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I knew that by the end of 2018 I would have started to turn the corner after resigning from my previous teaching positions. Indeed I have. I did teach my usual course with Fuller on the Practices of Worship. My work with Fuller is the one position I have kept. I have worked out most of the bugs in this online course now which makes it clearer for the students and easier for the teacher. I think we all had a good time. I also supervised a student in an independent study related to spiritual formation. I enjoy being able to help students in a one-to-one relationship.

A few groups asked me to do some study and consulting. I reviewed the Rules of Life for two organizations and I explored the history of visitation and ongoing formation for another. Cheri and I also produced a video introducing Ignatius of Loyola and his *Spiritual Exercises*. I am overjoyed that I was not so consumed with teaching responsibilities and can now am able to give my time and reflections to helping Christians support each other in whole-Gospel living.



Though I wrote only one article this fall, a review for the *Spiritus* journal of a book exploring Pentecostal Christianity as a mystical tradition, I gave a number of presentations here and there. In October I visited the Association of Vineyard Churches Mission Leaders Meeting and gave a presentation on vocation. I gave a presentation at the Evangelical Theological Society on “S/spirit and Spiritual Formation.” I also gave a presentation at the Academy of Religion meeting for the Charles S. Peirce Society on the thought of my doctoral mentor, Donald Gelpi. And just last week I was in Pasadena giving a presentation to Fuller’s Center for Missiological Research on the relationship between mission and formation.

I did not complete that paper on voluntary poverty I had hoped to write in the fall. But I worked on it yesterday and I hope to see it appear someday soon. What I did complete, however, was a couple of proposals for books related to

Christian monasticism and life today. I also figured out a way to revise my Monasticism(s) Old and New course with Fuller so that it can adapt as my research develops. I am excited to see how this next year develops.

Reflections - On Turning



I'd like to invite you to join me in a game I have been playing lately. I call it Turn.

The game is rooted in the timeless words of the apostle Paul. In 1 Thessalonians 1:9 Paul praises the Thessalonians because they “turned to God from idols.”

In 2 Corinthians 3:15 Paul speaks of the new relationship we have with God through Christ, declaring that “whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.” Paul here is referring to the veil Moses used to cover his face to hide the glory of God (a veil which he later used to hide the fact that the glory was fading). Paul’s point is that whenever we turn to the Lord we are entirely available to the Spirit (see verse 17) and to others, unveiled before a glory that will never pass away. Surely, it is a good thing to turn to God. But just when is this “whenever” we turn, and how do we do it?



So let me tell you how I discovered my game. For years – no, decades – I have wanted to learn how to “practice the presence of God.” I read the works of Brother Lawrence and tried the prayer-while-doing-dishes thing. But it didn’t really stick. I read *The Way of a Pilgrim* and tried the Jesus-Prayer thing. Not so good. I won’t bore you with the long list of other abandoned experiments. In the end I just decided that I would just have devotion times where I thought about God, and I would have other times when I thought about studies, people, ranch work and so on.

In the past few years, however, I began to discover situations where almost without knowing it (and that “almost” is very important) I was entering into the presence of God. I was quietly turning toward God, even though I did not have the language for it then. I realized I was giving worship to God when I was appreciating a mountain scene, just about ready to take a photo. I realized I could allow my own hunger, during my occasional times of fasting, to remind me to hunger for the righteousness of God. Rather than *trying* to pray throughout the day, I just *discovered* these little triggers that drew me into God.

A few months ago I woke up in the middle of the night. It was too early to get up, but I could not get back to sleep. As I lay there I found myself plagued with unwanted thoughts. I fought them off, but they kept coming back. Then I heard the still, small voice of the Spirit speak to me:

“All you need to do is turn to Me.”

“But still the thoughts will come back,” I replied.

“That’s OK,” I heard. “It just means you will have another, and another, occasion to turn to Me.”

That night I turned and turned and finally fell joyfully asleep.

I woke up the next morning with two new insights.

First: *My own unwanted thoughts themselves are triggers, invitations to turn to God.*

Second: *What God wants from me is for me to turn to Him.*

Inspired, I reviewed my studies. The Old Testament word for “turn” is used to indicate repentance and is an important element of God’s call to salvation. Paul’s proclamation--that whenever we turn to the Lord a veil is lifted--is rich with Old Testament background. I remembered stories of Christian saints who aimed to live a *life of repentance*. A life of habitually turning to God. But what was especially clear to me was just how practical this was. *I could do this!*

Then the game started. I realized that my photo appreciations, my prayers in hunger and such were reminders to turn to God. I discovered more and more reminders – most connected with the idea of “turning.” I am driving down the road and I see a sign that says “Turn here.”



So I turn to God with a little prayer of gratitude. I *turn* a door knob and realize that when I enter a house I am about to enter a new moment in my day, so I offer my upcoming moment as I turn the knob. I *turn on* my computer and pray for my time of writing. I *turn my*

attention to another person and share God’s own heart for them. I feel my *stomach turn* in anxiety and use my awareness of this to encourage me to turn to God in trust. The list—and the game--goes on and on. The *turns in my life* remind me to *turn to God*: in joy, in confusion, in all the ordinary experiences of life.

I want to look fully upon God’s glory, just as Paul mentions. So whenever I turn—whenever I prayerfully turn my car keys, whenever I turn a page of a book in the Spirit, whenever I turn red in anger and notice—I discover that God is turned toward me, waiting for me to turn toward Him. Want to join me in the game?