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Statement of Faith and Spiritual Autobiography

I believe that in and through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ I have been rescued from despair and ruin. God reached out to all of humanity with his son so that we may live wholly and free. I respond to this claim by simply loving God with all of my heart, soul, mind, and strength, and loving my neighbor as myself. I seek to serve the world by taking part in the gathering, equipping, and sending out of other disciples for service to Jesus Christ in the world, especially to those who live in depressed urban environments. I uphold the Westminster Confession of Faith as one that describes my own rootedness in Scripture. My heart breaks for adolescents, and I know beyond any doubt that I am called to serve them.

Three key life experiences depict the ongoing formation of my spiritual autobiography: the tragic divorce of parents, my relationship with my professor and mentor, Dr. Stinespring, and the theological and spiritual formation that I received at Princeton Theological Seminary. These experiences are certainly not the apex of my spiritual autobiography, nor do they define it. Even at this moment, I can think of other instances in time that have profoundly shaped me. Yet, these three chapters tell a grander story within the overarching narrative of my life.

I remember very little from living in Sacramento, but nearly all of my lingering memories contain vibrant and dynamic images of my father playing with me, teaching me, laying with me, and loving me. At the age of five, however, my father left me, along with my mother and younger brother.

I know very few details about the divorce – what led to it, how it came about, the words exchanged in the process – but what I do know, all too well in fact, is the fallout that ensued. Immediately following the divorce, my mother moved her newly reformed family across the United States. We hunkered with her family in West Virginia, experiencing lonely days and lonely nights, no phone calls from our father, no more birthday cards, no visits, nothing. Its consequences subsequently instilled within me a deep longing for security, love, leadership, and guidance, and thereby shaping my early understanding of the nature and essence of God. I questioned the kind of god who claimed to be all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-loving, yet snatch a boy from his father. How could a god like this not know the love for which a little boy needed from his father? How could this god let this event take place and destroy a young family? Furthermore, how could this god not work his apparent ‘power’ to reunite a father to his little boys? This kind of god meant nothing to me, and I wanted nothing to do with matters of faith...

...Until college, when a man named Dr. Stinespring rocked my world. We nervously walked into *our* very first class at Alderson Broaddus College... together – he the professor, me the student – both freshmen, both anxiously anticipating college life. Over the course of our ‘freshman year,’ he took me under his care, and together over the next four years, we wrestled with questions concerning the very nature and essence of God as attested in Scripture. These conversations exchanged under the banner of friendship commenced an unraveling of my hidden fears and *MIS*conceived notions about God. With patience, he helped me to unlearn an unfaithful view of God and work through the reverberating emotions of my parents' divorce.

His friendship and guidance helped me sort out those complicated aspects of my life. He introduced me to the world of theology – how to think about it, understand it, interpret it, and live it in everyday life. He also



created a safe space for me to ask questions, seek answers, and risk opening myself up to trust both God and others who genuinely care about me. Yet, his greatest impact upon my life has been and will continue to be his witness to the unconditional love of God for the world. He invested his time and energy into me, teaching me the ways of manhood and how a male Christian leader ought to live. He walked with me in humility and grace. He loved me in the way a father *ought to* love his son. Our relationship bore witness to the free and sacrificial love of God. Without any doubt, I know that God placed him in my life to show me the way of a man truly living after God's own heart, and he urged me to do the same...

...Which led me to Princeton Theological Seminary. Here, I have wrestled God. I have realized my greatest accomplishments and fears within those hallowed halls. This community, however, comprised of professors and students showed me the beauty and mystery of the love of Jesus Christ, and continually taught me about his grace and forgiveness. Here, I was introduced to the nature and purpose of the Church, the Christian community called to bear witness to its Lord, and here, I fell in love with the Bride of Christ. My year-long field education placement mentor at ORB Community Church encouraged me to think long and hard about the doctrine of mission. Additionally, my service at Urban Promise opened my eyes to God's broken heart for those who live in depressed urban environments. I fell in love with those whom Christ speaks of so many times in his Gospels: the fatherless, the widow, the orphan, the hungry, the naked, the blind, the lame, and the oppressed! Moreover, I owe a great debt to those professors who freely and graciously walked with me and patiently endured my questions: Kenda Creasy Dean, Darrell Guder, John Flett, Gordon Mikoski, and Richard Osmer. Each of these individuals challenged me to drink more deeply of the Gospel in ways that Dr. Stinespring hoped that one day I would do.

My life experiences combined with my rich theological education have profoundly shaped my understanding of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and those whom I am called to serve: the urban poor and homeless, adolescents, and the emerging adult age group. My hope and prayer is that my story can be a witness to the redeeming love and grace of the Risen Lord Jesus Christ.