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SPENDING TIME WITH GOD: THE MOST ESSENTIAL HABIT OF A FIRETEAMS LEADER

If I could give you one single piece of advice for growing as a disciple of Jesus Christ, it would always be this: spend time with God every day. Therefore, it follows that I believe the most essential habit of a Fireteams Leader (MFTL) is the same: the habit of spending time with God every day. Why? Here's just a few reasons:

- Because spending time in communion with His Heavenly Father was the most important thing Jesus did (Jn. 5:19-20; Lk. 5:17).
- Because spending time with Jesus was the most important thing the disciples did (all four gospels).
- Because God thought it was so important to be with us that He sent His Spirit to indwell our hearts forever (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13)!
- Because God made all people with the intrinsic need and desire to commune with Him; that is, to join in the fellowship of the eternally glorious and happy Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Gen. 1-2; Rev. 21:3).
- Because it is our privilege, honor, and supreme joy to spend time with God—and we get to do it every day (Heb. 4:16)!

It is as we spend time in God's presence daily that we are opening up our hearts and minds to be continually transformed from one level of spiritual glory to the next (2 Cor. 3:18). Repeatedly throughout the Scriptures we see that it is only when individuals encounter God through the means of grace He has given us (e.g. the Scriptures, prayer, obedience, and community) that individuals are truly transformed. I have known many leaders over the years who talked a good game and even seemed to walk it for a season, but only those who have consistently, regularly spent focused time with God are those who make it for the long-haul. When leaders fail to make time for God, they lose perspective, lose motivation, and lose the power of God to accomplish the purposes of God. Moreover, they open up themselves to the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil—who prowls like a roaring lion seeking to devour (1 Pet. 5:8). Perhaps you have been bitten a time or two yourself!

The Scriptures command us to be “filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18). And the way we daily fill our “tank” is at the living waters of time with God. But, how do we actually spend time with God? Isn’t God with us all the time and everywhere? Sure He is! But, there is a difference between God always being with us (i.e. union with Christ by the Spirit) and us always entering into His presence (i.e. communion with Christ by His means of grace). By spending concentrated time with God, we move from union to communion, from God being with us to us spending time with Him.

If you are not quite sure how to spend time with God, or you have found yourself stuck in a spiritual ditch, here are some key practices to get you where you want to go in relationship with Him.

Key Ingredients to Daily Personal Time with God

- **Spend time meditating on God’s Word.** The key ingredient to spending time with God is meditating upon God’s Word. God’s Word accomplishes God’s work. This is true from Genesis to Revelation and everywhere in between. His Word “does not return void,” but rather “accomplishes what it sets out to do” (Is. 55:11). Whether you read a few verses or a few chapters of the Bible, find a rhythm that works for you. And be sure to meditate on them; don’t just read them and check off a box (although that is always better than nothing!).
- **Spend time in Word-based praising, thanking, confessing, listening, and petitioning prayer.** Wow. That was quite a sentence. Let’s break it down.
 - **Word-based.** The power of prayer is when we connect our prayers to God’s Word. There are SO MANY PROMISES in God’s Word to hold on to. Let’s hold fast to them!
 - **Praising.** This is declaring the truth about who God is. It is especially important during times that He doesn’t *seem* to be who He says He is. Praise Him!
 - **Thanking.** If praising God sounds like, “I praise you God, because you are Good!” thanking God sounds like, “I thank you God, because you have been so good to me! Here’s how you’ve been good to me... (fill in the infinite blank).”
 - **Confessing.** Part of prayer is confession of our sins. When we confess our sins, God is always faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). The Scripture also encourages us to confess our sins one to another as a part of healing prayer (James 5:16).

- **Listening.** God loves to speak to His people through his still, small voice (1 Kgs. 19:11-12). It takes time and stillness to learn to do this well. Be certain that His voice will always align with His Word. In addition, it is important to note that the clearest way God speaks is as He illuminates or highlights portions of His Word that we meditate on. So, read some Scripture, meditate on it, and listen for God to speak!
- **Petitioning.** Sometimes we have not, because we ask not (or we ask with wrong motives) (James 4:2-3). Keep asking, seeking, and knocking. God will provide (Lk. 11:1-13).
- **Spend time singing the Word.** Singing has the ability to connect our hearts to God's in a unique and profound way. While we don't "have to" sing songs saturated with God's Word, it is the best way to form our hearts into the image of Jesus. I would encourage more Word-saturated Christian hymns and songs for personal time with God.
- **Spend time journaling your meditations and prayers.** Writing has a way of helping us form thoughts and prayers that is powerful. If you are stuck praying out loud, perhaps it is time to journal your biblical meditations and prayers.
- **Spend time reading Word-based books and articles.** There are innumerable good books and articles out there that can help you grow in understanding the Scriptures and knowing God. This is a helpful supplement to reading the Scriptures themselves, but a terrible replacement!
- **Get accountability.** Sometimes we simply need another brother or sister who can help us when we lack motivation to spend time with God. If the apostles needed the accountability of community, so do we! Don't forget that our flesh is in a WAR with our spirit (Rom. 7:21-23) trying to make us neglect this most essential habit. Who do you know who can help you stay on track?

Where can you start?

This list of ways to commune with God daily is not meant to overwhelm you, but to show you some of the options available to you for your own growth. If you are not sure where to start, start here: read the Bible slowly for one chapter a day, and then pray for yourself, your family, your work, your Fireteam, and your church. Just start there everyday for a season, and watch how God grows you!

Application Questions:

- Are you spending time with God (even just a little bit) everyday? If not, how can you build habits and systems of accountability to help you do this?
- What are some of the biggest obstacles to spending time with God daily? Is there anything you need to give up in order to get time with God (e.g. reading or watching news, social media, sleep, etc.)?
- What is the very next thing you need to do in order to establish or strengthen your daily time with God?



FOSTERING A CULTURE OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Many men have had discouraging experiences within the context of accountability groups. Although Fireteams are meant to be *wholistic discipleship groups*, and not merely accountability groups, they certainly have a significant emphasis on accountability. Because of this, we leaders must do our best to work with the Holy Spirit in promoting and maintaining a culture of encouragement in our groups.

How can we do this? There are at least three ways: 1) we can *rely on the Spirit's power*, 2) we can focus on *our identity in Christ*, and 3) we can *remember the gospel*.

Rely on the Spirit's Power

As a Fireteam you are a small unit of men whose expressed purpose is to grow as disciples of Christ, build Christ-centered friendships, and grow as Christlike leaders. This is spiritual warfare against the forces of darkness! They are opposed to each of these primary aims. By growing in each of these three areas your Fireteam is pushing back the darkness and advancing the kingdom of light. Yet, in order for you and your men to accomplish these purposes, you will need to rely on *spiritual* power, not mere human *willpower*.

In Ephesians 6:10, Paul writes, "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power" before going on to teach about the armor and weapons of God. In other words, before we fight, we must be reminded that our fight requires a spiritual power that is beyond any of our earthly powers. In order to defeat the ancient foes of the world, our flesh, and the devil, we must tap into the same power that raised Jesus from the dead and also now dwells within us (Rom 8:11). While God never sends us into a battle we can't win, he also never sends us into a battle we can win *in our own strength*. Rather, God always allows us to face battles and opposition that can only be defeated with *his* strength and *his* mighty power.

Thankfully, the All-Powerful Holy Spirit dwells within us and is always willing us to victory in Christ. God does not give us weapons and then step back and watch us go at it with the enemy. He is living inside of us, encouraging us and reminding us of the Word of God that applies to our current situations. He is our General who instructs us and trains us for battle. But, we must listen to Him through His Word and we must obey what He commands.

Your Fireteam will become discouraging the moment you and your team begin to rely on your own strength for the battles you are facing. Because you cannot win the battles in your own strength! Ever! On the flipside, your Fireteam will see God do amazing things as you rely on the Spirit's strength inside of you. He never loses a fight! Therefore, when we do our part to rely on Him and submit to Him, he will always win our battles for us! This is so encouraging!

Focus on Our Identity in Christ

One of the supreme privileges of becoming a Christian is that we acquire a new identity that will never go away. Once we become children of God, we never lose that status. Once we are the forgiven, we are always the forgiven. Once we are valuable members of the body of Christ, we are always valuable members of His Body. We are who God says we are and who God has made us to be—we will never become less than this!

At the same time, we still wrestle with the flesh, that part of us that wars against the Spirit and tempts us toward sinful thoughts, desires, and actions. Sometimes we win the skirmishes with the flesh, but often—even daily—we can lose them. If we are not careful, we can begin to allow this to impact what we believe about our identity. “I screwed up” can quickly become “I *am* a Screw-up.” When this happens discouragement sets in, and accountability time can begin to feel like a time when we come to share about how awful we are instead of how we are growing with some mistakes along the way.

This is why it is important that we maintain a clear view of what the Bible says about us. It is never more important to remember who we are than when we are confessing how we have not lived up to our identity in Christ. Our sorrow over our sins is actually a clear sign that *we are not our sin*, but we are *true believers* who are grieved by our sins. So, when you or your team is struggling with winning certain battles with the world, flesh, or devil, remember and speak out these true identities:

- I am an unconditionally loved Son of God. (1 Jn. 3:1) And nothing can separate me from the love of God in Christ. (Rom. 8)
- I am a Son whom Christ has given authority in His Kingdom; he empowers me by the Spirit. (Luke 10:19)
- I am a lamb in Christ's flock. (Jn. 17:3) Therefore, I am one who lacks nothing. (Ps. 23:1)
- I am a Son of Abraham, heir of the promises of the covenant. (Eph. 3:6; Rom. 4:16)
- I am a branch attached to Christ the Vine and pruned by God the Father, bearing lasting fruit. (Jn. 15)

- I am a friend of Christ and His disciples. (Jn. 15:17)
- I am both pure and free, washed by the word of Christ (Jn. 15, Rom. 8:1)
- I am redeemed by Jesus Christ's blood, cleansed from all trespasses according to the riches of God's grace (Eph. 1:7)
- I was chosen in love for adoption as a Son of God (Eph. 1:4-5)
- I am a living stone in the Temple of God (Eph. 2:22; 1 Pet. 2:5)
- I am a member of the Body of Christ (Eph. 3:6)
- I am a royal priest of God (1 Pet. 2:5-9)
- I am a citizen of God's holy nation, His treasured possession (1 Pet. 2:9)
- I have been liberated out of the kingdom of darkness and now dwell as a citizen in the kingdom of light. (Col. 1)
- I am blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ (Eph. 1:3)
- I am raised up and seated with Christ in heavenly places (Col. 3:1-4; Eph. 2:6)
- I am God's masterpiece, created anew in Christ to do good works. (Eph. 2:10)
- I am one sealed with the promise of salvation, the Holy Spirit. (Eph. 1:13-14)
- I am hidden with Christ in God. (Col. 3:1)
- I am an instrument for the praise of His glorious grace! (Eph. 1)
- I am more than a conqueror in Christ! (Rom. 8:26-39)
- I am an object of God's mercy, hand-crafted to declare His love and glory! (Rom. 11)
- I am a warrior in Christ's army, re-born and commissioned to wage war against all the schemes of the enemy! (Luke 4:19-20; Eph. 6)

Remember the Gospel

The good news that Jesus forgives us of our sin and saves us from the wrath of God is not only for us to believe *at the beginning* of our walk with God, but also *for everyday* of our walk with God. Why? Because, all of our sins—past, present, and future—were forgiven. Why else? It was faith—not our works—that brought us *into* right relationship with God, and therefore *our sins cannot bring us out of* right relationship with God. Faith in God's mercy through Christ brings us into right relationship with God and it keeps us in right relationship with God.

This doesn't mean we do not continue to confess our sins and ask for forgiveness (1 Jn 1:9). By confessing our sins to God and others (Jam 5:16), we continue to commune with God and his people in healthy and encouraging ways. But, we never have to worry that God is going to give up on us. If we were made right with God while we were still enemies of God (Rom 5:8), what makes us think we will lose right relationship now that we are sons of God? That's not

biblical!

When men are struggling and despairing about their weaknesses and sin patterns, remember the gospel of Jesus Christ. Remember Scriptures like these:

Romans 8:1

“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

Romans 8:31b

“If God is for us, who can be against us?”

2 Corinthians 5:21

“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

The tenor or atmosphere or culture of your Fireteam will largely depend on your ability to foster an experience of encouragement and strengthening. You can do this by relying on the Spirit’s power, focusing on identity in Christ, and remembering the gospel!

Application Questions:

- Have you had negative accountability group experiences? If so, why were they negative?
- Does your group need more help relying on the Spirit’s power, focusing on identity, or remembering the Gospel?
- Where do you need encouragement today?



THE NECESSITY OF PRAYER FOR LEADING A FIRETEAM

Prayer is essential to all that we seek to accomplish in the Christian life, including the leadership of a Men's Fireteam. With prayer, we are able to marshal the mighty power of God in order to grow and win as leaders; without prayer, we are incapable of accomplishing much at all. Prayer is a great difference maker in Christian leadership—those who pray will succeed, and those who don't will remain frustrated and stuck. Those who pray will lead their friends in advancing the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven; those who don't pray will be wondering why they can't seem to gain any traction.

The bottom line is this: *the leaders who pray will have front row seats to watching God powerfully enable the spiritual growth of the men in their Fireteam.* And, as a leader, this is exactly what we want! Nobody signs up to lead a Fireteam without the hope that he will be an effective leader who participates in the transformation of his men for the glory of God. If we want to be a part of a healthy, growing, advancing Fireteam, then we will need to put in the time needed to pray effectively for our friends. Exactly how much time we need to pray and exactly how consistently we must pray will change in different seasons based on the battles that our men are facing. But no matter our season, we must never stop praying!

So, what are some Scriptures that we can read (and re-read) to encourage us to pray? Here are a few:

Luke 11:1-13

“One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.” He said to them, “When you pray, say:

“Father,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come.
Give us each day our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,
for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.
And lead us not into temptation.”

Then Jesus said to them, “Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.’ And suppose the one inside answers, ‘Don’t bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can’t get up and give you anything.’ I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need. “So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. “Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

Romans 12:12

“Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.”

Ephesians 3:16-21

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Ephesians 6:18

“And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.”

Philippians 4:6-7

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Colossians 4:2

“Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.”

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

“Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

1 Timothy 2:1-4

“I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”

James 1:5-6

“If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. But when you ask, you must believe, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.”

James 4:2b-3

“You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”

James 5:16

“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.”

1 Peter 5:7

“Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.”

1 John 1:9

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

1 John 5:14-15

“This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.”

The command to pray—with all kinds of prayers in every circumstance—is so abundant as to be overwhelming. You cannot miss the command to pray without purposefully wanting to. But, not only are we *commanded* to pray, we are motivated to pray by God himself. God tells us to pray for wisdom, because he wants to give it (Jas 1:5). God tells us to pray for governing authorities, because he loves saving people and for people to live quiet and godly lives (1 Tim 2:1-4). God shows us how prayer is a weapon to push back the forces of the evil one (Eph 6:18). God tells us to pray so that we may experience peace (Php 4:6-7), forgiveness (1 Jn 1:9), and generally more of God (Luke 11:13)! In fact, God tells us to pray for anything according to his will that he might grant it to us (1 Jn 5:14-15)! There are incredible promises attached to prayer!

As leaders, these incredible promises are available to us and to the men we have been commissioned to lead. So pray! Pray for yourself, your spouse and family, your Fireteam, your church, your colleagues, and your community. Pray continually with joy (1 The 5:17-18), knowing that God will answer your prayers in his timing, for his glory, and always for your good.

As Fireteams leaders, we are those who go first, who model how to grow, who lead the way in all the commands of Scripture, especially the command to pray. Our prayer lives are essential for the growth of our men and—through our Fireteam—the advancement of the kingdom of God. So, let’s pick of the weapon of prayer and use it fiercely, consistently, and full of faith for the purposes of God to be accomplished!

Application Questions:

- How can you develop habits to pray regularly? Do you need other men to hold you accountable?
- If you don’t have a prayer list, create one and use it to pray daily. Other than your family, work colleagues, Fireteam, Life Group, and church, who else do you need to pray for?
- If it feels overwhelming to begin a prayer time regularly, who can you ask to help you? Who do you know has a vibrant prayer life that you can learn from?



HOW TO LEAD DIFFERENT TYPES OF PEOPLE

1 Thessalonians 5:14

“And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone.”

I’ve heard leadership expert John Maxwell say something to this effect: “You need to meet people where they are in order to take them where they need to go.” This is a fundamental truth of good leadership. Jesus modeled this for us in his incarnation. As he left the throne room of heaven in order to come to earth as a flesh-and-blood baby, he was meeting all people where they are (as humans) to take them back to where they need to go (heaven). Furthermore, Jesus continues to meet people in and through his body, the people of God, whenever they love one another and encourage one another.

As a Fireteam leader, you will likely encounter different types of men who struggle in different ways and will need you to help them in different ways over time. Some men are crushing life, and they need the help to keep crushing it. Some men are overwhelmed with life, and they need wise counsel to help process everything that is going on. Some men are battling addictions, and some men are attempting to stay sober. Because of the different types of men you will lead—with all of their different strengths and weaknesses and life situations—you will need to develop the skill of leading different men in different ways appropriate to where they currently are.

According to 1 Thessalonians 5:14, there are at least the “idle and disruptive” types, the “disheartened” types, and the “weak” types. And to each of these types of people, Paul gives a different approach to dealing with them. This doesn’t mean we don’t all act like these different groups at some times, but it does mean that some people have tendencies to live more often in one of these camps. So, let’s look at these types of people and how Paul commands us to respond to them.

“warn those who are idle and disruptive”

There come times in every leader's life when he must warn others. This isn't usually a pleasant part of leadership, but it is essential. Without warning others, we will not be obeying the commands of Scripture. Many people may be stuck in their spiritual walk because no one has had the guts to tell them that the reasons for them being stuck have to do with their own behavior. It is awkward and difficult to confront others who are not living the way they should, but leaders are called to press through uncomfortable feelings for the sake of others. (Think of how a leader may have called you out at some point, leading to your own growth.)

In this scenario in Thessalonica, those who must be warned are being lazy and divisive. Instead of laboring hard for themselves and the sake of the community, they are laying around and causing a stir. As a general principle, bored men can often become divisive men. When men aren't working toward good ends, they can often find themselves causing problems. And apparently this is what was happening to some of the people in 1st-century church in Thessalonica.

So, how do we warn the idle and disruptive if they show up in our Fireteam? In love. Ephesians tells us to "speak truth in love" (Eph 4:15). Yes, we must warn, but we must warn out of a loving desire to see the individuals we warn grow as faithful disciples of Jesus, impacting their homes and communities in powerful ways. Warning others should rarely be done out of frustration and anger, but should be done regularly out of a concerned, loving heart that wants the best for others. As you pray for and serve the men of your Fireteam, they will see your love for them and will allow you to speak into their lives in ways that others cannot. Don't take that privilege lightly. Embrace it when the time calls for it, and lovingly (and gently when possible) confront them in their errors.

"encourage the disheartened"

As the name "Fireteam" suggests, we are in a spiritual war. This war is not merely for physical territory, but for spiritual territory—the territories of the heart and mind. Because of this, our hearts are to be guarded at all times (Pro 4:23), because it is from our hearts that we live life. All of our outward actions are in some way connected to internal and spiritual realities going on inside of us. To have a discouraged heart is to have a heart that has been in some way wounded by the enemy of our souls.

So, how do we encourage the disheartened? We speak truth in love,

just like we do with the idle and disruptive. But, this time, we speak to them in order to remind them of the positive truths of the gospel and of their lives. By reminding a brother about the always-available, never-ending river of forgiveness that God offers us in Jesus (1 Jn 1:9), we can encourage a heart that is weighed down by its own sin. By reminding a brother that God is working out all the difficult circumstances he is facing for his own good (Rom 8:28), we can encourage a heart that is weighed down by the troubles of this life.

Moreover, there is a tendency in groups that emphasize accountability (like a Fireteam does) to only dwell on the mistakes and mess ups. But, there are likely countless things that a brother *is already doing well*. Some of these include: he might be working hard, he might be honest enough to share his struggles, he might be a first-generation believer trying his best, he might be investing in his marriage, and he might be showing up to Fireteams meetings even when it is inconvenient! Look for the ways that God is working positively in your brother's life and encourage him in these things. The busyness and stress of life can often hinder us from being able to see all that God is accomplishing in us and through us. We need other men who will remind us of the good.

“help the weak”

While some men are struggling, because they are being rebellious, others struggle, because they are simply weak humans. Weakness is not a sin; otherwise, Paul would not have boasted in his weaknesses (2 Cor 12:9-10)! While we certainly want to warn and admonish those who are not living according to God's Word, we don't want to discourage those who already are feeling the weight of their sin and simply are faltering ahead, often two steps forward and one step back at a time. As a leader, learn to read the differences between those who are refusing to obey God and those who are weakly struggling to obey God. Rebuke the former, and help the latter.

A great question you can always ask is, “How can we help you in this area of weakness? How can we be a part of strengthening you?” Also, search the Scriptures on behalf of your weak brother for passages that speak to his struggle or weakness. He may simply be unaware of what God says about the issues he is dealing with. You can help him by making him aware of what God says. You can also choose to pray more consistently for him in the coming days and weeks. Whatever you can do to help, do it.

“be patient with everyone”

Finally, a great test of a leader is his patience with those he leads. As frustrating as his disciples could be, Jesus never gave up on his men. Even unto the Cross, Jesus loved his disciples well (Jn 13:1). The same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead now lives in each of us (Rom 8:11) and empowers us for patient, long-suffering endurance (Gal 5:22-23) toward those we are called to love and lead. Who is frustrating you with their slow growth? Be patient. Who annoys you? Be patient. Keep fighting the good fight by leading faithfully over time, and you will see God use you to bring growth to the men in your Fireteam. To him be all the glory!

Application Questions:

- Is there anyone whom you need to warn? What is keeping you from doing this?
- Is there anyone whom you need to encourage or help?
- Is there any way in which you need to ask God for more patience?



PRACTICAL TIPS FOR LEADING A FIRETEAMS GROUP TIME

Just like any group, a Fireteam can be led well or poorly depending upon the leadership of the person in charge. Most of the time this has nothing to do with the character of the person leading, but rather has to do with the ability of the leader to navigate the time together well, steering the men in the right direction consistently. This article is meant to share some helpful tips I have learned over time in order to help my own Fireteam get the most out of our times together.

Tip #1: Focus on the 5 Core Elements *First*

This is not only the first tip, but the most important one. Most of the time when I look back on a Fireteam gathering time and am disappointed in how it went, it is largely due to this factor. Even though the 5 essential parts of a Fireteam are clearly laid out in the overview, I can still find myself spending an excessive amount of time at the beginning of Fireteam group time *just talking about life*. It's almost as if there is a slight nervousness to just jump in and get it done. It's as if that isn't loving or kind. But this is not true!

The opposite is true, in fact. Each of the men who participate in your Fireteam already know (or should know) what they are signing up for. They should be well aware that there is a need every group time to share updates on their accountability and be ready to discuss their prayer needs. While shooting the breeze and talking about life isn't *bad*, it just *isn't helpful* at the beginning of a Fireteam time together. It isn't what is *most* important. What is most important is to do what you came to do and work through the 5 core, essential pieces of the Fireteam log in your binders.

What happens when you don't "get down to business" quickly? Typically, prayer at the end gets cut short. Praying for each other is best at the end after updates have been given (so you know how to actually pray for each other), but putting it at the end of time together also makes it the most likely part of your time together to get cut short. This shouldn't be! Prayer is likely *the most important part* of your group time. The way to make sure it gets the value it

deserves is by making sure to start on time and quickly move into the 5 core elements.

Tip #2: Be Willing to Speed Up the Slow Ones

There is only so much time your group has allotted to spend together. Most men who are a part of a Fireteam know just how valuable their time is, and they want to make the most of it. When one or more of your teammates is (unintentionally) taking up most of the time, the whole team suffers. So, not only do you need to be punctual and dive quickly into the 5 core elements, but you also need to be willing to ask certain members of your Fireteam to “get a move on” when they are taking too long. This, of course, needs to be discerned from group time to group time, and, of course, it needs to depend somewhat on what is going on in someone’s life, but the principle remains the same: be willing to speed up the slow ones *for the sake of the group*.

Another thing to consider regarding this issue is that a Fireteams group time is not the same as a counseling session. There is a sense in which your team will naturally “counsel” one another as you share and pray. Moreover, it is true that men need to have the space and ability to share *what is really going on* in their world. If we do not allow men to open up and share (and this may take some time on occasion), then we are not leading well. Yet, at the same time, *there are other times and places for counseling*. Fireteams time together should focus on what *only a Fireteams time can accomplish*. If one or more members of your Fireteam is consistently (unintentionally) turning group time into a counseling session, then it is time to encourage them to get the help they need *from trusted counselors*.

Tip #3: Prepare for Fireteams Time Together

I am the worst of sinners in this regard. Typically, I either do not prepare, or I simply skim my own accountability card before stepping into the room where we meet. My preparation is halfhearted at best. I need to do better. Why? Because while the outline of a Fireteam group time is ready-made for just showing up and doing it, you will get more out of your time if you prepare. Just like anything in life, preparation is key for success.

Preparation can look many ways, but I suggest it emphasize two key things: 1) prayer and 2) review. To pray is to remember to consistently lift the prayer requests of your team before the Lord. This not only will propel your team further faster, but it will also help you remember what is actually

going on in the worlds of your teammates. While I do a poor job of preparing for actual time together, I feel that God often covers this, because I do a good job of preparing through praying for my guys. The more I pray for them, the more aware I am of what they are going through, and the better I am able to encourage and support them in their battles.

The second way to prepare is to review. If possible, take the time to review your action logs from your past two or three meetings. In all likelihood you will remember things that you have forgotten. This will enable you to ask relevant follow-up questions about areas of their life they may simply forget to bring up. It is always encouraging when another person asks us about something we said a week or two ago. It shows care. It is a sign of friendship and genuine concern. By reviewing your action logs ahead of time, it will allow you to better love and lead the men in your group.

There are many, many other things that could be said about leading a Fireteams group time. But, these three tips have served me well whenever I apply them. I pray that as you lead your group, God will give you the discernment, wisdom, and courage you need to lead your men well—in ways that love them and glorify God.

Application Questions:

- Have you ever been a part of small groups that neglect prayer due to not beginning on time? Do you believe prayer time is valuable enough to not neglect?
- Who might be someone that you can gently, lovingly nudge to move quicker in times together?
- How do you need to grow as a leader?



READING RESOURCES FOR MEN'S FIRETEAMS

While there are only five core, essential elements to a Fireteam, it is up to the Men's Fireteam Leader (FTL) to determine whether or not reading a book would be helpful in the discipleship of the group. If your team decides to read a book, here are some helpful options to get you started.

If you have a book that you think would be helpful for the Discipleship Pastor ("Michael") to know about, please email him and let him know! Michael, along with input from others, will be developing and updating this list over time.

Ten Books from Trusted Authors and Publishers:

- "The Masculine Mandate: God's Calling to Men" by Richard D. Phillips
- "The Meaning of Marriage" by Tim and Kathy Keller
- "Bondage Breaker" by Neil T. Anderson
- "When I Don't Desire God" by John Piper
- "Parenting" by Paul Tripp
- "Gentle and Lowly" by Dane Ortlund
- "Delighting in the Trinity" by Michael Reeves
- "Made for Friendship" by Drew Hunter
- "Crazy Busy" by Kevin DeYoung
- "The Death of Porn" by Ray Ortlund



MISCELLANEOUS Q & A REGARDING FIRETEAMS LEADERSHIP

How do I become a Fireteam Leader (FTLs)?

FTLs are adult male members of Wellspring in good standing who have been vetted and approved by either the Discipleship Pastor (“Michael”) or a Men’s Squadron Leader (SL). This entails at minimum the filling out of an online application that includes at least two non-family references for single men and three for those who are either engaged or married.

What is a Men’s Squadron Leader (SL)?

Just as Life Group Leaders are helped by Life Group Coaches, so too are FTLs helped by SLs. There will be simply too many FTLs to be directly overseen by Pastor Michael. Having another layer of leadership to help men work through the leadership of their Fireteam will prove essential. Eventually, every FTL will be assigned a SL.

Who decides who is in a Fireteam?

It is a mutual decision between the FTL and a prospective team member. While the FT Ministry will attempt to create opportunities to connect leaders and possible new members, we will not micromanage the process. It isn’t possible, and it wouldn’t be best even if it was possible; there must be room for the Spirit to lead the process. This also means that a FTL has the right to tell someone “no” who seeks to join their group.

How will the Fireteams Ministry help me recruit and enlist new team members?

By hosting Fireteams Advances, we will be creating regular opportunities for men to get connected to Fireteams and for Fireteams leaders to meet prospective new members. In addition, we will highlight any FTLs who want to be highlighted on the website. Lastly, our FT Coordinator (Josh Greiner) can help you discern who might be a good fit to join your team based on whomever is currently on a wait list to get into a Fireteam.

But, ultimately, the primary responsibility for recruiting, building, and growing a Fireteam is on the Fireteam leader.

How will I be equipped and encouraged as a FTL?

The hope is to create regular equipping times for all the leaders to gather and grow. Also, the FTL Binder should continue to be updated and edited over time with helpful tools and resources. In addition, SLs will also be helpful to our leaders as they learn from others who are also leading.

At the same time, remember: the Lord is with you always, and the Word of God can equip you for every good work (2 Tim 3:16-17).