

Reflection & Growth Plan

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In completing this assignment, specifically the areas about improvement, it became clear that there was a solid theme throughout. This was the theme of integrating various areas of my life. In my lifestyle, it is being much more intentional in ensuring that I do not compartmentalize “productive” time and “rest” time, but ensuring that they are well integrated. Within communication and proclamation, it is taking a close look at the way that I do things well in other areas, and then very specifically applying them to the areas in which I do not do them, and therefore do not do as well. It is also in being much more intention in general about how I go about both communicating and proclaiming. I know that I have heard many times that it is important to be the same person in all areas of your life. I am glad to see the areas in which that is true, but also the areas in which that could be more true.

Godly Lifestyle Improvement

One thing that stuck out to me from the very beginning of class in watching the lectures, and followed me throughout, was the importance of thinking through, and being intentional with, your daily routine. For the most part, over the last three years or so, my daily routine has felt like something that happens to me, rather than being something I put a great deal of time and thought into or am intentional with. I believe having fallen into this is primarily a function of being busy. School is obviously something that takes up a good amount of time and mental energy, as are daily life tasks that need to be completed. Then, owning a business, although I can put boundaries on the times I will engage in work activities, I am never truly off the clock. Because it is client based, and the vast majority of those clients are children, parents reach out all the time and expect to be answered. This leaves me tired and often feeling like I have very little time to do anything that is not absolutely essential. After hearing about the way that Dr. Reimer’s daily

routine, what he does and does not do very intentionally, affects his spiritual life, I took a good long look at my own daily routine.

I added up all of the time spent on work that was absolutely essential and could not be cut (43.5 hours a week, this school year). I then added up the time I spend on school related activities per week, whether lectures, papers, discussions, readings etc. (~20 hours a week, this semester). Then I estimated and added up all the time that is spent on essential household activities such as cleaning and cooking etc. (at least 10-15 hours a week). Looking at the time in a week not spent sleeping, that leaves me with approximately 33 hours in a week that are my own to spend. This does not include time spent at church or volunteering. Obviously, rest is very important. I cannot expect to be able to do anything productive if I am constantly on the go and never give myself time to relax. That said, there are ways of relaxing that require a little planning but are much more beneficial in multiple ways, and there are ways of relaxing that are easier to start and are addictive to continue, but are less beneficial in multiple ways. Right now, my tendency is to go for the easy, rather than the better. My goal is to integrate the more productive side of rest into my life, without making it feel onerous. If I can prepare to rest in advance, and even give myself designated rest periods rather than just collapsing into rest when I have run out of energy and steam, then I can relax by reading, rather than scrolling mindlessly on Instagram. Or I can relax by engaging in things that draw me closer to God and are simultaneously life-giving, such as hiking or playing music. This will take some planning, and intention, but I believe it will draw me closer to God, give me more opportunities to learn and develop, and give me more energy so that I can better serve the people the Lord has put me in a position to minister to and with.

Proclamation Positive

Feedback from the discussion posts about the sermons, as well as feedback other places I have preached, seems to indicate that when I preach, I come across as genuine, like I really believe what I am saying, and want people to understand and believe with me. Discussion feedback also indicated that I made my points clearly, so that people could follow them well. This will serve me well in continued preaching, as people like to feel like the person preaching really believes what they are saying. Nothing makes me stop listening faster than someone who is preaching who clearly does not believe what they are saying, and is only saying it because it is the “right” thing to say. My passion for people to truly hear and understand means that I want to engage my listeners, not just talk at them without looking at them. This will also be helpful. Dr. Reimer stated in his lectures that it is important to give eye contact to those in your congregation, to engage them, to make sure you are not just a statue standing at the front of the congregation. I think that this is something that I do relatively well, although there is always room for improvement and growth. As for making my points clearly, this is helpful in that a clear point is more likely to stick in a listener’s mind, and hopefully their heart, than one that is vague and hard to remember. In general, I want to utilize these pieces I did well by continuing to hone them to be better, and putting them into play in preaching at my church, and teaching in small groups and Bible studies, with the hopes that hearers will believe and retain what I have to say.

Proclamation Improvement

In preparing the sermon for this semester, I noted a few things that are points that could use some improvement. My tendency when preaching is to talk quickly, to try and get as much out there as possible. This is not conducive to people actually being able to hear and process

what I have to say. I find this tendency slightly baffling because when I am teaching, my general tendency is to go at a much more reasonable pace, leaving time for students to hear and ask any questions that are needed. I need to look at the disconnect between my preaching and my teaching and see what I can learn from the way I teach and bring back to my preaching. This is especially true when it comes to timing, and the way I strive to make it easy for my students to understand and grasp what they need to know. I am someone who works well when I have a good amount of information and data, so to look at this, I will take stock of how I teach, the things that are good and bad, the ways it differs from the way I preach. Then I will look at the whys behind why I teach that way. The areas that I do well in teaching, and not in preaching, I will consciously adopt the teaching way of doing things, rather than the preaching way. Another way to improve this is simpler: I will put conscious effort into slowing down when I preach, developing a steady rhythm, and giving chances for people to think. I always tell my students when they do their recitals that pauses and silences feel much longer to them than they do to the audience, and so they need to be a bit more dramatic with them than they think they need to be. I need to take my own advice in this area.

Communication Positive

From the discussion posts and other places in which my communication has been discussed, one good thing about my communication is that I am not a monologuer. That is to say that when I communicate with people, whether in person or via phone or email etc., I am looking to actually hear from the other person, and that is felt by the person I am communicating with. This is something that I especially want to ensure is present in hard conversations. I have had to have several difficult conversations recently, and attempted to put this into place. I noticed that although the conversations were not necessarily any easier, it felt less fraught than if I had tried

to simply make my point without acknowledging the other people's points and emotions. This would also be a good thing to integrate into any discipleship groups or Bible studies that I may lead over the next bit, as being heard and genuinely listened to makes it much easier to open up and feel safe to share.

Communication Improvement

In terms of communication, I tend to be much less concerned with keeping optimism than with making sure everyone has the facts. This was pointed out to me when we were doing our vision casts. One person stated that they would have liked to hear the good from the beginning, rather than starting with the not so good. It is something that I noticed coming into play when having multiple hard conversations over the last few months in meetings about various issues. Although this is the communication style that I favor being approached with, I have to remember that it is very much not everyone's preferred communication style, and I have to adjust accordingly. Again, contrasting from my job, this is very different from the way I speak with clients and students. In emails, I frequently am almost over-optimistic, and when students are struggling or feeling down, I am always the first to point out the areas in which they are doing well. Similar to the point of improvement when it comes to proclamation, I will take what I know I do well from teaching and consciously apply it to the areas that need to be improved in communication. Another way of improving in this area is to ensure that when I am communicating something that is not all good news, I ensure that I use the "sandwich method" of talking through it. Although I am not sure where this method originated, I was taught it many years ago for delivering criticism to students and others I come into contact with. In it, you do a positive, a negative or point for improvement, and another positive. Implementing this into my

communications, especially the difficult ones, will make it so that people do not feel as though I am hitting them over the head with bad news as soon as we sit down to discuss something.