

Spiritual Life With People

I grew up in a loving family that took me to church regularly. I was kind of raised in Jesus like a fish in water. I didn't really think about I too much because it was just a given. I got better than I deserved in the early days with safe people that loved me well. I was also a really shy kid. I liked my home but being out and about in the world felt really scary to me. I think early on in my school years I got teased a but and learned to stay quiet but flying low beneath the radar. If I didn't say much and didn't make waves, I would be able to maintain a sense of being safe and comfortable. And it worked pretty well for me in those early years. Thankfully I was able to make some friends and find my niche. I think that quiet inward disposition inclined me to a spiritual life from a young age. I can remember feeling a longing for God from really early on. But when I went off to college and decided to study ministry, and moved away from home that early fly beneath the radar thing really kicked into high gear. I really enjoyed my classes, but I stayed to myself a lot of the time. And I experienced this weird dynamic where I felt I was growing spiritually through study and prayer, but simultaneously I was growing more and more isolated and lonely. And that part of me was not growing. In fact it was kind of getting unhealthy. I felt depressed and stuck.

And I started to develop some compulsive habits in a lot of areas of my life. I was discouraged and I felt like I could see who I wanted to be and who God wanted me to be but I was stuck at the time and I was embarrassed to be stuck. I kept trying everything I knew how to get back on track but I couldn't make it happen. And I remember going to this healing prayer conference, it was kind of a charismatic deal. I thought well this will be interesting. And they opened the conference with an invitation to confession. They read confess your sins to one another that you may be healed. And then they had these prayer ministers on the side ready to hear your confession. And I thought oh heck no, I don't know these people and even if I did, I don't want to do this. I remember a different verse that didn't involve confessing to other people and said if you confess your sins he is willing and able to cleanse you of all unrighteousness. I'm going to go with that. Forget this, confess your sins to other people. And I sat and watched people go up and come back and with lightness and freedom. And I thought about the verse confess your sins and you will be healed. But I was too embarrassed. So I just sat

there and about 3 days later I went up. I went to this lady and decided to go for broke. I said there's stuff I have to confess and spewed all the things I was about and it felt like God knows everything about you and he loved you. But there were parts of me that couldn't be healed. And that felt so scary. And so life giving at the same time. At the end of confession the lady called me by name and told me that God loved me. I couldn't hide and be still and hide and still be so life giving at the same time. I think there is a part of me that is tempted to do it myself but that oriented me toward a vulnerable spiritual community

It oriented me toward a spiritual community and helped me realize there isn't a spiritual community without it. It was the first time I'd seen church operate like a community. They were praying for mothers that were addicted to crack and and so I really prayed God give me a life like that. I got a summer job working at a summer camp in the church, but on Sundays people would work from nearby apartment complexes. It was the first time I had seen church operate like a family. They were prayers for moms that had been addicted, the room was filled with genuine praise. But the room was filled with joy. I asked God to give me a life in this neighborhood. And so I remember asked God to give me a community like that. I finished up college and went back to that neighborhood as quick as I could. My husband and I started a nonprofit and have been at it ever since. WE started helping kids make the jump from youth to adulthood, get a GED, get their finances together, get a job, get a card. Started affordable housing so that gentrification wouldn't purchase anyone's houses. It quickly turned into a residential program but then someone donated a swing and turned into an after school program and some summer camp programs. Eventually we realize kids needed job experiences and so we founded some snowcone businesses. Now there is affordable housing, kids programming. I have been drawn to church communities who don't hide, places where gut level reason is practiced and where people can show up in the midst of struggle and that is one of the reasons I feel at home in Mercy Street.