

Prayer and Perspiration

Introduction

Christians generally want to make a difference; some of us have some idea of what needs to be done, but don't quite know how to do it, some are confident about what they are called to do, while others feel called to a life of prayer.

I can't know what God has called any individual to do, but I am sure that all of us can be confident that we are doing what we have been called to do, and that most of us are not called to specialise in just one activity.

One common model can be summarised as: just do it! If you think God is calling you to do something, get on with it. Trust that God will let you know if you are wrong, and guide you elsewhere. Until you receive that guidance, get on with what you know.

But many people feel the 'just do it' model is inadequate, so here is an alternative: the 'prayer and perspiration' model. There are four cumulative steps – you continue to pray as you plan, and so on.

- Prayer
- Planning
- Perspiration
- Perspective

The Four 'P's

Prayer

We have to start with prayer, Prayer provides both guidance and motivation for the task.

- Guidance: where is God in this?
- Motivation: where will the resources come from, and why should I care enough to try?

When we pray, we do not ask God to bless our plans, but we ask Him to guide us in implementing His plans. Prayer forces us to ask some difficult questions.

- Is this His objective, or just my own personal bright idea?
- Is this His character, or am I trying to build the Kingdom of God using the enemy's tools?
- Is this His time, or am I trying to impose my priorities, rather than listening to His?

- Is this His path, or is there a better way? Is there a more loving, Godly, gentle, kind, effective, generous, sustainable route I am ignoring?

Planning

Ask the question: how might this come about? And start to answer the question. The answers need to be specific; how specific depends on many factors. The answers need to address both head and heart, be grounded in facts but also engage the emotions.

In general, define objectives, not routes; be specific about what you are seeking to achieve, but uncommitted in the details of how to achieve it; come up with ideas and possibilities; talk about them and be open to other people suggesting better ideas or showing why the ones you are considering will not work.

Be aware that no plan to build some part of God's Kingdom can possibly be achievable without His active involvement, so do not be surprised if your plans require a miracle or two in order for them to succeed.

‘What?’ matters deeply, and should be described in as much detail as possible, as should ‘Why?’. ‘When?’ might not matter so much – often, ‘as soon as possible’ is the only valid answer, unless there is some external deadline imposed on you.

Perspiration

In the light of your prayer and the plans you have formulated arising from them, you have to make it happen – this is where ‘just do it’ comes in. This is always costly, always in time and emotional drain, and very often in finance as well.

You are hardly ever called to act on your own: you will need the help and support of others, even if it is only their prayers. Different people are called to play different roles, and bear different aspects of the cost to differing extents.

Perspective

Record keeping and feedback help you understand what is happening. You need to know what is happening in order to take responsibility and to manage it well.

Every project requires both management (keeping the project running) and governance (asking the big questions: are we doing the right things; are we missing something important; what possibilities and risks do we need to take into account?). It is hard to do both, and almost impossible to do both at the same time.

On a regular basis, you need to step back from the activity, look at everything and ask: does this make sense? If I were starting from scratch, is this what I would aim to create?

As we do it, we learn and grow. Assumptions change, new possibilities arise, partly because time has passed and circumstances change, partly because the process of trying has changed us and enabled us to reflect more deeply (and more knowledgeably) on what we are trying to do. We must be willing to change parts of what we do, and abandon some of the activities in order to achieve the ultimate goal.

Next steps

This was written by Paul Hazelden as a contribution to the *Strong Foundations* exploration. You are welcome to use it and distribute it how you like, but feedback would be appreciated.

- Is it helpful?
- Would you change anything?
- Would you like to talk about how we can learn from each other about how best to follow Jesus where we are?

You can contact me through the web form at mad-bristol or join the conversation on the *Strong Foundations* site.

- Web form: <http://mad-bristol.org.uk/contact/>
- Strong Foundations: <http://strongfoundations.pbworks.com>

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