



Northwest Conference Revitalization Gatherings for Pastors

February 28, 2012- noon

Purpose of Re-Connect:

1. Mutual Learning Opportunities
2. Sharing of Best Practices
3. Extend Connection and Support
4. Prayer Support
5. "Real Time" Peer Consultation and Support

Agenda

- **Opening Reflection- Jon**
- **Group Sharing**
 - What is going well? What new challenge(s) are you facing?
- **Prayer**
- **Reflections on marker- "Life Transforming Walk with Jesus"**
 - A few focus questions:
 - What does it mean to believe in Jesus?
 - What practices do you implement to strengthen your belief, trust, and obedience to Christ?
 - Does your church reflect a community of people whose lives are transforming?
 - Why or Why not?
 - How is your church helping your process of change/transformation?
- **Next Meeting- March 27 (Noon- 2pm)- Darrell Nelson will be joining us**
 - Bring Your Own Lunch...Beverages Provided**

"As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another"...

Proverbs 27:17

no. **1**
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Spiritual growth needs to be nurtured through regular spiritual practices. May this practice help you grow deeper in Christ and further in mission.

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Reading the Bible...

READING THE BIBLE is a critical discipline of our spiritual growth. While there are many different ways to build this into your life, the questions included here offer a reflective and prayerful means of allowing the Bible to shape your attitudes and actions.

As followers of Jesus, we are people of the Word. Our goal is not just to know the facts of the Bible, but to let its truths increasingly shape our attitudes and our lives. Regularly reading the Bible is essential as we seek to become more like Jesus.

There are many ways to dig into a Scripture text. Here's one way to enter the reading as a form of prayer. Using the word GROW as an acronym, the following questions are meant to guide your reading so that it becomes transformational rather than simply informational. As you

begin, ask the Holy Spirit to guide you. Read the selected text, and then enter a conversation with God about it.

Questions to help you GROW

God's Word...

- What does the text teach about God's character?
- Is this godly characteristic evident in my life?

Relationships...

- How does the text motivate toward healthier relationships?

Obedient Living...

- In what ways am I being called to obedience through this text?
- Is there something for which I need to ask God's forgiveness?

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Worship...

- How will I express my gratitude to God for what I've learned?
- How might I more faithfully engage in a lifestyle of worship?

You may wish to focus on the preaching text(s) of the upcoming Sunday in order to prepare you for listening to God. In that case, you might choose one of these questions as your focus for each day, or consider all of them with a different text each day. Whatever your approach, you can be confident that your attitudes and actions will be increasingly shaped by the truths of the Bible.

"...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."—Philippians 1:4-6

A few passages to get you started

Old Testament...

- Deuteronomy 6:1-9
- Isaiah 55:8-11

Psalms...

- Psalms 23
- Psalms 139:1-14

New Testament...

- Ephesians 1:3-10
- Colossians 3:12-17

You may choose to select your texts from the lectionary (a compilation of readings, based in the Christian year, intended to help a congregation

receive the whole counsel of God in a two or three-year cycle). You can find the lectionary beginning on page 960 of *The Covenant Hymnal*.

Please remember that not every question being asked can be answered within every passage we might read. The more specific a question, the more often that question cannot be answered by the text. The guiding questions we've given here are just that...guiding. The desired outcome within this practice is that you develop a regular habit of scriptural reading.

My plan for the next weeks or months

"For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."
—Hebrews 4:12

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Praying Scripture...

PRAYING SCRIPTURE is a practice used by the early church and for Christians ever since. The two methods described in this tool provide a means of allowing the Word of God to shape our actions and our lives.

"Praying Scripture allows God to direct the content of prayer. It opens the heart to praying particular prayers, psalms, teachings and hopes found in the Bible. It allows God to shape our prayer life through the words of Scripture."¹

Lectio Divina

This Scripture praying method has been used by Christians for many, many years. It is sometimes called 'lectio divina' or 'holy reading.'

1) *Select a short passage of scripture.* The Psalms are a great place to begin.

2) *Be purposeful.* Sit comfortably, breathe deeply, relax body, acknowledge and release distractions. Invite God's presence.

3) *Read the passage (1 or 2 times).* Stop when a word or phrase stops you, becomes vibrant or attracts you. Is there a word or image that impresses you? Bring your senses to the text. Allow for 1-2 minutes of silence.

4) *Read the passage again.* Listen to discover how this passage touches your life today. What does it mean? What is God trying to say? Do not try to force a meaning. Stay open. This is a time of reflection, involving thinking, feeling, and/or intuition. Allow for 1-2 minutes of silence, creating openness to the Spirit.

5) *Read the passage once more.* Listen to discover the invitation. What

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is God calling me to do or be today or this week? Be aware of resistance. Open your heart and will to the action that may be called for. Allow for 2-3 minutes of silence and response to God.

6) *Share and pray.* Take time to express what you have heard from God. If alone, journal impressions, or words, or a prayer that expresses your response to God. In a group, share aloud the word, image, or invitation received.

Imagination

Another way to pray Scripture is to use your imagination to place yourself within the text. This is easiest to do when reading a story or narrative text. For example, as you read the story of Jesus healing two blind men, through your imagination, become one of those men.

1) Read Matthew 20:29-34. As Jesus and his disciples were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed him. Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was going by, they shouted, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!" The crowd rebuked them and told them to be quiet, but they

shouted all the louder, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!" Jesus stopped and called them. "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked. "Lord," they answered, "we want our sight." Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him.

2) Enter the story, using your imagination. After you've read the story to become familiar with the scene, close your eyes and imagine that you are one of those men who is crying out to Jesus. See Jesus, in your mind's eye, coming toward you. He asks you..."What do you want me to do for you?"

3) What is your response? Imagine what Jesus does next. What does he say to you?

A verse to remember

"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."
—2 Peter 3:18

Endnotes

¹ Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (InterVarsity Press, 2005).

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Telling Your Story...

TELLING YOUR STORY is a practice that encourages and builds relationship with others. As you consider how God has been at work to transform you, an attitude of gratitude emerges. This spiritual growth practice offers us opportunity to reflect upon what God has been doing in and around us.

God is at work in your life. It's true...and through sharing the story of how God is at work in you, others are encouraged, and you become more aware of God's faithful work in and through you.

There are multiple effective approaches: written or spoken storytelling, artwork, poetry, dance, drama, music, video...be creative! The very process of putting your story into one of these forms is in itself a spiritual growth experience.

Making your story accessible to others is another growth step. You might choose to share what you've created in community worship...or in a small group...or in your family...or with a mentor or spiritual companion. Whatever the time or place, here are five guidelines to consider.

Five Guidelines

- 1) Describe a commitment or decision you've made in recent months.
- 2) Tell of the joys or struggles you've experienced along the way.
- 3) Are there people who have helped you grow closer to God?
- 4) How might others pray for you as you continue this journey of spiritual growth?
- 5) Remember, there are no right or wrong answers. This is your story...your journey.

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Ask someone else to join you in this spiritual growth practice. Bringing hope and encouragement to others through story is a powerful tool of transformation. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we're called to be encouragers of one another in this way.

"Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing."—1 Thessalonians 15:11

Questions to Guide You

Is there a commitment or decision I've made in recent months?

What joys have I experienced since making this decision or commitment?

What struggles or difficulties have I experienced?

Who has helped me grow closer to God during this experience?

Others might help me live more fully into this new commitment by...

What form(s) would I like to try in telling my story?

Who might benefit from hearing my story?

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Praying Your Community...

PRAYING YOUR COMMUNITY is a practice that will allow you to bring your community (the people, organizations, businesses, and government) before the Lord through prayer and intercession. As disciples of Jesus Christ we are called to be in the world, but not of the world (John 17:16-18). We do not live in isolation, but rather in neighborhoods and communities that are in need of God's transforming power.

Prayer is one of the avenues through which God works to bring about transformation.

1 Timothy 2:1 tells us to pray and intercede for everyone. By praying for our community, we are affirming our solidarity with our neighbors, while asking God to bring about transformation and change.

Praying your community can be

done in a variety of ways:

1) Make a list of your neighbors, the institutions (including schools, social agencies, and governmental offices), the people in positions of power and authority.

2) Ask yourself the following questions:

- What specific needs am I aware of in the lives of my neighbors and in the community at large?
- How does my community need to experience the transforming power of God?
- What social injustices are present in my community?
- What are the social problems that are facing my community?
- How can I engage my community and become an agent of change?

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3) Pray for the people, institutions, and organizations that you have listed. Pray for specific needs. Use the answers to the previous questions to guide you in your prayer.

It might also be helpful to take a community newspaper and read through it as you prayerfully ask God to reveal the areas and ways that he is at work, or the areas that need to be touched by his transforming power. As you read what is happening in your community, pray for discernment and for God to reveal the ways in which you can be salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16).

4) Finally, get out and walk around your neighborhood, or drive through your community, praying for the

places and people you encounter. Use this time to intercede on behalf of your community.

Stop in front of the local schools, parks, and any social service agencies. Take time to pray for the children. Pray for others in your community who may not have a voice.

Pray for the government officials as you stop in front of the government offices.

Again, ask God to give you discernment as you walk or drive through your community. Where is God at work? Where does transformation and change need to happen? How can it happen?

What is your role? How does God want to use you?

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Walking with God...

WALKING WITH GOD is a spiritual practice which involves specifically focusing on what God has to teach you through your surroundings. Especially in the gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John), you will notice that Jesus spent a lot of time teaching as he walked from village to village, from event to event.

As Jesus went, people often joined him. They gathered to hear him speak. Jesus used those times to teach his friends about the kingdom of God, about his Father, about themselves.

Jesus often taught significant life lessons using objects in the surroundings to illustrate the truth he was sharing, such as:

*The kingdom of God is like this....
Seeds falling on different kinds of
ground,*

*Lamps hidden under baskets,
Lost sheep,
Lost coins...*

You can grow deeper in Christ today by intentionally taking a walk with God. This is sometimes called a parable walk.

Begin your walk in an attitude of prayer

- 1) Ask Jesus to teach you.
- 2) Walk slowly and notice your surroundings.
- 3) When something catches your attention, stop and ask what God has for you there.
- 4) Linger long and let God's quiet voice tell you the secrets of the kingdom. When you sense God speaking, you may want to stop and write in your journal.

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5) Spend as much time there as you feel you need. When you are ready to move on, do so. Ask Jesus again to lead you, to teach you, to speak to you.

You can walk with God anywhere

Walk through an *indoor space*: home, church, work, shopping mall, grocery store. Pray for each space as you walk through it. Think about the people who occupy each space. What comes to your mind as you enter these spaces? While walking, think about how God might see this space. How do you see the heart of God for this space?

When you are *outside*, you might stop at a huge oak tree that is beginning to lose its leaves. What might God be saying here? Use all of your senses as you explore what God might want to convey to you through this object. What might the tree symbolize in your life or faith journey?

This kind of prayer takes time. Slow down, quiet your spirit, and allow your heart to begin to listen. Give yourself at least half an hour. Listening for God's still small voice is a vital dimension of prayer.

"Jesus then began to speak to them in parables." —Mark 12:1

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Making Commitments...

MAKING COMMITMENTS is a way to organize the spiritual practices you choose, and to set behavioral goals for your spiritual life. The resulting goals provide a framework for healthy and balanced growth.

Making commitments is essential to establishing a lifelong process of growth. Whether you've been growing for a few days, a few years, or a lifetime, continued growth requires taking the time to refocus on the goals and determining what is needed to get there.

Just as some plants need a frame for healthy growth, so we as Christians can benefit from a similar guide. Using the word GROW as a framework, a structure for healthy and balanced growth is formed. Sometimes this is referred to as a 'rule of life'.

Take a few minutes to reflect on your spiritual growth over this past year. What practices have helped you lean more intentionally and fully into the transforming work of the Spirit? Are there actions to which you'd like to commit in order to become more like Christ?

Each of us is designed to connect with God and to grow in a unique way. No two journeys are exactly alike. Whatever commitments you make, be confident of this: *"that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."*—Philippians 1:6

Some commitment examples:

God's Word

- "I will commit to daily Bible reading."
- "I will join a Bible study group."

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Relationships

- "I will mentor [name] through weekly contact."
- "I will participate in a small group."

Obedient Living

- "I will volunteer at a community soup kitchen."
- "I will give a tithe of my income."

Worship

- "I will spend 30 minutes in personal worship each day."
- "I will meditate on the Scripture passage in preparation for corporate worship."

"Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."—Ephesians 4:13

My commitment

Between today and _____
I commit to grow in each of these four areas. In the area of...

God's Word, I will...

Relationships, I will...

Obedient Living, I will...

Worship, I will...

I will ask this person/these people to keep me accountable for my growth commitment this year:

"It is unlikely that we will deepen our relationship with God in a casual or haphazard manner. There will be a need for some intentional commitment and some reorganization in our own lives. But there is nothing that will enrich our lives more than a deeper and clearer perception of God's presence in the routine of daily living."¹

Endnotes

¹ William O. Paulsell, "Ways of Prayer: Designing a Personal Rule" (Weavings, September/October 1987).

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Becoming Spiritual Companions...

BECOMING SPIRITUAL COMPANIONS is a practice in which we offer encouragement and support for one another. Seeking a deeper relationship with Christ? Then you will need the support, encouragement and accountability that a soul friend can offer.

Being formed into the likeness of Christ requires companions for the journey to help guide and nurture our faith, and to help us discern God's movement in our lives. Spiritual companions, or "soul friends," are found throughout scripture—Moses and Joshua, Ruth and Naomi, David and Jonathan, Paul and Timothy, to name a few. Soul friends provide soul care for others.

There are several variations of spiritual companionship.¹

Spiritual Direction

A relationship of holy listening, discernment, and prayer, providing encouragement and accountability. This is a "prayer process in which a person seeking help in cultivating a deeper personal relationship with God meets with another for prayer and conversation that is focused on increasing awareness of God in the midst of life experiences and facilitating surrender to God's will."²

How do you discern the movement of God in your life?

Spiritual Friendship

A relationship for mutual accountability and encouragement with the express purpose of spiritual growth. Spiritual friends can mutually help one another take notice of God's

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presence and our response to that presence.

Who is holding you accountable to grow spiritually?

Discipling

A relationship of encouragement and guidance between a more mature disciple and a (spiritually) younger believer for the purpose of moving the disciplined toward spiritual maturity.

Who might benefit from your spiritual wisdom? And who has the potential for helping you move toward maturity?

Christian Mentoring

A relationship in which one person empowers another by sharing their God-given resources.³ This process of guiding one to his or her maximum potential in Jesus Christ is generally done through personal modeling, guidance and encouragement.

Who in your faith community models wisdom and active growth in Christ?

"As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another."—Proverbs 27:17

"We were never intended to make the life pilgrimage alone...We want companions for the journey, companions with whom we can share our soul and our journey."⁴

A Process for Spiritual Friendship:

1) Prayerfully begin with yourself and your own needs.

2) Prayerfully seek another with

the same mutual spiritual needs.

3) In continuing the relationship, here is a possible agenda:

- Define the "covenant" between you (a mutual agreement, boundaries, confidentiality, etc.).
- Share your spiritual pilgrimages.
- Develop a "personal vision" or "rule of life" (spiritual and relational growth goals that can become a focus for your conversations).
- Decide on specific disciplines or relationships that need encouragement and accountability.
- Pray together in silent and spoken times.
- Share immediate concerns.
- Evaluate your time together periodically.
- Encourage, encourage, and encourage: "come alongside."

An article describing the selection of a spiritual director can be found at our website www.covchurch.org. Use the Google search engine to enter "choosing a spiritual director."

Endnotes

¹ Adapted from "Habits of the Heart," a spiritual formation retreat developed by the Evangelical Covenant Church.

² David G. Benner, *Sacred Companions*, (InterVarsity Press, 2002).

³ Paul D. Stanley and J. Robert Clinton, *Connecting: The Mentoring Relationships You Need to Succeed in Life*, (NavPress, 1992).

⁴ Benner, *Sacred Companions*.