I need to trust that God has already begun the process of growth in them.

Bibliography

Anderson, Keith and Reese. *Spiritual Mentoring: A Guide for Seeking and Giving Direction*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004.

Fleming, Anthony. *Transform: A Practical Guide for Men to Take Action and Get Unstuck*, (Austin, TX: The Fedd Agency, 2021).