

Corporate Spiritual Disciplines



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Leader's Guide

How to use "Corporate Spiritual Disciplines" by BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS in your regularly scheduled meetings.

Welcome to *BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS: Your Complete Guide to Leadership Training*. You've purchased an innovative resource that will help you develop leaders who can think strategically and biblically about the church. Selected by the editors of *Christianity Today International*, the material comes from respected thinkers and church leaders.

Building Church Leaders is not just another program. Each theme contains materials on the topic you choose—no tedious program to follow. The materials work when you want, where you want, and the way you want them to. They're completely flexible and easy to use.

You probably already have regularly scheduled meetings with board members or with other committees or groups of leaders. *Building Church Leaders* fits easily into what you're already doing. Here's how to use *Building Church Leaders* at the beginning of a board meeting or committee meeting:

1. Select a learning tool. In this theme of "Corporate Spiritual Disciplines," you'll find multiple types of handouts from which to choose:

- ◆ Bible study
- ◆ case study
- ◆ activities
- ◆ interview
- ◆ devotionals
- ◆ resources
- ◆ assessment tools
- ◆ how-to articles
- ◆ retreat plan

2. Select a handout. Suppose, for example, you want to identify the level of your church's commitment to specific spiritual disciplines. See "Keeping Our Balance in Worship" (p. 8) or "Fan the Flames of Service" (p. 9). Or maybe you want to know how leadership can best model corporate spiritual disciplines by consulting "Follow the Leaders" (p. 7). From these options, select the one that best fits what you want to accomplish.

3. Photocopy the handout. Let's say you selected "Fan the Flames of Service." Photocopy as many copies as you need—you do *not* need to ask for permission to photocopy any material from *BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS* (as long as you are using the material in a church or educational setting and are not charging for it).

4. Prepare for the discussion. We recommend you read the Scripture passages and identify key discussion questions. How will you apply the principles to specific decisions your church is making?

5. Lead the discussion. Most handouts can be read within five minutes. After you have allowed time for reading, begin the discussion by asking one of the provided questions. Be ready to move the discussion on to specific issues your church is facing.

Most *BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS* handouts can be discussed in 15 or 20 minutes (except the Bible study, which may take longer). Your board, committee, or team will still have plenty of time to discuss its agenda.

Need more material, or something on a specific topic? See our website at www.BuildingChurchLeaders.com.

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Out of Isolation

We encounter the living God in a powerful way while in the community of the temple.

Isaiah 6:1–8

Protestant faith in America is highly individualistic. Except for corporate worship, most of the current practices we think will produce transformation can be performed alone.

Pastors and church members increasingly struggle with this spiritual shortfall. Doug Pagitt, pastor of Solomon’s Porch in Minneapolis, says, “In my background, the emphasis was on personal devotional life: have you had your quiet time with God? But there’s more to the Christian life than Bible reading and church attendance.” Pagitt’s congregation is all about community, and he’s teaching the spiritual disciplines in the context of corporate worship and the church as the body of Christ. But what does it take to add spiritual practices to right beliefs?

Read Isaiah 6:1–8.

Isaiah not only fulfilled his obligations at the temple, he encountered the living God. After his mystical experience, Isaiah heard God say, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” And Isaiah responded, “Here I am, send me!” Isaiah moved beyond worship to personal encounter with God—and that encounter sent him onward to bring Israel to the most profound renewal possible.

Eric Reed, in an article “New Journeys on Well-Worn Paths” for LEADERSHIP journal, says that with the revitalization of Christian formation there have been obstacles in some Protestant churches.

“One factor is a theological emphasis on intellectual assent that leaves actions unchecked,” he notes. “Another is the highly individualistic nature of Protestant faith in

America. Except for corporate worship, most of the current practices we expect to produce transformation can be performed alone.”

But Isaiah does not experience the presence of God in isolation but in the community of the temple. His mission from there is to call the people of Israel to repentance and renewal—in the context of community.

— Adapted from our sister publication ChristianBibleStudies.com, © 2008 by Christianity Today International.

Discuss

1. Do you agree with the comment that there is more to Christian life than Bible study and church attendance? What other spiritual practices are important?
2. What are some of our struggles in connecting with others in Christian spiritual disciplines?
3. How does the practice of corporate disciplines such as worship contribute to an individual’s spiritual life?



Showing Up For God—Together

Help your congregation add a corporate dimension to its individual spiritual disciplines.

Colossians 1:9–10

Mindy Caliguire is founder of Soul Care, a spiritual formation ministry. She is a regular speaker and leadership consultant for local churches and national groups. Caliguire spoke with BuildingChurchLeaders.com editor Tim Avery about spiritual disciplines and how they can be practiced corporately.



How would you define a spiritual discipline?

It's anything that I'm intentional about that helps me become aware of and open to God's ongoing activity in my life. I say "intentional" because while pain and hardship, for example, can be another means for making me more open to God, it is not a discipline to practice. My part is to intentionally show up; God's part is to move in and shape who I am.

Put another way: a discipline is a choice not to do what the rest of my life normally looks like, but instead to carve out time and space for God's ongoing work in my life.

How can a church participate in disciplines as a body?

I love that you're asking the question because spiritual practices are often thought to be so private and individual that they don't have anything to do with the church gathered. But we can intentionally show up for God in interpersonal or large-group settings as well. And a church can do a great deal to equip people for the disciplines.

For starters, take the acronym VIM: vision, intention, and means. Dallas Willard talks about this in *Renovation of the Heart*. He says this three-part process is necessary for any transformation, and he gives the example of learning a foreign language. In the U.S., most of us don't master a second language because it wouldn't make a hill-of-beans difference in our lives, most likely. But in many other parts of the world, people know that English is their ticket out of poverty. They have such a clear vision of what would be different in their lives that, even though they have few resources, they find a way to learn English.

So it is with any kind of change. There has to be a vision of the result, an intention to pursue that, and the means for doing so. And I think a congregation can hit on all of those levels. With vision, you can give people a clearer picture of the kingdom, of the kind of life we are being invited into. So often we focus on getting souls saved, but once we get to that point, people's minds go blank. We must give them a vision. In my case, I like to think in terms of the redeemed soul's "journey."

Or with the means, a church can help people by letting the disciplines become a part of their vocabulary. There are ways in which, when you have hundreds of people in a room, you can set up a reflective experience—maybe a time of silence. This doesn't guarantee that, come Tuesday, these people will choose to repeat the experience in their own living rooms. But while you have them there, you can still facilitate that experience, and maybe it will stick.

Of course a Sunday morning gathering may not be the place you'll spend 20 minutes explaining how to practice solitude. But you can also create retreat-like environments, in which people are taught about a particular spiritual practice, released to go try it, and then return to talk about it. In my case, this took the form of a three-hour class on Saturday mornings.

And, in a sense, individual disciplines are also corporate when church members are invited to process them together.

Yes. If you give people a chance to talk about their experiences and then create some boundaries around the conversations, people help each other. I think we learn these things really well in community.

What are some important disciplines that are primarily corporate in nature?

Worship, obviously, is key. Communion is a part of that. Then you also have the time of corporate teaching. There's a certain thing that God is saying to us as a community that's forming who we are as individuals. Scot McKnight and others say that, while God cares about us as individuals, He isn't so much concerned with people as he is with a people. I think God sees us more than we realize in that collective identity.

Those are practices taking place in any church. But I don't think they're often thought of as spiritual disciplines. What should a pastor or leader do about that?

It's all about setting expectations. In that time of worship or teaching, you want congregants to ask questions like, *How am I learning to open my soul up to God? God, where are you in this moment? What are you saying to me? What are you saying to us?*

Those are different questions than, *Do I like the music?* It's an entirely different orientation. It's about elevating our vision for what's real, for what God is saying to us as a community and to us as individuals within that community. If it's not aimed at openness to God, then it's pointless.

What about a corporate discipline that doesn't already happen on a weekly basis?

Corporate fasting and prayer—you see this pattern in the Bible, but it's almost glaringly absent from the modern church. My church has done something like it, in which we were challenged to identify with the poor by living on a subsistence diet. But still, there are times when big decisions or needs are brought before the congregation, and I think, *Oh, come on, just call us out. Challenge us to have solidarity in this.*

The problem is that it's very difficult to articulate the importance of fasting without falling into "Oh, here are the benefits you'll receive." But fasting is a way for a congregation to say, "The sacredness of this time is such that we're stopping to beg together for God to move." There's a shared desperation. And you only go into a time of fasting as a community if you expect God might be speaking to you, right? So it's not about mustering up the willpower to not eat. It's about opening up.

I'd love to see the practice of fasting recovered, not just in my church, but all across our church today.

What should a church be mindful of if the disciplines are beginning to get more attention there?

Two related dangers come to mind first. First, it can create a new little mechanical framework for people and reduce their bigger picture of life with God to *Oh, I just need to do this, this, and this.*

Similarly, I'm amazed by how, even when you try to communicate this stuff in a very grace-based way, people still hear it in judgmental tones. So it moves toward perfectionism, or—

Legalism.

Yeah. People are quick to make up rules. And I think that's what the Enemy would want to have happen. So I think you have to err on the side of being very grace filled when you talk about these things.

One other mistake I see is, maybe partly because of American culture, is when discussion of spiritual practices becomes, *Oh, just go care for your soul. Have a cozy afternoon and snuggle up with God.* Sometimes that's what you need, but it becomes very flighty when it's disconnected from the bigger picture. This isn't about narcissism or escapism; it's about running the race that's marked out for us, engaging what's ultimately real, entering into the truest of all battles. And that means that, sometimes, life is going to be very hard.

What books would you recommend to pastors or church leaders that want to think more about spiritual disciplines and practices?

Scot McKnight has a book on fasting, *Body Talk*, which is excellent. Then there's a great chapter or two in Thomas Kelly's *A Testament of Devotion*—I love this book, so I quote it all the time—that addresses the community life. Also, Dietrich Bonhoeffer is extraordinary on these kinds of things.

Do you have any final words for pastors and leaders on this issue?

My parting comment will always be: Do not worry about being strategic with these disciplines in your church until you feel like your own soul is in a good place. Lift up every rock, cross every chasm, do everything in your power to have your own soul be in a place of health—not perfection, but health.

Pastors are already overwhelmed. The last thing I want to do is give them one more list of things they need to go and make happen. So find that place of health, and then, from there, God will lead you into a good next step for your congregation.

—TIM AVERY; © 2010 Christianity Today International/BuildingChurchLeaders.com.

Discuss

1. Use Dallas Willard's VIM acronym to brainstorm how your church can move toward a heightened practice of corporate disciplines.
2. What is our church's vision for what God is saying to us as a community?
3. What steps can we take to guard against legalism while emphasizing corporate disciplines?



Follow the Leaders

Pastors and staff best teach about corporate disciplines by modeling them effectively.

Philippians 3:17

If church leaders are asking their congregations to engage in corporate spiritual disciplines such as prayer and study, they should be modeling these practices as a group. This means your leadership group should have a set of established goals and a way to be accountable to each other.

Does your leadership team pray as a group? How accountable are they to each other? Use this assessment to monitor your progress.

We have established a set of corporate prayer goals.

Regularly **Occasionally** **Never**

We email or communicate with each other our progress on these goals.

Regularly **Occasionally** **Never**

We pray as a part of leadership meetings.

Regularly **Occasionally** **Never**

We regularly have leadership gatherings devoted exclusively to prayer.

Regularly **Occasionally** **Never**

We pray a minimum of an hour each day as individuals.

Regularly **Occasionally** **Never**

We read the Word devotionally at least 30 minutes a day.

Regularly **Occasionally** **Never**

We pray with our families at least three days a week.

Regularly **Occasionally** **Never**

We pray for people in our ministries by name every week.

Regularly **Occasionally** **Never**

We promote the disciplines weekly in our church.

Regularly **Occasionally** **Never**

— BRIAN HAWES; adapted from our sister publication LEADERSHIP journal, © 2004 by Christianity Today International. For more articles like this, visit www.Leadershipjournal.net.

Discuss

1. Which of these goals are (or could be) the toughest? Why?
2. How can the leadership group let the congregation know about the group's corporate practices?
3. Why could a strong leadership practice of the disciplines benefit the congregation?



Keeping Our Balance in Worship

Bringing people into the presence of God requires the right mix of form and freedom.

Isaiah 58:13–14

A woman who was visiting a liturgical service kept punctuating the pastor's sermon with "Praise the Lord!" Another woman finally turned around and said, "Excuse me, but we don't praise the Lord in the Lutheran church."

A man down the pew corrected her. "Yes we do; it's on page 19."

Worship may be the most misunderstood corporate spiritual discipline. The confusion often arises when the form and freedom of our corporate worship gets out of balance. How well are we helping our people keep their balance and have a sound footing as they stand (and sit) to worship together? Mark with an "x" where your church is positioned on each of the following scales.

Balancing Loud Praise and Quiet Worship

David declared it legal to shout to the Lord. And yet after entering his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise, there comes a time of needful quiet worship.

Loud _____ **Quiet**

Balancing Structure and Spontaneity

Strict worship forms have their liabilities. Rite easily moves into rote. But freedom without form imprisons us as much as form without freedom.

Strictly liturgical _____ **Free form**

Balancing the Timely and the Timeless

The strength of the contemporary is that it speaks our language. The major liability is that it appears (and may be) shallow. It has not stood the test of time. The danger of time-dated material, however, is that it is so distant it seems unapproachable.

Focused on the past _____ **Focused on today**

Balancing Leaders and Laity

Is our worship a one-man show or a gathering of the called? Church was not meant to be a place where the minister ministers and the congregation congregates. Worship is not something done for the laity but by them. But we do need pastoral leadership in worship. Tending the flock includes giving them the best we can when they are all gathered together.

Only the pastor's voice _____ **Only the flock talks**

— PAUL ANDERSON; adapted from our sister publication LEADERSHIP journal, © 1986 by Christianity Today International. For more articles like this, visit www.Leadershipjournal.net.

Discuss

1. Overall, which side does our church's worship tend toward, form or freedom? How severe is the imbalance?
2. Is our congregation more comfortable with form, more freedom, or a mixture of the two?
3. What do we teach, from the pulpit and in classes, about corporate worship and why it is important?



Fan the Flames of Service

How well does your congregation realize and practice the discipline of service?

Matthew 25:37–40

Service is a widely recognized spiritual discipline and one of the cornerstones of what the body of Christ does. How well do church leaders encourage and mobilize their people into being God's helping hands together?

We call the congregation back to evangelism every week. We emphasize that our ministry is for the purpose of sharing the gospel. The ministry aspect—helping people—is so satisfying that we may forget that we're here to meet a much deeper, eternal need.

Excellent Good Fair Poor

We encourage people into service. We don't push them, but we help them see what they can be. We often ask, "What are you doing today that's going to matter a million years from now?" That gives our members an eternal perspective.

Excellent Good Fair Poor

We hold up needs before the congregation. If God gives someone a vision for a ministry, we often begin to see that confirmed as a few give to the project and a team coalesces. We share that with the congregation, and another ministry is born.

Excellent Good Fair Poor

We celebrate accomplishments. We regularly have testimonies from those who have been helped. Our worship services break into applause as we cheer what God is doing.

Excellent Good Fair Poor

We work from where our people are. We find the need that most touches their hearts, and that they will give themselves to. This can mean doing an old thing very well instead of starting a new thing.

Excellent Good Fair Poor

We encourage our most available work force. We identify the groups most likely to have time and motivation for service, and then ask them to perform specific tasks.

Excellent Good Fair Poor

We network with other churches. Many churches in our community support our service spiritually, financially, and with workers, and we support their projects, too.

Excellent Good Fair Poor

— CHARLES ROESEL; adapted from our sister publication LEADERSHIP journal, © 2000 by the author or Christianity Today International. For more articles like this, visit www.Leadershipjournal.net.

Discuss

1. In what ways can we equip our people for service?
2. Identify a service project in which the entire congregation can participate.
3. How can we encourage and equip new members to practice corporate service?



The Upside-Down All-Church Picnic

Getting individuals to fast is a tough sell. How well would it work for an entire church?

Zechariah 8:19

The Case

Do ordinary, busy Christians fast anymore? That was the question that popped into the mind of First Church's board-of-elders chairman. The pastor had mentioned fasting in a sermon, and now the lay leader was intrigued. Should First Church take fasting seriously? Leaders agreed that the church had utterly disregarded fasting, and many other disciplines as well.

But of all the spiritual disciplines that leadership could suggest to their church as a corporate practice, was fasting the best one?

What Would You Do?

- ◆ Decide that spiritual disciplines were totally an individual matter.
- ◆ Select a less arduous or better understood discipline to suggest to the congregation.
- ◆ Study the practice of fasting to see how the congregation could participate.

What Happened

First Church began by referring the matter to its discipleship board for further study. In a matter of weeks, a board member presented a report that didn't let the leaders off the hook at all, and included practical guidelines for those who fast.

The paper was officially discussed at a special joint meeting of all boards. Within two weeks, the chairman of the discipleship board sent a letter to all who were present encouraging a trial period of prayer and fasting by the leaders. He asked the leaders to report their experiences and conclusions anonymously.

After receiving encouraging responses from the team, the decision was made to plunge in and ask the entire church to participate. Soon thereafter, the church's first "Day of Prayer and Fasting" was held. People were asked to spend regular mealtimes in prayer for "the nation, its leadership, our church, and our personal lives." First Church hosted corporate prayer at 7 a.m., 12 noon, and 7 p.m. Daytime participation was small but positive. The evening gathering drew 185 (out of a Sunday worship attendance of 1,400). Nevertheless, those who participated were enthusiastic, and many encouraged the idea of all-church fasts. Since then, church leaders have begun to understand this discipline in their individual and corporate walks with God. A "Day of Fasting" was built into the calendar for each quarter.

Discuss

1. How would our church react if leaders suggested a corporate fast?
2. What are the reasons a church would choose to fast as a body? Look to Scripture for examples.
3. What safeguards should the church provide, both physically and spiritually, to keep the fast safe?

— CLYDE MCDOWELL; adapted from the book [*Fresh Ideas for Discipleship and Nurture*](#), © 1984 by Christianity Today International and published by Word.



We Have Enough

Embracing the discipline of simplicity helps a church avoid the “cult of the next thing.”

1 Timothy 6:9–10

The Cult of the Next Thing is consumerism cast in religious terms. It has its own litany of sacred words: *more, you deserve it, new*. It has its own deep-rooted liturgy: *charge it, instant credit, no down payment*. It has its own preachers, evangelists, prophets, and apostles.

For Christians, this is a problem. So the answer is to stress the spiritual discipline of simplicity. However, the quest for simplicity can lapse into legalism. It can decay into brittle, mirthless austerity, or puff itself up into heroic do-it-yourselfism.

Simplicity is something more, something other than just doing without or doing it yourself. Simplicity is being content with God. It is driven by two plain sayings that help us live in simple contentment with God and what God puts into our hearts. The first is “thank you,” and the second is, “enough.”

There is a lady I know who lives this way, thankful with enough. Her name is Helen, and she attends the church of which I am the pastor.

Helen grew up in Russia during Stalin’s purges and engineered famines, and her family, of German origin, suffered terribly. After the war, Helen came to Canada. In time she married and lived modestly. Several years ago, her husband died and left her a small pension.

One time our church held a business meeting. The big vote that night was whether to hire a youth pastor. Our finances had not been strong, and many people were saying that we just couldn’t afford a youth pastor, even though the need was great.

Helen got up. She has one daughter who is middle-aged. She has four grandchildren, who live in another city. Helen has two stepdaughters with children. They also live elsewhere. She has no vested interest in youth work in our church.

Helen said, “When I lived in Russia, growing up, I wanted so much to have a piano and to play it. But I could never afford it. When I married, we had a piano, but I never learned to play it. Last month, I decided that I could now afford \$60 a month and fulfill my dream since I was a girl. I signed up for piano lessons.”

She stopped. Her voice was breaking. She continued, slow, soft. “Tonight, I realize that our young people are far more important than my learning how to play the piano. I love young people and want them to know about Jesus. So I am going to quit piano lessons and give that money every month for a youth pastor.”

That changed everything. The church voted unanimously to hire a youth pastor. It’s what one person can do who pays no tribute to the Cult of the Next Thing.

— MARK BUCHANAN; adapted from our sister publication CHRISTIANITY TODAY, © 1999 by Christianity Today International. For more articles like this, visit www.christianitytoday.com/CT.

Discuss

1. Is simplicity embraced as a discipline in our church? Why or why not?
2. How can our church as a whole practice simplicity?
3. In what ways can the church and the community benefit from our corporate simplicity?



A Mighty Prayer Partnership

Where two or three—or more—are gathered, prayer increases its potency.

Acts 1:14

The church I pastor has become a praying church. And it all started ten years earlier at a pastors' conference where God started the transformation in me, and then in us all.

We had no agenda at that conference. Joe Aldrich, then president of Multnomah Bible College and Seminary, billed it as four days away just to pray. The four days away sounded especially inviting. My church was embroiled in the usual fights. We didn't get along. At 200, the church hadn't grown much during my tenure. We had tried every program I could find or concoct. I was exhausted and at the end of myself.

But that's the point—I was at the end of myself. Joe called a number of pastors to come for this first prayer summit. He envisioned pastors praying together, and their churches and communities praying together. He wanted to encourage us in our complete dependence on God. And there I found that it had been many years since I was completely dependent on God. In prayer I was convicted of my own prayerlessness, of trying to program the work of God in our church. And the church I led was just like me.

I returned to my pulpit with a renewed commitment to seek God's face and his will for our church. Before my congregation, I made a personal commitment to make prayer a priority in my life.

"I have been a prayerless pastor," I told a subdued gathering. "I didn't realize how important prayer was in experiencing God's blessing and presence. That is going to change in my life and, I hope, in the life of our church."

I set a personal goal of one hour per day in private prayer and two hours with others from the church. If just one other person met me at the church to pray, I knew I could keep that commitment.

My congregation was willing, even eager, to join me in prayer. Almost everyone came to those first sessions. Then attendance dropped off—sometimes down to a handful. But we kept praying. And over time our daily meeting grew.

Prayer has taken every conceivable form in our congregation. We pray in homes and in the streets, with believers from other churches, and over the lost. In prayer, we have grown to one thousand regular attenders in our town of 1,800. In prayer we have found God's purpose for our church and an expanding region around our church. We have seen Joe's vision realized, that we would simply be together, united for the cause of Christ, in prayer.

—DEE DUKE; adapted from our sister publication LEADERSHIP journal, © 2000 by the author or Christianity Today International. For more articles like this, visit www.Leadershipjournal.net.

Discuss

1. What role do corporate disciplines play in the overall health of a church?
2. How high a priority is prayer in the lives of our church's leaders? Of the church as a whole?
3. What lesson does this devotional teach about perseverance in personal and corporate prayer?



Answering the Objections

Teaching your people about spiritual disciplines often starts with dispelling myths.

2 Timothy 4:2

Suggesting that your church collectively practice the spiritual disciplines is a way to build corporate spiritual maturity. But when you make this kind of suggestion, you will spark a few common objections. Here's how to answer them.

Objection: Disciplines are only for the spiritually elite churches.

Answer: Talk about the disciplines as a normal part of the believer's life, not an add-on for the spiritually elite. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke about prayer, fasting, and giving as if he expected all people to practice them. Mention them regularly in sermons; introduce them in the new members' class as what it means to be a member of the church.

Objection: Disciplines were done by churches in the past. They're not for today.

Answer: Convincing people of the continued timeliness of spiritual disciplines begins with using illustrations of more contemporary well-known figures and churches that practiced them. But especially important is letting people hear, in worship or small groups, the testimonies of fellow church members who find the disciplines a very present help.

Objection: Practicing the disciplines is dull.

Answer: Some people imagine that practicing the disciplines regularly will bind them to a dull routine. They think such routine will make their Christian lives stale and thwart their spontaneity and creativity. But ritual need not turn into "rutual." Routine actually provides a source of power in people's lives. It takes pressure off the mind. Such order, in fact, allows us to be creative. Just as a world that followed natural laws arbitrarily would be impossible to live in, so is an arbitrary life.

Objection: Only bad people need the disciplines.

Answer: The word discipline reminds some of the unpleasant duty of parents and army sergeants of keeping the unruly in line. Nobody likes to be disciplined. In a country founded and nurtured on the word freedom, discipline sounds like a dirty word.

Consequently, we need an attractive carrot to convince people, even Christians, that their priorities should include spiritual disciplines. The "carrot" comes in stories of changed lives. Those who move from the duty to the beauty of discipline are our best advertisements for the value of that seemingly unpleasant word.

—PAUL ANDERSON; adapted from [Mastering Pastoral Care](#), © 1990 by Christianity Today International and published by Multnomah.

Discuss

1. Which objections to the spiritual disciplines have you heard?
2. Some may object that "the disciplines are only for individuals." How would you respond?
3. What is your reaction to the word "discipline"? Is there a good alternative word? Should we even look for one?



Ways to Pray Together

Use these specific ways to encourage your people to pray as a body of believers.

Acts 2:42

Who do Christians learn the most about prayer from? If they were raised in Christian homes, the answer is, “our parents.” But praying parents cannot be chosen. Not everyone will be so blessed.

So believers, to build up their corporate and individual prayer lives, need opportunities to learn from each other. Even people who are not participating in a prayer group can be helped vicariously through other people totally absorbed in prayer. Watching people in the congregation grow in their prayer life can be stimulating.

What if your church was a place where cloisters of people could be seen praying for one another after every service? Or praying for one another over the phone? If everyone in your church is talking about prayer and praying for one another enough, then a critical mass can be formed and the church will become a praying church in every sense of the word.

Get started on the road to achieving this critical prayer mass by starting these six corporate prayer opportunities:

- *Prayer partners.* Two people who commit to pray for and with one another. They also become spiritually accountable to each other.
- *Prayer corps.* These individuals pray daily for the needs of the church as well as praying nonstop throughout all the services.
- *Prayer chain.* Emergency needs of people are sent through the network of other people who have committed themselves to pray immediately.
- *Prayer vigil.* For a 24-hour time period, people have committed themselves to half-hour time slots for prayer.
- *Prayer and fasting.* Designated meal times for people to isolate themselves in the presence of the Lord for constant, consecrated prayer instead of eating.
- *Prayer bulletin.* In order to keep the current needs of the church before the people, a weekly prayer bulletin is sent out to everyone committed to prayer.

In all these opportunities, encourage participants to be as specific as possible with their prayer requests. Report answers to prayer to the congregation in bulletins, church websites, and from the pulpit.

Places to pray and people to pray with are tremendous motivators to consistent, regular prayer. What really happens? People are encouraged and the mysterious adventure of prayer is reaffirmed.

—TERRY MUCK; adapted from [Liberating the Leader's Prayer Life](#), © 1985 Christianity Today International and published by Word.

Discuss

1. Who are the prayer teachers in our church? What have we learned from them?
2. Which of the group prayer opportunities listed above are now offered or under consideration? How well do they work?
3. What kinds of spontaneous prayer activities can we encourage in our church's people?



Communal Disciplines and the Web

Nurture fasting and other disciplines with technology.

Joel 2:12–13

A church in Colombia has a weekly fast day. Everyone is encouraged to fast in whatever way works for them. Some church members fast from all food and consume only water. Those with more physically taxing jobs eat lighter foods. Children are encouraged to give up television. Each week during Sunday worship a set of prayer requests is announced for the fast day.

Fasting plays a significant role in congregational life in many parts of Central and South America, Asia, and Africa. We Christians in North America, Europe, and other Western countries—many of us just now rediscovering fasting and other corporate spiritual disciplines—can learn from these brothers and sisters of ours. At the same time, we can take advantage of new forms of communication now available to us.

A congregation in Kenya uses its weekly printed bulletin to list prayer requests for its monthly fast day. As in the church from Colombia, these specific requests help people focus their prayers during a fast. For many congregations, those requests could easily be listed on the church's website or Facebook page. Then as the date of the fast approaches, a reminder could be sent out via text message, email, or Twitter, with a link to the requests on the website.

The practice of fasting is new and baffling to many people in Western countries. Sensitive to this reality, a congregation in Wisconsin that fasts for a month every year prints and circulates a booklet about the practice. That kind of information could also be posted on a church's website and, once again, linked to through email, Facebook, and Twitter.

What kind of information about fasting should be included? A story or two about how fasting has helped someone pray more intentionally. An overview of fasting in the Bible, perhaps with two or three of the two dozen fasting stories in the Bible. A summary of the biblical passages—Isaiah 58, Joel 2:12–13, Matthew 6:16–18, Mark 2:18–20, etc.—that teach about fasting. A description of opportunities for fasting communally: in families, home groups, groups that do ministry together, groups that share specific concerns, and the whole congregation.

Options for different kinds of fasting should also be provided. In Western countries, where eating disorders are common, fasting options that do not involve food must be presented and validated. A person who has had an eating disorder at any time in their life must not be encouraged to fast from food in any form. Fasting from media, music, shopping, cell phones or any common activity can create space for prayer in much the same way that fasting from food does.

A church's leaders can decide which food-fasting options they want to encourage. Abstaining from all food, and drinking only water or juice, is a time-tested form of fasting for people without medical issues. But throughout Christian history, many other forms of fasting have been used, including abstaining from meat and sweets. In Africa, a Daniel fast is common, which involves eating only fruit and vegetables. Eastern Orthodox Christians fast often and in community. They refrain from consuming meat, fish, eggs, dairy, oil and alcohol.

Then you must plan how to break the fast. Eastern Orthodox Christians often break their fasts communally, celebrating by sharing with each other food they haven't been eating. If you were to arrange a communal end to a fast, you could publicize it online. Be sure, though, that when breaking a heavier fast, you ease people back into eating safely. A youth group leader who has participated in many 30-hour famines (sponsored by World Vision to help participants engage with and pray for the world's hungry) has learned the hard way not to overeat at the end of 30 hours without food. If you're not meeting corporately to end the fast, you should at least share fast-breaking tips online.

After the fast is completed, a few testimonies about the impact of the fast could be posted online, again using email, Facebook, and Twitter to provide links to the stories. These testimonies will help participants reflect on their own experiences and also encourage other church members to join in next time.

This same pattern of online advertising, educating, reminding, and recapping can help facilitate any communal spiritual discipline in the church, including prayer and service. People need to hear stories showing the benefits of that particular discipline. They need a biblical foundation. They need specific guidance. In the case of service opportunities, for example, they need to understand the time commitment and how to sign up.

Websites work well for posting this material, and email, text messages, Facebook, and Twitter are effective ways to point people to said material. It may also be necessary to print the information in a booklet or flyer, for those who don't spend much time online. But as congregations begin to engage in more spiritual disciplines communally, the internet will prove a more and more strategic means of sharing information, encouragement, and stories.

—LYNNE M. BAAB; © 2010 Christianity Today International/BuildingChurchLeaders.com.

Discuss

1. Do you think web-based communication would help unite your church around a particular practice or discipline? Why or why not?
2. Which forms of communication—email, text messages, Facebook, Twitter, etc.—are the people in your church using?
3. What would be your primary purpose for such communication? Reminding people of dates? Giving them more background information? Sharing testimonies? Something else?



Praying All Day Long

An organized 24-hour congregational prayer vigil is easy to do and powerful in result.

Psalm 88:1–2

Try this time-tested method to challenge and stretch people in prayer: the prayer vigil. The idea is centuries old. Vigil indicates a time of vigilance or wakefulness, a watch. People used to keep vigils the night before a religious feast.

Prepare for the Event

Circulate a sign-up sheet with hour-long blocks of time. If needed, ask specific people if they would shift from crowded hours to one or two vacant hours.

Prepare the sanctuary or prayer room by offering prayer helps on a table. Next to a log-in sheet are brief instructions for first-timers. A globe and letters from missionaries stimulate prayer for the world. Provide the church's prayer request list.

Prepare the participants. If people wonder what they will do during an entire hour, offer suggestions, such as:

- Bring your Bible, a hymnal, a church directory, and your church's current prayer list.
- Be yourself. Talk to God as you'd talk to your best friend.
- Get comfortable in whatever posture suits you best.
- Try praying out loud, though not loud enough to disturb others.
- Don't feel you have to do all the talking, however. Discuss something with the Lord, and then be silent.

Structuring the Vigil

Offer participants these time suggestions for their hour:

- *Preparation (one minute):* Ask God to help you spend this time profitably with him.
- *Confession (four minutes):* Spend a moment going over with him recent sins that weigh on you, but don't dredge up old ones. Ask for his cleansing, and then accept it by faith and thank him for it.
- *Praise and thanksgiving (nine minutes):* Sing your adoration to the Lord using a hymnal or choruses you know. Now start to thank him for his goodness to you and your friends.
- *Petition (nine minutes):* Pray about life's difficulties. Discuss with him your relationship with your loved one or spouse, your family, your financial needs, your studies or job.
- *Intercession (nine minutes):* Pray for friends, loved ones, relatives, neighbors, fellow workers. Don't just read a list of names to God, but talk to him about their lives and needs.
- *Prayer for the church (twelve minutes):* Pray for your pastor and church leaders. Intercede for individual ministries. Call on God for an increase in giving so the church can accomplish its work.
- *Prayer for the nation (eight minutes):* Pray that God will guide our leaders. Pray for righteousness in government.
- *Prayer for other nations (eight minutes):* Pray for the work of Christ throughout the world.

Those prayers add up to 60 minutes. As people begin to visualize themselves actually praying for an hour, they are more willing to risk it.

—RALPH F. WILSON; excerpted from our sister publication LEADERSHIP journal, © 1988 Christianity Today International or the author. For more articles like this, visit www.Leadershipjournal.net.



Further Exploration

Helpful resources on building your church's corporate spiritual disciplines.

Websites:

BuildingChurchLeaders.com: Leadership training resources from Christianity Today International.

- "[Spiritual Disciplines](#)" Assessment Pack
- "[Go Deeper With God](#)" Building Small Groups
- "[Finding Focus through Spiritual Disciplines](#)" Practical Ministry Skills
- "[Leading a Group in Prayer](#)" Practical Ministry Skills
- "[Church Health](#)" Training Theme
- "[Prayer and Awakening](#)" Training Theme
- "[Spiritual Formation](#)" Training Theme
- "[Effective Prayer in Worship](#)" Worship Essentials
- "[Engaging Everyone in Worship](#)" Worship Essentials

LeadershipJournal.net: This website offers practical advice and articles for church leaders.

Books:

[Listen for God's Leading: A Workbook for Corporate Spiritual Discernment](#) by Valerie K Isenhower and Judith A. Todd. Guidance is a recognized spiritual discipline for individuals, but it also applies to churches, as explained in this book. (Upper Room, 2008; 978-0835899857)

[The Prayer-Saturated Church](#) by Cheryl Sacks. Provides ways to inspire and organize your church into a house of prayer. Includes an instructional CD. (NavPress, 2007; ISBN 978-1600061981)

[Praying With the Church: Following Jesus Daily, Hourly, Today](#) by Scot McKnight. An exploration of how "high church" Christian denominations practice corporate prayer and what we can learn from them. (Paraclete Press, 2006; ISBN 978-1557254818)

[PRAYzing!: Creative Prayer Experiences from A to Z](#) by Daniel Henderson. This book's first section—overlapping some with Henderson's *Fresh Encounters* book—includes some corporate prayer strategies. The second section features 26 ideas for group prayer. (NavPress, 2007; ISBN 978-1600061899)

[Seeking God Together: An Introduction to Group Spiritual Direction](#) by Alice Fryling. Offers step-by-step ideas about how to enter into spiritual direction in groups. (InterVarsity Press, 2009; ISBN 978-0830835249)

[Spiritual Disciplines Within the Church: Participating Fully in the Body of Christ](#) by Donald Whitney. A guide to how congregation members can put spiritual disciplines into practice within their churches. (Moody Publishers, 1996; ISBN 978-0802477460)

[There Is No I In Church: Moving Beyond Individual Spirituality to Experience God's Power in the Church](#) by Keith Drury. Challenges the American preoccupation with private spirituality and offers an alternative set of corporate spiritual practices. (Wesleyan Publishing House, 2006; ISBN 978-0898273113)



Corporate Spiritual Disciplines Retreat Plan

How to create a weekend retreat on the theme of “Corporate Spiritual Disciplines.”

BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS expands easily into a retreat format. Here is a sample retreat schedule you may follow for the “Corporate Spiritual Disciplines” theme. The purpose of this retreat is to help leaders examine all the ways they can improve how their congregations can practice spiritual disciplines as a body, and not only as individual believers.

Friday Evening

- ◆ 8–8:45 p.m. **Opening Session:** Hand out copies of “Showing Up for God—Together,” the interview with Mindy Caliguire on pages 4–6, and allow time for each person to read it. Then form groups of three or four. Have each group discuss the questions at the end of the interview. Reconvene for the last 20 minutes and have the groups share their comments and consider what that may mean for the church.
- ◆ 9–9:45 p.m. **Bible Study:** Close the evening with “Out of Isolation,” the Bible study on page 2. Photocopy and pass out the study, or use the handout as your notes.

Saturday Morning

- ◆ 9–9:45 a.m. **Devotional:** Set the tone for the day by handing out (or presenting) “We Have Enough” (p. 11). Discuss the questions at the bottom of the page, and have a time of prayer and thanksgiving for family and close friends.
- ◆ 10–11:00 a.m. **Activity.** Use the activity “Praying All Day Long” on page 17 to help you sample what an all-day prayer vigil looks and feels like.
- ◆ 11:15–Noon. **Assessment:** Hand out “Keeping Our Balance in Worship,” the assessment on page 8, to each participant. After everyone has read and completed the assessment, have them discuss their commonly held attitudes about corporate worship.
- ◆ Noon. Lunch

Saturday Afternoon

- ◆ 1–2 p.m. **Final Group Session:** Close the retreat with the case study “The Upside-Down All-Church Picnic” on page 10. Have each person spend some time alone to quietly read and respond to the questions on the handout. Have the group come together to share what God has taught them. Then pray together, asking God for guidance and wisdom as you take new steps together.

You can create similar retreat plans for any of the other BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS themes. Simply decide what you want to accomplish and choose the handouts that support your goals.