

NURTURING SPIRITUAL GROWTH AMONG BUS COUNCIL MEMBERS*

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"I planted the seed, Apollos watered the plant, but it was God who made the plant grow."

1 Corinthians 3:6

Introduction. The Apostle Peter epitomizes the concept of spiritual growth. He experienced firsthand a positive movement in his life from immaturity to maturity. The New Testament letter of II Peter reflects a wisdom born of many years of following Christ. One of the foci of this short letter from beginning to end is personal spiritual growth.

Spiritual growth is implied in chapter one when the writer encourages the readers to "add goodness to your faith...knowledge to your goodness...self-control to your knowledge. . .endurance to your self-control...godliness to your endurance. . .brotherly affection to your godliness...and love to your brotherly affection." (II Peter 1:5-7 Today's English Version) The letter concludes in the final verse with an emphatic admonition to personal spiritual growth. The elderly Apostle writes, "But continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." (II Peter 3:18 Today's English Version)

This Dissertation/Project has as its focus spiritual growth. Spiritual growth is a natural dimension of Christian discipleship which is both possible and desirable for Christians at every stage of life. Spiritual growth can be nurtured and college students have unusual potential for such growth.

Definitions. The organizational context for this Dissertation/Project is Baptist Student Union which is a student-led, campus organization sponsored by Southern Baptist churches. It is a fellowship of Christian students (BSU's

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include non-Baptist students) organized for purposes of nurture and ministry on and off campus. The Baptist Student Union Director (in some states known as Baptist Campus Minister) is the person responsible for the total program of ministry of BSU on one or more campuses. There are approximately seventy-five full-time BSU Directors in Texas. Some of the larger BSU ministries include one or several Associate BSU Directors to share the workload and expand the ministries. In this Dissertation/Project, the terms 'BSU Director or BSU staff' will refer to BSU Directors and Associate BSU Directors.

The student leadership group of BSU is called the Executive Council. It is composed of selected students with demonstrated leadership ability, spiritual vitality, and desire to serve the Lord. The Executive Council meets weekly as a whole with the BSU staff to plan, coordinate, and pray for the ministry of BSU. The weekly council meeting usually includes time for personal sharing and mutual support among the membership. In addition to the weekly meeting as a group, each member meets individually with the BSU Director. The concern of this Dissertation/Project is the spiritual growth dimension of the weekly personal conference between BSU director and BSU Executive Council member. It is important to understand that these weekly conferences are multi-faceted, i.e., the agenda is larger than nurturing spiritual growth. It also includes discussion of BSU program responsibilities and matters of personal concern at appropriate times (family crises, peer relationships, school concerns, job, etc.). Students serve on Executive Council for a minimum of one semester and sometimes as long as two or three years. The potential for nurturing spiritual growth in the context of the BSU Director/Executive Council member relationship is very real.

The Problem. Although many BSU Executive Council members experience some spiritual growth while serving as leaders in BSU, most BSU Directors do not follow a clearly defined approach in nurturing that growth. This is due in part to the limited availability of materials specifically designed for use in the context of the Director/Council member relationship.

Hypothesis. The hypothesis of this Dissertation/Project is that BSU directors have an unusual opportunity to nurture spiritual growth in the lives of their Executive Council members. In their nurturing role many BSU directors would benefit from the availability of a spiritual growth model designed specifically for them, tailored to the wholistic needs of college students, ordered yet flexible, individualized, and informed by the Scripture and selected contemporary models for spiritual growth/direction.

The challenge of this Dissertation/Project is to create an integrated spiritual growth model which embraces the best of traditional, evangelical spiritual growth training models familiar to BSU directors while at the same time incorporating the fresh insights and rich tradition of spiritual direction, which is relatively new to most BSU directors.

A MODEL FOR NURTURING SPIRITUAL GROWTH AMONG BSU EXECUTIVE COUNCIL MEMBERS

The presented spiritual growth model should not be seen as a new system to master, but an encouragement toward heightened sensitivity to the Holy Spirit in the BSU director/Executive Council member relationship. Specific materials are provided in the twelve growth tracts, but it is assumed that each director will follow his/her own sense of direction in the use of the materials with students. This model, despite appearances, is not a call to complexity, but rather to simplicity. It is intended as a coach's playbook, not a detailed manual of operation. The effectiveness of the model depends primarily on the character and spirituality of the BSU director. Therefore, proper attention to physical fitness, emotional well-being, and spiritual vitality represent a priority for the director who wants to be at his/her best for the sake of ministry to students.

Many modern attempts to systematize spiritual growth are overly complex and demanding. This growth model may seem

imposing at first glance (twelve growth tracts, 104 pages), but keep in mind that the individual student would likely be exposed to a maximum of four or five tracts over a two year period. The variety presented in the growth tracts should allow for a whole spectrum of personality types, student needs, and unique circumstances the director will encounter. The matching of these growth tracts with council members and the design of a multi-year curriculum for each student will require authentic spirituality and humble sensitivity to God's leadership by both director and student. The director using the material in this model for the first time would likely begin with three or four tracts and then add to his/her repertoire one or two new growth tracts each semester. This approach allows the director time to "own" the material in each tract in the model.

Rationale. Since spiritual growth is a highly individual matter, it logically follows that in a BSU Council of 10-15 students, a single regimen for spiritual growth would miss at least some, if not many, of them. This growth model assumes diversity in student spiritual needs and seeks to address that diversity by providing twelve spiritual growth tracts. Such an approach to nurturing spiritual growth will require a great deal of work by the BSU director. It would be much easier to have the whole council on one growth tract even as a teacher with one preparation has it easier than a teacher with three.

There is some progression (in terms of maturity) intended in the listing of the twelve growth tracts. It is not a rigid progression, however. There are no set categories such as novice, intermediate, and advanced. The liabilities of spiritual maturity labels outweigh the assets. The director and the council member must discern which spiritual growth tracts appropriately match a student's maturity level and unique set of needs.

The Givens. There are certain dimensions of spiritual growth which will be common to each of the tracts. Regardless of a student's growth tract he/she will be expected to observe certain disciplines called the "givens". They are as follows:

- (1) A daily time to be alone with God — Usually called

a "quiet time", this is time set aside daily for reflection, prayer, Bible reading, and reading of other devotional materials. Morning is recommended, but not required. Students should be given the freedom to find the right time suited to their individuality. Consistency is the more important consideration than the time of day. Students will need assistance in the selection of content materials for use in their quiet time.

(2) The keeping of a spiritual notebook — Some of the growth tracts such as Spiritual Journey Notebook include the idea of keeping a notebook as inherent to the tract. Such is not the case for all the tracts. However, each of the tracts is more easily facilitated if the student has some kind of notebook in which to do Bible study, make journal entries, etc. The materials provided in this model fit a 5 1/2" x 8 1/2" notebook. The student will need several dividers and some blank paper. It would be helpful if the BSU director made "generic" notebooks available at cost for his/her students for the sake of convenience. The spiritual notebook is one means of organizing one's spiritual life. The divisions for a "do it yourself" spiritual notebook might include time management (daily do lists, calendar), Bible study, speaker notes, prayer concerns, personal journal, and miscellaneous (names, addresses, phone numbers, BSU matters).

(3) Regular participation in corporate worship — Centuries of Christian history have conclusively proven that regular involvement with other believers in corporate worship is indispensable for spiritual growth. Church membership and active involvement is generally accepted as a requirement for being on BSU Council. The director has the responsibility of monitoring a council member's involvement in terms of regularity, satisfaction, and fulfillment. Dialogue about a student's church life should be a regular (not necessarily weekly) dimension of the council conference.

Diagnostic Tools. The use of a diagnostic tool in the context of a nurturing relationship is intended to support the process of spiritual discernment so crucial to the growth process. The more the BSU director knows about his/her council members,

the better he/she will be able to facilitate spiritual growth in their lives.

Use the tools early in the semester with the newly appointed council members. Explain the rationale to them and then make the completion of the questionnaire an assignment due in one week. From the outset assure them of confidentiality. Pray for discernment as the information is processed and decisions are made about appropriate growth tracts.

The same three diagnostic tools used in the test model are being recommended in this model with minor revisions: "A Confidential Spiritual Life Check-up," "Spiritual Autobiography," and "Questions for Interior Awareness." They follow in order:

A CONFIDENTIAL SPIRITUAL LIFE CHECK-UP

(A revised version adapted from an article by Rev. Dennis Wayman in Leadership, Vol. 4, Fall, 1983, pp. 88-92, used by permission.)

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Set aside an hour of uninterrupted time in which to thoroughly answer these questions.
2. Keep your answers private. Plan to share them only with your BSU director, pastor, or trusted friend.
3. Come prayerfully and openly to your council conference, trusting God to use this experience as a means of personal spiritual growth.

I. BLOOD TYPE:

A. When did you take the decisive step of becoming a follower of Jesus Christ?

B. Have you been baptized? When? By whom?

II. RED BLOOD CELLS (*Oxygen carriers that prevent anemia*):

A. Worship Life

1. How meaningful is Sunday worship to you?

2. How meaningful is private worship to you?
3. Do you feel you are becoming better acquainted with God? In what ways?
4. Is meditation a part of your spiritual walk? Please describe:
5. Do you keep a spiritual notebook? How do you use it?
6. Have you ever kept a spiritual journal? How has it helped in your relationship to God?

B. Intellectual Life

1. Are your questions and doubts being answered? If yes, how?
2. Do you feel you have a working knowledge of the Bible? What specific help do you need?
3. Do you understand basic theological concepts - justification, regeneration, sanctification, etc.? What help do you need?
4. In what areas of intellectual life (explaining, defending the Christian faith, Bible knowledge, etc.) are you strong, and in what areas are you weak?

III. WHITE BLOOD CELLS (*disease fighters for inner spiritual cleansing and renewing*):

A. Do you feel you are a more accepting, forgiving, loving person now than you were in the past? Please explain:

B. Do you feel you are stronger against temptations to be impatient, angry, greedy, lustful, etc.? Please explain:

C. Do you have a healthy self-esteem? What do you like about yourself?

D. Are you becoming purer in motive, thought, and life style? Please explain:

E. Do you find yourself usually encouraging others or

competing with them? Expand:

F. Do you occasionally tear another person down in jest or in anger? What triggers this reaction?

G. How is the Holy Spirit helping you become whole?

IV. PLATELETS (*blood clotters that stanch the wounds of living in a hurting world*):

A. Have you found someone to help bear the burdens of life? Who?

B. Do you find you can share your inner joys, hopes, and dreams with significant others? Expand:

C. When someone tears you down, how do you handle it?

D. When you fail, what happens within you?

E. How do you deal with success?

V. BLOOD PRESSURE (*hypertension and exercise*):

A. Are you able to turn your finances over to God? Do you tithe? What is the shape of your struggle against materialism?

B. Are you seeking God's direction for your life in terms of vocation? Please explain:

C. Are you exercising your gifts within the Body of Christ? In what ways?

D. Do you share your faith consistently and effectively?

E. What is your level of concern for the poor? Have you found practical ways to minister to their needs?

F. Do injustices and social evils bother you? How?

VI. TIRED BLOOD (*from an imbalanced spiritual diet*):

A. Is your life balanced in terms of recreation, family time, school, work, etc.?

B. Is your life balanced in terms of corporate worship, personal Bible study, prayer and personal ministry (servanthood)?

QUESTIONS FOR INTERIOR AWARENESS

(Adapted from Spiritual Friend by
Tilden Edwards, pp. 138-144.)

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Set aside an hour of uninterrupted time for this exercise.

2. Write a three or four page essay based on the following questions.

3. Feel free to answer only the questions which relate to your pilgrimage.

I. In Scripture God is Judge, Lover, Comforter, Redeemer, Father, Mother, Husband, Creator, Faithful One, Law-Giver, the Almighty, the All-Knowing One, the Holy One, Provider, the Ever Present One, the Merciful One, Sufferer, Liberator, and Spirit.

What is your image of God? How do you think you acquired your image of God?

II. What is your image of yourself and how did you come by it?

What seems to be the "footsteps of God" in your life: particular events, relationships, experiences, etc?

What are the patterns you have noticed? Do the footsteps

appear primarily alone, with others, or in nature?

Does God speak to you primarily in religious settings, in your daily work, or in recreational settings?

When He speaks does it come as a surprise or do you usually expect it?

What has been the place of spiritual disciplines in your pilgrimage?

What have spiritual friends meant to your life?

- III. What happens when you pray? How must is it telling God things, and how much is it listening?

Do you think there is any conscious or unconscious censoring in your praying? (e.g. suppressing anger towards God)

- IV. How have you experienced the church? Positively or negatively?
- V. Do you see yourself as introvert or extrovert? Would you like to change your basic nature?
- VI. How do you deal with your emotions? Do you feel open and free or bottled up? Are you comfortable with the way you handle anger?
- VII. Describe your mother and father in terms of how they relate to you.

Describe their relationship. Did it foster security or insecurity in you?

Who was the center of human warmth in your childhood?

SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Using the following chronological format write your spiritual autobiography.
2. Limit the length to five typewritten pages.

I. Your Life With God As A Child:

(family make-up, spiritual life of your family, church background, most influential person, your feelings about God)

II. Your Life With God As An Adolescent:

(changes in your family after childhood, significant events -religious and otherwise, church involvement, most important persons, peer friendships, conversion experience, experiences at youth camps, retreats, mission trips, etc., important decisions, serious illnesses, devotional habits, feelings about God)

III. Your Life With God As A Young Adult To The Present:

(changes in your family after adolescence, church involvement, special friendships, devotional habits, special spiritual experiences, important decisions, life changing experiences, how you felt / feel about God)

The Spiritual Growth Tracts. The spiritual growth tracts are located in Appendix D of the original dissertation. Each tract has a cover sheet which includes these sections: source(s), over-view/evaluation, time frame, and format. The "source" section identifies the primary references used for the content, gives information about availability, and in some cases offers supplemental bibliographical information. The "overview/evaluation" section provides a summary of the content of the tract and, when appropriate, includes evaluative remarks. "Time Frame" is the section where a suggestion is made for the duration of the tract. The "Format" section gives

specific suggestions for the use of the material.

A Listing of the Titles of the Growth Tracts.

1. "Lifestory Conversations"
2. Survival Kit
3. Spiritual Journey Notebook
4. Patterns for Discipleship
5. "Vision: Personal Discipleship Strategy"
6. "Four Basic Methods of Personal Bible Study"
—devotional, chapter summary, topical and biographical
7. "Four Bible Study Methods: Some Examples"
8. The Table of Inwardness
9. Celebration of Discipline
10. "Topics of Relevance to College Students"
—"Growing Spiritually"
—"Developing a Lifelong Plan of Personal Bible Study"
—"Scripture Memory"
—"The Will of God"
—"Self-Image"
—"On Being A Servant"
11. "Keeping A Spiritual Journal"
12. "A One-day Personal Prayer Retreat"

Suggestions for Using the Model. The possibilities for various combinations of the twelve growth tracts are numerous. Listed below are four, two-year curriculum possibilities using these materials:

<u>CURRICULUM #1</u>	<u>GROWTH TRACT</u>	<u># WEEKS</u>
Semester 1	<u>Survival Kit</u>	12
	"Lifestory Conversations"	4
Semester 2	<u>Spiritual Journey Notebook</u>	16

Semester 3	"Vision"	16
Semester 4	<u>Table of Inwardness</u>	16
<u>CURRICULUM #2</u>	<u>GROWTH TRACT</u>	<u># WEEKS</u>
Semester 1	"Lifestory Conversations"	4
	"Four Basic Methods of Bible Study"	12
Semester 2	"Keeping A Spiritual Journal"	8
	"Topics of Relevance"	4
	"Bible Study Methods: Examples"	4
Semester 3	<u>Celebration of Discipline</u>	12
	"Topics of Relevance"	4
<u>Semester 4</u>	<u>Celebration of Discipline</u>	14
	"One-day Personal Prayer Retreat"	2
<u>CURRICULUM # 3</u>	<u>GROWTH TRACT</u>	<u># WEEKS</u>
Semester 1	<u>Spiritual Journey Notebook</u>	12
	"Topics of Relevance"	4
Semester 2	<u>Spiritual Journey Notebook</u>	12
	"Topics of Relevance"	2
	"Personal Prayer Retreat"	2
Semester 3	"Patterns"	8
	"Four Basic Methods of Bible Study"	8
Semester 4	"Patterns"	14
	"Personal Prayer Retreat"	2

<u>CURRICULUM #4</u>	<u>GROWTH TRACT</u>	<u># WEEKS</u>
Semester 1	"Four Basic Methods of Bible Study"	12
	"Topics of Relevance"	4
Semester 2	<u>Table of Inwardness</u>	12
	"Topics of Relevance"	2
	"Bible Study Methods: Examples"	2
Semester 3	<u>Celebration of Discipline</u>	12
	"Bible Study Methods: Examples"	2
	"Personal Prayer Retreat"	2
Semester 4	<u>Celebration of Discipline</u>	8
	"Keeping A Personal Journal"	8

Spiritual Growth Log. A logical corollary to an intentional effort of spiritual nurture for BSU Council members is the keeping of a spiritual growth log for each student by the BSU Director. The log consists of a detailed documentation of dates, materials used, results, and, in the case of multiple staff, the name of the BSU staff person conferencing with the council member for each semester. The keeping of a spiritual growth log on each student enhances the possibility of continuity and forward movement, enabling the student and the BSU Director to see in summary fashion where he/she has been and is headed in terms of intentional spiritual growth efforts.

Implications. This D/P answers some, but raises many other questions about spiritual growth and how to nurture it. At every point further study is recommended. . . needed.

It is imperative for the campus minister to stay abreast of the constant changes in the campus environment. Politics, economics, ethical concerns, the world situation, etc. impact students in significant ways which must be figured into the formula for effectively nurturing spiritual growth. Therefore,

the campus minister's role is always to be a student of students and their environment.

The Old Testament Scriptures were not included in the Biblical studies section of this D/P. They represent a library of books several of which contain the life histories of prominent persons whose spiritual growth pilgrimages present excellent opportunities for further study. (e.g. Moses, Jacob, Ruth, David, Solomon, etc.) The Psalms record a rich tradition of communion with God through open-hearted prayer which is so vital to spiritual growth. The wisdom literature teaches significant principles which shed much light on personal growth. The prophets reveal the dangers of a "no growth" mentality which leads to apathy, hypocrisy, religiosity, superficiality, idolatry, and inevitably to spiritual ruin. A more extensive study of the New Testament would also yield valuable insights. In short, this D/P has barely scratched the surface of the Biblical revelation concerning spiritual growth.

One of the goals of this D/P was to create an interface between traditional evangelical discipleship methodologies and the ancient practice of spiritual direction. More study is required to insure that the marriage of the two survives and thrives. As in any good marriage, the two partners must strive to bring out the best in each other and minimize each other's weaknesses. Careful scholarship is needed to ascertain both the strengths and weaknesses of each approach and utilize them to the fullest advantage.

The twelve spiritual growth tracts in the presented model are representative of a virtually inexhaustible supply of spiritual growth materials available. Further study would possibly yield growth tracts more suitable than the ones presented. As time passes and various books are no longer available, it is a practical necessity that the nurturer be ready to make substitutions. Additional growth tracts in the following areas could be beneficial: apologetics, personal evangelism, simplicity, sexuality, fasting, and financial responsibility. If one's ministry focuses on nurturing spiritual growth, an ongoing commitment to research and study will be required.

Suggestions. Although the question is outside the parameters of this D/P, it is interesting to ask, "What possible relevance does this D/P have to the ministry of the local church?" Several suggestions come to mind.

In churches with organized youth ministries, particularly those with student leadership groups analogous to the BSU Executive Council, a one-to-one correspondence suggests itself. The primary difference which would need to be considered is the age/maturity factor. Certain adjustments in content would be incumbent upon the youth minister using the spiritual growth model presented.

The traditional role of pastor in Southern Baptist life would require some adjustments in order to implement the ideas presented in this D/P. For some pastors there would need to be a shift in focus away from the preacher/administrator model to that of pastor/nurturer. For others, problem-centered personal counseling would have to be re-directed toward positive, individually tailored spiritual growth agendas. Nurture and training is generally relegated to the Sunday School organization, but the apparent spiritual immaturity of the average Baptist student arriving on the college scene does not seem to bear out the effectiveness of this strategy of spiritual nurture. Lost in the "bigness" and "groupness" of church is the powerful potential in one-to-one relationships (spiritual friendships) for spiritual growth. A pastor who understands this potential and is willing to risk criticism for "playing favorites" is likely to experience a rewarding personal ministry not enjoyed by others. The logical beginning point in the church setting is with persons in positions of leadership (deacons, Sunday School staff, etc.) who demonstrate a hunger for growth and an openness to being nurtured. After several years, it is conceivable that those being nurtured might become nurturers of others. The pastor would then continue to function as nurturer of a few and also equipper of other nurturers.

Conclusion. It is not necessarily the expectation, but rather the hope of this writer, that the long term impact of this D/P will be seen in the overall effectiveness of BSU directors in

nurturing spiritual growth among their Executive Council members. The result of such effectiveness will be evident in the overall level of spiritual maturity of student leaders in BSU. These same students potentially will make their impact in local churches as they graduate and eventually assume positions of leadership and responsibility.

Editor's Note: Copies of the published, abridged version of this dissertation may be obtained at a cost of \$16.70. Send requests to: Roger Matkin, P.O. Box 29432, San Antonio, TX 78229.