

*Presence of God Journal*

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In this reflection, I will share some of what God has been putting on my heart through processing the book *Soul Care*. I was first exposed to this book by my twin brother, who went to Soul Care a few years back as an intern at a C&MA church in Florida while attending Reformed Theological Seminary. He also encouraged me to attend Alliance Theological Seminary. I initially resisted reading it, as I spent considerable time in college with cessationists. But coming to ATS, I became more open and intrigued by the role of the Holy Spirit. Last semester, I had our ministry begin reading through *Soul Care* and working through the book slowly.

I have struggled with the performance and the people-pleasing lie in my identity. The issue of my value depends on my achievements or failures. I am most attracted to a version of myself who has a big dream with the ability, drive, and opportunity to achieve it. As I look back at my childhood, I often look back at times when I was highly productive and high achieving and consider them my glory days in contrast to days when I feel unproductive and low achieving. Working with my therapist, I experience triggers when I am called out for my actions, fail, or do not meet other people's expectations. As a result, I feel anxious, more irritated, frustrated, and angry, or have the desire to escape, avoid, or run away from the thing at hand in an unproductive way.

Growing up, I felt insecure and was very timid for various reasons. Before ESL, I went to speech class in elementary school because my mother taught me broken English. At the time, speaking a foreign language was not encouraged at home. I did not enjoy talking because I would be frustrated because people would not understand what I was trying to say in my broken English, and I would feel stupid. In my perception, I felt small due to my smaller physical build and being a minority person. I came to believe that if I could speak correctly, be bigger, or be someone of respect, I would be treated better, and others would like me as well as myself. In

middle school, God met me at a church camp and told me He loved me. He just kept saying this repeatedly, and I broke down in tears. I initially resisted because I did not feel worthy compared to the popular, strong, or attractive people I admired. But when I realized the God of the universe loved me, I realized that my identity was not based on what others think about me but who God says I am. That was a life-altering truth. This truth has allowed me to take steps of faith and grow into various leadership positions for several years. But my identity was shaken as I experienced setbacks and failures in ministry.

When we covered the first chapter in small groups, I shared about my struggles with my performance lie, and I tended to run away. One group member blurted, “Yes, you run away a lot. You are a coward.” I was stunned and hurt. As the study’s leader, I did not know how to respond, so I thanked her for her comment and said I would have to consider what she shared. The next day, I went on a prayer walk and asked God to understand what had happened. As I sat, God revealed that I acted cowardly but that I was not a coward. Reflecting, I realized that my performance lie wants to equate my identity to my actions. Perhaps I have acted cowardly often, but that is not who I am. That is what I have done. God was differentiating my personhood from my actions. Because I could not separate the two, I was always afraid to talk about my failures because I felt my identity was being attacked. But if they are two different things, I can talk about my failures without it attacking my identity. Of course, it may challenge my identity, but the more secure my identity is, I can listen to various complaints or critiques and make healthy changes. Before, I could not listen to what I needed to work on because my toxic shame would yell at me that I was stupid and ask why I was like this. God was helping me to take responsibility for my actions, so I could repent and be forgiven.

This leads me to the second principle of repentance. Every time repentance would come up, I would cringe because of my performance lie and its connection to my identity. Repentance was a time to beat me up more because repentance was connected to my toxic shame. My toxic shame often hijacked godly sorrow with worldly sorrow, so instead it bringing “repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret” (2 Corinthians 7:10), I often felt death. My toxic shame would lead me to self-deprecate myself by calling myself names and continuing to relive my failures.

One brother in my small group shared how he saw repentance very differently. Repentance was God leading him to be set free because God loves him. Seeing God as a sports coach trying to advise you on winning the match was helpful imagery. Another was seeing God as a cheerleader who supported the team with shouts of encouragement. God does not want to struggle in my sin, isolated and alone but wants to join in my battle with sin. I do not have to wait until after falling and ask God to help me pick up the pieces. Instead, God wants to help me when I am struggling. My shame would never allow this. After all, I would be too ashamed to ask God for help when I was struggling because I had already failed by being tempted. God is in my corner and shouting encouragement that I can overcome with God’s help and that I do not have to figure it out alone. Dealing with the toxic shame in my battle with sin was a game-changer. I am no longer alone, and I can invite God into my struggles with sin.

Going back to my previous example of being called a coward, I could repent of my cowardly actions, which were driven by my fears and wanting to protect myself rather than loving others who may have felt the consequences of my cowardly actions. The combination of both dealing with identity and repentance was critical. With my identity more secure and my toxic shame not derailing me, I can now deal with my sins. There has been a backlog of sins that

needs to be confessed. My confession prior was to make a blanket statement, "Sorry, God. I am a sinner." But I can begin to go deeper and identify the actual sin I committed. Before, I would believe everything was terrible and repent of even the good things. Instead, God is helping me to thank God for the good parts and identify what is terrible more precisely. God is showing me that he is more like a surgeon who wants only to take out the cancerous cells rather than wanting to amputate my entire body part or organ.

In the third principle of overcoming family patterns, my brother was an encouragement and partner in understanding my family and personal struggles. In the personal and family inventory paper, I interviewed my dad. Through the interview, I began to sympathize with my father's struggles, and it helped me to identify similar struggles of not knowing how to process negative emotions by burying them. I never understood how traumatic World War II caused my family. My father's life began in a relocation camp as a Japanese American, and my grandfather took a stand against this injustice. He was considered an enemy of the state and sent to a different prison. After the war, they were shipped back to Japan as unwanted American citizens. But back in Japan, their return caused their auntie's family to be displaced and created more family tension and stress. As a little boy, he could not express his frustration and anger because it would only make the family more ashamed. He learned to bottle up his emotions, and only when he was past the point of frustration would he explode in anger. My father shared that he did not like himself and was always very insecure. Meeting God in college and giving his life to Christ during the Vietnam War, God began transforming him. Without God's intervention, my father would be more like his oldest brother, who has completely isolated himself from the rest of the family. My uncle never married and did his dutiful responsibility when called for to care for my grandparents and a niece in need. Still, after completing his duties, he lived his own

separate life alone. I feel sadness for him. In contrast, my two other uncles, born in Japan and several years younger than my dad, were very confident and self-assured.

I often see the desire to run away and isolate myself, which I see as a family sin pattern. We are dutiful and will do what is asked of us, but I would instead isolate ourselves to have the freedom to enjoy our interests. I see the dutiful part as being responsible mixed with a people-pleasing lie. I see similar patterns of holding in our frustrations, hurts, and pain but exploding in anger like my father. Talking to my therapist, I realized I have a childish understanding of how to deal with emotions. My mother was a positive person, and though she would have difficulties, she could smile and say she was ok. My therapist asked if my mother had put on a mask. As I thought about it, my mother did not, but I learned to put one on. I often saw the result but did not see the process. She would spend an hour every night before going to sleep doing her quiet time at the dining room table. I realized that my mother brought her pain and sorrow to God, so by the time she would share with me, she had found peace and comfort in God. I had to update my thinking on processing my emotions like my mother.

Earlier this semester, I led a praise night with another intern. Instead of following the previous format, we both felt led to do things differently and took steps of faith in how we led, sang, prayed, and shared. Though not perfect, we both felt satisfied with what had happened. Shortly after the service, we received a text from one of the leaders who critiqued the worship night and said that we needed to pay more attention to the environment during worship. On the drive back, I felt hurt, discouraged, and ashamed that it bothered me. I wanted to stuff my emotions but was challenged to bring this to God. I took it personally because I put my heart and soul into leading the night. God acknowledged that my heart was for him, but my motivation was not pure. As I continued to talk to God, I became angrier and more frustrated. God revealed

a lie that if I obey God, then everyone will be happy. God helped me to see that following God is often counter-cultural, and as a result, our actions may be misunderstood. God wanted to deal with this deeply embedded lie that following God would be smooth sailing that my people-pleasing lie fed. I repented my desire to please people. Afterward, my peace was restored, and I could consider the concerns in the text. They had legitimate points that we made some changes. But in hindsight, the timing and delivery of it could have been improved so my fellow intern and I could receive it better. Later, I learned that my fellow intern also had a tough time with the critique. Looking back, I see God was breaking my family's sin pattern by allowing me to feel my pain and inviting God to process my emotions. God validated my heart but also removed the lie that was crippling me from hearing the suggestion being made.

In principle four of forgiveness, God brought up a few people I needed to forgive. A person in my ministry has texted me with accusations, and when I have attempted to clarify, it only led to more charges. One practical and constructive step is praying blessings for those who sinned against me. Praying blessings helped me channel my frustration and hurt productively. Through the time of prayers and also putting myself in their shoes, God gave me more compassion. Putting into practice, Ecclesiastes 7:21-22 helped as it says, "Do not pay attention to every word people say ... for you know in your heart that many times you yourself have cursed others." I view the texts as venting sessions rather than a time to converse and clarify myself. It saddens me how hurt the other person feels. I still struggle with what is happening, but I have peace that I do not need to know and that God does.

In principle four, the part that struck me was related to grieving my hurt and losses. "Your expectations and your disappointments are tied together... You must process your disappointments in order to reignite your expectations and once again channel your passions to

the healthy places.” (Reimer, 2016, pg. 144). My failures and setbacks have piled up, but I have not taken the time to grieve my loss. Instead, I use comfort sins to cope with the pain, like binge-watching TV, movies, or sports. When I feel overwhelmed or discouraged, I have also struggled with pornography. My problem was that I focused more on my resulting behaviors of escapism and battle with pornography but not dealing with the root problems connected to my unprocessed expectations and disappointments. I appreciated the testimony of the neatly dressed elderly woman who hated everyone and drank in secret. I resonated with, “She had suffered ... loss and hurt, and she just kept picking herself up and doing the right thing, trudging along like a good soldier, because that’s what she thought she was supposed to do. All of this pain got stuffed inside” (Reimer, 2016, pg. 146). I am learning how to “acknowledge your pain in the presence of God so you can access his healing love” (Reimer, 2016, pg. 146).

In principle five, healing wounds, I was struck by 1 Corinthians 13:11, “When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me.” Reimer’s insights were helpful. “You only become a grown-up when you take responsibility for your life and choose to put the ways of your childhood behind you. That means you must face your past, and you must process the events of your past that have contributed to your present broken ways. You must find healing, and you must change, or your soul will not be healthy” (Reimer, 2016, pg. 154). That resonates deeply as I often do not feel mature because I have not learned to take responsibility for my life by not processing my past hurts and wounds. This principle gave me hope to end my childish ways and pursue a healthier life.

One night I woke up with a soulful dream where I remembered a young woman I used to be interested in but never pursued. I felt rejected and alone. When I woke up, I asked God why I

remembered this person. God revealed that I had not processed my past hopes of a potential love interest with God. Instead, I stuffed my hopes because I believed it wasn't my time, and I also saw my value as a potential spouse based on my performance which was not good at that season of life. But as I talked to God, I realized I was delighted with how my life turned out. When I was younger, I couldn't understand God's plan for my life, but now I see that God was protecting other people and me so we could marry the person God had in store for us. I praised God for my wife and the three boys I have been blessed with and would not want to change anything. I think my unprocessed past hopes and disappointments were lingering because there was no place for them to go. But as I talked to God, I was able to pray blessings for all the various people I had once dreamed of a life with and was able to thank God for each of our spouses and families we have. I felt that I could let these people go into God's hands.

To access Jesus' healing power, we must understand that "God is smart, and He knows stuff we don't know, and He likes to tell us" (Reimer, 2016, pg. 159). Reimer gives testimony of helping Tom, who shared his story, which centered on his mother's tragic death of accidental drowning. The danger is to jump to conclusion, but you must listen to the Holy Spirit, which leads Reimer to say, "Tom, the Holy Spirit knows the key to unlock your emotions, I am just going to ask Him to bring any memory to your mind that He needs to address to unlock your emotions" (Reimer, 2016, pg. 161). When I read this story, I was reminded of a memory where I jumped to a conclusion a few years back in a counseling session, and recently, that person has been very upset about the understanding I shared. For the longest time, I thought my conclusions were correct, felt convicted and at peace about it, and the other leader who was with me at the time supported what I shared. But hearing the complaint, I was confused about how to process what happened. This story helped me identify that I did not invite the Holy Spirit and made an

inaccurate conclusion. I confessed my sin of pride and asked God that I would live out Proverbs 3:5-6, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.” I have not talked to the person yet, but I am asking the Holy Spirit how to proceed. I believe, minimally, I will have to apologize to the person for stating definitively the conclusion I made when I should have been humbler and asked God to reveal what was happening.

The sixth principle is about overcoming fears. My root fears come from my identity and my worth. I have bought the lie that I am only as valuable as I am to what I can accomplish or contribute. I fear that if I fail or make a mistake, people will realize I am worthless and an imposter. I identified with Saul’s story of timidity. “Saul has a fear of inadequacy, a fear that he does not have what it takes; it is undoubtedly tied to an identity wound” (Reimer, 2016, pg. 193). Samuel calls Saul’s fear and says, “You were small in your own eyes” (1 Samuel 15:17). Fears run rampant in my heart, so I often can not respond with faith. I look at myself too much rather than fixing my eyes on God. I have become tolerant of fear because I do not believe I will overcome fear. I appreciated that “fear often threatens the foundation of our value... When we act on these things because of our fears, we actually strengthen the stronghold of the faulty foundation and lies in our lives” (Reimer, 2016, pg. 189). This helped me recognize that I have been building my house on the wrong foundation of fear and no longer have to. “Ultimately, to conquer our fears, we have to surrender our fears to God and trust Him... We must experience that reality through revelation. We must act on faith and not on fear” (Reimer, 2016, pg. 189). I heard God’s voice once in middle school, which sustained me for many years, but I have not heard his audible voice since. I am asking God to reveal this truth and build my life on the

foundation of God's love, peace, and faith. I sense God leading toward the spiritual disciplines of silence and stillness, but I am still learning how to enjoy them.

My time in seminary has been developing my worldview of the supernatural. I was conflicted as I spent time with cessationists in college and attended Vineyard worship conferences with John Wimber during my teen year. Due to the contentious battles between the two sides, I was always afraid to engage and pick a side. But being at Alliance Theological Seminary, I have become convinced that this is no longer a battle I must fear. *The Word and Power Church* by Dr. Doug Banister was instrumental in helping me see the value of having both rather than picking one or the other. Taking the "Theology of Power Encounter" with Professor Reimer last semester allowed me to jump into the deep end of understanding the supernatural. Looking at the list of questions, I do not believe I have any significant symptoms of demonization. My main problem is the numbness in my heart, but I think it is more human than demonic. There may be something demonic, but none of the questions triggered me. The one thing that causes me to wonder is that my twin brother experienced demonization in his early college days when he felt super lonely when I went away to school. He gave himself to a spirit of lust to end his loneliness. He came to Soul Conference a few years back and was able to cast out the demons. He believes that his demonization only came from that time in college, but it makes me wonder if there was any demonization in our family history.

Going through *Soul Care* has opened my eyes to see that I have many things I need to work on. I felt stuck prior, but I have hope that things will change. There is much processing, uncomfortable conversations, and acts of faith I need to take, but I am encouraged. I do not feel alone in the process anymore. God is inviting me to greater intimacy with Him. I have many

bad habits that need to change, but I look forward to breaking forward. I hope God will meet me where I am during the Soul Care Conference.

## **Bibliography**

Reimer, Rob. *Soul Care: 7 Transformational Principles for a Healthy Soul*. Franklin, TN: Carpenters Son Publishing, 2016.