

Final Project

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## Spiritual Well-Being Reflection

### *Who am I? How have I grown?*

Reviewing the assessments I've taken over the years was an insightful trip down memory lane, unveiling emotional and spiritual areas where I've grown and other areas that still have room for improvement. In SF503, the first personal assessments I took were the Emotionally Healthy Spirituality (EHS) Test and Enneagram Test. Looking back at my EHS results, the emotional maturity level I achieved then was that of an emotional adolescent. I scored high in terms of being empathic, approachable, transparent, quick to listen, and non-judgmental – I was *right* on the cusp of attaining the level of an emotional adult. However, I struggled in two areas: “receiving the gift of limits” and “slowing down to lead with integrity.” My first biggest issue was not knowing how to step back and say no, eventually risking overextending myself. My second biggest issue was not intentionally taking a regular Sabbath “to stop, to rest, to delight, and to contemplate God” – I was often serving from a place of spiritual emptiness instead of fullness.<sup>1</sup> Both issues were rooted in my tendency to people-please and avoid conflict, as affirmed by my Enneagram results, which revealed that I'm a Type 9, or the Peacemaker. My desire to maintain harmony at all costs and ensure everyone was “happy” meant I was willing to take on more burdens than I could handle. I'd often become too agreeable and complacent, minimizing my wants and desires, and going with the flow instead of asserting my opinion because I was afraid of conflict. As a result, my physical, mental, and spiritual health suffered.

When I reflect on where I am today, I can testify that God has been faithfully refining my ability to speak up for myself, especially amid tension. I am no longer frozen with fear that I will offend when I disagree with someone and feel increasingly secure in voicing my viewpoints, even at the cost of conflict. Instead of repressing any anger or uncomfortable feelings that arise,

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.emotionallyhealthy.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/ehs\\_assessment013.pdf](https://www.emotionallyhealthy.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/ehs_assessment013.pdf)

I've learned to silence the voice in my head that I'll be ridiculed or rejected for sharing my truest thoughts and emotions. It took a lot of soul-care work to uproot this pernicious people-pleasing lie in my life, but I now know with certainty that my voice has value and my presence matters. I'm also becoming more aware of my emotional, relational, physical, and spiritual capacities so that I can say "no" to requests or choose to pull back when my "gas tank" is empty. I've had ample opportunities to practice presenting my authentic self not only to my husband but also to my ministry team members these past few years – and time and time again, their response has consistently been one of grace and understanding.

When comparing my spiritual gifts results in SF503 with the one I took from Brennfleck's *Live Your Calling* book in SF703, I still scored high on helps/service. I still enjoy working behind the scenes in a supporting role to meet needs and accomplish specific tasks, all to advance the Kingdom. Interestingly, three spiritual gifts that didn't make the mark last time ended up among my top spiritual gifts: administration, encouragement, and mercy. I believe God had always given me these spiritual gifts, but they were simply underdeveloped and immature. Over the last two years, I discovered my growing desire to minister compassionately and comfort those who are hurting. In the process of working with vulnerable women and teen moms in the slums and low-income children around my church, the Lord has been expanding my ability to minister to those who are suffering from physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual issues. Slowly, but surely, God has been unveiling how my unique design intersects with the needs of this world specifically in the area of family-based care.

Based on my 16PF test results, my top three traits were warmth (91%), sensitivity (91%), and rule consciousness (83%), and my lowest-scoring traits were self-reliance (8%), tension (8%), and dominance (12%), which remain true to this day. As a high scorer for warmth, I tend

to “seek closeness and connection because of [my] sincere feelings of compassion, sympathy, and concern” which aligns with my spiritual gifts of encouragement and mercy.<sup>2</sup> As a highly relational person who values community, it is also easy for me to be sociable and ask for help, which explains the low self-reliance score. While I scored high on warmth and sensitivity, I also scored high on rule consciousness, which is defined as “dutiful, conscientious, conforming, moralistic, and rule-bound.”<sup>3</sup> Tension occurs in situations that require both grace and truth (i.e. a friend dealing with unrepentant sin) – I gravitate towards showing grace and often struggle to speak the harsh truth to someone who needs to hear it. Over the last two years, however, the Lord has stretched my capacity to uphold God’s truth, speak up, and stand firm in my beliefs even at the risk of offense or causing strain in the relationship. I’ve had at least two difficult conversations and both encounters taught me to speak truth *in love* and to leave the results to God – it is the Spirit that will convict. It may be a lifelong journey of learning how to balance the tension between truth and grace, but I believe God is growing me and leading me in the right direction.

As for the spiritual covenant I developed in SF503, one quote I highlighted that has become a core tenet for me throughout seminary is from Spanx founder, Sara Blakely: “Failure for me became not trying, versus the outcome.” My relationship with failure back then was unhealthy and toxic – I had been wired to keep any flaws or signs of brokenness to myself for fear of rejection and disapproval. In my covenant, I wrote, “It is particularly difficult to be vulnerable and honest about failures, even in a faith community, but I’m eager to forgo the double life.” Oh, how much has changed since then! Blakely’s quote has since reframed my idea of failure as a means for *growth* instead of an end. I’ve become more willing to take risks,

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.idrlabs.com/16-personality-factors/test.php>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.idrlabs.com/16-personality-factors/test.php>

instead of always playing it safe, and can process and move on more readily from failures, whereas, in the past, each failure would have been a debilitating loss for me.

Regarding my grief journal from SF505, I truly appreciated the space to unload and bring to the surface buried pain I had never fully processed. This assignment coincided perfectly with my professional counseling sessions. I had never met with a counselor before, and found myself in tears during the very first session, openly processing the losses I had just written about in my grief journal. The two major losses I unpacked were related to doing missions overseas: [1] loss of intimacy due to separation from family and loved ones, and [2] loss of financial security. I felt for a very long time that I could not and should not be sad about these losses – I convinced myself that following Jesus means there are weighty costs and sacrifices and I should endure any suffering without complaining. My decision to embrace God's calling on my life is a joyous one, so how could I possibly grieve my choice? Well, there is grieving even in the most joyous of moments. I will always remember Dr. Ron Walborn's testimony of grieving before, during, and after his daughter's wedding. It was a celebration, and yet, he was grieving this happy transition, because of the hurt of having to let his daughter go. I've since learned that grieving is a regular spiritual discipline that is *necessary* for healing and moving on healthily. In fact, when I realized grieving is not just reserved for major life losses, like the death of a loved one, but for big, small, and in-between losses that affect us in our daily lives, it was transformational for my spiritual formation. Losses still have their sting and I do get tempted to push the pain under the surface, but making the active and conscious choice to grieve has become more second nature. I know with certainty that there is freedom and restoration on the other side.

Please note, the field education piece is not applicable as I'm in the Intercultural Studies master's degree program.

### Philosophy of Ministry

I believe every follower of Jesus ought to be involved in ministry in some way, shape, or form – that is, serving God in our unique contexts to bring forth Kingdom goodness and restoration wherever we are. In Matthew 5:13-14, Jesus calls us to be salt and light of the world so that we may be beacons of truth and grace, and show others what he is like; this command applies to everyone regardless of their vocation or background. Moreover, I believe God’s “top priority is to conform [us] to the image of Christ for ministry with spiritual authority.”<sup>4</sup> One way the Lord does this is by calling us to the “Two Greats” of the Bible: [1] the Great Commission when Jesus calls his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing and teaching them<sup>5</sup> and [2] the Greatest Commandment when Jesus calls us to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and to love our neighbors as ourselves.<sup>6</sup> These commandments offer glimpses of God’s heart, and how we are to go and do likewise. Ministry, thus, must entail sharing the hope of Christ in both *word* and *deed*.

While these commands are for all believers, each person’s revelation from God about their unique ministry assignment is tailored to their specific design, talents, passions, and experiences. Often, God chooses the unlikeliest of people for ministry – those who are frail, ordinary, and imperfect. In Exodus 4, Moses is reluctant and doubtful about the eloquence of his words, and yet, God handpicks him to be His spokesman and leader, asserting that “I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.”<sup>7</sup> Ministry is not reserved for the gifted and powerful; if the Lord calls, He will empower and equip as necessary. He even calls people with broken and dark histories, as in the case of the apostle Paul, a former zealous persecutor of Christians who

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<sup>4</sup> Clinton, J. Robert. *The Making of a Leader*. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2012), 45, Kindle.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 28:16-20, NIV.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 22:37-39, NIV.

<sup>7</sup> Exodus 4:12, NIV.

humbly asserts in 1 Timothy, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst.”<sup>8</sup> Jesus does not discriminate and chooses to redeem His fallen creation when the world would be quick to discard. In fact, despite Paul’s past sins, he became one of history’s greatest missionaries and one of the Bible’s most prolific authors. Whomever God chooses, the purpose of ministry is always to advance His Kingdom here on earth – whether that’s fighting against oppression and exploitation or evangelizing to non-believers.

Ultimately, God desires a heart posture of faithfulness, obedience, teachability, and humility in ministry. Jesus often spoke against the Pharisees and Sadducees and chose lowly fishermen to follow him instead, calling them to “Come, follow me and I will send you out to fish for people.”<sup>9</sup> With very similar language, Jesus tenderly calls out to Matthew, a resented tax collector, to “Follow me.”<sup>10</sup> These are some of the characters who make up Jesus’ motley crew of disciples – the ones He chose to partner with him in proclaiming and demonstrating the good news of the Kingdom of God. All they had to do was say yes. In the same way, I believe ministry today involves submitting to the Lord, surrendering selfish desires, and leading people to follow Jesus, who is the only way to true wholeness, shalom, and reconciliation with the Father – “the way and the truth and the life.”<sup>11</sup>

### **Statement of Faith**

I believe there is only one true God, the Creator and Sustainer of all things, who eternally exists as three persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Dt. 6:4, Mt. 28:19). Jesus, the Son of God, is God incarnate and born of the virgin Mary through the Holy Spirit (Lk. 1:34-38). He is both fully man and fully God, and in his whole and sinless nature died for our sins as a sacrifice, that

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<sup>8</sup> 1 Timothy 1:15, NIV.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 4:19, NIV.

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 9:9, NIV.

<sup>11</sup> John 14:6, NIV.

whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (Heb. 2:9, Rm. 5:9, Jn. 3:16). I also believe that Jesus defeated death and rose again on the third day, and is now seated at the right hand of God; he will come again in power and glory at an unknown time to fulfill God's eternal plan for salvation (Lk. 24:6-7, Mt. 26:64, Mt. 24:44). Moreover, I believe the Holy Spirit indwells in all believers, working in their hearts to be more like Christ through guidance, empowerment, and conviction (Jn. 14:15-18). Until Jesus' return, humans will continue to live in a world tainted by sin, but the Spirit is given to believers for sanctification, strength, and wisdom to live holy lives and serve the church with their spiritual giftings (2 Th. 2:13, 1 Cor. 4-11).

At Creation, I believe God created humankind to bear His image, but the Fall happened when Adam and Eve gave into Satan's temptations and disobeyed God's commands, tragically ushering in spiritual and physical sin and death into the world (Gn. 1:27, Gn. 3:17-19). It is only through Jesus' atoning work on the cross that humans can be saved (Rom. 3:23-24). What's more, all sinners are saved by God's grace through faith in Christ, not by good works (Eph. 2:8-9). While salvation is a free gift, I believe everyone must repent and believe in Jesus in their hearts to be born again of the Holy Spirit and be adopted into God's eternal family as His children (Mk. 1:15, Acts 2:38). As for the Bible, consisting of the Old Testament and New Testament, I believe it is fully inspired by God, infallible, inerrant, and to be used as the only authority by which Christians formulate their beliefs and live their lives (2 Tim. 3:16).

### **Core Ministry Values**

#### *Intimacy with the Lord*

I believe abiding in the Lord should be the starting point for all leaders in ministry. Developing a regular rhythm of silence, solitude, and stillness is essential because it allows me to simply enjoy and savor God's presence. It allows me to know with deeper certainty whether my

ministry aligns with the Father's purpose and will. In a world that celebrates performance and results, it's all too easy to get wrapped up in *doing* for God that we forget to simply *be* with Him. Truly, "effective spiritual ministry flows out of being, and God is concerned with our being".<sup>12</sup>

Jesus modeled the importance of cultivating intimacy with the Father during his ministry. Oftentimes, after especially tiring and depleting seasons, Jesus sought to retreat to a secret place to commune with God. Early in his ministry, in Mark 1:35, after healing crowds of sick and demonized people, Jesus woke up very early in the morning, "left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed."<sup>13</sup> Simon later alerted Jesus about the masses seeking his attention, but Jesus' priority was to pray and worship in the presence of God, the ultimate source of his strength and power. Despite the quickening pace of his ministry, Jesus held fast to the disciplines of silence and solitude throughout his life. For example, in Luke 5:15-16, when widespread news of Jesus' teachings and healings led to his soaring popularity, Jesus "often withdrew to lonely places and prayed."<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, in Mark 6:30-32, Jesus urged the apostles – who had just returned from a hectic season of preaching, deliverance, and healing – to "come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest. So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place."<sup>15</sup> To guard against enslavement to the growing demands of ministry, Jesus advised his disciples to root their ministry in solitude, prayer, and regular communion with God – lest they and their ministry both crumble. As a leader, unless I intentionally retreat from noise and busyness to pray and listen, I will not be in a position to clearly hear from the Father and thereby lead others to follow His direction. The worries and cries of the world will drown out His voice.

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<sup>12</sup> Clinton, J. Robert. *The Making of a Leader*. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2012), 9, Kindle.

<sup>13</sup> Mark 1:35, NIV.

<sup>14</sup> Luke 5:15-16, NIV.

<sup>15</sup> Mark 6:30-32, NIV.

*Relational Evangelism*

Another core ministry value I have is sharing the good news with non-believers via intentional relationships. I firmly believe we should boldly share the gospel as the Spirit leads, whether spontaneously with strangers or intentionally with old friends. Still, I most resonate with sharing about Jesus in the context of relationships that are built on trust and credibility. During Jesus' ministry, he sought out 12 disciples (who were non-believing Jews at the time) to share life with them so that they could taste and see who he truly was – the long-awaited Messiah. In Luke 8:1, when Jesus was traveling “from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him.”<sup>16</sup> It is likely that during those long journeys, Jesus was with them from day to night, breaking bread together, and camping out – all serving as opportunities to not only teach and preach but also bear witness to his God-centered way of life.

Jesus also never shied away from befriending those on the margins for salvation. In Mark 2:15, we see Jesus “having dinner at Levi's house [and] many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples.”<sup>17</sup> He engaged with people who were shunned by society and loved them, never allowing scandalous reputations to withhold him from sharing the good news. In the same way, I believe in investing time, money, and energy into building relationships with people from all walks of life – especially the poor and marginalized – having meals, inviting them into my home, hearing their stories, and pointing them to Jesus in the process.

*Holistic Ministry*

While evangelism is vital, I also believe we are called to embody the gospel in every aspect of life – not just ministering to spiritual and soul needs but also to physical and material

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<sup>16</sup> Luke 8:1, NIV.

<sup>17</sup> Mark 2:15, NIV.

needs. The Hebrew word *shalom* illustrates the concept of peace, wholeness, and restoration, which Paul alludes to in Colossians 1:20 – through Christ’s work on the cross, we are reconciled to him in *all things*, whether *on earth* or *in heaven*.<sup>18</sup> In fact, scripture is rife with examples of Jesus and his disciples exercising holistic ministry to engage and transform people with their whole well-being in mind – physically, emotionally, intellectually, socially, and spiritually.

For instance, when Jesus healed the paralyzed man in Matthew 9:1-8, he not only demonstrated his love by cleansing the man’s sin, but he also healed his physical ailment, granting him the ability to walk. Jesus proclaimed “Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven” and, in the same breath, said, “Get up, take your mat and go home.”<sup>19</sup> The Lord knew the paralyzed man needed spiritual restoration beyond what the eyes could see; thus, he cared not only for his eternal being but also his immediate, physical needs. James affirms this sentiment when he explains how speaking encouraging words to a brother or sister who needs clothes or food is useless.<sup>20</sup> As such, as a leader in ministry, it is crucial that I engage holistically in people’s spiritual growth and discipleship (i.e. bible studies, prayer, etc.) *and* social issues (i.e. poverty, equitable access to education, etc.). Our words must be accompanied by deeds; otherwise, “faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”<sup>21</sup>

### *Incarnational Presence in Community*

Another core ministry value is incarnational presence, which I define as choosing to live and work alongside the people God has called me to minister to. This means staying put in a community when the going gets rough. This means investing in families and neighbors in the long run. This means building reciprocal relationships in which my neighbors and I can serve

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<sup>18</sup> Colossians 1:20, NIV.

<sup>19</sup> Matthew 9:1-8, NIV.

<sup>20</sup> James 2:15-16, NIV.

<sup>21</sup> James 2:17, NIV.

each other. I immediately think of Jesus as the prime example of one who served incarnationally, and with humility. He left the throne room of heaven and entered our broken world as a helpless babe with the sole purpose of redeeming humankind for Himself. In John 1:14, we read that “the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” – this demonstrates that God willingly limited himself in the form of man and became tangible and visible so that people could come to know the Father more fully.<sup>22</sup> Jesus forsook status and privilege, and immersed himself into the fabric of Israelite society, working as a carpenter, eating bread and fish,<sup>23</sup> and staying as a guest in his friends’ homes, so that he could relate to and identify with the very people he was seeking to share the gospel with. Wherever God plants me in the future, especially if in an intercultural context, I hope to authentically minister in a way that allows me to share a common rhythm of life with my neighbors and build community *with*, instead of *for*.

As a natural extension of incarnational presence, I also highly value covenanted community, which is beautifully depicted in Acts 4:32-35 when the believers freely sold and shared all their possessions to the point that “there were no needy persons among them” and all money “was distributed to anyone who had need.”<sup>24</sup> How radical in today’s world! And yet, this is a heavenly glimpse of what Kingdom economics should look like – where the church collectively practices voluntary simplicity and income limitation so that the community as a whole can flourish. This sense of spiritual unity and communal generosity could only flow from the power and leading of the Holy Spirit. As I grow my family and root myself in the neighborhood God calls me to, I hope to lead by example, exercising radical hospitality and stewarding God’s resources in a way that allows me to always have extra to give and share.

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<sup>22</sup> John 1:14, NIV.

<sup>23</sup> Luke 24:42-43, NIV.

<sup>24</sup> Acts 4:32-35, NIV.

*Leadership Development*

The last core value in my philosophy of ministry is developing leaders. Jesus demonstrated the importance of training his disciples so that they'd be equipped to carry on the Great Commission after he ascended into heaven.<sup>25</sup> In fact, Jesus rarely ministered solo. He often preached about the Kingdom and taught parables to crowds with his disciples nearby so they could observe and learn. He also miraculously healed lepers, the blind, deaf, and mute, and delivered countless demonized people, with his closest followers in tow. Eventually, in Mark 6:7-13, Jesus gave the 12 apostles authority over demonic spirits and sent them out two by two to preach, heal, and do deliverances.<sup>26</sup> In Luke 10, we see Jesus yet again sending out his followers two by two, except this time, he is sending out 72 messengers!<sup>27</sup> This shows that Jesus was intentional in continually recruiting, mobilizing, and training up new followers who would grow into entrusted and effective ministers on his behalf.

Paul's mentorship of Timothy is another classic example of godly leadership development I hope to emulate. Paul's letters to Timothy, a young leader of a church in Ephesus, are rich with practical advice on how to confront false teachers and minister faithfully, but beyond practical instruction, Paul's letters illustrate a depth of love and tenderness towards his disciple. All the time and effort Paul spent empowering Timothy for church leadership was undergirded by a genuine appreciation of their relationship, which he affectionately describes "as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel."<sup>28</sup> If, in my current and future ministry, I am able to develop leaders, whom I both adore and entrust to multiply more leaders for the Christ-centered ministry, then I will have succeeded.

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<sup>25</sup> Matthew 28:16-20, NIV.

<sup>26</sup> Mark 6:7-13, NIV.

<sup>27</sup> Luke 10:1-3, NIV.

<sup>28</sup> Philippians 2:2, NIV.

## **Non-Negotiables**

### *Authority of Scripture*

My first non-negotiable in ministry pertains to upholding the authority of Scripture, no matter what. I have a high view of the Word of God and look to the Bible as the ultimate truth on which I base my beliefs and how I live my life. If Scripture says it, then I believe God says it. And if “all Scripture is God-breathed” and reflects God’s perfect character and good purposes, it must be the yardstick by which I measure everything else.<sup>29</sup>

Ultimately, the purpose of reading and meditating on the Word is to encounter the presence of God – without the Word and the leading of the Holy Spirit, we cannot know who the Father is, who we are, and how we are to live our lives. As such, we must minister from a place of complete obedience to God’s Word and His commands, which were given to us for our flourishing, joy, and growth. This means rooting my ministry approach, vision, and mission statement in solid theological principles and teachings gleaned from the Bible. Sadly, living in a relativistic and postmodern world today, there’s a widespread worldview that there is no absolute truth. This thinking has permeated Christian circles as well around hotly debated topics such as sexuality and abortion, and more and more believers are basing their beliefs on personal preference and experience as opposed to truths in the Bible. Any ministry that has a low view of Scripture, fails to exercise careful exegesis, or doubts the inerrancy of the Bible is one I’d be wary of.

### *Spirit-empowered Ministry*

Another non-negotiable is empowerment through the Holy Spirit. It is all too easy to rely on human strength and wisdom to do ministry, but we often don’t realize that we can minister

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<sup>29</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16, NIV.

with the tangible power of the Holy Spirit in the here and now! To be effective in ministry, I find it crucial to cultivate and grow my spiritual authority so that I can touch heaven and change earth in ways that could never be possible by my own human effort. One way to practically do this is to examine my God-given talents and spiritual gifts and develop them. Spiritual gifts, after all, are manifestations of the power of the Holy Spirit and are given to us to do ministry, help others inside and outside the church, uplift the body of Christ, and advance God's Kingdom. As Paul affirms in 1 Corinthians 12:7, "now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good."<sup>30</sup> As a leader, I'd want my team to discover and mature their giftings, whether it's teaching, prophecy, or mercy, so that we, as the body of Christ, can walk in the fullness of the Spirit and maximize our potential as carriers of God's reign wherever we go.

### *Missions*

My last non-negotiable is that ministry must be missions-focused. The entire bible, from Genesis all the way through to Revelation, reveals the missional nature of God who desires that all of Creation be redeemed back to Himself. If God is missional, then we, as leaders, must also be missional. What's more, God rarely chooses to act on His own; rather, time and time again, He invites ordinary people to carry out His redemptive purposes. Jesus affirmed this after his resurrection when he said, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."<sup>31</sup> We are sent to be laborers in a harvest that is plentiful. Until the gospel reaches the ends of the earth, I believe all Christians are to be on mission – preaching the gospel, loving our neighbors, and living Christ out in our community. This requires a paradigm shift in the way many churches and ministries function; we need to become less inward-focused and more outward-focused and dedicate more time, money, and resources to those outside of the church.

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<sup>30</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:7, NIV.

<sup>31</sup> John 20:21, NIV.

## **Leadership Growth**

### *Why I Am Ready for Ministry*

Based on my leadership assessment from Maxwell's book, I currently lead at a Level 2 - Permission level, but I'm on the cusp of attaining Level 3 - Production. As a Level 2 leader, my influence is largely due to the relationships and trust I've built over years of serving with others in ministry. My team members are people I genuinely enjoy being with and care about – there is no pretense and our general work environment is quite positive and encouraging. Moreover, as a highly relational person, learning about my team's dreams and hopes and supporting them in their life callings is something I deeply value. As for my competency as a Level 3 leader, I value high performance and consistently hit targets and goals at work; however, my biggest roadblocks are: problem-solving difficult situations, giving candid feedback about errors and problems, and being comfortable with being seen as an expert or leader. While I'm still a work in progress and in the midst of tackling these challenges, I've invested in four key areas these past two years to better prepare me to lead in ministry.

One reason I'm ready for ministry is that I've done the hard work of unmasking my false self and have learned to embrace my true self. As a leader, it is important that I lead from a place of authenticity rather than illusion. I will not always have the answers and it's okay to not have it all together. It is okay that I am not always agreeable, calm, kind, and patient. I will have moments where I'm frustrated or angry, but I no longer feel like I need to uphold a certain image or hide behind a contrived identity of "agreeableness" when in reality I feel differently. I'm aware there's a time and place to bare my vulnerabilities and I have to be wise with whom I disclose my rawest self. But the bottom line is I no longer feel the pressure to hide and pretend; rather I'm learning to embrace the version of myself that God uniquely created and redeemed. I

understand my identity is no longer rooted in an idealized image of who I want others to see me as, but my identity is rooted in who I am – and who I am becoming – in Christ.

Secondly, two core qualities of a leader are grit and resilience – both of which I would not have developed if not for a long season of waiting and uncertainty (which I’m still in). The wilderness is an uncomfortable place to be. It’s barren, quiet, and unforgiving. I don’t think anyone would ever wish to be in the wilderness, but God deemed it good and worthy that I go through it. The keyword here is *through*. I’m not in the clear yet, but God has already increased my capacity for trust in Him in ways I never thought possible. During a time when my finances were unstable and all I could do was step out in faith and rely on Him, He came through in abundance and has continued to care for my every need. I am only able to face uncertainty square in the face today because of the Father’s unwavering faithfulness to me in the past. I liken this experience to the metaphor presented in class of the American pioneers heading out West. In the process of traveling through the rugged terrain, the pioneers had to let go of unnecessary attachments and live a nomadic, bare-bones lifestyle. But in the process, they developed perseverance. Grit. Resilience. As a leader, I find this (ongoing) wilderness experience valuable for not only shaping my character but also empowering me to teach others to do the same.

Another reason I’m ready to lead is the credibility I’ve built over the last few years with my ministry teams. For instance, consistently meeting deadlines, returning messages promptly, keeping within budget, and delivering work with excellence are all aspects of my workflow that speak to my expertise as a leader and a team player. As I look ahead to seeking new partnerships and changing organizations in the future, I’m aware I’ll have to prove myself and earn my new team’s trust – as Maxwell asserts, “Every time you lead different people you start the process over again.”<sup>32</sup> However, because I have a decent track record with credibility in the past, it will

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<sup>32</sup> Maxwell, John C. *The 5 Levels of Leadership*. (Center Street Hachette Book Group, 2011), 17.

be much easier for me to work my way up. I'm willing to start from the bottom up again.

Lastly, I'm receiving increasing clarity from God about His purpose for my life, and I'm eager to not only step into my calling but also lead others to step into their calling. As I shared in my *Live Your Calling* paper, I feel deeply led by God to serve vulnerable children and families via education and family strengthening. My puzzle is not yet complete and I'm still gathering pieces, but it is clear that God has given me a special burden for marginalized families in need of holistic renewal, whether economical, emotional, mental, or spiritual. I've gone through my journey of saying no to things (sometimes good things) so that I can make room for saying yes to the Father. The life I've chosen is not the life my parents would've hoped for me, but God has sustained me through and through, and I have peace that I am where He wants me to be. Knowing that God's calling is unique to each person, I hope to lead others in examining their giftings, passions, desires, and experiences so that they may discover their own need-driven and design-driven mission in the world.

### **Three Specific Areas I Can Deliver in a Ministry Context**

Three areas I can deliver in a ministry context are [1] inclusivity and diversity, [2] mentoring, and [3] strategic planning to bring visions to life. Over the past few years, I've worked in diverse, multicultural environments (i.e. Urban Neighbours of Hope and Envision Bangkok) with people of all nationalities and denominations, and learned the value of considering different perspectives, including those I disagree with. As such, the atmosphere I'd cultivate in my team would celebrate inclusivity, diversity, open-mindedness, transparency, and teamwork. Making space for team members to speak in a situation may not be the most efficient, but it can be beneficial for discerning God's voice and direction – as a leader, I am not the only one who can hear from God. By opening up the floor, I do run the risk of having people voice

negative opinions about my idea or vision, but a part of being a leader is having the emotional stamina to withstand and handle criticism well. As I've mentioned earlier, dealing with conflict has been a recurring challenge for me, but I'm learning that conflict is not necessarily bad. It can be constructive, or even good. Welcoming the viewpoints of people who are very different from my own creates a safe space where anyone and everyone can feel bold enough to speak their minds. Considering community and relationships are pivotal to me, I will always advocate for team reliance over self-reliance.

Secondly, I discovered this semester that I truly enjoyed leading my mentoring small group. I received encouraging feedback that the women were incredibly blessed by the sessions and were hungry for more of God by the end of it – praise God! Over eight weeks, I was able to exercise my encouragement and mercy spiritual gifts and regularly witness the Spirit show up in subtle and mighty ways. Secrets were brought to the light, hidden wounds surfaced, and breakthroughs were made. Considering my personality and other strengths – relationship-oriented, warm, sensitive, empathetic, and attentive – I thrive in small groups and find I'm able to listen and ask deep questions with ease. As I anticipate my next season of mentoring with the ladies (around the topic of singleness or grief), I am eager to grow in my role as a facilitator and to continue leaning on the Holy Spirit to lead and guide.

Lastly, I do well in situations where I can plan and strategically bring ideas to life. It's how God wired me. My current boss from Envision Bangkok is a visionary; he is great with casting vision and dreaming up innovative ideas, but he struggles to come up with plans to achieve them. Follow-through is his weakness, but it's my strength. Ideating is his strength, but it's my weakness. As a collective team, our skills combined complement each other to spur each other on toward success. For instance, I don't mind dealing with details, logistics, coordinating,

and managing a project from start to finish. I also enjoy looking at the bigger picture to craft and outline concrete next steps required to bring a vision to life. Interestingly, I first harnessed these skills when I worked in advertising, but these skills are applicable and transferable in a ministry context as well.

### **Redeeming Sex**

If I were to teach my church about sexuality and gender roles in a series of three sermons, I would explore the following topics: [1] God's good design for sex, [2] sexuality – marred by the Fall, and [3] redeemed sexuality. My sermons would model after the biblical trajectory of Creation, the Fall, Redemption, and Restoration – tracing how sex was originally part of God's good creation, but became twisted due to sin, and finally can be renewed through the redeeming work of Christ, whose life, ministry and death showed us another way.

#### *God's Good Design for Sex*

I'd first introduce the series by teaching about the goodness and holiness of sexuality – this is to reorient any flawed thinking in the church that sex is evil and shameful. I'd begin by sharing how, as humans, we all share the same innate desires – connection, wholeness, communion, to know, to be known – which are deeply rooted in our sexuality, and ultimately our spirituality. We cannot divorce our sexuality from spirituality. Why? Because every facet of our sexuality, “our capacity for relationships, our longing for love, our identity as male and female, all point to something beyond oneself, to the ‘Eternal Other.’”<sup>33</sup> To better understand God's original intention, we'd study Genesis 1:27-31, which affirms that God created humankind in His image, as male and female, and declared it was very good. God later creates Eve out of Adam's rib, because He knew it was not good for man to be alone.<sup>34</sup> Our sexuality, thus, is a good gift

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<sup>33</sup> Hirsch, Debra. *Redeeming Sex*. (InterVarsity Press, 2015), 23.

<sup>34</sup> Genesis 2:18, NIV.

that points back to God, who designed us for relationship, love, and intimacy *with Himself* and *with others* from the very beginning.

I'd then examine different Scripture that reference the goodness of sex. For instance, Proverbs 5:18-19 vividly encourages a man to rejoice in his wife and captivate himself with her love; the Song of Songs likewise celebrates the love and sanctity of marriage between a bride and groom. Even so, genital sexuality is only one aspect of the bigger picture. I'd then explain that sexuality is a larger umbrella term that entails, "a longing to know and be known by other people (on physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual levels)."<sup>35</sup> I'd also share different examples of social relationships between friends, family, co-workers, and neighbors. As we navigate our spiritual and sexual longings in society, it is important to fix our eyes on God and seek wisdom from the Spirit on how to express our sexuality in a godly way in today's world.

#### *Sex – Marred by the Fall*

This second sermon would focus on how sin entered the world at the Fall, how it has distorted the goodness of sexuality, and what the effects are on today's society. I'd first briefly list out various issues with sex and gender roles in our current climate today – premarital sex, same-sex relationships, transgenderism, pornography, adultery, and more. To highlight that these problems are not new, I'd turn to the Old and New Testaments for a plethora of examples of sinful expressions of sex: Solomon struggled with sexual addiction and had hundreds of wives and concubines,<sup>36</sup> fertility cults among the Canaanites were rampant,<sup>37</sup> and David raped Bathsheba, a married woman.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Hirsch, Debra. *Redeeming Sex*. (InterVarsity Press, 2015), 26.

<sup>36</sup> 1 Kings 11, NIV.

<sup>37</sup> Judges 6:28-32, NIV.

<sup>38</sup> 2 Samuel 11:1-5, NIV.

These failures can all be traced back to the Fall, in Genesis 3:5-7, when Adam and Eve disobeyed God and fell into Satan's temptation, ushering sin, shame, and guilt into the world. They chose to live their way and be their own god instead of submitting to God's authority – and this hubris and desire to decide what is best for their own lives carries on to all humankind to this day. If we recall God's original design for sex in marriage, it was meant to be an illustration of Christ's love for the church,<sup>39</sup> for procreation, recreation, and mutual love. However, as the Fall corrupted human desires, many have gone beyond God's good boundaries and engaged in various types of sexual immorality. At this point, I'd add a word of caution that Christians are often quick to single out and elevate the sins of the LGBT+ community above others, but we forget sexual sin is something that befalls all humans of all orientations (i.e. having sex outside of marriage, promiscuity, adultery, pornography, molestation, etc). The church tends to minimize our own flaws and miss the plank in our eyes.<sup>40</sup> What's more, Paul lists "sexual sins with a whole host of other sins<sup>41</sup>, letting us know that while sins might have different consequences, all sins are equal before God."<sup>42</sup> Sexual sin is as much a sin as idolatry of money.

I'd then close this teaching by reiterating how sin has distorted every aspect of our sexuality, whether it's our understanding of gender roles/identity or our social/genital sexuality. Jesus, ultimately, as the full embodiment of spirituality and sexuality, models for us what it looks like to love God and love others in perfect measure.

### *Redeemed Sexuality*

The last sermon would be a message of hope, affirming that even though the Fall marred God's design for sexuality, all is not lost. There is redemption. Alongside Scripture's

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<sup>39</sup> Ephesians 5:25, NIV.

<sup>40</sup> Matthew 7:5, NIV.

<sup>41</sup> 1 Corinthians 6; 1 Timothy 1:8-11, NIV.

<sup>42</sup> Hirsch, Debra. *Redeeming Sex*. (InterVarsity Press, 2015), 43.

condemnation of sexual sin are invitations of grace and transformation. For instance, in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, Paul asserts that no sinners, including the sexually immoral, would inherit the Kingdom of God, but through Jesus' justifying work on the cross and the Holy Spirit, they can be washed clean and sanctified. The call, therefore, is that "we all must turn, with all that we are (sexuality included), in order to receive saving grace."<sup>43</sup>

I'd also dedicate a significant part of the sermon to how the church can respond and be salt and light in a world that is increasingly accepting of various sexual expressions. It is insufficient, and even harmful, to instill control by simply reiterating a list of "don'ts" and commanding the church to stay pure and practice abstinence. Our framework around sexuality suddenly becomes a rulebook to follow and we miss the fuller picture of God's good intentions at Creation. I'd aim to illustrate what healthy and God-honoring sexuality looks like and to explain *why* it is important to abide by God's designs for sexuality and gender roles. For one, Jesus demonstrated healthy sexuality as a celibate man who embraced masculinity and femininity in his interactions with men and women. Jesus had intimate relationships with his disciples, had trusting friendships with women, and invited outcasts and the marginalized to his table. Acceptance and belonging are two factors that are missing in the church today. If we look at Jesus' ministry, he "didn't wait for us to get our behaviors cleaned up before he embraced us; he embraced us first, with open arms" – will we go and do likewise?<sup>44</sup>

For far too long, sex has been a taboo topic deemed too "unholy" to speak about, which perpetuates an environment of toxicity and shame, where some are inclined to judge while others hide in the shadows. The ultimate hope behind these sermons is to open up thoughtful conversations about biblical sexuality and gender in the church. Hirsch beautifully encapsulates

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<sup>43</sup> Hirsch, Debra. *Redeeming Sex*. (InterVarsity Press, 2015), 122.

<sup>44</sup> Hirsch, Debra. *Redeeming Sex*. (InterVarsity Press, 2015), 145.

this sentiment when she said, “If our sexuality lies close to our spirituality, as I suggest it does, then it’s vital we find a way to bring a living, holy sexuality back into the context of the church. How can any of us be real, authentic people if we have to leave our sexuality at the door? And how can we speak to a sexually confused world if we have nothing to say?”<sup>45</sup> To invite further discussion, I’d partner with other leaders to host small group workshops each week that coincide with the sermon topic shared the previous Sunday (i.e. God’s good design for sex, the Fall, etc.). Each workshop would include a series of discussion questions and prayer ministry. The idea is to provide a safe space for congregants who want to unpack their thoughts and questions, or even begin the process of repentance, in a more intimate setting with the guidance of a spiritual leader.

### **Three-Year Developmental Plan**

My three-year plan for my ministry context will include a mix of formal education as well as on-the-ground work. I’m currently partnering with two different ministries in Bangkok with my husband: Urban Neighbours of Hope (UNOH) and Envision Bangkok, and will continue to serve until my husband’s green card comes through. Upon receiving the green light to move back to the US, we will relocate to NYC so that I can finish my degree, while also serving at my home church in the children’s ministry. I would also be keen on finding work related to family-based care. Below is an overview of expectations for the next three years, followed by a more detailed plan with action steps by ministry type and year.

<b>2023</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>2025</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Expecting first child in September</li> <li>● Take a break from school</li> <li>● Focus on ministries in Bangkok</li> <li>● Move back to US (tbd)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Finish degree stateside</li> <li>● Begin serving in church children’s ministry</li> <li>● Search for ministry opportunities in family strengthening</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Gain more experience in family-based care</li> <li>● Explore missions organizations to partner with for overseas ministry</li> </ul>

<sup>45</sup> Hirsch, Debra. *Redeeming Sex*. (InterVarsity Press, 2015), 16.

2023

Below, I've outlined actions, timelines, and measurable goals so that I can connect with God in deeper ways, and enter into His presence simply to enjoy Him. Here are the spiritual disciplines I plan to incorporate into my routine:

- Practice silence and solitude every morning to foster inner stillness and cultivate a listening ear. Light a candle, set aside 5-10 minutes, and listen for the Father's voice
- End each evening with a worship song, an examen to reflect over the day, and prayer
- Read a chapter from the gospel every day (starting with Matthew), study Jesus' life and ministry, and meditate on a verse or a short passage that the Lord points out to me
- Practice watercoloring based on a Bible verse/passage as the Spirit leads, bi-weekly
- I plan to dig deeper into my brokenness and re-read *Soul Care* (2016) in-depth with a mentor or some trusted church members on a bi-weekly basis

As I mentioned above, my husband and I will be expecting our first child in September – we are excited, but also nervous as both sides of our families do not live nearby. I have quite a few missionary friends in Thailand who have also started their families overseas away from loved ones and I've witnessed what a toll it can take on one's mental, emotional, and spiritual health. While having a baby is a joyous gift, I am aware that having a baby comes with a lot of loss as well, and I'm preparing to grieve those losses (i.e. having a baby without my family or best friends present, loss of independence or freedom, loss of capacity to do ministry, etc.). Regarding my schooling, I plan to take a break from school to focus on my growing family (I've completed the majority of credits for my degree, but I still have one more year left).

My partnership with UNOH is currently tapering off as the foundation is going through some transition at the moment, but my team leads are supportive of my seeking

family-strengthening opportunities with other organizations and have even connected me with contacts in their network. I'm currently waiting to hear back on volunteer opportunities with an organization based in the slums of Bangkok called "Step Ahead," which focuses on advocacy work, economic training, and social services. I hope to shadow experts in the field to learn more about the practical ins and outs of family-based care. I also plan to apply for other short-term volunteer opportunities with NGOs in Bangkok, such as the Sahathai Foundation, Care for Children, or The Convention on the Rights of the Child Coalition for Thailand (CRCCT).

As for my work with Envision, I plan to continue the mentoring group I started this semester with the same group of ladies on a relevant topic, such as singleness. For the larger church community, there has been a lot of loss recently – and the Lord has given me a burden to make space for members to process and unpack their grief. I plan to co-lead a weekly community group with my husband to go through Jerry Sittser's book *A Grace Disguised: How the Soul Grows through Loss* (2004), which I already have copies of. As I'm expecting to leave Bangkok within the next year, I will also invite an apprentice to learn how to lead during these sessions so that they can further the ministry after I go back to the States.

2024

Lord willing, my husband and I will be back in NYC by next year, at which point I aim to finish my degree. I also plan to connect with my home church, Oversea Chinese Mission (OCM), to serve in the children's ministry by planning lessons, managing volunteers, and developing leaders for the English congregation. I would also like to start mentoring groups at my church, reading through *Spiritual Journey: Can I Really Get Close to God?* (2021) as the pilot. In terms of developing professionally, I hope to seek employment with a family-based care organization in NYC, such as The Family Center in Brooklyn, Power of Two, or The New York Foundling.

2025

For this year, my focus would be seeking discernment from the Father, alongside my husband, about which missions organization to partner with, specific ministries to lead overseas, and the people group the Father is calling us to minister to. My husband shares the same overarching vision as me to serve in Southeast Asia and work with “vulnerable children” and “education”; however, we currently diverge in the specifics – I feel called towards family-based care while he feels led to education training and media work. To ensure my husband and I move forward in agreement, I plan to allocate time seeking the Lord in prayer and fasting, silence and solitude, and retreating to a quiet place for clear direction. There are plenty of spiritual retreat centers in the mountains right outside the city! I remember in SF505, Dr. Ron Walborn shared about a time early on in his marriage when you both retreated together in a cabin for a week to establish a list of planned goals for your lives together. You’d seek the Lord separately, and then come back together to see where there was synergy about what the Father was revealing to you. You’d also seek the Lord together to see where there was congruity. I love this model of retreating together as a couple to hear directly from the Lord and then set measurable goals and plans from a place of agreement. While seeking discernment, I plan to simultaneously continue my work with the children’s ministry at OCM and at a family-based care organization. With my mentoring ministry, as with any, I hope to also recruit, coach, and build up leaders who can then multiply other leaders to carry the torch when my husband and I return to the mission field overseas.

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