



Dancing the One-Step:

Pursuing God after Seminary

I love the rain. I mean love with a giddiness that often turns into a jig and sometimes a barefoot run in falling water. Might as well burst out in song as Gene Kelly: “I’m singin’ in the rain, just singin’ in the rain. What a glorious feeling, I’m happy again!” Most of the time, I restrain myself from singing, but not from jumping in the puddles.

I have a friend who also finds happiness when the Weather app predicts imminent raindrops. One time we anticipated a week of storms due to the forecast, and we immediately planned a day inside filled with reading novels, taking teatime, and cuddling up next to the TV’s fireplace image. Within a day of these preparations, our excitement was washed away by the dreadful prediction of sunny days all week. “Preposterous,” my friend texted. I blamed Texas.

CARRYING AN ERASER

How easy for our plans to disappear as quickly as the swap of a cloud for a bright sun. I enjoy planning, which means I have a knack for making everything fit snugly and neatly into my blue planner. However, life tends to ignore our plans, and I’m learning to carry an eraser.

Many ministries leaders warned me and my fellow seminary students about the false expectations of landing the perfect job after graduating. I heard seasoned alums in classes and chapel share stories of their thriving ministries often built by suffering, loss, and disappointment.

Yet, as a student in the throes of memorizing sermons, translating Jonah in Hebrew, and studying more Greek paradigms, I only tended to envision seasons of recognition and a responsive audience. Much like the blind disciples, I skipped the suffering and only saw an empty throne filled with the possibility of my honored self (Mark 10:32–45).

FIRST YEAR OUT

When I graduated and began my first full-time job at my home church, I thought I had received an invitation into the Promised Land. Done with classes, debt-free, and full of homework-free nights, I jumped into a position I soon found to be ill-fitting, challenging, and humbling.

I had completed the requirements for a ThM, and for the first time in my life, I felt I could not do the work essential to my new job. It felt discouraging and debilitating. Many times, I sat at my desk in defeat, holding back tears.

The first year out of seminary proved one of the most trying years of my life. The vision of landing a sweet job, possibly finding my-long-lost-not-yet-found husband, and living the “stress-free” life evolved quickly into one of the fictional happy endings that lean on my dusty bookshelves.

I went to counseling, completed a twelve-step program, started medicine for anxiety and depression—switched those meds multiple times in nine months—ended a couple of dating relationships, and to top it all off, my job at the church ended abruptly. My ThM degree was not supposed to lead to these circumstances!

Finding myself stretched between the past and future with an unwillingness to find my footing in the present, I spent many evenings during this first year after seminary sobbing on my bedroom floor. Peace seemed fleeting in a reality I could not exegete. Life proved disappointing. Uncomfortable. Lonely.

I wasted countless mornings in bed weighed down by impending panic attacks. With a tightened chest and pseudo-closed eyes, I made it a habit to roll over to the other pillow, hoping to escape the unwelcome responsibilities that would accost me when my feet hit the floor.

LEARNING TO ONE-STEP

And yet, as I sit here writing these words, tears from a content heart trickle down my face and into my smile. I’m happier than I’ve felt in a long time. Still single. Still on meds. But for the first time in years, I continue to learn to enjoy the today (Matt 6:24–34). God crafted this day for me with moments that will soon grow into memories. For so many years, I passed by the present for the hope of dreams—now turned to dust.

What caused the transition from a tear-stained face to the smile of contentment?

While searching for a job, God introduced me to the simplicity of stopping for a conversation and

not rushing to the next task on my to-do list. He ushered in the discipline of sleep and taught me that my body needs three meals a day. I even learned how to breathe better. (You’d think an adult would have these skills down by now.)

In short, God helped me implement simple steps I had lacked in my walk with Him. And I learned all of this from the simple

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concept of “one-step.” Many folks have heard of the two-step country dance, and most have certainly seen the three-step waltz, but what about the “one-step?” What is it?

While journeying through the twelve-step recovery program at my church, I sat with a small group of women who always encouraged each other with these five words: “Do the next right thing.” When I heard those five words each Thursday night, my mind learned that with a desperate dependence on our powerful God, I could take the next right step—the following “one-step.” And my disappointments would no longer overwhelm me to the point of paralysis.

Many days my one-step looked like a roll out of bed or stopping work to eat lunch or not canceling an early-morning gym class. Sometimes it was answering an inconvenient phone call or initiating a difficult conversation to strengthen a relationship. Some days I only had enough strength to share an embarrassing moment with my counselor. Other days, I could only pray.

To determine my next step, I approached each day in light of our Savior’s imminent return. One day while jobless, I read Acts 20: 22, 24, and Paul’s words stayed with me: “I don’t know what awaits me, ... But my life is worth nothing to me unless I use it for finishing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others the Good News about the wonderful grace of God” (NLT). Paul’s Spirit-filled statement remains in the background of my iPhone, reminding me that my steps must remain oriented toward the work Christ has assigned me before His return.

SAVORING TODAY

For many years, my hope was built on a dream of a sweet husband and a ministry that was the perfect job. Through this challenging past year, God helped plant those hopes in their proper place—as undeserved gifts, not ultimate goals (Jas 4:13–15). Some of my friends’ current seasons might taste as sweet as Texas tea right now, and if so, that’s great! But some people are genuinely struggling.

How do we take steps forward in an unwanted season? How do we live well in discomfort?

When my jobless bank account dwindled, and bills continued their steady pace, I noticed God shifting my faulty mentality that the best life would someday arrive. I learned to embrace the belief that this “best life” is present in seeking to love Him with all my mind, heart, and strength today.

Life is not about feeling accomplished. It’s not even about feeling anything. It’s about an all-out, all-in pursuit of the One who pursues His children. I seek the One, with my intellect, desires, choices, and actions. With my whole being, I follow Him in a step-by-step pursuit. During the time without a job, God opened my eyes to something so ordinary that I can’t believe I lived blindly for years. He helped me see the beauty of today.

So let’s savor today!

Today is the day the LORD specially planned before He created time. So let us rejoice and be glad in it (Ps 118:24). Life is where life exists in the present. Sounds obvious, doesn’t it? Then why spend time striving to pull back to the past or zoom forward to the future?

God did not design His children to live in the past or spring forward to the year 3000. Discontentment will grow when people try to live fully in the previous “perfect” past or future. Anxiety makes its home entirely in those self-fulfilling seasons.

Do you know why the next season always seems better? Because dreams for it delete the main character of pain. But for today, and all the Christmases and Good Fridays to come, the pain will play a part while on this earth.

However, because of Christ’s Resurrection, there’s also the main character of hope that should permeate present thoughts that help in gaining perspective in pain. We, as Christ’s brothers and sisters, have inherited a future home and shalom. There will be a perfect day. So let’s embrace today’s cross or celebration in whatever God has planned.

THE NEXT RIGHT STEP

The next right step God has might include doing things that seem mundane. I try not to discount the ordinary days. I think about a baby born in a manger and raised in the home of a carpenter. That same baby grew into a man who faithfully taught truth and loved well—loving to the point of death. He died and rose again to redeem His people. Small things add up—all ordained by an all-knowing God, whose ways are higher. He doesn’t ask for understanding. He desires us to seek to know and to trust Him.

Like the crazy weather of Texas that can bring snow in April, a summer Christmas day, and ten tornados on a Sunday night, sometimes the seasons of life hit unplanned and unmarked. As a new graduate, I thought I had an idea of what came next after walking across the stage. Little did I know.

I don’t understand why everything happened as it did, but I’m glad for it because of what I’ve gained—an appreciation for today and a stronger trust in my God. He created His people as desperately-dependent beings who live best in a one-step dance with Him. And when I dance with Him, I find contentment, and it always feels like rain.



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