

CHAPTER 1



SPIRITUAL FORMATION FOR LAY LEADERS

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Spiritual formation is growing in our relationship with God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. It is what happens in our lives and the lives of others as a result of this growth. It truly is job one, where you start and end as a Lay Leader and everything in the middle. It should be a major part of the reason you were asked to be Lay Leader.

Some or all of the things we say regarding spiritual formation are a target for which all of us are shooting. As you read this, don't think everyone around you has met or arrived at all we are talking about. The authors haven't either! But it is what we want to be about so we can arrive spiritually at where God wants us to be.

Your personal relationship with God the Father is primary, paramount, and the base from which all you do springs. As we grow in relationship with God, His holiness will become evident in our lives. We must seek Christ daily to know Him better and to be more like Him. A daily set-aside time to be alone with God – in prayer, Bible study, and meditation is a must for the Lay Leader. The 'how' is up to the individual but seeking God and listening to God is where servant leadership begins and ends.

Suggestions to help continue your spiritual growth:

1. Set aside a time for devotion and a period of meditation
2. Develop a consistent prayer life
3. Participate in Bible study and other training opportunities for spiritual development. Remember, transformation through learning is a continuing process.
4. Seek an understanding of how to integrate God's work into our daily life experiences
5. Use your spiritual gifts for the glory of God
6. Seek to understand the mission and vision of the local and general church

The above is a 'gleaning' of an outstanding writing for the original Lay Leaders Handbook on spiritual formation by Debra Davis, a wonderful spiritual woman from the Ardmore District.

Is there anything else? Jesus was once asked a similar question by the rich young ruler (Matthew 19:16-22). "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" Jesus answers by going through a list of do's and don'ts, to which the young man responds, "I've done all that." Jesus' answer to the young man was to tell him what the next step, for him, needed to be.

In our setting today, the answer might be, look at the strategic plan. Where is the area that causes you the biggest challenge in submitting to God? After prayer and meditation, and after seeing changes in my own faith journey, the following is where God led me.

Our conference is heavily invested in the Strategic Plan movement. We are saying this is a start in making our churches more what we believe God intends them to be.

God is everywhere, in us, through us. He lives in our hearts. He is us. This is what we are striving for. He lives in us and his Spirit overlays our hearts, minds and souls. The Strategic Plan begins with us and God, expands to us and our churches, then ripples out even further to our communities. Just as the 4 quadrants of the Strategic Plan document can shape a church, so can they shape us as individuals.

The Strategic Plan and its quadrants can be a lens through which we look at ourselves. I believe this helps our spiritual formation to be more holistic, broader, and deeper. It will assist you as you help lead your church in implementing Strategic Plan and its ministries. If you are living them personally, the church will see it. It will be clearer for you and easier to explain to others if you are modeling it yourself.

Individual Focused Inward

Are you in a small group? There is an abundance of ways and materials, almost infinite, to use: books, a book of the Bible you creep through; focus can be prayer, Bible study, accountability, worship and praise, and others or a blend of one or more of these.

Is your church offering and are you participating in group ministries? Are you in tune with what God sees as your church's needs to grow spiritually?

Are you involved in intentional discipleship outside worship? Are you growing and is their action connected to your faith?

Do you regularly spend time (daily) in prayer, Bible study, and devotion?

How's your personal stewardship?

What spiritual practices are you focusing on? (Prayer, Bible study, Fasting, Tithing, Acts of Devotion, and Worship)

Do you know where you are in your faith journey? How did you get there?

Individual Focused Outward

Do you/have you (would you survive?!) sharing your faith with someone?

Are you involved in a justice ministry? Does your faith have arms and legs that reach out to others?

Have you taken the time to go on a mission trip?

Are you tithing or growing in that direction?

Community of Faith Focused Inward

Do I have a clear vision of my ministry, of what God is calling me to do? Am I prepared for it? If not, how do I prepare?

How do I enter worship? Am I expecting to meet God in worship?

Am I passionate about worship myself?

Am I nurturing and/or providing nurturing to someone/someone's?

Am I doing intercessory prayer for others?

Do I know what my spiritual gifts are and am I putting them to God's use?

Do I know what God is calling me to do and am I doing it?

Community of Faith Focused Outward

Do I invite people to my church for various events?

Am I excited about professions of faith and am I reaching out to others/sharing my faith with them?

Am I involved in short-term and/or long term mission projects?

Am I radically hospitable to anyone and everyone who comes to our church?

Am I involved in a social justice project or ministry?

Do I understand the apportionment process and can I explain the how/why of apportionments to others?

This is a long inventory of our spiritual formation. Don't let it overwhelm you! Yet, even this extensive list of areas is not comprehensive. It is an excellent beginning point for giving ourselves to God and his kingdom, just as Jesus told the rich young ruler. For him, possessions must have been the things that were getting in the way of being totally committed to God. What is your stumbling block? Where is your weak point? Where is God speaking to you about growth? Where is your opportunity to grow into an even more exciting relationship with God?

We, the laity who have put together this handbook for Lay Leaders, want to be clear that servant leadership – leadership which surrenders self to God and wherever He leads us in serving others – begins with our personal relationship with God. The foundation of this relationship is one's time spent alone each day with God in prayer, Bible study and meditation. Everything else grows from our spiritual disciplines. In this we learn about and grow in our love for God, which prepares us for loving others. Jesus ranked these very high. He was asked "Which commandment is the first of all? Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' Then he added the New Testament flavor: "The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Amen