

DEVELOPING YOUR SPIRITUAL BASE

The single most important developmental exercise a Christian leader must do is that of developing adequate spiritual resources sufficient to carry out the responsibilities of his or her job. All other activities, all other training, all mentoring, all education will be rendered useless if there is not a sufficient spiritual foundation. Just as a car, no matter how expensive and equipped, will not run without fuel, so also a Christian leader cannot lead, minister or impart vision without spiritual resources. As leaders, we need to lead from a spiritual base." In our hearts, that is exactly what we want to do...but how?

A spiritual base is the fountainhead--the wellspring of your life and ministry. A spiritual base can be built, eroded, repaired and expanded. It will ultimately determine the breadth, depth, longevity and the effectiveness of your ministry. Our spiritual base is our "roots" of which Solomon wrote in Proverbs 12:12, *"The root of the righteous yields fruit"* (NAS). Fruit is ultimately the product of our roots--our unseen life, not our branches.

The importance of a spiritual base

1) Our effectiveness is a product of who we are. In Luke 6:43-45, Jesus tells a story. He says, *"No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its fruit. People do not pick figs from thorn bushes, or grapes from briars. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks."* What can we learn from this lesson? First of all, I cannot bring forth and give away anything that is not in my heart.

Second, what is in my heart is determined by what I "store up" in my heart--both good and evil. Little wonder Solomon penned these words, *"Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of*

life" (Proverbs 4:23). What comes out of the well is determined by what we put in. Psalm 119:9 says that we can hide God's Word in our hearts. Ephesians 3:16 reminds us that Christ dwells in our hearts. What we put in our hearts will be the most determinative thing about us.

Third, our ministry to others is an overflow of who we are and what we are becoming. When people are spiritually hungry they look for grapevines and fig trees not thorn bushes and briars. If we are genuinely walking with Christ and are ministering from what we are storing up in our hearts, ministry is almost effortless. The Psalmist wrote, *"As they pass through the Valley of Baca (a desert), they make it a place of springs"* (Psalm 84:6).

2) Without an expanding spiritual base we face the prospect of "burn-out." A good formula to remember is this...If our resources are greater than our responsibilities, we will be bored. If our responsibilities are greater than our resources, we will burn out. If we want to have an ever-increasing ministry, we must be committed to building an adequate spiritual base that will accommodate ever-increasing opportunities. Some staff may not be "burned-out" but they have not built a sufficient spiritual base to take them into the next life-phase or area of ministry. They've "dried out." Vocationally, they have outgrown the campus job but don't have the spiritual resourcefulness to take the next step.

3) Our spiritual base will determine the longevity of our effectiveness. Psalm 92:12-15 *"The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green, proclaiming, 'The Lord is upright; he is my rock, and there is no wickedness in him.'" Pastor Ron Dunn used to exhort us staff saying, "Take care of the depth of your life and God will take care of the breadth of your ministry."*

Barriers to building a base

1) Spiritual Giftedness. We can run for the first few years of ministry on the energy of youth and our spiritual giftedness--especially if our abilities are public and in demand. There will always be those pragmatic individuals who will gladly use our gifts (which may not be dependent on our spirituality) regardless of our spiritual condition. If one is effective he or she will be used. However, when a leader's abilities outstrip his or her spirituality, he or she will eventually stagger and fall.

2) Our commitment to "the basics." Because we traffic in "basic discipleship" it is easier to master the methods of ministry than it is to develop genuine spiritual strength. We really don't have to develop deep spiritual resources to handle most of our ministry responsibilities. Each year we begin with a group of fresh recruits to whom we can impart what we taught to last year's entering class. We really don't have to develop a spiritual foundation.

3) Busyness. If you are a leader, you probably prefer to be on the front lines where the action is rather than to pray, study God's Word and be still before him. That's not an indictment but it may be a fact. However, without (in Howard Hendrick's words) "a virile private life" eventually you will run out of steam. It may be at the end of the semester, the end of the year or the end of your spiritual life.

4) Ministry success. Ironically enough, the ministry itself can keep us from developing intimacy with Christ. If we are experiencing "success" it is easy to conclude that we must be doing things right. We are deceived into thinking that we don't really need much spiritual development to be effective.

Illustrations of a spiritual base

1) A Rock. Interestingly enough there are several "word pictures" attributed to Jehovah God--words that give a mental picture of God's character or abilities. One of the most commonly used names

for God is "rock." First used in Genesis 49:24 to describe the source of Joseph's strength, many writers, when searching for an expression to describe God, return to the word "Rock." For instance, David in Psalm 18:2 wrote *"The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge."*

God is also described as the foundation of our very lives--*"He will be the sure foundation for your times, a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge..."* (Isaiah 33:6). *"For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ"* (1 Corinthians 3:11). In the final analysis, our spiritual foundation is Jesus Christ himself.

2) A Fountain/Well. In John 7:37 Jesus extended an invitation to each one of us. He said, *"If anyone is thirsty, let him keep coming to me and keep drinking and...streams of living water will flow from within him. By this he meant the Spirit..."* In this passage, Jesus identified the Holy Spirit as the source of spiritual life. As we recognize our thirst and keep coming to him to have our thirst slaked, the same life--the living waters--flows in and out of us into those we minister to. We are giving from the resources he has given to us.

Building a spiritual base

A spiritual base is not built during a weekend retreat or on a sporadic quiet time. A strong spiritual base is constructed and repaired over a lifetime. How can we build a spiritual base?

1) Spend extended time before the Lord. Psalm 23:3 says *"He (the Lord) restores my soul."* The word "restore" means to return to its original condition--to renew. Our souls get worn down by the pressures and responsibilities of life. As we give our lives away, we will run out of spiritual energy and resources. After his busiest recorded day, *"very early in the morning Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed."*

The word "prayed" means "to put oneself before" the Lord as opposed to getting something from the Lord. Jesus simply needed time alone with the Father to renew his spiritual batteries. On his knees, his purpose and priorities became clear (Mark 1:38). Eugene Peterson, in his New Testament paraphrase The Message, translates Matthew 11:28-30 as *"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me--watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."*

In Psalm 51:12,13 David prayed, *"Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me."* We need daily time with the Lord to replenish our "reservoirs" to meet the demands of the day. We need extended time with the Lord to replenish our underground aquifers. The aquifers keep us going and growing during the dry seasons or during those times when we genuinely don't have time for a quiet time. Most Directors give themselves and their staff at least one full day a month to spend with the Lord for a time of extended prayer, Bible study, reflection, planning and evaluation.

2) Commit yourself to God's Word. Psalm 19:7 states, *"The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul."* Just as the Lord himself restores our soul (Psalm 23:3) God's Word, probably more than any single component, is what "fills our tanks" and revives our souls. Psalm 1 talks of the fruitful person who lives from the resources of the Word as a tree lives from the water in the stream.

In Matthew 7:24-27 Jesus says that our spiritual foundation is built through applying his teaching. Our spiritual base is built line upon line, precept upon precept as we apply the Scriptures to our lives. God reminded Joshua that his spiritual strength would come from the resources of the Word. One Team Leader punctuated this point by saying, "If I

don't spend at least an hour in the Word, I feel like I'm going on campus half-dressed."

Practically speaking, one of the most fruitful things one can do is to commit oneself to regular, systematic study of the Bible. Howard Hendricks suggests an hour of Bible study a day, studying a different book of the Bible each month. As we fill our lives with God's Word, we will have a deep reservoir from which we will minister to others. It's difficult to feed hungry people on yesterday's manna.

Think of it this way...in 2 Timothy 3:16,17, Paul gives instruction to a spiritual leader. He concludes the passage by saying that it is God's Word that makes us *"thoroughly equipped for every good work."* God's Word is what equips us for ministry. We don't have the luxury of giving just our opinions. People come to us because they want God's perspective on life.

3) Live a cleansed life. Earlier in Paul's second letter to Timothy, he wrote in 2:21, *"If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument...useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work."* Do you see the connection between the value of God's word coupled with a cleansed life? A cleansed life *prepares* us for every good work. God's Word *equips* us for every good work.

4) Walk in the Spirit. The Christian life is a supernatural life. There are few things as difficult as attempting to do spiritual work from the resources of the flesh. When all is said and done, ministry is simply allowing Jesus Christ to minister through us as we aggressively abide in him.

5) Integrity and authenticity. People are not looking for perfect people to follow but they are looking for genuine people. Integrity means that what we appear to be in public is who we are in private. Psalm 78:72 says that King David *"shepherded them (God's people) with integrity of heart..."* His spiritual base was one of integrity.

Jesus condemned the Pharisees in Matthew 23 for their lack of integrity. They loved the positions and titles of ministry but didn't *"practice what they preached."* Followers will forgive almost anything in their leader except a lack of integrity.

Developing your resourcefulness

In Exodus 33:12-34:32 we see a good illustration of Moses' interaction with the Lord, and what he did to build his spiritual base.

Motivations for meeting with God

- An unmet need. *"You have been telling me, 'Lead these people' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me"* (33:12).
- A desire to know God's will. *"If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways..."* (33:13)
- A desire to know God. *"...so I may know you..."* (33:13,15,18)

Preparation for meeting with God

- *"Chisel out two stone tablets...and I will write on them"* (34:1). We come to God with an expectancy to hear from him and a notebook, journal, etc. When we come to a quiet time with a pen, we are expecting to hear from God himself. We are not meeting with a book or a habit. We are meeting with the living God.
- *"Be ready in the morning"* (34:2). It's interesting that whether one is a "morning person" or "night person," the most effective time for people to have a quiet time is before the busyness of the day begins. Mark 1:35 portrays Jesus rising *"very early in the morning, while it was still dark..."* In Psalm 5:3 David wrote, *"In the morning, O Lord, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation."* In Psalm 119:147 *"I rise before dawn and cry for help; I have put my hope in your word."* It's not that we can't meet with God just as well at another time of the day, but each

of our personal histories attests to the fact that we usually don't.

- *"...come up on Mount Sinai.* Present yourself to me..." (34:2). Until the tabernacle was built, Mount Sinai was the dwelling place of God. Do you have a special place to meet with the Lord? Your "Mount Sinai" may be your study, your living room or McDonald's.
- *"No one is to come with you"* (34:3). A quiet time is not a group function. It is a time to be alone with the Lord.

Meeting with God

Then look what happened. God actually came down and met with Moses and told him what he was like--merciful, compassionate, forgiving, loving--and in response Moses bowed to the ground and worships. Moses confessed his sin and asked God to take Israel as his inheritance (34:5-9). God also gave to Moses his words. He personally instructed Moses. Sounds like a great quiet time, doesn't it?

Results of meeting with God

Let's look at the postscript in 34:29-32. As a result of meeting with the Lord Moses was both radiant--he experienced an inward change and he was resourceful--*"He gave to them all (the Israelites)...(that) the Lord had given him on Mount Sinai"* (34:32). Many believers want to be spiritually resourceful but have not met with God and so they have nothing to give away. If we want to be resourceful it is imperative to get resources.

Application: