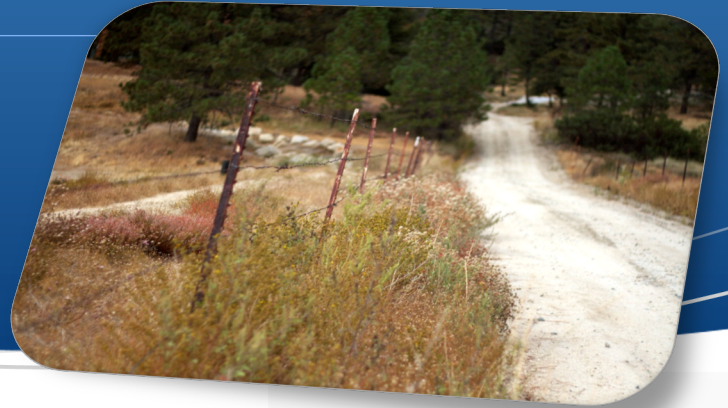




THE
LEADERSHIP
INSTITUTE

Developing Christian leaders who
listen and respond to God's voice,
embody His character and extend His kingdom.



Spiritual Formation & Leadership

Practical suggestions for integrating spiritual formation
and leadership in a planning day for a church or
ministry.

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Integrating Spiritual Formation & Leadership Development

EXPERIMENTS IN UNHURRIED LEADERSHIP

One of our ministries at The Leadership Institute is consulting with and training leaders of Christian organizations in what we call a *Contemplative Planning Process*. It's a kind of unhurried approach to leadership.

We've been doing this work for over twenty years. Whether in the context of retreat days or in on-site consultations, we've enjoyed a great sense of the guiding presence of God in the midst, giving us a scripture, a question, a next step, or a word that was just what was needed in the moment. We keep witnessing ways in which Jesus manages the process in such a way that we simply cannot take credit for the very fruitful outcome. The master plan is His and not ours.

We've learned, sometimes through uncertainty and sometimes through practical need, to feel more dependence than independence in these processes. This is actually a great gift in practicing leadership that is deeply rooted in spiritual transformation. We learn a kind of deep and substantial confidence that Jesus knows just what He is doing, that He is purposefully present, and that He is glad to graciously use us along the way for His purposes. In any Christian leadership venture, we are not the majority player but a minority partner. That is actually a very freeing and refreshing arrangement.

The ministry of helping leaders build in substantial time and space to enjoy God together before moving into the practical strategizing and planning work on their plate continues to be delightfully rewarding. Seeking God's kingdom and righteousness first (not just in sequence, but also in deep substance) may reduce the quantity of time to do the practical work of strategizing, goal setting or planning, but it dramatically increases the quality of that work.

We have often had the experience of setting aside significant time at the beginning of a planning day when a leadership group then finished their work before the scheduled ending (even with the shorter time to work on it). Far from diminishing the quality and quantity of their strategic work due to reducing the amount of time spent planning, this approach actually multiplies the fruitfulness of their work beyond what they felt they would have produced if they'd "opened in prayer" and spent the whole remainder of their time on the work. When Jesus says that if we seek God first, then *all these things* will be given as well, He actually means it. Though the things Jesus mentioned specifically were food and clothing, It's not a stretch to count on God's gracious provision of basic organizational needs like wisdom, unity, creativity, insight, mutual care, emotional buoyancy, or energy in ministry strategizing or program planning.

This isn't to say that spiritual practices like solitude, silence, community, intercession or lectio divina should be used in a utilitarian manner. We don't *use* spiritual disciplines to get what we want. We *practice* spiritual disciplines as a way of noticing, acknowledging and responding to the God Who is already with us.

We're finding that this more unhurried approach is proving more fruitful than the common hurried approach to which many of us are accustomed. Taking a two-day planning retreat and devoting as much as half of that time to an unhurried seeking of God Himself to listen to Him and respond to Him, apart from the work of ministry itself, is producing fertile soil in which good planning and strategizing grows.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

One practical guideline that helps us structure the flow of the day is a piece of priceless wisdom from Chuck Miller, one of our founders and senior mentors: *“We must be the people of God before we do the work of God.”* So we prefer to arrange the flow of a planning day so that the first part of the day is “people of God” time with the second part, “the work of God” portion, flowing from there.

FIRST PART OF THE DAY

One pastor in our Dominican Republic Journey process describes this first part as “enjoying God together.” We seek to provide opportunities to unhurriedly enjoy the goodness, beauty, kindness and generosity of God together before we jump into the “God business” on our minds.

We build in a few moments at the beginning of the day for members of the team to share a little about where they find themselves as they come: sharing desires, hopes, challenges, burdens, worries, whatever. We give a little time for personal journaling, and then some small group sharing.

We provide time to reflect together on a key passage—perhaps using the classic practice of *lectio divina*. (Here are [a few journal entries](#) that serve as examples of how one of our team members engages this practice.) In preparation for such a day, we recommend taking some time to ask God for insight into selecting a passage that would be especially helpful for this team at this time. A simple “read, reflect, respond, rest” process can be a rich way to enjoy God together in scripture.

We often then take time to share together what are some of the big questions that are on the hearts and minds of the team as they come to this day of planning for the season of ministry ahead? How do they see the people they are serving? What seems to be on God’s heart for them? What next steps might the Spirit be guiding us to take together?

We build in an hour or two for the team to move out into solitude and silence. One of our team members has written on [“How to Enjoy a Long Time Alone with God,”](#) as well as provided a resource we use for [“Extended Personal Communion \[EPC\] with God.”](#) This is *very* stretching for some leader types. There are *many reasons we resist* being alone with God like this. Decide on a length of time that will stretch the group without overstressing them. The point of this time is simply to be with God and *listen, listen, listen*. Listen for yourself. Listen for the leadership team. Listen for the group you serve together.

When we come back together after the time in solitude, we like to use [debrief questions](#) to help people share their stories.

We end this first half of the day expressing our thanks to God for experiences of grace we’ve experienced and heard from others on the team.

SECOND PART OF THE DAY

As you move toward the planning part of the day, start by praying as a team for people these plans will serve. Have directories or other group lists available. How might Jesus Himself be praying for this group? What is on His heart for these His beloved sons and daughters? What does He want to communicate to them? How does He want them to walk with Him? Specifically? Pray in a listening way. Take notes, maybe even on Post-it poster paper stuck to the wall. What are you learning that helps in your planning?

Through the second half of the day, expect that that insights from scripture, solitude and community in the first part of the day will seep into the planning part of the day.

Have fun planning opportunities for the group this team serves to enjoy God together, enjoy one another, and engage in good kingdom work for the benefit and blessing of the world around them. Don't plan too much.

End the day with a time to express thanks together to God for whatever you've witnessed of God's grace, God's initiative, and God's favor in your day.