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CHURCH LEADER'S PERSONAL GROWTH:

Personal Devotions

Importance of time alone with God:

Time spent alone with God each day is of vital importance to the spiritual life of a church leader. It is during this daily time of interaction with God, as one reads His Word and prays, that God communicates with His child in a personal, specific manner. What a privilege it is to spend time alone with God! Such time is essential and needs to be protected from the things of this world which try to crowd in and rob a person of this necessary communion with his God.

As one spends time alone with God, seeking Him and getting to know Him better, he has an opportunity to develop an intimate relationship with the Creator of the universe. It is through this time of daily fellowship that an Omniscient, Omnipresent, Omnipotent, and Perfect Heavenly Father can encourage (Rom. 15:5), build up (cf. 2 Cor. 13:10), direct (Pro. 16:9), and give wisdom and understanding (Jam. 1:5) to His child who longs for Him (cf. Psa. 145:18; Jer. 33:3). It is also during this time that God's child can seek forgiveness and restoration (1 John 1:9; cf. Psa. 51), thank (cf. Psa. 30:12; 106:47) and praise Him (cf. Psa. 47:6; 150:1) and be empowered in his faith (cf. 1 Cor. 2:5). God told the prophet Jeremiah: "Call to Me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know" (Jer. 33:3). Though this invitation was made to Jeremiah, God tells His children to ask Him for wisdom which He will abundantly supply (Jam. 1:5). In a believer's personal devotions, such intercourse is possible and can occur on a daily, even minute-by-minute basis. Such truth should be heartening to church leaders, knowing that no matter what they face, such a wise and caring God is enclosing them behind and before with His hand upon them (Psa. 139:5). This means that they are not alone as they face situations that tax their very faith and being as they minister to others and encounter the attacks of the evil one. Who better to have on one's side? No one. This is why it is so important for church leaders to guard this time alone. They should not allow anything to get in the way of keeping this daily appointment with their Father. Allowing other things to interfere with or take the place of this time with God is foolishness. Doing so can be compared to a pilot flying a plane which is low on fuel, has no form of radio communication, no radar nor navigation equipment, and who is trying to navigate by his own skills and senses. Although this can be accomplished, it is dangerous and unwise compared to a pilot who has a continual supply of fuel, has the assistance of instruments, and people in the airport control tower helping and di-



recting him. So it is with the church leader -- he can operate in his own strength and in his own wisdom, or he can experience and benefit from the guiding, helping hand of God as He empowers him in his work.

Danger of routine:

One danger a church leader may face in his devotional time is allowing it to become a habit or ritual. When this happens, his daily devotions become something he does, not for the purpose of drawing closer to God, but because he feels he has to do this for some underlying, often erroneous reason. These devotional times become dry and commonplace, and as a result bear no fruit. This might be one reason why some church leaders are not diligent in maintaining their devotional times. Why is this the case? Generally after a believer's salvation, he has a great desire to know and understand God and the Bible. As a result of this craving, he asks questions, reads his Bible, goes to church and Sunday School, learns to pray and to share his faith. It is this desire that fuels all he does. It is also this desire which empowers his devotional time with God. It is what makes this time special and alive. But later this desire may wane, which makes one's devotional time unmeaningful, unproductive and stale. Therefore if a believer is no longer experiencing a relationship with God or seeing the fruit he desires resulting from his devotional life, then he must renew the craving he once had as a new believer.

Restoring one's passion for God:

How can a believer restore this passion? He needs to follow the example of King David after being confronted by Nathan the prophet about his sin with Bathsheba. Immediately following this confrontation, David prayed: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and sustain me with a willing spirit. *Then* I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners will be converted to You" (Psa. 51:10,12-13). David asked God to do four things in his life: 1) create in him a clean heart; 2) renew a steadfast spirit within him; 3) restore to him the joy of God's salvation; and 4) sustain him with a willing spirit. These four facets are what a believer needs to have occur in his life if he desires to have a vibrant, living, and intimate relationship with God. A believer also needs to deal with sin in his life as David did, sin which may have crept in unnoticed. David desired to experience once again viable fruit in his life after having these four aspects of his faith renewed -- seeing those who had strayed from the faith restored, as well as seeing the conversion of the lost. At times church leaders lack these aspects of their faith. This is why they may operate in the flesh at times and not in the Spirit (cf. Gal. 5:16). These are what they need to ask God to restore afresh in their lives as David did so that they too can have a fruitful ministry and intimacy with God once again. Jesus told the church of Ephesus which He commended for doing many good things: "But I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love. Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place -- unless you repent" (Rev. 2:4-5). God did not need to use this church if Christ was not loved by it just as He does not need to use church leaders who do not love Christ as they should. He must be first in their lives.

Planning your devotional time:

How one conducts his devotional time is personal and will vary from person to person. However, the goal of this time needs to be kept in mind, that of glorifying God (1 Cor. 10:31) and drawing closer to Him. To achieve this, besides reading the Bible and praying, some may do such things as sing a hymn or two and/or listen to Christian music. They may record their thoughts in a journal about what they read in the Bible and/or specific answers to prayer. They may also memorize Scripture or integrate other significant, spiritually-enriching practices into this time to make it more meaningful. Also when reading their Bible, they may make notes in the margins, underline or highlight words, phrases or passages, and/or cross-reference passages. They may even have a commentary or devotional on hand for the purpose of quickly looking at another person's understanding or application of the text they are reading. Remember, the objective of a personal devotional time is not to study the Bible, but to hear from God. Therefore it is recommended that the use of commentaries should be kept to a minimum and study time should be separate from devotional time.

If church leaders desire to grow in their faith and know their Heavenly Father better, daily devotions are a necessity in this process. Meeting daily with God in this way also sets an example for the flock over which they are responsible. If they are not consistent in this area of their life, how can they expect the members of their church to be consistent and draw closer to God? They can't.

**APPLICATION QUESTIONS FOR CHURCH LEADERS,
CROSS- CULTURAL MISSIONARIES AND CHURCH
PLANTERS:**



1. Do you schedule time alone with God each day to read his Word and pray? Are you consistent in meeting with Him daily?
2. Are your devotional times with God profitable, or do they lack fulfillment? If these times are not profitable, how do you think you can change this? Would it be helpful to have them at a different time and/or in a different place? As in the case of King David, does repentance need to take place?
3. What could you add to your devotional time to make it more meaningful, encouraging and enriching? Would listening to music be beneficial? Would singing a hymn or memorizing Scripture be beneficial?
4. When God shows you something special in your devotional time, do you record this insight in your Bible or in a journal? Do you share this with others to encourage them?
5. What is the greatest benefit you derive from your devotional time?
6. Your devotional time is not only time that you spend with God, it is also time He spends with you. Therefore, how important do you think this time is for Him? Do you think He looks forward to this daily time with you? As you ponder this thought, think about it from the perspective of a loving, caring Father Who desires to spend time with His precious child. Record your thoughts below.