

**The Camino to Interdependence:
Personal Assessment and Goal Setting Paper Tailored to Pilgrimage**

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The global service-learning trip to Greece in the Summer of 2022 was co-led by Dr. Amy Davis and her husband, Ghiath. Spending the first evening of this trip at a local restaurant in Thessaloniki, I had no expectations as to what would happen on this trip. Given that I convinced my older sister, Christine, to leave the country with me for the first time, and had not been on good terms with Prarthana at that moment, I realize that I had put myself in unfavorable circumstances. But with any adventure comes the unknown that lies ahead; this is how I met the Walborns. Given that you will most likely be reading this, Ron (and possibly Wanda), I will be speaking in a manner that brings about my perspectives on where you had been present. The core memory that lingers in the back of my mind upon meeting you both is that I had embarrassingly enough assumed that you were the Notley's! Given that I had not met either of our lovely professors prior to this trip, and had never had the opportunity to actually know who you were as a person, my own pride forced me to sit back and just take notice of how you and Wanda interacted with everyone—and deep down I knew that I wanted to get to know you more.

Having been invited to walk the Camino this past June, I had full intentions of taking the opportunity to process the past events that were going on within my life and within my heart. Realizing that there were many areas of my life that were challenged, I had been able to reflect on my thoughts as well as my emotions, how I take notice of my spiritual health, but also how I would listen to my body. Taking the opportunity to take a step back, and process how I interact with people on a day-to-day basis, these areas of my life have really been exercised on the Camino. In actually applying it to my own life, I've realized the benefits of getting away from everyday life in order to explore the world and evaluate the areas within my life, I come to the realization that I cannot do everything on my own. With that being said—my personal goal in this season is to grow in becoming more interdependent in building relationships for God's kingdom.

My physical health had always been predictable and consistent. Being able to walk many miles at a time and even climb steep hills with ease, I forget that I still have limitations. But with all honesty, it was due to my pride and arrogance that stunted the training that was required leading up to the Camino. With the first day having felt like a breeze for everyone including myself, I believed that this Camino was not going to be challenging enough. But with pride comes a moment of humility, for that second day taught me that purpose of the pilgrimage was not the finish line, but rather the marathon and the journey along the way. The pain and ache from my feet and shoulders that second day had finally settled in and the limitations of my body began to reveal itself. While I knew that we were able to get through the day, it had not made the literal climb up these hills any less exhausting. That alone reminds me of what Wanda had mentioned, “to listen to your body, and to slow down when you need to.” From this point on, I began to listen to how my body reacted and took notice of the warnings. Noticing these things bring about a lot of the peace and joy that God provides by reminding me of my health and revealing to me what my limitations are, especially upon doing things alone and alongside

Social interactions have been an ongoing activity during the Camino. With each day bringing about a new conversation with someone from the group, I get to learn more about them while at the same time, reflecting on who I am and why I am even on this trip. I believe that God existed for eternity in communion with himself as three persons. With that being said, we too are to be in communion with God and others. With Chase, I had been able to relate to the shame that he’s carried around in his life, as well as Isaac who I now see as a mentor-like figure. These conversations have truly opened my eyes to where I am at in life and it has only been measurable because of the trust that I’ve built with the godly men on the trip. Relating to this also came the opportunity to witness to someone who had just so happened to be on the path with us. Putting

my faith and my knowledge about Christ into play, the conversation sprouted naturally to where I could tell my new friend was curious to hear about my faith in Christ and the testimony of how God moved in my life. This past experience has reaffirmed the passion that I have for sharing the gospel with others!

Having taken part in the counseling sessions that were provided through Alliance University for the past several months, processing my thoughts with someone had really guided me to put more trust in people to receive affirmation and even guidance on how to cope with my emotions that have brought past pain and confusion. At some point in my life, verbally expressing what is on my mind and heart was challenging because of my desire to be accepted for being someone that I fully wasn't. Speaking of this brings us back to Wanda's explanation on the mask that we leave on because we are trying to fit in with the crowd and avoid any potential judgment. I realized that I was living a double life outside of church service because of my addiction to pornography and masturbation. After listening in on others and their story in overcoming the addictions in their life, I wanted to find ways in keeping myself accountable through confessing to those who I trust, which includes my counselors. Being able to verbally hear my counselors reiterate and affirm the words that I would try to explain gave me more opportunities to better process my thoughts. Before coming to these counseling sessions, I believed it was meant for those who only needed help. I for one was arrogant in thinking that I could process these thoughts on my own, but in having guidance along the way, God has humbled me in realizing that I need to take these opportunities to receive help, even when I don't believe they are necessary.

One of the ways in which I process my emotions come about when performing repetitive tasks such as pacing back and forth with my lawn mower or even scrubbing away at the

never-ending dishes in our kitchen. The embarrassing \or even traumatic moments would naturally sprout and would oftentimes resolve themselves once my task was completed. There were many moments of revelation in understanding the alternative, let alone more healthy methods of dealing with my emotions brought about the grief journal. Intentionally sitting down to write or even type out my thoughts on a piece of paper was abstract to me, but once I got down to actually writing, I take a moment to process my thoughts and to even wipe off my tears during moments that were unbearable to hold in. My desire to fix everything has really brought me down rabbit holes of overthinking and emotions. It's taken one of my past seasons to realize that I won't let go of the steering wheel of my life. I can't help but realize it takes a lot in order for me to even humble myself before God to know that I cannot do this alone. Being on the Camino with everyone was a miracle in itself for I never came from money. The lowest moments of my life came about through financial struggles and in overcoming them, it was clearly God who delivered me from hard times. Trusting that God continues to provide me the peace of mind goes beyond what I had ever expected and for those reasons, I would continue to wait on the Lord and lean on Him, fully.

Patience has been one of the hardest virtues that I have come to face. The irony in this is the intentional time orientation for there to even be growth. At some point, it raised a lot of questions for God. "When will I be able to grow more patient? Can't you just skip to where I am already changed, Lord? How am I to remain patient if all of these things are going to test keep testing me?" The truth in asking all of these questions is that God had already revealed to me these answers, and yet, these answers fly over my head! A close friend of mine reminds me that God doesn't simply change our hearts to be more patient, but rather God allows for these circumstances to come about in stretching and molding us to grow more patient. A tough pill to

swallow if you ask me, but there is a lot of wisdom and truth in saying that. I now understand that it is by God's grace that allows me to be reminded to—"Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD" (Psalms 27:14).

Striving for interdependence has not been a new goal of mine, but rather, something that has been on my heart for many seasons to come. Being challenged with my introverted desire to be in solitude for the sake of productivity, working with others would be my weakness as trusting and depending on others has not been something that I would say is a frequent thing in my life. Group projects come off as daunting and less productive than actually doing it myself because of the possibility that others may not be able to complete their portion of the task. In addition to that comes the idea of letting myself be the passenger in my own car. Driving becomes another daunting task as I cannot trust anyone to take me anywhere. I enjoy being the leader but the unfortunate term to better describe my trait would have to be "control freak." All of these things bring about my weakness for I cannot trust anyone to get the job done if I don't do it myself. But in actuality, this comes measurable as to how I treat others around me and I typically catch myself after the matter had even happened. Trusting someone to help carry the responsibility has been a long journey and in saying these things, I am reminded that Christ had carried my cross, and the weight of my sin when he died. There's a lot that I am desiring out of the next few seasons of my life and I have now learned that I cannot do it alone.

As you may remember from my grief journal and the conversations on the Camino, I've grown up in my Vietnamese community in New York City for nearly ten years. Within those ten years have been a constant cycle of transition out of the city, for both leaders and young families. Not knowing when our church leaders would pack up their things and move back home, we still expected it to inevitably happen—New York City is just too hard for new families. What will

happen to the church if more and more families continue to move out? This is a question that has been lingering in my mind. The reason for bringing it up is that I continue to struggle with believing that next-generation leaders will come from New York City church for this very reason. Wrestling with having to do things alone has been a constant challenge for the leaders that I have seen growing up in the church and now I get to walk that very same walk after them.

Being on this journey has truly been a learning experience with many ups and downs, much like the Camino where there would be days that are easier than others. However, I have hope in God watering the seeds that would hopefully be planted in good and rich soil among the next generations to come and that He would use me to guide people to God. The next 3-5 years are uncertain for God is the sovereign one over the past, present, and future. But I do know and believe that God would use the outcome for His glory—for whatever happens in between would bring about growth for both myself and those around me. I believe God is calling me to serve in the local Vietnamese church for the next 3-5 years to help raise up the next generation of faithful servants for His kingdom and glory alone. Trusting in God and leaning on His promises and ruling authority over all of the outcomes is to say “that no matter what happens, I will still praise my God, for His faithfulness and loving-kindness. Just like how the Camino had a destination and an adventure, full of growth and excitement of the unknown, so too is the life that I am blessed to live, serving with joy and faithfulness in seeing what God does next for His people.