



Sanga Sanga Pastors' Conference



Training in Spiritual Formation

Introduction: An American seminary student was asked why he was going into the ministry and his

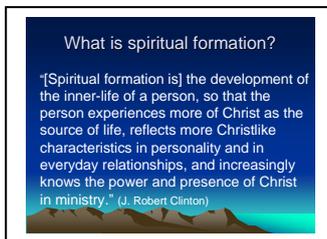
reply was basically, "It's as good a job as any."

Why is it commonly said of some Bible College students that they didn't receive their call until the results of their high school examinations came out?

These two examples should make us pause and think about the nature of the ministry.

The main work of the church is spiritual. The qualifications for elders in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 are primarily spiritual in nature. To ignore the spiritual qualifications and the spiritual life of the elder is to sow the seeds of destruction, discouragement, division and dissension within the church.

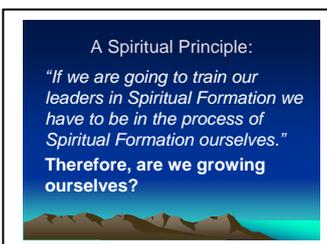
Therefore, the first area the multi-church pastor (MCP) should focus on is spiritual formation in the lives of his elders. Paul instructed Timothy to "train yourself to be godly" (1 Timothy 4:7b). This is in line with the equipping responsibility of the pastor as outlined by Paul in Ephesians 4:12-13.



What is Spiritual formation? There are many definitions but here is a useful one from J. Robert Clinton:

[Spiritual formation is] the development of the inner-life of a person, so that the person experiences more of Christ as the source of life, reflects more Christlike characteristics in personality and in everyday relationships, and increasingly knows the power and presence of Christ in ministry.ⁱ

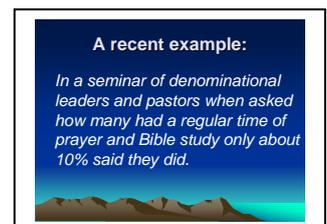
Spiritual formation is concerned primarily with the inner-life or one's walk with God. This would include private Bible study and prayer life. It deals with a person's relationship with Christ and the development of Christlike qualities in his life. It is concerned with ministry that is empowered by Christ through the outflowing of the Holy Spirit. It is this kind of spiritual life development that will make the elder an effective leader in the Church.ⁱⁱ



There is a Spiritual principle that we need to be aware of:

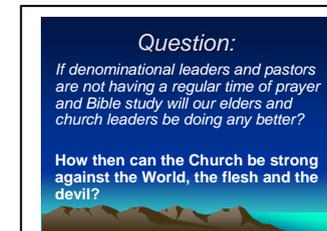
"If we are going to train our leaders in Spiritual Formation we have to be in the process of Spiritual Formation ourselves."

Therefore, are we growing ourselves?



Let me show you what I mean by giving a recent example: ***In a seminar of denominational leaders and pastors when asked how many had a regular time of prayer and Bible study only about 10% said they did.***

Question: *If denominational leaders and pastors are not having a regular time of prayer and Bible study will our elders and church leaders be doing any better?*



How then can the Church be strong against the world, the flesh and the devil?

Because we are so busy, and too busy, to spend time with the Lord we can

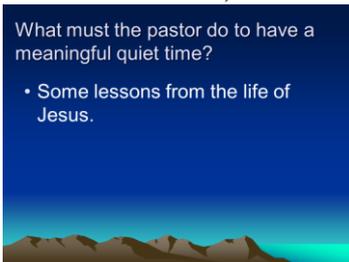
easily become weary, and exhausted and even burn ourselves out and we can fall into sin as we are too weak to resist temptation.

We are not going to look at the subject of burnout this week, but in the MCP book there is a section on symptoms and the cure for burnout on pages 11-13.

How do we avoid burn out? By continuing to grow spiritually. By continuing to go through the process of Spiritual Formation.

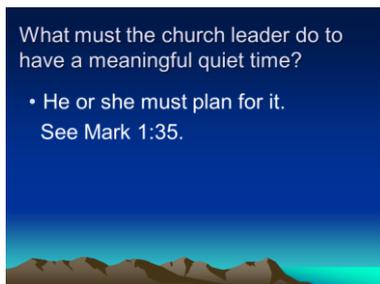
And one of the most important parts of this is our quiet time with the Lord.

When I was a lecturer at Moffat College of Bible we had mentoring groups and from time to time I would meet with a student and often I found, along with the other lecturers, that these Bible College students didn't really know how to have a quiet time with the Lord. It was one of their biggest struggles. Some didn't know how, and others simply struggled to have a quiet time at all.



So, I believe we can learn some **lessons from the life of Jesus** in all of this. Let's turn to Mark 1:34-37. (READ)

This brings us to the very important question of the pastor's relationship with God.



What must he do to have a meaningful quiet time?

[He must plan for it.]

Look at Mark 1:35. (READ) "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed."

Now I don't think that I am reading too much into this incident in Jesus' life. But I believe it shows that Jesus planned for his quiet time with God. This didn't happen by accident.

What we read here was something that Jesus intended to happen and it happened because he planned for it to happen. If you don't plan to have your quiet time you will rarely have it.

What did Jesus plan here? I believe he planned the time. Very early in the morning. While it was still dark in the morning—Jesus got up. I don't know about you, but I don't usually get up in the morning when it is still dark unless I plan to do so.

Illustration: When I was on the staff at Rift Valley Academy I had an early morning meeting with one of the other men on the staff. We meet at 6:00 A.M. on Tuesday morning. So I had to plan to get up for those times. And when I did, it was cold and it is dark—and I didn't really want to wake up. But I was committed, so before I went to bed I would take off my watch and I set it on a night stand so that when the alarm went off I had to get up and I had to turn it off.

Now, I don't know what Jesus used as an alarm clock—but somehow, He planned to get up early and go off and pray. **And that is what we must do as well.**

Secondly, I noticed that He planned not only a time, but I notice that He planned something else.

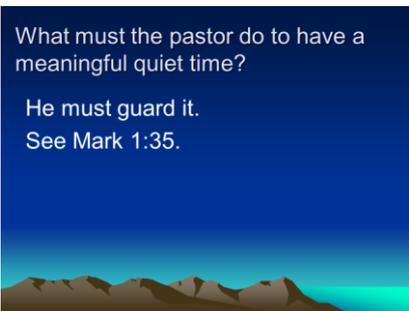
What else did He plan? He planned a place.

Notice he left the house. Why did he do that? If he hadn't left the house what do you think would have happened?

Just what happened in verses 36 and 37? Look at what it says: "Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!"

Someone would have come looking for Him in the house and would have interrupted His prayer time and His fellowship with His father.

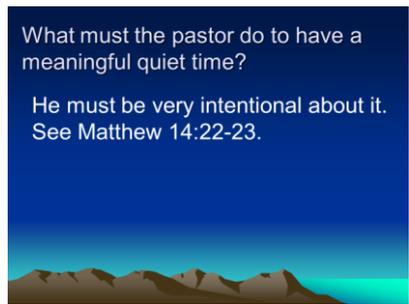
And so He planned a time and a place.



And once we plan it we must guard it.

So what are some practical things can be done to plan and to guard? Put this into your diary. Block off times in the day when you can have some time.

And the emphasis should be on doing it daily rather than how long you do it. Fifteen minutes each day is better than none for four days and then an hour on the fifth.

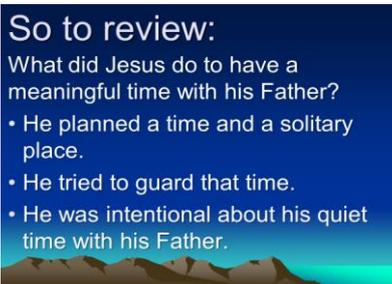


And Jesus was very intentional about it. Look at Matthew 14:22-23. (READ)

Sometimes Jesus had His quiet time early in the morning and sometimes it was late at night. So sometimes it can be a matter of when you can fit it in. But the important thing is consistency.

And that is what we must do as well, as very busy pastors. We must be intentional about our quiet time or devotions. We must plan a time and a place where we won't be interrupted.

Sometimes it might be that you will have shorter periods of time throughout the day. My wife had a friend who would take time out throughout the day and have what she called a "spiritual snack." It was just short periods of reading something and praying. But it helped to keep her close to the Lord.

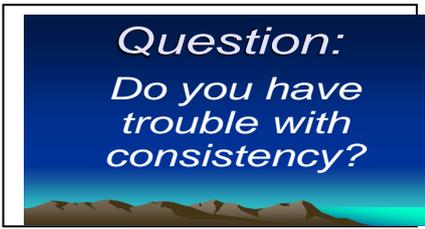


So let's review these lessons from Jesus' Quiet times:

He planned a time and a solitary place.

He tried to guard that time.

He was intentional about his quiet time with his Father.



Question: Do you have trouble with Consistency? Let me just make a note about consistency.

When I was a young pastor I struggled with being consistent with my time with the Lord. Then I went to a seminar where the speaker challenged us on our daily time with the Lord.

He asked us to make a vow to the Lord to read the Bible for at least five minutes a day. He said, “Don’t promise an hour or 30 minutes because you won’t be able to keep that vow. It is too much and too long.”

But a 5 minute vow you can keep. And you can do more than 5 minutes. But at least you will do five minutes.

So I made that vow. But habits are hard to break. And sometimes I would get into bed late at night and I hadn’t read my Bible that day—and it was like the Holy Spirit would whisper, “*You didn’t read your Bible today.*”

And so I would get out of bed, turn the light on, read for 5 minutes and drop back into bed. Do you think I got too much out of that reading? Of course not!

But what was happening? I was starting to develop consistency. And over the last 40 years or so since I made that vow, there have been very few days that I have not had time in the Word with the Lord.



So, these are Five-Minutes towards eternity that helps us to focus on eternal values each day. So here are the steps:

- Promise the Lord that you will read the Bible for at least 5 minutes a day.
- You can do more!
- It will help you to be more consistent.
- The Holy Spirit will remind you of your commitment if you forget.
- Only make this commitment if you are serious!

Now that we have dealt with our own Spiritual Formation as Pastors we need to look at

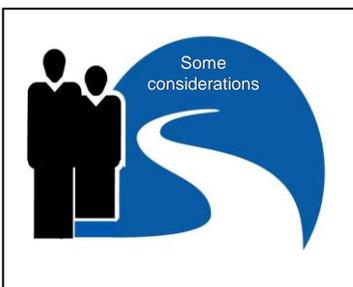
The Church Leader’s Spiritual Formation



and it is path you will walk together.



You see, as a Pastor, it is your responsibility to help your leaders grow spiritually. Being an elder or a church leader is spiritual work. It is a high and holy calling.



This leads us to look at some considerations.

The first area the multi-church pastor (MCP) should focus on is spiritual formation in the lives of his church leaders. Paul instructed Timothy to “train yourself to be godly” (1 Timothy 4:7b). This is in line with the

equipping responsibility of the pastor as outlined by Paul in Ephesians 4:12-13.

Although the pastor should start with spiritual formation, it is not a topic or skill that is taught to the church leaders only one time before moving on to something else. It is an issue that must be addressed on an ongoing basis.

The Need for Spiritual Formation

"The need for such spiritual formation is obvious, since otherwise Church leadership would be exercised in a purely technical way. Ministry would degenerate into the work of functionaries. We must always be aware that any kind of ministry is at the same time a witness of our depth of faith or our lack of faith."
 —Fritz Lobinger

To train leaders in the area of spiritual formation is to lay the foundation for a fruitful and effective ministry in the church. Fritz Lobinger writes: ***“The need for such spiritual formation is obvious, since otherwise Church leadership would be exercised in a purely technical way. Ministry would degenerate into the work of functionaries. We must always be aware that any kind of ministry is at the same time a witness of our depth of faith or our lack of faith.”***

Areas of spiritual growth that should be addressed:

- The development of personal, private prayer
- The development of a truly Christian life-style
- The development of a realization that people around them need God and should be helped to find him
- The development of general religious knowledge (basic theology, etc.)
- The development and integration of a concern for socio-political issues with spiritual life

What are the spiritual needs of growth that should be addressed among church leaders in spiritual formation? Little research in this area has been done in Africa. However, **Fritz Lobinger** suggests the following from his own experience:

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- The development of a truly Christian life-style
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- The development and integration of a concern for socio-political issues with spiritual life

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- The development of a critical, reflective mentality
- The development of an awareness and a response to the fact that the marriage relationship plays an important role in spiritual life [Note: 1 Peter 3:7]

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The ideal person to do the training in spiritual formation is the pastor.

Ideally the Pastor should do the Spiritual Formation training.

- He is the one who knows the leaders and their needs.
- He will be able to develop long-term and deep spiritual relationships with his leaders as they work together in the process of spiritual formation.

- He obviously will not excel in every aspect of spiritual formation, but he is the one who knows the leaders and their needs better than an outside expert who might be brought in to do a one-day seminar.
- He will be able to develop long-term and deep spiritual relationships with his leaders as they work together in the process of spiritual formation.

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- This is something that a short-term trainer, or an outside expert who might be brought in to do a one day seminar, will not be able to do.
- Relationship is key to Spiritual Formation. Growing together in the bond of love is the result of the pastor leading the training.

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How can this training be done?

- The pastor should involve the leaders in sessions of study and reflection.
- A weekly meeting with leaders would be ideal.
- The sessions should involve the leaders in active participation using the “learning by doing” model.

How can this training be done?

As the pastor leads the process of spiritual formation with the leaders from his churches, he should involve the leaders in sessions of study and reflection.

The most logical place would be at the weekly or regular leaders meeting, although other times may work as well. The pastor and leaders must

determine when they are able to meet.

Trained pastors should be able to lead these sessions or they can adapt materials from other sources.

However, the sessions should involve the leaders in active participation using the “learning by doing” model.

Ideas for the training sessions:

- They can include an opening illustration that gives a true-life example of the topic under study.
- The group can then be guided to discuss the various issues contained in the story.

What are some ideas for these training sessions?

- These sessions can include an opening illustration that gives a true-life example of the topic under study.
- The group can then be guided to discuss the various issues contained in the story.
- This will lead into a Bible study where the trainees examine the Scripture passage for insights and principles on the topic.
- Together, under the leadership of the pastor, they will seek to apply these principles to their present situations in life and in the ministry of the church. In this way, they will grow spiritually by helping each other to be serious about the demands of God’s Word.

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- This will lead into a Bible study where the trainees examine the Scripture passage for insights and principles on the topic.
- Then, with the Pastor, they will seek to apply these principles to their present situations in life and in the ministry of the church.

Spiritual reading in spiritual formation

Spiritual reading is a discipline that is important in spiritual formation. Church leaders in a multi-church situation may be left on their own for long periods of time while the pastor is not present. It is my observation that many Christians are unsure of how to read and study the Bible for their own spiritual nurture. Spiritual reading will help them to be nourished and fed when the pastor is away.

Spiritual reading in spiritual formation

- Spiritual reading is a simple, yet meaningful, method to help leaders grow in their faith and knowledge of the Word of God.
- Only the Bible is needed for spiritual reading.
- One does not need other books or manuals or to be at a certain venue.

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Spiritual reading in spiritual formation

- There is no need for expert guidance
- It can be done according to one’s own schedule and pace.
- Further instructions are found on page 33 of *The Multi-Church Pastor*.

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How to do spiritual reading

- 1. Preliminary Steps
 - Decide at what quiet place you will do your spiritual reading.
 - Decide at what fixed period of time you will do your spiritual reading. This can be done daily or once or twice a week.
 - Decide what texts you will use for your spiritual reading. Don't jump from place to place. Determine to read through one book at a time.

How to do spiritual reading

- 2. Practical Steps for each spiritual reading
 - Take time to be still and be aware of the presence of the Lord.
 - Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to help and guide you in your reading. Tell the Lord that you are willing to submit to the authority of the Word of God in your life and that you will obey the commands that you learn from your reading.
 - Read the text aloud slowly.

How to do spiritual reading

- Mark with a continuous line any text that moves you or pleases you. Mark with a broken line any passage that you are not comfortable with or that challenges you.
- Read the text again silently and slowly, watching your reactions to the text, especially to the portions already marked.
- Quietly think about the marked passages or words. Why are you comfortable with some texts and uncomfortable about others? Think about how the marked texts relate to your life.

How to do spiritual reading

- Pray about the message that God's Word has brought to your life and how you should respond to it.
- Share with someone what you have learned from God's Word that is helping you or challenging you in your spiritual life.

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Spiritual retreating in spiritual formation

Once the leaders have begun practicing spiritual reading the next step can be a spiritual retreat. This can be done individually or with the whole group of trainees.

Spiritual retreating in spiritual formation

- The idea behind the retreat is to spend a half day or a whole day alone with the Lord.
- Retreat is a common theme throughout Scripture.
- They were times of silence, solitude and prayer.

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- Retreat is a common theme throughout Scripture.
- They are not like youth camps of today with lots of activity and energy. They were times of silence, solitude and prayer.

Spiritual retreating in spiritual formation

- John the Baptist, Jesus, and Paul in the Arabian desert are good models to follow.
- In the wilderness God met these men and prepared them for their ministry of teaching and leading.
- This idea could be combined with a study leave.

• Further instructions on pages 33-34.

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- In the wilderness God met these men and prepared them for their ministry of teaching and leading.
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- There are further instructions on pages 33-34 which give step by step instructions.

I would encourage you to take a half day retreat with the Lord yourself first. Once you have gone through the experience, you can help your elders and church leaders to know what they are going to be facing.

We did this in Uganda with a group of pastors. They found it very helpful but they felt that time with the Lord more than two hours was too long. They felt that because they hadn't done it before it was something they needed to grow into. One felt that they could slowly increase the time as they went along. So you might want to try a shorter time first and then grow into it.

But let me encourage you to really work at this Spiritual Formation of your elders and church leaders. In many ways the spiritual health of the churches under your care depends on it.

