

Pray and Plan: A Decision-Making Technique Based in Prayer

"Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers; Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. And while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away." Acts 13:1-3

Why Pray and Plan?

Military people are men and women of action. When God indicates a special need to us, we want to organize, make a plan, and accomplish it *now*. But we need to be sure of *what* He wants first, as well as *how* He wants us to do it. Or else we may make the mistake that Joshua and the nation of Israel made in Joshua Chapter 9 when they foolishly made a treaty with the Gibeonites because "they did not ask counsel of the Lord." (Joshua 9:1-15) As a result, Israel did not drive them out, and the Gibeonites remained a stumbling block within Israel for many years.

Proverbs 3:5-6 says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all you ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths." As leaders, we want to know His will in all we do. Otherwise, when we plan before we pray, we depend on our own wisdom instead of God's and often wind up later having to pray that God would save us from our plan.

When we apply the Pray and Plan process, we put aside our own preconceived ideas and plans and diligently seek God's will and His way of accomplishing it. This puts us in an attitude of humility and obedience so that He can unite our hearts to do *His* will, reducing the divisions that come when we try to impose our own ideas and plans on a group. In Jesus' prayer to His Father in John 17:20-23, He said that it is by our unity that, "the world may know that You have sent me..." And so, by following the Pray and Plan process we glorify God and bear witness to Who Jesus is by the humility and unity that result from our following His will in His way, instead of each of us trying to do the things we want in our own way.

Pray and Plan is not merely a technique but an attitude that should undergird all undertakings. It keeps those involved in ministry focused on what God desires, rather than the ideas of anyone person or group within the military Christian fellowship (MCF). In Isaiah 55:8 God reminds us that, "Your ways are not My ways." Holding frequent Pray and Plan sessions is important to help MCF leaders discern God's leading and establish objectives and plans that align with His will and desire.

Pray and Plan Steps

There are three steps to this "Pray and Plan" process: preparation, discovery, and plan of action

1. Preparation

- Forming the team. Before forming a Pray and Plan team there must be a clear need or area of concern that God has indicated to a group. This might be a new program for an MCF, a specific activity or event that the fellowship feels led to hold, or some new initiative. Whatever the case, once the group decides to form a Pray and Plan team, they should select its members and a leader.

- (1) Size and Members. The size of the Pray and Plan team depends on the size of the task, the availability of team members and other factors, but the minimum number is two (2), and the team should be no larger than necessary. There are no special qualifications for the members of a Pray and Plan team. But they must be Christians with a clear conscience toward God, willing to share in open, informal conversational prayer, and committed to be available to meet at the times set by the team leader.
 - (2) Pray and Plan Team Leader. As with all teams, the Pray and Plan team needs a leader. But the leader is not necessarily the one who prays the "best" prayers, nor necessarily the senior Christian. The leader must be a mature Christian, a capable organizer, and readily accepted as the leader. The leader must oversee the translation from prayer to a workable plan, and should therefore be a person who has a gift for organizing.
 - (3) The leader is also responsible for deciding how often the Pray and Plan team meets. He can call additional meetings whenever they are required, and the frequency of meetings is likely to increase as the deadline or date of the activity approaches. Meetings should continue through the completion of the event, including a period afterward for follow up, evaluation of lessons learned, and, most importantly, praise and thanksgiving for God's faithfulness throughout the process.
- b. The key to the Preparation step is prayer. The Pray and Plan team gathers to worship God together. The meeting may start with a reading from Scripture, followed by publicly praising God, confessing their sins to Him, and giving Him thanks. Team members should also quiet their hearts and focus on His nature and character as revealed in Scripture in order to "take every thought captive to obey Christ." (2 Corinthians 10:5) This turns their hearts and minds toward God and away from themselves, helping the team members to empty themselves of their own thoughts, plans, and worries. As they focus on God, the team is reminded that God does not need them but graciously allows them to join in the work He is doing through their ministry. It may take a long time in prayer – sometimes several meetings - for the team to come to the point where they are tuned to hear what God says and are unified in a spirit of readiness to obey it, whatever it may be.
 - c. Although the Pray and Plan team forms the central planning committee, the team should also enlist a group of people to pray for this entire process all the way through to its completion. MCF, church, and family members or other military Christians can be part of that praying team. For a major project (e.g. international conferences, etc.) it may be desirable to set up subordinate Pray and Plan teams to work on certain aspects.

2. Discovery

After a time of prayer and focus on God, the team leader should then mention the subjects for which prayer is needed and explain a bit of background where necessary. At the start of the discovery process the team must ask: "What is God's Purpose? Is it outreach and evangelism, deeper spiritual teaching, a need to unite the local Christian group, or something else?" Until God's purpose is revealed, an aim or objective cannot effectively be stated.

If there is much to be covered this should be done a few subjects at a time rather than isolated, single points or an excessively long list. Time is then spent in prayer for each subject mentioned. The team should not be afraid to pause for further prayer, for silent reflection, or for listening to

the Lord if His purpose is not readily apparent after some discussion. Determining the need will determine the format of the activity.

As they pray about the specific details, God will begin to reveal more of His will to the group. After the time of prayer, people can share what they believe God told them during that prayer time. Multiple courses of action can emerge, including doing nothing at all. One person on the team should write down those thoughts so that others can see them, perhaps on a large piece of paper, a chalk or dry erase board, or even on software displayed on a computer projector. At this stage, the group is still only recording ideas not evaluating or criticizing them. After the items have been written down, the team should spend more time in prayer and ask God what He will do to fulfill each need.

Team members should be sensitive to God's leading towards a concrete decision, which would be evidenced at least in part by a sense of clarity and harmony within the team concerning God's will in the matter, leading to thankfulness and worship. This includes not only agreement on what He wants the group to do, but a spirit of peace and confidence that the direction and way ahead will bring honor to God through Christ.

How does the Lord actually reveal His plan to the team? The discussion should not be dominated by any one member, but rather the team should be a group of sharing and expectant Christians who are sensitive to the Lord's leading. When there is no agreement on an issue the group should turn to specific prayer and then try again to discern by discussion what the Lord is saying. The characteristic of Pray and Plan should be consensus, but sometimes when seeking to undertake a new initiative a group will have to meet three or four times before the Lord will reveal the fundamental issue, such as the essential aim of the undertaking on which all else depends. The Lord can as easily reveal detail to a Pray and Plan team as He can reveal principles. There are countless examples of the Lord's leading a team to derive meticulously crafted programs for conferences and other activities. In short, the Lord can reveal His perfect plan to any group that earnestly seeks to know His will and obey it.

3. Plan of Action

Once God reveals to the group what He intends to do, the team should try to capture all relevant factors that are likely to affect the planning and execution of the activity or filling of the need. The group will build a different comprehensive plan, depending on the type of activity or need. The team leader should note all of the planning factors as they arise in prayer and discussion, prayerfully weigh each one, and consider each option before a course of action is adopted.

As the outline of the plan emerges, there should be a clear consensus on the way ahead, which should be committed to prayer and recorded in the minutes of the meeting. If a consensus is missing in a particular area, more prayer is needed there. Some areas may require additional development in future Pray and Plan meetings, and others, where there was apparent agreement, may need to be revisited as the conditions change during execution of the plan.

Where possible, the Pray and Plan team should decide on measurable objectives. One person should be designated to write down a list of the needs that were confirmed during the discovery period, and how God has shown them He will fulfill them. After these have been written down, the planning team should select one person to monitor progress on how the situation/need is being met in the days, weeks, or months to come. Every Pray and Plan

meeting should close with a time of praise and thanksgiving for the Lord's guidance, wisdom, discernment, and for His presence with the group.

Following each Pray and Plan meeting, publication of minutes that record the consensus agreements is important to help those who are assigned to carry out the different facets of the plan. Minutes should also capture areas where the group has not yet received clarity and where further prayer and discussion is needed. The Pray and Plan minutes can remind the team of God's providential hand in guiding them when, later, Satan tries to undermine the team's confidence in the group's purpose and its commitment to see it through. Furthermore, they remind the group that when we prayerfully commit ourselves to obey whatever He directs us to begin, He will bring it to completion, even when He uses His weak and fallible people to make it happen (Phil 3:6), and He will glorify Himself by accomplishing His work through our weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Conclusion

There is no undertaking which is beyond a properly prepared Pray and Plan team that seeks to do God's will in confident trust that He will accomplish it. Jesus said, "...if you have faith as small as a mustard seed you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." (Mt 17:20). Through the Pray and Plan process, the planning team will discover that God's solution will always exceed the fondest imaginations of any team member and will glorify God for what He condescends to accomplish through us when we approach Him in a spirit of humility and obedient faith.