



Taylor Seminary

Our Mission: To develop Christ-minded leaders who make a difference in the world.

Ministry Event Study (MES) for FE/Internship Students

The Movement Toward Insight

Introduction:

- One of the strongest drives within the human experience is the need to understand, to make sense of life.
- Whenever we ponder, muse, analyse, or reflect on an even it is for the purpose of finding meaning.
- Admittedly there are many events that are experienced without the search for meaning, they are often the routine events of life when we seem to be on “auto pilot.”
- There are however, other events that seem to draw us into reflection; they are the “double-take” moments, the “aha” moments, the life-changing moments.
- The assumption of Theological Reflection is that God is at work in all the events of life, and while not all events have the same weight of meaning, all events are worth pondering.

Hindrances to Theological Reflection

- Within the wide scope of faith traditions, some groups are more open to and more practiced in the discipline of reflection.
- For some, even the word itself conjures up images yoga positioning, mind emptying, and sense numbing.
- Admittedly, within evangelical communities the idea and practice of theological reflection is a foreign concept.
- Yet even here one may speak of the spiritual discipline of meditation, quickly clarifying the assumption that this is not like eastern religions.

- Although evangelicals may identify what is not practiced, there is also the lack of clarity as to the importance and value of theological reflection.
- However, theological reflection is not as uncommon as one might think.
- In reality, theological reflection takes place whenever one seeks meaning or understanding in the midst of the events of life.
- When tragedy strikes and one asks, “Why?”, theological reflection is engaged.
- When the unexpected occurs and one asks, “How?”, theological reflection takes place.
- When decisions are faced and one asks, “What?”, theological reflection is practiced.

- The practice of theological reflection is not as foreign or unusual as one might suggest, and the opportunities for theological reflection are found throughout the experience of every day.
- At the same time however, even where theological reflection is practiced, whether subliminal or intentional, there are certain conditions or assumptions that hinder the effectiveness of the act.

Certitude

- Taking the stance of certitude (CERTAINTY, ASSURANCE, FREEDOM FROM DOUBT), one interprets the experiences of life, only in relation to what has already been decided.
- Prior assumptions, convictions, beliefs or interpretations provide not only the foundation but the boundaries for interpretation.

- When confronted by a new experience, what has happened in the past, not only guides but determines how the experience is interpreted or how the interpretation is applied.
- If the new experience does not fit into the patterns of the past, it is ignored or denied.
- Within the position of certitude, tradition reigns supreme Theological tradition, social tradition, cultural tradition, even relational tradition takes precedence over all things and determines in advance how the experiences of life will be interpreted.
- Warning of the danger of certitude is not to be taken as an attack on the theological heritage one may possess.
- Rather it is a challenge to not miss the opportunity to learn or grow just because the experience is different than what has been experienced in the past.
- In the end, theological reflection may reinforce, challenge, or change what one believes, however none of this will happen while assuming the position of certitude. See: Acts 10: 9-48

Self-Assurance

- Unlike the standpoint of certitude in which past positions, interpretations, and convictions hold ultimate power, within the standpoint of self-assurance self is supreme.
- Here the individual becomes their own guide, rejecting all others and ignoring every other influence.
- Self-assurance relies solely on personal perspectives, personal convictions, personal feelings to the neglect of all others
- Having interpreted life from a singular perspective, one accepts or rejects or embraces the thoughts or opinions of others only to the degree that it fits their own perspective.
- Every opinion that differs is deemed to be wrong without discussion or debate.
- From the position of self-assurance, every experience stands isolated and is interpreted independent of all others.
- Here there is no effort to conform to a theological tradition and historical perspectives, even as recent as yesterday, are of little importance. See: Luke 12:13-21

Collective Dangers

- Although these may not be the only hindrances to theological reflection, they certainly are common and dominate.
- Likewise, each has its own inherent dangers.
- Standing in the position of certitude, one so seeks to replicate or emulate the perspectives of a given tradition, there is no room for growth.
- Any inherent value or opportunity embedded in a given experience is only validated by narrow and singular conformity.
- Standing in the position of self-assurance every other thought or perspective is rejected and individualism reigns.
- All other influences --- family, culture, society, faith --- are routinely rejected as unnecessary artificially imposed models of interpretation.
- Both mindless repetition and routine dismissal serve as effective barriers to any form of theological reflection and the potential of subsequent growth.
There is however an alternative.

Exploration

- From the perspective of exploration one enters the event as both a participant and observer.
- Here influences are welcomed and embraced.
- Here historical perspectives, interpretations and understandings are valued.
- Here the opinions and viewpoints of others are welcomed.
- This then is the Movement Toward Insight
- Here we move through five parts: **experience, feeling, images, insight, and action.**
- As Patricia Killen and John de Beer suggest:
When we enter our experience, we encounter our feelings.
When we pay attention to those feelings, images arise.
Considering and questioning those images may spark insight.
Insight leads, if we are willing and ready, to action.

(Killen & de Beer, The Art of Theological Reflection, p. 21)

From Experience to Experience

1. Select an **experience** – Identify a recent experience that will become the focus of reflection.
 - An event or experience has both an inner and outer dimension.
 - The inner dimension has to do with: feelings, thoughts, attitudes, and hopes
 - The outer dimension includes: people, places, circumstances, and culture.
 - In order to understand the experience, as one begins the movement toward insight, it is necessary to re-enter the experience, to pay attention to both the inner and outer dimensions.
 - Re-entering the experience we observe and reflect without making judgements or coming to conclusions.
2. Reflect on the experience using the acronym N.A.M.E. (Narrate, Analysis, Meaning, Experience).

NARRATE

1. **Narrate** – Write the story factually avoiding elaboration, interpretation of application. The narrative must be clear, concrete, accurate, thorough, and objective. Answer the following questions in the narrative:
 - 1) Who was involved?
 - 2) What happened?
 - 3) Where did the event take place?
 - 4) When did the event take place?
 - 5) How did the event unfold?

Whenever we re-enter an experience we discover it to be filled with emotions.

2. **Feelings** and emotions often reflect a sense of importance.
 - For example, an event may be as simple as driving to work or school.
 - At this point there are few emotions, however if while driving you are involved in an accident, or witness a hit-and-run, many emotions or feelings arise.
 - The event has suddenly become important.
 - The expression of feelings may be physiological; and while people are wired differently, and respond differently, the more emotional the response the more significant the event.
 - Moving to insight it is important to register one's feelings and see the range of emotions.
 - Once again, as the narrative unfolds, this is not the time to draw conclusions or make judgements.
 - Rather this remains an objective level of insight.
 - It is however, possible to identify how feelings were treated in the event.
 - One may see how feelings were denied, suppressed, ignored, or controlled.
 - This too is a valuable insight, telling as much about the person in the event as the event itself
3. **Images** symbolize our experience, they serve as reminders, as sign posts.
 - Images reinforce both facts and meanings.
 - Like a picture, an image speaks volumes.
 - Finding an image that illustrates one's story is like finding a good sermon illustration.
 - In isolation the image has little significance, however when meaning is attached, the image becomes important and helpful in the move to insight.

ANALYSIS

Assumptions: Pay attention.

1. God is at work.
2. God invites us to be present and participate in His work.

3. What God is doing and what God seeks to accomplish is far more important than what we seek to do or accomplish.
4. Understanding and participating in the work of God is not easy nor automatic, rather it requires practice and purpose.
5. The practice of understanding and participating is engaged through Theological Reflection.
6. The purpose of Theological Reflection is refocused decisions, direction and action.
7. Theological Reflection is neither the beginning nor the end, rather it is a part of the process of moving from experience to experience.

- Pay attention to Scripture
- What are the Biblical/theological issues found in the event?
- What passages of Scripture speak to these issues?
- What do the passages of Scripture seem to say about the issue?

- Pay attention to Tradition
- How have these passages been interpreted historically? How has this issue been treated historically?
- Is there a tradition of interpretation within your denominational perspective?

- Pay attention to Culture
- What is the perspective on this issue within culture today?
- Is there a cultural debate taking place today? Has the situation of today influences how Scripture is being interpreted?

- Pay attention to Community
- How has this issue been treated within community of faith?
- What have your trusted friends/influencers spoken to this issue?
- Is there a sense of agreement or debate amongst your friends/influencers?

MEANING

Meaning – Bring this situation and your analysis into intersection with your faith and **insight** is gained.

- What insights did you gain as you examined Scripture?
- What did you learn as you studied the interpretation of Scripture?
- Has the focus issue taken on any new meaning or significance?
- Is there any tension between your understanding of the issue and the perspective of culture?
- As you discussed this issue with others was there a sense of agreement or difference?
- What have you learned through this exercise, about yourself, about those you work with, about God?
- What impact will your reflection have on your faith?
- Affirmation – Reinforce what you believe
- Adaptation – Adapt what you believe;
- modify what you believe;
- rearrange or change what you believe;

EXPERIENCE

Experience – The narrative takes a decided direction into the future insight is incomplete until **action** is engaged.

- The life of the believer, the character of ministry is not merely about knowledge or understanding.
- The value of knowledge and understanding is seen in the resulting action.
- The issue is not merely what one knows but what one does with that knowledge.

Questions that should lead to Action:

- 1) What obstacles stand in the way of resulting action?
- 2) What planning is necessary (what/who/where/when)?
- 3) How will your faith-style be different in the future?

Moving from Experience to Experience

Here the loop is closed as one moves from experience to experience.