

Healthy Ministers

First and foremost realize they are children of God first and everything else after, they prioritize as preeminent their relationship with God recognizing and delighting in His presence daily. As a response to such reflection they find themselves seeking to:

1. Pray.

So he said to me, “This is the word of the Lord... ‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the Lord Almighty. (Zechariah 4:6, NIV)

2. Invest in their spiritual gift(s).

Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you. Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. (I Timothy 4:14-15, NIV)

3. Get intentional about evangelism.

I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. (I Corinthians 9:22, NIV)

4. Care for themself spiritually.

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. (Philippians 3:12, NIV)

5. Make the tough decisions you know are best.

And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me — the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace. (Acts 20:22-24, NIV)

6. Confront debilitating patterns of sin.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. (Hebrews 12:1, NIV).

7. Do the hard work needed to build community.

If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. (Matthew 18:15, NIV)

8. Keep in touch with contemporary culture.

From the tribe of Issachar, there were 200 leaders...All these men understood the signs of the times and knew the best course for Israel to take. (I Chronicles 12:32, NLT)

9. Quit comparing themself to other Christians, other leaders, and other churches.

Turning his head, Peter noticed the disciple Jesus loved following right behind. When Peter noticed him, he asked Jesus, “Master, what’s going to happen to *him*?” Jesus said, “If I want him to live until I come again, what’s that to you? You — follow me.” That is how the rumor got out among the brothers that this disciple wouldn’t die. But that is not what Jesus said. He simply said, “If I want him to live until I come again, what’s that to you?” (John 21:20-23, Msg)

10. Read.

Timothy, please come as soon as you can...When you come, be sure to...bring my books... (II Timothy 4:9, 13, NLT)

11. Prioritize their family.

A leader must be well-thought-of, committed to his wife,...attentive to his own children and having their respect. For if someone is unable to handle his own affairs, how can he take care of God's church? (I Timothy 3:2-5, Msg)

12. Refuse to use ministry to satisfy their personal ambition.

Should you then seek great things for yourself? Seek them not. (Jeremiah 45:5, NIV)

13. Love people, not just crowds.

If I speak with human eloquence and angelic ecstasy but don't love, I'm nothing but the creaking of a rusty gate. If I speak God's Word with power, revealing all his mysteries and making everything plain as day, and if I have faith that says to a mountain, "Jump," and it jumps, but I don't love, I'm nothing. If I give everything I own to the poor and even go to the stake to be burned as a martyr, but I don't love, I've gotten nowhere. So, no matter what I say, what I believe, and what I do, I'm bankrupt without love. (I Corinthians 13:1-3, Msg)

14. Be open to change.

See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? (Isaiah 43:19, NIV)

15. Stay focused on the vision.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47, NIV)

Grieve Over Sin So You Can Grow

Sin isn't something most of us want to think about. But recognizing and grieving over it helps us grow.

By: Donald S. Whitney

The closer you get to Christ, the more you will hate sin; for nothing is more unlike Christ than sin. Because Jesus hates sin, the more like Him you grow the more you will grow to hate sin. And the more you hate sin, the more you will grieve whenever you have embraced that which killed your Savior. ...

But the fact that there is a struggle with sin, and a sense of grief because of sin, is good. Unbelievers have no such struggles or griefs. They may disappoint themselves for not living up to their own standards or to the standard of someone they respect. But they do not agonize over being unholy before God - a God who is holy and who calls them to holiness (see 1 Peter 1:15). As A.W. Pink explained, "It is not the absence of sin but the grieving over it which distinguishes the child of God from empty professors [of faith]."

Are you aware of sins in your life that you weren't cognizant of years ago, even though you were committing those sins back then as well? As discouraging as the fresh exposure is, and as grievous as it may be to have ever-deeper layers of sin laid bare, there's something positive here. Increased sensitivity to your sin is a mark of growth. You've made spiritual progress beyond where you were years ago because back then you didn't even realize that those were sins. The closer you come to the light of Christ, the more sins His holy light will expose in you. In the words of nineteenth century Bible scholar Thomas D. Bernard, "Our sense of sin is in proportion to our nearness to God." ...

What should I do if I do not grieve over sin? John Owen ventured, "I do not understand how a man can be a true believer in whom sin is not the greatest burden, sorrow, and trouble." If you are not sure your experience resonates with Owen's statement, consider the following recommendations:

Make sure you understand the gospel of the New Testament. I'm always amazed at how many churchgoing people are unclear on the gospel. Write it out, as if you were putting it in a letter or e-mail. Think paragraph or page length, not a sentence or two. In this instance, give special attention to two parts of the gospel: that which made the death of Jesus necessary, and the relationship of repentance to faith.

Ask God to show you the reality of your sin. Ask Him to show you specifics of how you sin, when you sin, where you sin, why you sin, and against whom you sin.

Pray slowly through Psalm 51, making it your own heartfelt prayer.

Remember that these words are more than just David's words. God Himself inspired them (see 2 Timothy 3:16), and He preserved them as an example of grief over sin. Pray through these words until they become a reflection of your own heart.

Meditate on the fact that it was your sin that nailed the holy, sinless One from heaven to the cross. Are you never sorrowful for causing the death of Jesus? Think of what your sin cost the most loving, pure, and gracious One who ever lived. Consider how others are now in hell for the same sins you've committed. Remember that it is the eternal and perfect law of God Himself that you have so willingly and repeatedly broken and disregarded. Realize that your every sin because every sin is also a failure to keep the greatest of all commandments - to love God with all your heart, mind, and strength (see Mark 12:28-30). "Behold the Man" (John 19:5) your sins have pierced. Then remember that the life and death of Jesus saves from sin all who repent and believe. Be driven closer to Christ by your sin. May your sin only serve to cause you to prize Christ even more.

Preach the gospel to yourself every day. I've borrowed this phrase from Jerry Bridges, who wrote:

To preach the gospel to yourself, then, means to continually face up to your own sinfulness and then flee to Jesus through faith in His shed blood and righteous life. It means that you appropriate, again by faith, the fact that Jesus fully satisfied the law of God, that He is your propitiation, and that God's holy wrath is no longer directed toward you. ... You can be sure of one thing, though: When you set yourself to seriously pursue holiness, you will begin to realize what an awful sinner you are. And if you are not firmly rooted in the gospel and have not learned to preach it to yourself every day, you will soon become discouraged and will slack off in your pursuit of holiness.

From this perspective of grieving for sin, there are two ways to evaluate your life - proximity to the ideal or progress toward it. You can look at what you ought to be - Christlike - and be discouraged because you are so far from it. Too much measuring yourself by the perfection of Jesus will dishearten you. Too little can breed spiritual pride. But you can also look at how far by God's grace you've come, and be hopeful. In the life of the growing Christian, there are times for both.

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CRITICISM AND ABUSE

1 Thessalonians 2:4 but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men but God, who examines our hearts.

"Let not thy peace depend on the tongues of men," said the wise old Christian mystic, Thomas a Kempis; "for whether they judge well or ill, thou art not on that account other than thyself."

One of the first things a Christian should get used to is abuse...

To do nothing is to get abused for laziness, and to do anything is to get abused for not doing something else.

Was it not Voltaire who said that some people were like insects, they would never be noticed except that they sting? A traveler must make up his mind to go on regardless of the insects that make his trip miserable...

One thing is certain, a Christian's standing before God does not depend upon his standing before men. A high reputation does not make a man dearer to God, nor does the tongue of the slanderer influence God's attitude toward His people in any way. He knows us each one, and we stand or fall in the light of His perfect knowledge.

Lord, I know this truth, but it's so hard to "let not thy peace depend on the tongues of men." The stinging insects are so annoying! Give me peace in Your approval today. Amen.

When seeking to measure the effectiveness of the staff, ask the following:

- Are those in leadership positions functioning as equippers?
- Are additional leaders being raised up and developed within the ministry?
- Is the ministry expanding because newly developed leaders are being deployed in additional leadership roles?
- Are more and more servers (those meeting needs) being identified, developed, and engaged in ministry service?
- Is the ministry increasing in its impact because more servers are actively involved in serving?

If you can answer yes to each question, the staff is functioning as God intended it to.

If not, you either have the wrong people, or you have the right people doing the wrong things.

Biblical leaders equip the servers for their work. This automatically results in the expansion of ministry.

WHAT MAKES LEADERS LEADERS?

They ask, "What needs to be done?"

Good leaders identify what needs to happen then work toward their strengths and when possible delegate other things to other team members.

They ask, "What is right for the organization?" For those of us in the church, this means that the mission of God trumps personal preferences, "political" decisions, or difficult people. It means that the Great Commission is our driving force.

They develop action plans.

Often what is missing in churches that want to bring about transformation is an intentional process to make the plan happen. Good leaders help to stimulate things into action. They make things happen.

They take responsibility for decisions.

Good leaders don't play the blame game. They are quick to take responsibility for decisions and invite accountability for decisions. They also hold others accountable.

They take responsibility for communicating.

Good leaders work at making the mission, vision and strategy clear and easily communicated to others.

They focus on opportunities rather than problems.

I love the following quote by Joe Sugarman. He writes, "Each problem has hidden in it an opportunity so powerful that it literally dwarfs the problem. The greatest success stories were created by people who recognized a problem and turned it into an opportunity."

They run productive meetings.

Good leaders have a defined purpose for meetings and will often follow up with a brief summary of the meeting.

They think "we" not "I."

Good leaders put the interests of the church or organization before self-interest. Admittedly, I am not very good at several of these practices. I have some things to work on! But the good news is that these practices can be learned. Leaders may contrast in various areas. Some are natural "born" leaders. But I believe all of us can learn leadership practices that can help us lead better.

Knowing Him Better

by Dick Winn

At its very core "devotional life" is not a technique, a discipline or a religious duty. It is a fascination of a person for a Person. It is the God-drawn questing of ones' soul for that divine Friend by whom we were created for fellowship. As such, it has all the elements of an absorbing, rewarding, mutual friendship.

In the beginning God did not walk away from man because he misbehaved. Man walked away from God -- and as a result, misbehaved. Ever since then man has turned against God because his understanding of God has been tampered with by the enemy. Jesus cried out, "O righteous Father, the world hath not known Thee" (John 17:25). And this is the greatest tragedy in the universe: that man should regard One so ready to share nurturing fellowship with him as hostile, unapproachable -- or irrelevant.

No wonder, then, that nothing was more central to Jesus' ministry than making His Father known! "I have shown Your glory on earth," Jesus reported to His Father; "I have finished the work You gave me to do." (John 17:4) Far more than any topic, Jesus talked about His Father. John alone records 229 explicit statements Jesus made about His Father. Jesus is the pathway to the Father, not a refuge from the Father. By opening peoples understanding to the beautiful truths about the Father's character, Jesus draws them to Him, in trust and love and admiration. In contrast to the alienation and fear that track those whom Satan's distortions have blighted, those who accept Jesus' revelation are drawn into bonded union with the Life-giver. They put their trust and loyalties in One whom they have come to know -- and thus they pass from death into life. (John 5:24)

This is precisely where the devotional life focuses. It becomes the ongoing, excited, soul-feeding deepening of an informed friendship with Him who is the rightful center of our lives. Through it we build rich reservoirs of insight into His character, so that our confidence in Him will be unshakable. Through our devotional life we discover anew that His wisdom is fine and sensible and applicable to earthly details of life, so that we become teachable, in His presence. Through it we find evidence, from His dealings with His Biblical-era friends, that God's love is unconditionally nurturing, even when it is confronting. Through it we have the almost sensory delight of discovering a little nuance in Jesus' interaction with some hurting people that confirms that He knew exactly what He was doing in every encounter. It gives us the exhilarating freedom to ask Him the most probing questions, knowing that He relished such dialogue. In brief, our devotional life is an absorbing, stretching, and healing fascination with a real Person!

Those who have passed from death into life -- from alienation into reconciliation -- find joy on the other side. Jesus spent whole nights in prayer, not because He had a fetish about praying but because He enjoyed His Father. For those who suspect that the Old Testament -- except for the Psalms -- isn't intended for devotional reading, it's worth remembering that the Father whom Jesus cherished in private and revealed in public was made known to Him entirely through the Old Testament. He didn't arrive on this planet with a full-blown memory of His previous existence. Through the same documents and the same Spirit that are available to us, Jesus found His Father.

Obviously Jesus knew what to look for. And all of us who occasionally, or frequently, find our devotional seasons to be dry and dusty need to know what to look for. The answers we find when we open the covers of Scripture depend on the questions we ask. If we ask, "Where are some promises that will make me feel good?", we may in fact find some. But in time we should grow beyond dropping the correct promises in the slot, pulling the "trust lever", and waiting to catch our expected benefits on the dispensing tray. In time we shall want something more personal, less blessing-centered and more God-centered.

The Most Rewarding Questions

I have found the most rewarding question is, quite simply, "Who is He?" What are The qualities of His character? What can I know about His personality? Sometimes this question becomes very specific: What is His attitude toward sinners caught in the act? How does He intend to bring everyone in the world to make his or her final decision for or against Him? Actually any of God's goals, methods of accomplishing these goals, and especially His attitudes and feelings toward sinners comprise prime targets for study, for they all give us more and more reasons to trust Him.

Though this approach to devotional study will produce many doctrinal insights, I find it places each such insight in a very personal framework. I have come to see the doctrine of forgiveness, for example not as a theological statement about a judicial act. Rather, I have discovered that our Father is by His very nature a forgiver. I know that I am forgiven, not because I have memorized the proper key texts or measured up to the correct formula. I am confident of my forgiveness because I am confident in the Forgive.

Once again, the "good news" is not that I am forgiven, but that God is a forgiver. The good news is not that the judgment is coming, but that our Father is the Judge. The good news is not that I can go to Heaven, but that my God will be there when I arrive. The good news is not that I can overcome, but that our Father wants nothing less for me than wholeness. In a word, the good news is God-news -- news about Him. It is the "gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God." (II Corinthians 4:4)

It is fitting that many writers speak synonymously of the devotional life and the "Life of faith." For "faith" takes on its richest meanings when it is used to describe the relationship between a thinking, trusting person and his God. Our parishioners hear repeatedly (often from our pulpits) that they should "have more faith." Many of them, in a response destined to frustration, search for some greater intensity of feeling, some deeper gullibility of response to the unknown, or some occasion to abandon a quest for meaning and "simply trust."

In most discussions of "righteousness by faith", or its children "justification by faith" and "sanctification by faith" the big Latin words get all the attention and faith gets benignly neglected. But no man can be "righteous" with God (that is, in his rightful state of union with the life giver) apart from faith. And faith cannot exist meaningfully by itself. It must be connected with its object -- as in "faith in God". So we can only have more faith in one way: by becoming better acquainted with God. This confirms that we must take getting to know Him better the fundamental purpose of our devotional life.

Paul states it as unquestioned fact: When we behold Christ, we shall be changed into His likeness. (II Corinthians 3:18) Though he reports that this is a step-by-step process (from "glory to glory"), he affirms that the Holy Spirit supports this work. The key however, is that the object of this beholding is the Lord Himself, not ancient Hebrew history; not intriguing stories; but the Lord and the qualities of His character.

This means that we increasingly learn to read the Bible as a revelation of who God is. Every story, every parable becomes an occasion to see God more clearly. Even the Old testament events that are not apparently helpful devotionally portray how God works in secular, or less-than-Ideal, settings. Thus the entire the entire scope of scripture opens to us a prime territory for devotional study, for all of it reveals our Father -- the God who is active among His people.

The Prayer Focus

As our devotional life deepens and our spirituality matures, our praying will quite likely change as well. We will ask less frequently for things, for favorable circumstances, or for creature comforts. Instead, we will hunger for a relationship and for the likeness of the one we admire. We will focus less on our needs and celebrate more the One who is aware of those needs. As our attention becomes swallowed up in the overwhelming majesty of God's goodness, our prayers will less often be preoccupied with our own perplexities. We shall cease trying to coax Him to act on our behalf and rather seek to align ourselves with what He is already doing to meet those needs. We shall see that blessings are inherent in following the path of his wise will and announce our readiness to walk in His ways.

Jesus said, "If I be lifted up ...(I) will draw all men to me." (John 12:32) The Bible unceasingly lifts up Jesus Christ. And if we behold Him in its pages, we shall be unceasingly drawn to Him. That is the enduring motivation of the devotional life, the greatest assurance that our quest will be rewarded.

Seeing Jesus' unconditional love for us will heal our insecurity and loneliness. Grasping the grandeur of the themes that occupied His mind will gently rebuke our pettiness and lift us higher. When we sense how powerfully He touches us when He trusts us, we shall gladly relinquish our untrusting, manipulative ways of dealing with others. When we awake to the bright discovery that where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom (see II Corinthians 3:17), we shall be ashamed of our attempts to control others. When we know that He himself is the truth, we shall loathe faulty concepts of him as far greater heresy than mere doctrinal heterodoxy. When we see people damaged, confused, and discouraged because they do not know Him aright, we shall feel the greatest indignation -- indignation that will drive us anew into the pursuit of that chief treasure, the knowledge of His character. We shall crave to be "His people", His transparent medium, because we know that He is the answer to all the world's questionings.

For there is no calling for the people of God more grand than they should be devoted to Him!

SELF INVENTORY

On a scale of 1-10, Waxer how are you doing in the following areas?

Balanced - How have you used your time in the past month?

Acting as a change agent - Are you in a position to facilitate change?

Commitment - Are you whole-hearted?

Communication - Do you communicate well verbally and in writing?

Self-confidence - Are you dependent on 'success' to validate your worth?

Energy - Are you being energized or drained?

Focus - Can you keep to a task until completed?

Hopeful - Do you have an expectant attitude?

Evangelism - Do you have a passion for others?

Risk-Taker - Do you have any risks in your leadership?

Intentionality - Are you intentional or do you wing it' often?

Life Learner - Are you demonstrating a hunger to keep learning?

Creativity - Do you have time to dream new dreams?

Positive Attitude - How do others around perceive you?

Approachable - Do you receive input, or tend to bully and coerce?

Loving People - Are you a people person?

Persistent - Are you able to keep going when it is tough?

Persuasive - Do others follow your lead?

Standing Alone - Can you be the sole leader when required?

Life Mission - Are you pursuing your personal life mission?

Vision - Do you have clarity as to God's calling for your life?