

At the Doorstep of Orthodoxy

A NeuroFaith® Bridge from Evangelical Roots



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I woke in the middle of the night, stirred in that familiar way when something deeper is moving beneath the surface. As often happens in those quiet hours, my mind began to gather threads, things that have happened, things that are happening, and to make meaning of them.

A Return, and a Setting

Part of that reflection is rooted in where I am right now. I am in Washington, D.C., staying with my dear friend Ned and his wonderful family for several days before heading up to a medical conference where I have the honor of speaking again this year on NeuroFaith® and its application to building resilience in adolescents. Being invited back for a second year is not something I take lightly. It is deeply meaningful to me. But what has made this time especially significant is the opportunity to reconnect with Ned.

After ten years, here we are again, sitting together, sharing life, and I have had the gift of being welcomed into his home, spending time with his two lovely daughters and his remarkable and beautiful wife, Sabine.

Ned is, in every sense, an extraordinary man. He served in the United States Army as a medic, married Sabine, and after a season out of the military returned as an officer and chaplain. Along the way he was ordained as a priest in the Orthodox Christian Church. After the time he and I worked together in therapy, he went on to serve in a federal capacity helping lead counseling efforts and continues even now to advocate for causes such as combating sex trafficking and other forms of malfeasance in the world. Ned has never been without a cause. That has always been true of him.

What He Taught Me Without Saying It

For those who do not know him, he has had a massive influence on my life. I wrote about him just days ago in a blog, reflecting on what he gave to me during a time when my life had come apart. He stood with me then. He helped me when I could not stand on my own. Looking back now, I realize that even then he was teaching me principles I would later come to articulate in NeuroFaith®. He embodied Dr. Steven Porges' principal of polyvagal co-regulation, the healing power of presence, Dr. Dan Seigal's model of Interpersonal Neurobiology, and what we now understand through HeartMath® and neurocardiology. He did not teach these as abstract concepts. He lived them.

The Forgotten Ingredient: Cost

But perhaps the most important thing he taught me was something that is often neglected in modern Christianity, and that is the idea of cost. We speak often of grace, and rightly so. The grace of Christ is a gift, freely given, unearned, and transformative. But somewhere along the way, we have begun to treat Jesus as if He were a vending machine, something we access easily, expecting comfort and relief while remaining largely unchanged in how we live.

Ned challenged that in me. He helped me understand that while we do not earn salvation, there is a cost to living it out. The cross was not comfortable. Christ's suffering was real, embodied, and costly. And when we step into a life with Him, we are invited into something deeper than belief alone. We are invited into participation, yes even participation with what He experienced on the cross.

There is a cost to transformation, and paradoxically, it is in that cost that something becomes sanctified in us.

Healing Requires Participation

I remember during one of the darkest seasons of my life, when I was struggling profoundly, Mondays were especially difficult. Those were the days when everything seemed to collapse inward. Instead of allowing me to remain stuck in that internal spiral, Ned encouraged me to do something. He sent me to the Union Gospel Mission.

On those Mondays, when I felt at my worst, I went and served. I hugged the homeless. I prayed with them. I held their hands. I listened. I mopped floors and cleaned dishes. It was not glamorous and it was not easy, but it was deeply healing. It was not the only thing that helped me recover, but it was essential.

He also taught me something simple and profound. When I found myself caught in self-condemnation, he would challenge me to act. If I could not resolve it internally, then I would go to a church and lay it at the cross. If the church was closed, lay it on the steps of the church. Do something. Engage the process.

For healing is not passive. It requires movement. It requires that you show up and participate.

A Living Liturgy

Yesterday, I stepped into an Orthodox Christian service for the first time. Ned had prepared me. He told me we would be standing, that in the early church people stood, that worship was not designed for comfort but for participation.

Even so, I was not fully prepared for what I experienced.

The environment was both intimate and beautiful, but more than that, it was alive. Under the guidance of Father John and Father Madai, the liturgy unfolded in a way that was deeply engaging. Everyone stood. Everyone participated. Everyone moved. The entire service required presence, attention, and involvement.

There was no passivity. It was not something to watch. It was something to enter into. And as I stood there, I realized I was experiencing the very thing Ned had been teaching me all those years ago.

Faith is not something we consume. It is something we live.

NeuroFaith®, Trauma, and the Image of God

As I reflected on all of this, something deeper began to crystallize in me. NeuroFaith® is not a passive model. It is an embodied, participatory process. Just as we are called to embody Christ and live in alignment with the Holy Spirit, healing itself requires embodiment. It requires movement. It requires engagement.

We do not heal by observation alone. We heal by participation.

This is where the Orthodox understanding of the human person resonates deeply with me. We are made in the image of God. We are not inherently bad as evangelicals would say. What we inherit are the consequences of a broken world, a turning away, a fracture in relationship.

In many ways, trauma operates similarly. It is not who we are. It is what has happened and what has shaped us. It leaves residue. It creates patterns. It can separate us from connection, from others, and even from our sense of God. But it does not define our essence.

That distinction matters.

Because if we believe we are fundamentally broken and evil at our core, then healing becomes nearly impossible to access. But if we understand that something has happened to us, and perhaps also through us, that has created distance, then the work becomes one of restoration, of returning, of reclaiming the image that was there all along. Both acknowledge need for Christ for redemption but the condition within is different.

There are modern frameworks, including certain interpretations within critical race theory, that at times emphasize an inherited condition tied to identity itself. While I understand the historical concerns those frameworks attempt to address, I find myself drawn instead to a model that preserves both responsibility and dignity. In NeuroFaith®, we are not defined as inherently bad because of what came before us. Rather, we inherit consequences, we are shaped by forces beyond our control, and we are still called into responsibility for how we live and respond.

Responsibility without dignity leads to shame. Dignity without responsibility leads to passivity. NeuroFaith® holds both.

And that is not a passive process. It requires ownership. It requires responsibility. Not blame, but responsibility. It requires us to engage the very things we might prefer to avoid, to move toward healing rather than simply asking for it, to participate in grace rather than merely receiving it.

As I stood in that Orthodox Divine liturgy, fully engaged, fully present, not watching but participating, it struck me that this is what both faith and healing have always required.

Not spectatorship, but embodiment.