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Dr. Rob Reimer

Spiritual Formation for Leaders

LE2

### **Integrative Paper**

Entering this program, I felt the spirit of God leading me. I have always been afraid of doctoral work due to my lack of confidence in my academic abilities. I often felt unworthy of being able to adequately perform the tasks necessary. I do not see myself as an academic, so during our very first session, I was extremely nervous about starting this program. Dr. Reimer asked us where we placed on a scale of 1-10- I answered that I was a strong five!

For the past five years I have been in full time ministry as a lead pastor in Trenton NJ. During my time there I have experienced the highs and lows of ministry. In learning leadership, I quickly found out that leading people and leading a church are two different things. My ambition to lead a church is different than my heart in leading people. I quickly understood that leading the business side of a ministry can be extremely draining and at times stressful as I am always thinking of ways to improve the church. The pressure to grow the ministry became my focus. I have tried to balance life and ministry, but it has become extremely difficult. So difficult that I arrived at a point when I was questioning the calling on my life because I did not see the results that I wanted. The “Soul Care” book helped point out some of my blind spots in ministry. As I dove into the book, God brought something back to the surface that I tried to push down for years, especially during these last five years of ministry.

“Soul Care” offered a practical response to the state of my soul that enters us into spiritual formation. I believe that we cannot have a true experience without a deep dive into the soul to identify the roots of our responses to situations. As a leader in the Lord’s church and one who wants to proclaim Jesus in the marketplace, we must be able to identify the spots in our lives that we need to deal with. Below I will attempt to identify those areas in my own personal life and produce a plan, rhythm of how to reproduce that in my own life.

### **Part 1: Plan of Growth**

**Abandonment:** This had everything to do with who God has called me to be and who I see myself as. For years those two visions did not add up and to be honest at times they still do not add up or come together. This past year after the COVID-19 pandemic and pastoring showed me a lot about some blind spots I have in my own life. I would often say I do not care if people left me or not: context meaning the church. If people would say “pastor I am leaving the church but its not about you” I would hear them but would still feel like it was about me. I never felt like I could articulate what I was feeling because I did not want people to think that I was weak or that I needed people to like me. However, during this class I realized that my feelings have a root, and my root was my abandonment issue that was rooted in my dad leaving me. I would have never thought that an issue that I had put away would resurface in my ministry like it did. I never talked about it because my life has moved on from my dad not being there. I was able to graduate, stay out of trouble, get married and have my own family without him being around. Now I can look at my life and point out things that connect to that root.

**Self-doubt:** I look how I encourage my three children; I am declaring over them every day on how they can do anything they put their mind to. They can be whatever they want to be. I am their support even at this age. They also see how my wife and I communicate as a team.

These are lessons that over the years I took for granted because I never saw this taught in my house growing up. As a young pastor and husband, I deal with self-doubt daily. I associate that being directly connected to my dad who was not there. Yes, I had men in my life who filled that void, but it was different from it would be to hear a father support me the way I support my kids. I once told my wife that I could have been the President of the United States if I had the male support like I wanted.

God is bringing this to the surface so that I am aware of this underlying problem and therefore I can address it in my life. I think he is showing me this in ministry so not only do I learn how to deal with it but also to help me become a better leader as I pastor in the urban context with many people who have felt abandoned by their parents. I deal with people that have never said anything about their feelings in this regard because in the Black family we are taught “what happens in this house stays in this house” which is why we do not speak on things that directly refer to the family context. I identify this in my own life. I have been able to have real and honest conversations with members of my church community about this and it has helped them to realize the root of different things for them to have freedom. Most people I talk to do not even know, because it has become part of their identity- that it is just who they have become. To a default I often hear “Pastor this is just who I am,” something I have struggled with saying also, this is just who I am.

As I grow, I will continue to see this in my life as an area of growth. One of the things that I think was clear in Rob’s lecture is that having friends around you that can speak into you and be honest and have a real conversation is essential. Friends who can speak into me and who I can be honest with will be key for my development moving forward in this area. In ministry it is extremely hard because of trust issues with clergy. This has everything to do with shame and

allowing that to become a part of who we are as well and is a blind spot that I need to address for me to grow in that area in my life. My thought patterns have always reflected on how I think people viewed me. I never felt good enough because that is who I felt people were viewing me and I never felt like I met the mark. I will continue to grow in this area because I am now aware of it, and I will have a healthy relationship with my inner circle so that I can grieve this season of my life.

My other assessment is forgiveness. I do not forgive people like I should. I may say yes, I forgive you but in reality, I do not. Forgiveness has always been extremely hard for me because of how I grew up. I always felt like whenever I did something wrong, and I asked for forgiveness it never was genuine because people would always bring it up from my past. I developed in my mind the idea that if people did not forgive me, why should I forgive them? Obviously holding on to this idea just made it hard for me to trust people. Trusting was a major concern for my wife when we got married because I had very little with no explanation for why I did not trust her readily. It was not like she did anything to provoke me not to trust her, it was the conversation I had in my own mind that caused me to think things that I should not have. I do that also with people in my church. I have conversation with myself that causes me not to trust people because everyone is going to leave me anyway.

I believe my issues with trust are rooted back to my abandonment issues, and I believe they are tied to my experience in middle school as well. I was the only Black kid in my school, and I did not trust the teachers or the school at all, because of the prejudice I felt during that time. They did not make me feel a part of the school and I always felt like an outsider who would never fit in because I was Black. This caused me not to trust the system. Even now I am always speculating when I become close to a white person, especially a male, as I feel like I cannot trust

them because they do not have my best interest at heart. This has caused me to question what God is doing in my life.

Most recently God is bringing that to the surface. It is uncomfortable but I had to address this in my life. Some of my mentors are white men and I had to address this because God was showing me that to move forward, I must be healed from this hurt. This came from open and honest conversation, and I had to be willing to be honest and not apologetic about the way I felt. This has also played out in the denomination I am currently in, as it is mostly white and some of my childhood feelings are spilling over to my ministry because the same way I felt in middle school is the same way I feel currently in my domination. I have identified things in my soul that the Lord wants to heal- my abandonment issues, my hesitancy to forgive/trust issues are both rooted in my dad not being there and my experience with prejudice in middle school.

## **Part 2: Rhythm of Life**

To ensure growth in me I must be honest and be aware of what is going on in my life. Currently my wife and I work full time with three small children and Pastor a small urban church. With that it is extremely hard for me to get away in solitude to replenish myself. However, one of the ways I can do this is to make sure I take time away by myself once a year, along with visiting other ministries to learn. My wife and I also must take three vacations a year, two by ourselves and one with the children. I must also set a reading goal which is to read ten books a year. I think that this will help me get a rhythm of life that fits for me and my family. After I spend time with my family, I do feel God's presence more when I return to work and church.

My regular structure must change in order for me to reach the next level. Here are a few things that I know I need to change daily. Prioritize my time: I cannot do everything and be everywhere for everyone. I must spend at least 1 hour with God each day reading and writing what God has been doing in my life. I need to practice this weekly. One of the things that Rob went over to experience healing for my soul is to understand who God sees me as and understand what helps me to remember that I am loved already by the Father. This is one area of my life that I know I need to change because I must be reminded that I am enough by God.

My wife will be my measure of success when it comes to how I am doing. She sees me like no other person around me, she is not afraid to be honest with me about how I am doing because I am open with her, and she understands the meaning behind my words. I also have two close friends who I can be myself with and who know and love me. They will be key in helping me move toward what God has called me to. I will also assess my success with my church leadership. I would like to measure my growth with a 6-month assessment every year. I will give my first one in June and the next in December. This will give me a clear measurable understanding in how I am doing personally and in ministry.

### **Part 3: Plan for Spiritual Formation Reproduction**

My ministry context is a small urban church in Trenton NJ. We are currently under the Assemblies of God denomination, which is one of the largest Pentecostal denominations in the world. The administration and I are on staff part time. Our current church membership is 40-50 people as the pandemic really hurt us as some of our key members retired and moved away and many are just not returning the building. We have a leadership team and executive board. The executive team oversees the business aspects of the church, and the leadership team helps me with the direction of the ministry.

I inherited this type of structure which served a purpose when they had more people. However, now that membership is not that many, I am rethinking just having one leadership team who manages all aspects of the church business. I would like to bring soul care to my ministry context and how I will do it is to get the leadership on board. I can bring this to them have them read "Soul Care." Then I would invite Rob Reimer to come and do "Soul Care" weekend. I would like to go over this entire book with my entire ministry to set off a revival that will lead us next year to Freedom.