

# Three Essential Resources for Every Spiritual Leader in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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In order to be effective in our own Christian life and witness, as well as our spiritual leadership and service, I am convinced that ***every Christian leader needs a spiritual director, a prayer team, and an intentional plan for spiritual growth.*** I have found it to be true in my own experience and I believe it will be true for you as well.

## 1. A SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR OR GUIDE

Jesus called his disciples to follow him; he taught them to pray; he modeled the mission, and he gave them specific assignments to complete, followed by time together for conversation and reflection. As Jesus prepared the disciples for his departure, he promised them that the Holy Spirit would come to guide and empower their ministry enabling them to disciple future believers in the same way of life. After his death and resurrection, Jesus kept this promise. The disciples, now apostles, guided and directed new believers in prayer, study, reflection, and mission. The new believers learned through the teaching, practice, experience, mission, correction and reproof of their elders. They went where Jesus went, did what Jesus did, and loved those who Jesus loved. They were engaged in worship, prayer and praise--evangelical witness and social justice.

Christian formation includes the biblical principle of spiritual direction or guidance, where those with more spiritual maturity and experienced help those with less knowledge and experienced in the Christian life.

Do you have a spiritual director? Is there someone you see on a regular basis (every 4 to 6 weeks) who is helping you grow in grace, learn new ways to experience God, to pray, and to care for your spiritual health? If not, would you benefit from time with someone to help you on your spiritual journey? For everyone I know, the answer is yes.<sup>2</sup>

Finding the right spiritual director is similar to finding the right doctor or counselor. There should be an initial consultation or two in order to get acquainted and to discuss the long term goals and expectations you have for your spiritual director. In the initial conversation, the spiritual director can also tell you about his/her hopes, expectations, processes and fee structure (if any).

## 2. A PRAYER TEAM

Jesus not only taught his disciples to pray but invited them to pray with him and for him. Within the 12 disciples, there was a special role for Peter, James and John. Most effective Christian leaders in the history of the church had an inner circle of people who prayed for him/her. In the early Methodist movement, John and Charles Wesley had a small group of spiritual intercessors that received special

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<sup>1</sup> The information is extracted from a larger paper by the author. Permission is granted to copy and distribute this extract free of charge for use in Christian teaching, preaching or ministry settings.

<sup>2</sup>For an excellent discussion of this practice, see W. Paul Jones book, *The Art of Spiritual Direction*.

letters with their prayer requests along with the invitation to pray with them at a certain hour on Wednesdays and Fridays. Your prayer team does not need to be physically present to be spiritually effective.

Do you have a prayer team 3 to 5 people; or a prayer group who know you well and you can trust to pray for you every time you lead a meeting or event, preach a sermon, or teach a lesson? I believe your ability to be an effective spiritual leader will be enhanced and strengthened by a small group of intercessors. In my experience, God will bring these people into your life and there will be an inexplicable spiritual connection. These people will never want your job or role. They want to see God working in and through you so that God's kingdom can come and God's will be done on earth, now.

One important thing I have learned from having a prayer team to support me in my ministry as a Christian leader is that ***Information is the oxygen a prayer team needs to pray effectively.*** Your prayer team needs information **before the event** and they need information **after the event**. It is your responsibility to give the prayer team a healthy environment; essential information or "oxygen", in order to provide you with spiritual support. In a sentence or two, tell them where you will be, what you are doing, and what you are praying for God to accomplish in and through this particular event, message, etc. The same is true after the event; tell them about one or two ways that you experienced God in the midst of the event; and tell them one or two things that you saw God do in others because of this event and their prayers. It does not have to be a great deal of detail and it should never involve information that is confidential.

The biblical passage that informs my understanding of an effective prayer team is Exodus 17:8-13. Israel was in a battle with the forces of Amalek. So long as Moses held up his staff, Israel prevailed. When he got weary and he could no longer hold up his hands, Amalek prevailed. It took Aaron and Hur to stand on either side of Moses, holding up his arms, in order for the forces of Israel to win battle.

The question is, do you have two or more people to hold up your arms? Are there people God has placed in your life or come to your mind who might respond positively to an invitation to join you in ministry through prayer? If not, would you be willing to ask God to bring these people across your path and point them out to you? Every Christian leader I know, lay or clergy, would benefit from a prayer team to lift up our arms when we are weary and give spiritual support to our ministry.

### **3. An Intentional Plan for Spiritual Growth**

No one can develop his or her talents, skills or finances without an intentional plan of learning, practice and action. Every athlete, musician, seamstress, farmer, factory worker, gourmet chef, teacher, lawyer, doctor, mother and father has learned the value of having a plan and actively following the plan to get to the desired result. The same is true with our spiritual lives as followers of Jesus Christ. We need to be as intentional with our spiritual growth and development as we are with our physical diet, exercise and self-care. The place to begin is in prayer and in consultation with our spiritual director. What is your plan to give your soul time and means to grow?