Golden Triangle

Objective for the Meeting: The goal for the meeting is to teach the Golden Triangle and empower and equip leaders to be able to be better mentors. They should be able to use the Golden Triangle in their mentoring thought process. It is good to frame it as something that the staff think through in our mentoring process.

Today we are going to talk about a framework for discipleship that we as the staff use in our one-on-ones. One of our main goals in mentoring meetings is to help facilitate spiritual transformation in the lives of the students we meet with. We want to give you a glimpse of how we are thinking through where a student needs to go in a mentoring meetings. So are you ready to hear that framework?

Everyone should have gotten a napkin when they walked in the door. Yes? Why you ask?

Because we wanted you to get the full discipleship experience today! This is so much our framework in doing mentoring that many of us have drawn it on a napkin in the Pav or at Para or Wilsdorf. In fact Pete does this so much that we the staff want him to write a book called “Discipleship by Napkin” Raise your hand if Pete has drawn on a napkin for you in the Pav?

Alright so take out your napkin and everyone draw an equilateral triangle. thats the one with 3 equal sides yes?

This triangle, which we are going to call the Golden Triangle, is going to be a framework to help us think about spiritual transformation.

The Holy Spirit is the one who enacts spiritual transformation, He initiates it. But that initiation does not imply passivity on the part of the believer. One must learn to be attentive to what the Holy Spirit is doing and be able to help that transformation along. Actively partnering with God is better than waiting for sporadic moments of growth. Aggressive receptivity if you will. Gordon Smith says that transformation is like a dance. God leads and we respond. God doesn't just drag us around the dance floor.

The goal of this triangle is to help you as you help others “dance.” To help them see their spiritual lives a little more holistically so they can see where they are strong and where they can provide some room for growth. It’s not a test, and everyone will be different but we have seen these principles play out many times over the years. It’s not always something that I draw out for each student (though maybe I should) but I do think through it for each student.

So on your Golden Triangle, we are now going to label the sides.

1. Experience: The Holy Spirit transforms us through our daily lives.
2. Encounter: the Holy Spirit transforms us by direct intervention
3. Exercise: The Holy Spirit transforms us through the spiritual disciplines

So lets look at each of these in turn:
Remember that as we are looking through these different sides, how you can help the students you are mentoring.
EXPERIENCE

**Definition:** Everything that happens to us. The ordinary events of life. Spiritual formation takes place through experience when we consciously submit everything to God.

The ordinary events of life: The joys, the trials, the tribulations. Life happens. The past is behind us, the future is not here yet. The present is all we have and God uses present circumstances to shape our soul. If we are conscious of this then each experience, the joy, pain, promotion, injustice, even tedium can be an opportunity to see Christ dwell in our hearts.

**Scripture**
James 1:2-4 Consider it pure joy my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

Romans 5:3-5 “Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

Dallas Willard
“It is absolutely essential to our growth into the mind of Jesus that we accept the “trials” of ordinary existence as the place where we are to experience and find the reign of God-with-us as actual reality. We are not to try to get in a position to avoid trials. And we are not to “catastrophize” and declare the “end of the world” when things happen. We are to see every event as an occasion in which the competence and faithfulness of God will be confirmed to us”

**Common misconceptions:**
1. **Everything that happens is deliberately God’s will.** God can work inside of free will to enable his plan to go forward, but sometimes stuff just happens because the world is broken or because evil exists. But God does work through occasions to show us more understanding of him
2. **If I follow God, all of my experiences will be good.** not true. In fact Jesus assures us that picking up our cross involves suffering and pain. But God does promise to be with us in every painful situation and to give us the tools to navigate that situation. and to redeem it for good
3. **God has plans only for my future.** Our tendency is to wish away the present. But God has great purpose in the here and right now
4. **God can’t redeem this.** He can and He will

**Guidelines for Helping People Grow in Experiences:**
1. Live in the moment. Don’t wish your life away. God wants to work in and through you right now

2. Live intentionally. Take time each day to meditate on the day’s events, your schedule, interactions with others, attitudes, thoughts. What can God teach you through them? What have you done well? What do you need to change?
   St. Ignatius: The Daily Examen
   The Daily Examen is a technique of prayerful reflection on the events of the day in order to detect God’s presence and discern his direction for us. The Examen is an ancient practice in the Church that can help us see God’s hand at work in our whole experience.

3. Live Openly: Allow others to speak into your life. They may see your circumstances from a different angle providing needed correction or encouragement
Downfalls of being Experience only:
Now if one of the students you are mentoring only strengthened the “experience” side of the triangle they would be incomplete. They would be one of those people that just kinda like “whatever happens happens. its all good” and could be very self-focused. They would be constantly venting about the day, like a therapy session where all that has to happen is everything has to get out. There wouldn’t be a lot of change or transformation, just a description of what happens. We need the other sides of the triangle to make us a balanced people.

Things like Exercise and Encounters teach us how to appropriately respond to the day’s experience, and how to understand the full meaning from our trials

Lets look at Exercise

EXERCISE

Definition: Spiritual exercises (disciplines) are the intentional actions or activities that train us to recognize our sin and short comings, to receive the enablement of God, to reorient ourselves to God’s glory rather than our own.

Dallas Willard

“spiritual disciplines... are disciplines designed to help us be active and effective in the spiritual realm of our own heart, ...they are designed to help us withdraw from total dependence on the merely human or natural... where we pass from “the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak” into where the flesh (basically what we automatically feel, think, and do) is with the spirit and supportive of its deepest intentions"

Lets have a quick brainstorm. What are some spiritual exercises or disciplines that you can list:

(The most basic ones are praying and reading our Bibles)

Scripture
1 Cor 9: 24-27
Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

2 Peter 1:3-8
His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Common challenges: Hinderances many of our students have in developing the discipline side of spiritual formation.
1. The first challenge is that trying to be holy seems at odds with grace. We know that we are saved by grace, but we also are encouraged by Scripture and tradition to "walk live, grow, and make an effort" in our faith. We cannot save ourselves, but we all seem to be called to do something. We are scared of becoming legalistic but we can't sit around and do nothing.

2. We have the idea that to develop the disciplines in our life would be too difficult. That they are for saints and not regular Christians.

3. Third hinderance: that the disciplines are not "fun" or "powerful experience".

Thinking about the disciplines as training gives the proper perspective and deals with these challenges. Disciplines are not the spiritual life nor standards of saintliness. They are simply tools. They don't earn us grace, but that put us in a place where we are receptive to God's gracious acts. Considering it as training helps us not see disciplines as belonging to only experts or saints.

Disciplines develop character. They are a practical way to posture ourselves in aggressive receptivity to spiritual transformation--picture of kid catching ball at baseball game.

*a personal story about putting disciplines in my life.*

Notice how that was able to bring you into the desire to build the spiritual disciplines into your life? It would be good to do this as you teach other students to study the Scripture and to pray.

**Guidelines for Exercise**

The Christian life is not one of passivity. Passivity is not faith: it's either laziness or presumption. The disciplines help to reveal to us all the real desires of our hearts.

1. Train purposefully: We need to understand what it means to actually take on the character of Christ. This assumes we know what Christ was really like. More specifically, when taking on discipline we need to have in mind a particular aspect of character toward which we are working. "being more like Jesus" is a great slogan, but it can be too broad to be helpful.

2. Train specifically: Once we know our purpose, we must make our training as connected as possible to the change we are looking to make. i.e. doing leg exercises are a poor activity if what you are really lacking is upper body strength. Typically our tool box of disciplines is small (pray read the bible, fast). While those are fundamental exercises, we need to have the freedom to get more creative and specific.

3. Train corporately. The disciplines are often personal but never individularist. We need coaches, training partners and friends for mutual encouragement, accountably, and discernment.

**A person of only Exercise**

If you were mentoring a person who only strengthened the "exercise" side of the triangle they would also not be healthy. They’d probably be a legalist. Someone for whom religious activity itself was the goal rather then transformation. Exercises would probably become just a checklist with no joy. Might lead you to be critical of those not "performing" like you or to be a legalist. Sound like the Pharisees?

We need encounters with the Lord to add life to our disciplines and experiences give our exercises purpose.
ENCOUNTER

Definition: The experience of the supernatural presence of God

God wants to interact specifically with his sons and daughters. He desires to speak to us, to heal us, to deliver us from sin. We see throughout Scripture how one encounter with the unmediated presence of God changes the course of a believer’s life. That same encounter is available today.

Scripture:
1 Cor 2:1-5
For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. 3 I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. 4 My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, 5 so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power.

Is 64:1 “Oh that you would burst from the heavens and come down!”

Common misconceptions:

1. God only speaks through the bible: God is also relational

2. “God said it, I believe it, that settles it” - the faulty idea that the encounter is the only way God speaks to us. All our encounters need to be undergirded with scripture, with the exercises, with experience, in community etc

3. The work is done with when the “encounter” is over. We are not just thrill seekers. When God brings deliverance or healing often times after the encounter there are practical ways we need to continue to work it out in our life. Maybe changes need to happen or disciplines put in place. Discipline is deliverance lived out on a daily basis.

4. The experience will be dramatic. Not always. Often God speaks quietly and can be just as powerful. The story of Elijah in the OT when God spoke to him not in the earthquake or fire or windstorm but in the quiet small whisper.

5. Encounters with God are confined to a certain personality type. Not true.

6. I will lose control: Definitely not. The Spirit is one of order. He is a gentleman. We get the joy of co-operating with Him but He never over powers us.

Guidelines for Encounters

1. For the Christian the supernatural is often NATURAL. Don’t confuse bells and whistles for the activity of the Spirit. Jesus operates in the Spirit before thousands but also in quiet conversation.

2. Take discernment seriously. This is a subjective area. We can be incorrect as we watch for God’s activity. The supernatural needs to be grounded in a proper understanding of God’s word and the collective wisdom of His Body, the Church.

3. Stay humble, Encounters are not meant to puff us up with pride but to fill us with encouragement and joy. Its ok to ask for counsel saying something like “I think i’m experiencing something like this.. is that right”
4. Deliberately set aside times where you purposely open yourself up to the Spirit. Make yourself available, try new things. Maybe take a personal retreat, maybe be intentional during a worship time (go to the back, raise hands). Try a different body posture (kneel). Make space during your personal prayer time and ask the Spirit if has anything to share with you.

5. Trust God!

**Person of only Encounter**

You’ll recognize them right away. They go from retreat to retreat to conference to conference to concert to concert, looking for the high. The Saturday night at the Retreat is their favorite time of year, and they can’t wait to get there again. As the wind blows so do they. Though they have deep encounters with God, they seem to be some of the more flaky students you will mentor. They need the other two sides of the triangle to round themselves out. To even out those highs and lows and give them a better trajectory of growth. Also, this will help protect them from a hyper charismatic movement that could take them astray.

As you can tell, there is a lot going on but you can see why having all three sides of the triangle is the best way to open up for growth. You may have certain students in mind as you think through each side. I would encourage to cast a lot of vision as you teach them the other sides of the triangle and to think through the rest of your mentoring relationships and see how you can promote growth the best in each of your relationships. This tool is designed to help and encourage you in your mentoring relationships, not to heap law or make it harder for you. We hope you enjoy!
Golden Triangle

What is the Golden Triangle?

Experience

Exercise

Encounter

Why is this helpful?

What are the problems with the extremes?