

Testimonies of Encouragement and Insight

“A Day of Prayer and Vision”

In this article I want to focus on how to have a Day of Prayer and Vision. A Day of Prayer and Vision is really just spending a day with the Lord. This can seem daunting if you are not used to doing it. However, if you do it regularly, it will become something you look forward to. There is evidence in the Gospels that Jesus regularly got away to spend time with the Lord in a concentrated way for both Spiritual nurture and guidance. A Day of Prayer and Vision is not just an extended Quiet Time, or a one time event useful for big crises. It is certainly always appropriate when you just need spiritual refreshment and renewal, or are facing an important decision in your life. We are asking all TEAMers: singles, husbands, and wives to set aside time at least once a year for a day of prayer and vision that is focused on a growth plan.

So how do you spend a whole day with the Lord? Here are some suggestions that may help you.

First, plan your day. Make sure you find a place where you can be alone with the Lord without interruption or distraction. Home often has too many distractions, computer with email to answer, unfinished laundry, prayer letter half written, dust on the TV, kids, people who drop by, etc. The Psalmist said he had “stilled and quieted his soul” before the Lord. The value of the Day of Prayer and Vision is being able to still and quiet our soul before the Lord. Husbands you will want to take care of the kids for a day while your wife has her Day of Prayer and Vision unless other arrangements can be made.

I like to go away the night before and make it a personal prayer retreat. Obviously you

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Reflections on A Day of Prayer and Vision

In these three articles, you will find many helpful ideas for spending a day alone with the Lord.

Seven Habits of Highly Effective Missionaries

What makes an effective missionary? While most missionaries dread evaluation, church mission committees aren't sure what questions to ask—or what exactly they're evaluating. A church's attempts at evaluation can be sadly comical. On a home assignment from Africa, our supporting church's missions committee members couldn't think of anything to talk about, so they asked if we had any snake stories.

Another time, a Christian foundation director asked Jim, “How many people did you win, and how much money did it cost per soul? If we fund this project, how many people per dollar will come to Christ?”

The snake story episode reveals wasted chances to ask probing, meaningful questions about the essence of our work. The committee was mired in trivial things irrelevant to assessing our effectiveness. The cost-per-soul discussion revealed crass materialism and a corporate mindset for what only the Holy Spirit can bring about.

So how DO you evaluate missionaries? “Vision-driven evaluation” entails exploring the kingdom vision God has given

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Rest for the Mind: How can you still your racing thoughts in order to enjoy the presence of God?

My heart is not lifted up, my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. But I have calmed and quieted my soul like a weaned child with its mother. Ps. 131

Not too long ago my husband informed me that during the night I sat up in bed and launched into the introduction to a new message. What surprised him most was that this sleepy sermon was coherent and came

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A Day of Prayer and Vision continued

can't travel far or it defeats the purpose, but there may be somewhere an hour away that you can go for the night. Having the extra time the evening before to quiet yourself, even if you spend it just reading and relaxing can prepare you for the Day with the Lord. You also may want to plan to fast some or all of the time. I sometimes do this and other times do not. If you do not fast you should plan for meals in such a way that it does not take time away or disrupt your day.

You will want a plan in your mind to organize the day. You do not want a schedule that is too strict, because you want to leave room for the Holy Spirit to guide you. You could spend the whole day, just in worship, prayer, and feeding on the Word. However, at least once a year you need to make sure you have some time for reflection on your life and ministry and looking to the future.

Second, begin your day worshiping the Lord in song and prayer. Bring songbooks, hymnals, tapes or CD's of worship music, a musical instrument, or anything that helps you worship. Sometimes I like to sing and sometimes I like to just listen to worship songs. As I go along I talk to God about what I am singing or hearing. This begins to tune my heart in to the Lord. I had to teach myself to do this because it did not come naturally to me. I was used to a more cognitive approach to God. However, I have learned that this is a real key to hearing from God. As you worship, consciously submit yourself to God and to His sovereign will for your life. This is a key to God revealing his will to you. Let your attitude be, "Lord, I am here to hear from you, not to tell you what I have got planned and ask you to bless it." Though you begin your day in worship, you will also want to take time to just worship the Lord through out the day as you fellowship with Him.

As you worship and throughout the day, be sensitive to God wanting to point out un-confessed sin in your life. You may want to take a moment to ask God if there are areas of your life that you have not confessed to Him. Make a list of anything He shows you and then write 1John 1:9 across the page and accept God's cleansing and forgiveness. Tear up the paper and enjoy the freedom of fellowship with God that His Son purchased for you on the cross.

Third, spend extended time studying the Word. I sometimes do a study on a topic and other times study a specific passage of scripture. I like to dig, look up cross-references and words, and let God speak to me out of His word. It is not unusual for the Holy Spirit to lead you all over the Scriptures as you begin to listen to Him. Sometimes I will read part or all of a devotional book on a specific topic. However, I do not just read the book, but take time to look up scripture references from the book and really chew over the Word.

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Seven Habits of Highly Effective Missionaries continued

the missionary, rather than simply judging his or her work by a checklist. Instead of focusing on how many times the missionary showed the Jesus film, a vision-driven evaluation asks, "How will it affect people's lives and, what are the next steps for those who viewed it?"

Here are seven vision-driven development points to move missionaries to reflect, plan and be highly effective in their lives and ministries:

1) Spiritual: Are you growing in grace or stagnating in your relationship with Christ? What's helped you grow? What's hindered you? What needs to change? How does your missionary experience enhance or detract from your spiritual growth?

2) Family: How is your marriage? Your relationship with your children? What specific things have you done to build both? If single, how have you nurtured healthy relationships?

3) Mental: Are you growing in wisdom and knowledge? What have you done to gain professional, language and cultural skills? What could you do specifically to continue developing your mind?

4) Physical: What have you done to maintain physical shape? Would more rest, better diet and consistent exercise help?

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Seven Habits of Highly Effective Missionaries continued

5) Relationship: Have you developed strong cross-cultural friendships? How are your relationships with missionaries and national co-workers? What has helped or hindered the growth of loving, trusting relationships? List ways you will prayerfully develop love and trust within your team this year.

6) Vision: What are your hopes and dreams for God to use you in others' lives? If God were to richly bless your ministry, what difference would it make in other people and the church? What indications show that God has been using you to make an eternal difference in others' lives?

A Day of Prayer and Vision continued

How you study God's Word is up to you. The important thing is that you dig in the Word. The goal is not a theological dissertation, but neither is it just reading a few verses. The goal is to meet with the Lord. The Word is so important because it helps us get God's mind. As we read and reflect on His word, we begin to think God's thoughts. God's Word also begins to wash all the craziness out of our heads and focus us on wisdom and reality.

Fourth, discuss God's word with Him. I love the conversations Tevya has with God in the musical "Fiddler on the Roof". A few years ago I started doing this with the Lord while I was studying the Word. "God are you saying . . .? Does this passage really mean . . .?" I have found it helpful in opening up communication with God, especially when I am spending a day with Him. Discussing with God and asking Him questions means that you will spend time waiting and listening after your questions. Keep a pad and paper with you and write down what you sense God is saying to you.

In closing let me say a word or two about what to expect from a day like this. My experience with these days varies. Sometimes the days are life changing, direction altering, mountain top experiences. Other times they are good, but nothing dramatic. A few times they have even been real spiritual battles. In all cases, I am always glad I spent the Day with the Lord. Even on the days when it is a struggle, I still come away feeling I had done the right thing. God had an impact on my life even though it did not necessarily seem evident at the time. My point is that you need to have realistic expectations in terms of the experience of the day and that it may vary. God will always meet you if you get alone with Him. This is the bottom line.

This article by Steven Edlin, is adapted from "A Day of Prayer and Vision", TEAM, 1999, and is repurposed with permission.

7) Activities: How has God used your ministry to fulfill the kingdom vision? What have you done to hinder fulfilling it? What belongs on your "to-do" or "stop-doing" list?

This evaluation helped a missionary at one of our Kenya seminars. He found the root of his many frustrations with his work was the mismatch in his ministry. He was doing administrative tasks, but his real passion was to teach Bible. As a result, he moved to a Bible college to teach. Later he told us that this exercise greatly improved his ministry, personal life and marriage.

We hope these seven habits may guide missions committees to move from snake stories to vision-driven evaluations that further the kingdom cause. We invite missionaries to prayerfully reflect on them to evaluate the past and plan for the future. Discuss your findings with a mentor and with your church missions committee.

What's your experience with evaluation? Let us hear from you as we seek ways to be highly effective servants for the kingdom.

by Jim and Carol Plueddemann

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Rest for the Mind continued

out in complete sentences! He said that his only regret was that he hadn't taken notes. (I was sorry too, because then I would have had my introduction!) After our laughter subsided, I was sobered by the realization that my mind was busy even when my body was resting. No wonder I woke up so tired some mornings.

The Psalmist's description of the mind at rest in God is powerful both in its simplicity and its seeming impossibility for the modern mind. The truth about me is that I seem to *always* be occupying myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. My mind is perpetually busy trying to control things, trying to figure things out, clinging to the latest idea, working endlessly to put everything into categories and boxes and systems of thought. Sometimes even God himself gets relegated to a category or a box *in my mind* rather than being free to be God *in my life*.

The irony is that the mind—as wonderful as it is and as tireless in its efforts—is so limited in what it can accomplish in the realm of the soul. The intellect can set the stage but it cannot provide the drama of true encounter and life-change—those things that my heart truly longs for. The heart of the spiritual journey for me recently has been to experience and learn to accept the limitations of the human mind and its efforts when it comes to the spiritual life. I have had to acknowledge that the wordiness, the emphasis on intellectual assent, the busyness that has characterized my life as an evangelical Christian has left me starving in some ways. Starving for mystery—to know God as one who is, in the end, far beyond what my mind can figure out. Starving for intimacy with God that changes me in the deeper places of my being rather than merely monitoring externals. Starving for rest—to know God beyond all that I think I'm supposed to do for him. Starving for quiet—to hear the sound of sheer silence that is the Presence of God himself.

Silence is the discipline that has helped me to drop beneath the superficiality of my mental constructs to that place of longing and desire,

that place of reaching for what I do not have. It is in this wordless place that I turn all facets of myself (not just my mind) toward God and wait for his initiative in my life without taking so much responsibility for it. There is a kind of experiential knowing that comes in the silence that doesn't come in the words. The Hebrew word translated *be still* (Psalm 46:10) literally means *let go of your grip*. Let go of your grip on your human understanding. Cease striving at the level of human effort and open yourself to a whole different kind of knowing.

What I'm learning these days is that a lot of our God-talk is like the finger that points to the moon. The finger that points to the moon is not the moon; pointing to the moon, talking about the moon, involving ourselves in study and explanation about how the light of the moon is generated is not the same thing as sitting in the moonlight, letting the moonbeams fall around us illuminating what they will. It is not the same thing as noticing how everything is transformed in this numinous light. When we sit in the moonlight, we don't try to figure it out, explain it, or force it to be anything different than what it is. We just enjoy it.

It is the same with God. Our words and mental constructs *about* God are not the Reality itself. They only point to it. In silence we give in to the fact that our words can never contain God or adequately describe our experiences with God. We give our minds permission to just stop and rest themselves in the *experience* of the Reality itself. The willingness to be silent in God's presence results in quietness, confidence, and clarity beyond what the human mind can generate. This is a very deep kind of rest indeed.

Ruth Haley Barton is a teacher, spiritual director, and retreat leader. She is author of *Invitation to Solitude and Silence: Experiencing God's Transforming Presence* (InterVarsity Press, 2004), from which this article is excerpted.

This article can be accessed at:

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/bcl/areas/spiritualgrowth/articles/bcl-031126.html>