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INTRODUCTION: WHY TAKE A PRAYER RETREAT?

It has been my joy to be involved in church planting since 1980. I have experienced personal prayer retreats since 1976. This has been a spiritual discipline for me longer than I have been serving in my primary mission. In fact, it was through a personal prayer retreat that I was guided into church planting.

Before I entered the ministry, I was an Outward Bound instructor. Outward Bound is an experiential outdoor education program which utilizes outdoor activities like backpacking, rock climbing, river rafting, and sailing to accomplish goals in the life of the student. These goals would include gaining an appreciation of nature, learning how to work together in a group, and developing an overcoming attitude toward life.

One of the disciplines of the Outward Bound experience is called “the solo.” The instructor places each student at an isolated place in the wilderness for three days and two nights, with only a minimum of survival gear. For many people this is the first time they have been completely alone for an extended time.

As an Outward Bound instructor, I enjoyed doing “solos.” It was during a solo in the city that I became a Christian. A friend gave me her Bible and asked me to read Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and Acts. I rented a room for three days at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. As I read the Bible and prayed, I came to believe that Jesus was who he said he was. And I trusted Jesus as the Savior of my sins, the Son of God and the Lord of my life.

After I became a Christian, I began to think of my “solo” times differently. They weren’t really “solos,” since “solo” is the work of a single individual. Because I now had God in my life, my “solos” were actually “duos,” with *two* people involved.

Psalm 139 reminded me, “Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.” God is everywhere!

Incredible! I could spend quality time with the Creator of the Universe who is also my Heavenly Father. He and I could be together, just the two of us, for a time of joyful intimacy and guidance. I could express my deepest thoughts and needs to the One who would understand and meet those needs. I could ask the one who loved me most for the guidance I needed for my life and my family. As a Christian leader, I could inquire of the Master Strategist and receive guidance for my ministry!

What a wonderful privilege to be able to get away in order to be with my God in a special, powerful way.

I thought, "All Christians and Christian leaders must be doing this." And then I discovered that this was a spiritual discipline practiced by just a few.

And so that is what this Profile is about... helping you experience an effective personal prayer retreat. I want you to be able to get the guidance that you so dearly want from God.

I am convicted that he wants to communicate with you and be with you, even more than you want this yourself.

Isn't it time for you to develop this joyful Christian discipline? At the end of this profile, I want to challenge you to take at least two personal prayer retreats every year to be alone with God.

————— FOR REFLECTION —————

1. What is a personal prayer retreat to you?

2. What would motivate you to take a prayer retreat? What are the benefits to you?

WHAT IS A PERSONAL PRAYER RETREAT?

Definition: A personal prayer retreat is a time you set aside to go away to be alone with God.

Let's look at how each phrase clarifies an understanding of a personal prayer retreat.

- ***“A time you set aside”***

A personal prayer retreat must be a time that you set aside. We are all so incredibly busy, it is easy to be trapped into doing the urgent rather than the important. Is there any time more important than the time you could spend alone with the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords? I consider the time that I schedule for my personal prayer retreats the most important time that I will invest in any given year. If you don't set it aside, you simply will not have a personal prayer retreat. Other responsibilities will suck up all your time. Satan wants to keep you from enjoying this sweet fellowship with God. He loves for you fill your schedule with everything but a block of time to experience the Lord.

So set aside the time right now. Go to your calendar and block out the time that you need with God alone this year. Find at least two blocks of three days and two nights this year and write them in your schedule. Make sure that you don't calendar over these days and decide to invest the time in something else.

What will happen if you face a problem, an issue, or a big decision in the time between your first and second yearly prayer retreat? Go ahead and plan to meet with God in whatever time you may have available. Maybe it will be only a day or half a day but you can still get away, practice the presence of Christ, and receive guidance from God.

————— FOR REFLECTION —————

When will you take your prayer retreats? Forecast two dates that you can clear on your calendar.

Date: _____

Date: _____

- **“to go away”**

Make sure that you *go away* for your personal prayer retreat. Trying to “retreat” at home or at the office will be frustrating. There are too many distractions in these places. We need to go away in order to focus on being with the Lord.

We live down in the valley—the valley of our everyday lives, where it’s too noisy to hear God very well. In the valley we have too much to do, too many people to talk with, too many problems, too much time pressure.

We need to leave this valley of noise and pressure, and get away to the quiet of God’s presence.

That doesn’t mean that you have to go far away. I am composing this profile in a little cabin that I have all to myself at a place called Green Oaks Ranch. Though I live only 20 minutes away, this small, secluded Christian campground gives me the “feel” of being away. I’m able to focus on being with my God.

- **“to be alone with God”**

This is the essence of a prayer retreat... to be alone with God. In the intimacy of fellowship, your relationship with the Lord will be renewed. You will experience *Him*. And then you’ll ask Him what He wants to do in your personal life, in your family, and in your ministry. Usually, I find that God wants to work in all three areas during most prayer retreats.

So get alone with God and let him reveal what he wants to share with you.

WHAT ARE THE OBSTACLES THAT MUST BE OVERCOME?

What are the obstacles that must be overcome to take an effective prayer retreat?

One obstacle may be the thought that it's not right to try to listen to God. After all, isn't the written Word of God all the guidance we're supposed to receive?

I love the Word of God, and it has a lot to say about inquiring of God.

In Gen. 25:22, Rebekah, Isaac's wife, inquired of the Lord about the two babies in her womb. God answered: "Two nations are in your womb." The two nations were represented by Jacob and Esau.

After the death of Joshua, the Israelites asked the Lord, "Who will be the first to go up and fight for us against the Canaanites?" The Lord answered: Judah (Judges 1:1).

In Judges 20:27, the Israelites were at war with Benjamin, one of their own tribes. They wept, fasted, and burnt offerings to the Lord. And the Israelites inquired of the

Lord, "Shall we go up again to battle with Benjamin our brother or not?" The Lord responded, "Go, for tomorrow I will give them into your hands."

Or consider 2 Samuel 2:1. David asked the Lord if he should go up to one of the towns of Judah. And the Lord said, "Go up." David asked, "Where shall I go?" To Hebron," the Lord answered, where David would be anointed King over Judah.

God consistently responded when his people inquired of him in the Old Testament. And in response to specific questions, the Lord provided specific answers. King David, a man after God's own heart, sought the Lord's guidance again and again. Maybe that's one of the reasons God loved David so much.

In the New Testament, we see the same pattern: it is good to inquire of the Lord. Jesus said, “. . . the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me.” But how did Jesus learn what the Father wanted him to do? He went away to be with his Father alone for extended periods of time. He took personal prayer retreats to pray and to listen.

“After leaving them, he (Jesus) went into the hills to pray” (Mark 6:46).

“Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed” (Luke 15:16).

“Jesus went out into the hills to pray, and spent the night praying to God” (Luke 6:12).

The Word of God in both the Old and New Testaments teaches us that it is right and good to inquire of the Lord and expect guidance.

A second obstacle is similar: we need to overcome an *unwillingness* to listen to God.

Daniel Boone reportedly said, “I was never lost. I was just bewildered for about four months one time, but I was never lost.”

It’s a cliché that men don’t like to ask for directions. And of course not all men are like that. But the point is, we need to ask God for direction in the journey of life, and *listen* to his guidance.

God knows all, and we only know a little. God loves us perfectly and works toward our best interests. Our love is less than perfect and our intentions are marred by selfishness. Doesn’t it make perfect sense to listen to God when he gives us guidance? He knows what is best for us, for our family and for our ministry.

Isaiah spoke about listening to God: “He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught. The Sovereign Lord has opened my ears, and *I have not been rebellious; I have not drawn back*” (Isa. 50:5, my emphasis).

“The shepherds are senseless and do not inquire of the Lord, so they do not prosper and all their flock are scattered” (Jer. 10:21).

We must, absolutely *must*, listen to our God and the Shepherd of our souls!

A third obstacle may be your own personality. Prayer retreats are more difficult if you are an extrovert.

Introverts draw their energy from being alone, and so prayer retreats are easier to practice. Extroverts are energized from relating to others, and may actually dread being separated from other people.

But since our example is Jesus, who withdrew to lonely places to receive guidance from God, prayer retreats are for all of us. Extroverts included.

Extroverts will want to be especially careful about planning their retreats. If you're an extrovert, you may want to include others in your retreats, while still preserving time alone with God.

For example, a husband and wife could share a prayer retreat together. Or two Christian friends or leaders could go together. A small leadership team could retreat together, but with significant time alone with God for each person. Then there could be group times planned for input and sharing.

FOR REFLECTION

1. What are the obstacles that would keep you from taking a prayer retreat?

2. How will you overcome these obstacles?

TWELVE STEPS TO AN EFFECTIVE PRAYER RETREAT

Step 1: Go to your retreat site and rest.

The location of your retreat is a matter of personal preference. The real issue is to *go away* to be with the Lord. I've preferred the mountains since my days in Outward Bound. A leader friend gets his inspiration at the beach, where the pounding surf reminds him of God's power and constancy. A woman leader prefers a safe, secure motel.

Where is the place where you are able to hear from God most effectively? Where can you best become quiet and listen to the Lord? Go there.

— FOR REFLECTION —

1. List as many places you might go for your prayer retreats. Don't forget inexpensive motels, Christian camps, retreat centers, vacation homes of friends, and state parks.

2. Where are three places that you would like to take a prayer retreat?

3. Which place would be best for the next retreat? Why?

Once there, what do you do? When I arrive at my retreat site, I am usually exhausted from the pressures of ministry. It is hard for me to hear from God when I am tired and wired. I need to rest first.

It reminds me of Jesus counsel to the apostles:

“The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, ‘Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.’ So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place” (Mark 6-30-32).

So when you arrive at your retreat site, I recommend that you take a nap. Hopefully, you will awake rested and refreshed and ready to experience an effective prayer retreat.

Step 2: Pray for your retreat.

James 1:5 is one of our most precious Bible promises. “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.”

Isn't that wonderful! If we need wisdom, He has promised to give it generously when we ask Him. Praise the Lord from whom all blessings flow! John Maxwell has said that his most common prayer is “Lord, please give me wisdom.”

That's true for all of us, isn't it? We need God's wisdom for the issues, questions and problems we are wrestling with. And He has promised to pour out his wisdom for us.

At the beginning of your retreat, you may want to pray like this: “Dear Lord, I pray that you will meet with me and give me your wisdom from the Word and the Holy Spirit as we spend this time together. Help me to plan this retreat so that it accomplishes your purposes in my life and in our time together. I pray in the name and presence and power of Christ. Amen.”

Step 3: Plan your retreat.

The most important time that I invest all year is in my prayer retreats. Because this time is precious, I must not squander it. I need to be intentional and plan the prayer retreat process well. Proverbs 14:22 promises that those who plan what is good find love and faithfulness.

So lay out, step by step, what you are going to be doing during your retreat time. The Twelve Steps to an Effective Prayer Retreat is one plan, but not the only one I use. And I adapt my plan based on how I sense the Lord is moving during the retreat. For each retreat, your plan will be affected by a number of variables:

- How is the Lord leading you to plan this retreat?
This is the most significant variable. Of course you want to do what the Lord wants you to do. This leading may have emerged from your time of praying for the retreat or from a prompting that you had prior to the retreat.
- How much time do you have?
The same plan that you use for a three-day retreat will not work if you have only six hours.
- What is the purpose of this prayer retreat?
Are you producing a TimeLine for your ministry? That retreat will require you to spend much time in planning. Or is the primary purpose to take a prayer walk with the Lord?
- Do you have just one pressing issue or several?
The number of issues that you have to resolve will affect how much time you have for other steps.

Step 4: Repent of your sins.

I don't see how it is possible to receive guidance from God or to enjoy His fellowship, unless you first repent of your sins and receive His cleansing.

Jesus said, "Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me" (Rev. 3:19, 20).

We often use v. 20 as a salvation verse, but it speaks more directly to Christ's desire for fellowship with the believer. He is knocking on the door of your heart. Repenting of your sins assures He will enter the door of intimate fellowship with you, ready to communicate and guide.

————— FOR REFLECTION —————

Write a prayer of repentance of any sins that might get in the way of your relationship with God.

Step 5. Thankfully review how God has been working.

Each year I begin a document in my computer titled “Praise and Thanksgiving.” During my early morning devotions, I enjoy recording my praises for who God is and my thanks for what he does. Here are a few examples from one document:

Dear Lord, I praise and thank you for...

- Agreement reached with an association to partner in church planting.
- A productive personal prayer retreat in Rancho Bernardo.
- Seven strategic goals for the year.
- The presence of the Holy Spirit in my life.
- Your provision and protection.
- My daughter, Jessica, talking with me about issues that really matter to her.
- Our best-ever church planting training.
- The multi-ethnic church planting couples we just trained. 3 African-American. 3 Anglo. 1 Latino. 1 Chinese.
- The privilege of prayer.
- A partnership with Rev. Jay in India.

Then, on the retreat, I will look back over the last few months of the “Praise and Thanksgiving” document for the year. I will try to find areas in which God is working. For example, God is working in my family’s communication. He is working in me in the area of prayer. The Lord is helping us to develop missionary relationships. He is using DCPI to train multi-ethnic church planters. We have an open door to serve in India.

This is also the time to worship the Lord for who He is. Sing to Him, worship and adore Him, simply enjoy being in His presence. In our activist world, it’s easy to think of our prayer retreats as a technique to get more ministry done. But remember, the primary purpose is to get alone with your Heavenly Father. So let Him know you love Him, and take time simply to experience the joy of His presence.

One of the great principles of Scripture, highlighted in Henry Blackaby’s *Experiencing God*, is that we must join God in what He is doing, rather than asking Him to join us in what we are doing. This step helps me to join God in what He is doing.

Step 6: Submit to God’s plans for you.

As we prepare to write down our issues, questions and problems, we may already be thinking about how we would like them to turn out. Though we may not even be aware of it, sometimes our plans emerge from impure motives. The sad result may be that we have plans for our life that are not God’s plans for us.

Proverbs 19:21 counsels us, “Many are the plans in a man’s heart, but it is the LORD’S purpose that prevails.”

To realize God’s best for our lives and ministries, we must want and be willing to submit to His plans. Sincerely pray a prayer like this one:

“Lord, I willingly submit to your plans for my life. I know that you have my best interests at heart. You can see the end from the beginning. I want what you want for my life. I trust you. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

_____ FOR REFLECTION _____

Write a prayer of submission to God. Assure him that you will submit to his plans for your life, rather than your own plans.

Step 7: Devour the word of God and take notes.

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path,” promises Ps. 119:105.

Much of the guidance that I have received from the Lord during prayer retreats has come directly from the Word of God. God may very well guide you into specific books of the Bible to meet your needs during specific retreats.

For example, when I am on a prayer retreat to do strategic planning for our mission, the Lord often has me read Proverbs and Nehemiah. Proverbs is great for planning, and Nehemiah is an incredible book for vision, team building, completing a huge project and overcoming enemies.

Ask God to guide you into the right books of the Bible to read for your retreat. Then read and read and read some more. Jot down notes about specific verses or thoughts that you have while reading the Bible. Often God will bring verses back to you during your listening time.

Step 8: Write down your specific issues and questions.

What are the specific issues and questions that you really need to hear from God about?

When King David was confronted by a Philistine threat, he inquired of God using two specific questions: "Shall I go and attack the Philistines? Will you hand them over to me?" The LORD answered him, "Go, I will hand them over to you." So David and his men proceeded into combat, and God brought about a magnificent victory. The Hebrew name for the place of victory, *Baal Parazim*, means God "broke out" against the enemies (cf. 1 Chron. 14:10-12).

What a great example! King David asked the Lord two specific questions, and the Lord answered each one specifically. David acted on this guidance and won the battle.

Do you want God to "break out" in your life and in your ministry? Take your specific questions and issues to God... and listen!!!

For my prayer retreats, I have three categories of issues and questions: personal, family, and ministry.

Here are some sample questions and issues that you may consider for a prayer retreat:

Personal:

- What do you want me to do now to strengthen my spiritual life and keep it vital?
- What happens next with my exercise and eating plan?

Family:

- What do you want me to do to help my spouse and enhance our marriage?
- What do you want me to do to prepare my children well for their lives?

Ministry:

- What is the next step in our ministry and how do you want to bring it to pass?
- Who do you have in mind to help us with our ministry?

_____ FOR REFLECTION _____

Write down your specific issues and questions.

Step 9: Meet with God in a quiet place. Listen and take notes.

Consider Elijah, who was discouraged, and needed guidance from God. He found his quiet place in a cave (1 Kings 19:9-13). The Lord instructed him to stand outside the cave, and wait for the Lord to pass by. First came a great wind, followed by an earthquake, and then a fire. But the Lord was not in any of these earth-shattering forces of nature. Finally the Lord spoke in a gentle whisper.

That is why I love to hike by myself in the mountains when I really need to hear from the Lord. His guidance usually comes to me in a gentle whisper. The world is too noisy for me to hear his still, small voice. But as I am quiet and prepare myself through the previous steps, I am able to quiet myself and listen to His whisper.

It really helps my mind and spirit to connect with the Lord when my body is engaged in an exercise like walking. I take along blank 3 x 5 cards or a small notebook and a pen. At the beginning of the hike, I pray, "Lord, this time is your time. If it pleases you to communicate with me, please do. I am open to you. I pray that you will give me guidance concerning those questions and issues that I've written down. Most of all, I want your will. I want to hear from you about any issue or question that you want to communicate with me about. In Christ's name. Amen."

Then I start my walk. It is hard for me to express how much joy I find in a good hike. Just the simple act of walking along a trail can totally exhilarate me. I hear the breeze through the pine needles. I love the warmth of the sun radiating from the trail. It is quiet. I am experiencing a sweet solitude with the Creator. The views from the trail overlook a lake or the surrounding valleys and peaks. I praise and thank God for the opportunity just to be with him in this place.

I pay attention to my thoughts. Each time I have a thought, I stop and write it down on a card or in my little notebook. You could also use a palm pilot to record your thoughts.

Here are some thoughts I have marked down while on a prayer walk:

- My kids need to know how much I love and appreciate them...especially now. They need to know they can come to me to get their needs met.
- Reconcile with a couple.
- You must love your staff.
- Don't create your own vision. Test your vision... your ideas... with the counsel of godly leaders.

I consider the majority of my notes to be "consecrated" thoughts. "Consecrated" means to set apart, dedicate or sanctify to some sacred purpose in the service and worship of God. Since we have dedicated ourselves to the sacred purpose of being alone with God and hearing from Him, it makes sense that we are thinking consecrated thoughts.

And then there are times when you will receive a thought or a vision or a picture that you know is directly from the Lord. Of the above examples of thoughts I had while on a prayer walk, only one impressed me that it was directly from the Lord: Reconcile with a couple.

Soon after my retreat, I did reconcile with that couple. It was a great blessing to all three of us.

_____ FOR REFLECTION _____

To what special place will you go to hear from God?

Step 10: Prayerfully respond in writing to your questions and issues.

After I return to my retreat site, I transfer my notes from the 3 X 5 cards or notebook to my laptop computer. Or if you are using a palm pilot, you can just download into your computer.

I try to match my thoughts from the walk with the issues and questions I've recorded. I usually find that there are many issues and questions for which I have not received specific guidance. So I spend time thinking specifically about these issues and questions, and I record my thoughts as before. Because I have been prepared by God through this process for consecrated thinking, my clearest thinking and planning is done during my prayer retreats.

Step 11: Receive counsel from wise, godly people.

There can be pitfalls when you try to listen to God. You could be wrong. Even after repentance and submission, your motives could be impure. You could be hearing what you want to hear. You could have had a bad dinner the night before.

The Lord gives us his sobering perspective on lying prophets:

“I have heard what the prophets say who prophesy lies in my name. They say, ‘I had a dream! I had a dream!’ How long will this continue in the hearts of these lying prophets, who prophesy the delusions of their own minds?... I am against the prophets who wag their own tongues and yet declare, ‘The LORD declares.’ Indeed, I am against those who prophesy false dreams... They tell them and lead my people astray with their reckless lies, yet I did not send or appoint them. They do not benefit these people in the least,” declares the LORD (Jer. 23:25, 31, 32).

Counsel from wise godly people is a solution to this pitfall. “Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.” (Proverbs 15:22).

For example, our vision for Dynamic Church Planting International came from my prayer retreat on June 13 - 14, 1997. I was alone for two days, focused on receiving God’s vision for DCPI. I spent the first evening and morning in a motel room, reading the Bible, praying and inquiring of the Lord for His vision. On the afternoon of the second day, I drove to Palomar Mountain for a hike. As I walked along a trail, I prayed that if it pleased the Lord, He would communicate his vision for DCPI to me.

Within a few minutes, I turned up the Upper French Trail. The Lord brought these words to my mind: “Plant a million churches.” I didn’t hear a voice, but the words were impressed upon my mind.

I kept walking and a few minutes later a second, more complete phrase came from the Lord in the same manner: “DCPI will impact the planting of a million churches.”

I kept hiking and came to this incredibly huge oak tree. This tree is so large that one of the four main branches has a diameter that is thicker than I am tall. It is so overarching that it shades ground 60 feet from the trunk. But the most unique characteristic of this oak is that its massive trunk rests right on top of a granite boulder. Its roots encircle the boulder and anchor the tree in the ground. This is truly the Oak on the Rock.

While I stared at the tree, amazed, another impression came from the Lord: “DCPI will be just like the oak on the rock. Now, DCPI is just like an oak sapling. But over time, DCPI’s growth and influence will be massive and overarching, with many branches of ministry, like this great oak tree.”

Just like this tree is founded on the rock, DCPI is founded on Jesus Christ, the Rock. “And on this rock I will build my church” (Matthew 16:18).

I went home, and in the days following my retreat, I was silent. Frankly, I was afraid. I wondered, “Can we at DCPI carry this vision?” And then it came to me, “We don’t have to carry the vision...God will.” And He can. Amen!

For me, the “Vision of a Million” was confirmed by an “internal conviction” during a personal prayer time at my home office on Tuesday morning, June 24, 1997.

Next, I brought the “Vision of a Million” to our DCPI Board. Some of the board members were energized and enthusiastic about the vision. In fact, two of them decided to join full-time staff. Two of my dear friends on the board thought I was off the mark, and they brought up some valid concerns.

One of them rightly pointed out that DCPI won't be planting a million churches. The leaders, mother churches, and associations we partner with are the ones who are actually doing the planting. We at DCPI must shine the line on *them*. So we added an opening phrase to the vision statement: "Equipping leaders, churches and associations to plant..."

Another board member added another key clarification. DCPI is not planting churches as an end in itself. The overall purpose is to reach people for Christ! So we added a closing phrase to the Vision Statement: "... to Reach the World for Christ."

I was glad to bring the "Vision of a Million" to our DCPI Board members, glad that the vision didn't just "slide" right through. Seven wise men thought, prayed and wrestled with the vision over a period of six months and three board meetings, seeking to know if the vision was really from God.

Our final statement reads: "Equipping Leaders, Churches and Associations to Impact the Planting of One Million Dynamic Churches to Reach the World for Christ (by 2050)."
During the third board meeting, we adopted this statement unanimously.

Run your guidance from God through the grid of wise, godly leaders.

Step 12: Plan to communicate your thoughts and delegate tasks.

As you consider your thoughts and decisions, ask yourself, Who needs to know?
To whom do I need to communicate these thoughts? Family members? Church leaders? Friends?

How do you need to communicate these thoughts and decisions? And as a Christian leader, to whom do you need to delegate the tasks that emerged from your retreat?

Jethro, Mose's father-in-law, taught a great lesson in delegation in Exodus 18. His point? We wear ourselves out if we try to do everything ourselves. We need to get organized and entrust ministry to reliable people.

So plan your communication and delegation. Who needs to do what? How will you communicate this to them?

A caution: One truth that I have learned recently from our Director of Prayer at DCPI is that some of what God has revealed to you is just for you. It is not meant to be communicated. You are to hide these things in your heart.

CHALLENGE

On May 26, 1998, Tom Whittaker, an instructor at Prescott College in Arizona, succeeded in climbing Mount Everest. Completing this climb would have been an incredible achievement for anyone, but even more so for Tom. Why? Because it was his third try after two other attempts? Or because he was 50 years old? Or because he had to overcome altitude sickness. No. What was most remarkable is that Tom Whittaker climbed Everest using an artificial limb.

I know from climbing much smaller mountains that mountain climbing involves hard work, suffering and joy. I can only imagine how hard it must have been for Tom, the incredible hard work and suffering he endured. But Tom Whittaker believed it was worth it.

How hard are you willing to try to receive guidance from God?

As I look back on 24 years of ministry, every life-changing decision that was made for our family and our ministry emerged from a prayer retreat. Each of the four new churches that God used me to plant was born out of a prayer retreat. My decisions to lead two church planting ministries were forged in prayer retreats. Dynamic Church Planting International (DCPI) was born in a prayer retreat. And, as I have shared, DCPI's "Vision of a Million" came from a prayer retreat.

If you set aside blocks of time to go away to be alone with God, He will give you the guidance you seek. God wants to communicate with us more than we want to communicate with Him. As He gives you direction, you will have more internal conviction about implementing His guidance and more confidence that you are doing the right thing. You will have a greater potential to succeed in your personal, family and ministry life. You will see the tangible results of God's guidance.

Why would a Christian make a major decision without doing his or her best to know God's will?

How can a Christian leader make a decision affecting many other people without doing his or her best to hear from God?

Why would you ever want to make a big decision without consulting your Heavenly Father first?

The Lord Jesus taught us to pray, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." How can we who are Christian leaders best help advance His kingdom and accomplish His will here on earth?

One of the best ways I know is to schedule a prayer retreat to be alone with God and receive His guidance.

My challenge to you is to set aside at least two personal prayer retreats every year. Times to get away and get with God. Times to listen, plan, and obey.

Will you commit to taking at least two prayer retreats each year?

————— FOR REFLECTION —————

Write your response to the challenge of making prayer retreats a regular discipline of your Christian life.

PRAYER RETREAT CHECKLISTS

The following checklists are meant to help you accomplish an effective prayer retreat. Feel free to photocopy them and use each time you plan your retreat.

1. For what time period have you scheduled this up-coming prayer retreat?
2. Write a prayer request for your up-coming retreat.
3. How much time do you have for this retreat?
4. What is the purpose of this prayer retreat?
5. What are your top three issues that you want to resolve in this upcoming prayer retreat?
6. Write a prayer of repentance of any sins that get in the way of your relationship with God.
7. Write five ways in which you want to praise or thank God.
8. Can you see any patterns in what the Lord is doing in your life? If yes, what are they?
9. Write a prayer of submission to God. Assure him that you will submit to his plans for your life, rather than your own plans.

10. What books of the Bible will you read on your prayer retreat?
11. Write down as many as five questions or issues for which you want God's guidance.
12. Once you're at your retreat site, to what quiet place will you go to inquire of the Lord?

CHECKLIST FOR AFTER YOUR RETREAT

13. Share up to 5 consecrated thoughts that you received from the Lord.
14. Prayerfully respond in writing to your questions and issues.
15. Name at least three godly Christians that you will go to for counsel regarding the results of your prayer retreat.
16. To whom do you need to communicate your thoughts?
17. Which thoughts to which person?
18. To whom do you need to delegate tasks? What tasks?
19. How will you sensitively delegate tasks to people?
20. For what time period have you scheduled your next prayer retreat?

BENEDICTION

Deuteronomy 30:19

This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice and hold fast to him.

For the Lord is your life...

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PERSONAL PRAYER RETREAT

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