

feature article

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Connecting with God

Next Generation Pastors Striving for Rich Devotional Life

By Pat Spurgeon

Next generation pastors are finding the same realities as their predecessors when it comes to building a deepening relationship with God:

Without a meaningful devotional life, the ministries of these influential church leaders in their 30s are dry and lifeless. But the constant and enormous demands of leadership regularly threaten to crowd out their time with God.

"I wonder if other pastors struggle with their devotional lives as much as I do," lamented one pastor. "Sometimes it's rich and real, but often it feels like I'm just going through the motions. There has to be more to it than what I'm experiencing.

I'm sure God wants my times with him to be much closer and much deeper than they are right now

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These emerging church leaders who are growing in impact across the U.S. long for God to touch their hearts day in and day out, but they resist legalistic demands. They know that misconceptions about connecting with God can dampen the flame of desire, and that the most meaningful relationships are celebrations of affection--not rigidly observed traditions.

"I don't tell my wife I'm going to spend 20 minutes with her doing one thing and then 20 minutes doing something else, and call that a 'relationship,'" says Les Hughes, pastor of **Westwood Baptist Church** (Alabaster, AL). "It's much more fluid, more varied, and more about understanding and communicating our hearts than going through some arbitrary motions."

"In relationships with people, sometimes I'm talking, and sometimes I'm listening, and sometimes we're just together and nobody is talking. I'm trying to cultivate that kind of relationship with God."

Next generation pastors are deeply committed to God, and they want their ministries to flow out of a heart that is full of God's truth, mercy and power. Though the fundamental ingredients of Bible reading, reflection, and prayer are common in virtually every model of devotional life, they take widely varied forms.

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At-Cost Congregational Profile Available

Large-attendance churches that want a current profile of their congregation are invited to participate in a low-cost opportunity that includes a wide-ranging demographic and spiritual snapshot of their congregation.

The profile also includes data analysis by two experts, comparison data on other large churches and a copy of their own church's raw data so church leaders can do further study.

For a sample of the preliminary findings, testimonials, the actual survey, price and other information, click "more information" below.

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Noel Heikkinen, pastor of [Riverview Church](#) in Holt, MI explains that some of the spiritual disciplines used for centuries simply don't fit his personality: "I'm such an extrovert that solitude can actually become a destructive discipline for me if I'm not careful. When I'm alone . . .

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God has something planned . . . and it's bigger than you think! How do you lead? Who will you follow? The answer to those two questions will change your life and the lives of those you influence. The great philosophers like Socrates, Plato, and others said, "Follow my teaching." Jesus is the only one who said, "Follow me."

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Sobering News from the Front Lines

A national study of evangelism in seven mainline denominations presents a sobering conclusion for those groups: Very few are reaching unchurched adults.

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Online Networking Almost Passes TV Viewing

Social networking has become a way of life for the younger generation. It's so prevalent that 9- to 17-year-olds report spending nearly as much time using social networking services and websites as they spend watching television: 9 hours a week of networking compared to 10 hours of television.

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Third Place Comes to Church

By Lois Swagerty

Third Place Comes to Church

By Lois Swagerty

Today's churches are developing strategies that are innovative and missional to reach a group of people who might not be churchgoers, but who are attracted to a nonreligious venue for coffee, lunch, play dates, workouts, or concerts.

This resource highlights some of the ways churches are intentional about "third places" where followers of Christ are hanging out with spiritual seekers.

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Noel Heikkinen, pastor of **Riverview Church** in Holt, MI explains that some of the spiritual disciplines used for centuries simply don't fit his personality: "I'm such an extrovert that solitude can actually become a destructive discipline for me if I'm not careful. When I'm alone with my thoughts and pray too long, my mental process gets tied into a knot and I get stuck. I'm a verbal processor, so any time of solitude must be accompanied immediately by interaction and verbal processing."

From early church fathers to the leaders of the spiritual movement today, the church has a long, rich history of people who pursued God with all their hearts and who provide an example for others to emulate.

"We stand on the shoulders of great men and women who pursued God with all their hearts," says Brian Howard, pastor of **Copperhill Church** (Valencia, CA). "They made the Scriptures and prayer central to their lives and their ministries. Who are we to do anything less? The consequences of not making God central are too great--self-reliance, sin, destroying our families, stress, and lost opportunities in ministry."

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"We simply must make seeking God the central drive of our lives."

And these leaders can't deny the results of that type of pursuit.

"When I'm in touch with God's heart, I'm a better husband, friend, and minister," says Matt Evans, pastor of **Rock Bridge Community Church** (Dalton, GA). "It's not about being legalistic. Passion for God produces discipline because I instinctively prioritize what's most valuable to me. When I pursue God, He reveals himself in ways I don't expect. When I open my heart to him and his word, he speaks words of correction, direction, and affirmation."





Pat Springle is a freelance writer for Leadership Network and the president of Baxter Press in Friendswood, Texas. He served on the staff of Campus Crusade for Christ for 18 years, 11 as the Texas state director. Before starting his publishing business, Pat was Senior Vice President of Rapha.

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in brief

Lead like Jesus Revolution Simulcast

God has something planned. . . and it's bigger than you think! How do you lead? Who will you follow? The answer to those two questions will change your life and the lives of those you influence. The great philosophers like Socrates, Plato, and others said, "Follow my teaching." Jesus is the only one who said, "Follow me."



The Lead Like Jesus Revolution simulcast on October 17, 2008 invites leaders to embrace Jesus as the greatest leadership model of all time, follow Him, lead like He did and teach others to do the same. Broadcast live from Mt. Pisgah United Methodist Church in Atlanta, a stellar cast of speakers includes **Patrick Lencioni, Miles McPherson, Nancy Ortberg, Matthew Kelly, Wilson Goode, Ken Melrose, Jim Blanchard, Margie Blanchard, Colleen Barrett, Bob Pike, Phil Hodges, and Phyllis Hendry.**

The *Revolution* is coming! Join it and sign up today!

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Sobering News from the Front Lines

A national study of evangelism in seven mainline denominations presents a sobering conclusion for those groups: Very few are reaching unchurched adults.

The four-year study funded by the Lilly Endowment, designed to identify and analyze highly effective examples of evangelism by congregations in seven mainline denominations, reached two primary findings:



.005%--That's the percentage of mainline churches recording significant numbers of adult conversions. Of the 30,000

churches that qualified for the Mainline Evangelism Project, only 1/2 of 1 percent (.005%) are baptizing a significant number of adults (conversion baptisms). That translates to only 150 churches out of a qualifying survey pool of more than 30,000.

89--That's the average age of congregations that are were identified in the study as "evangelistic."

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Social networking has become a way of life for the younger generation. It's so prevalent that 9- to 17-year-olds report spending nearly as much time using social networking services and websites as they spend watching television: 9 hours a week of networking compared to 10 hours of television.



The drive behind this explosion of social networking? A hunger for relationships.

Interviewed on a Harris Interactive® website, Suzanne Martin, Ph.D., suggests the Internet will play an increasingly important role in students' friendships. The Web has become a preferred place for young people to connect with a community.

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