

Research: An Essential Ministry Tool



How do you understand research in Ministry?

The term research creates different thoughts and expectations for different people. Very often people think it is mere statistics. Others listen better because they expect some quality information that can be trusted. Generally people think that research is only the domain of the learned and specialists and is not for the ordinary man on the street.

We at INSERV believe that is not true. Terminology sometimes brings a barrier and causes misunderstandings to concepts that are actually essential for our survival and existence. We all use information and basic research principles every day to live life. The better information we have, the better decisions we can make and the more successful we are in what we want to do. We believe this is also

true for church, missions, ministry and just being a Christian that wants to make a difference in the world.

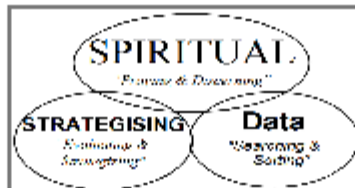
Research is a Process

Research is always part of a process that acknowledges the history, the current situation and context, and the future intention God has. Research in ministry loses value if approached as a mere event. We will explain this using three important aspects we believe forms a critical part of this process:

- The relationship with and interaction with God as part of the process (Spiritual)
- The gathering and interpretation of data. (Data)
- Application of data to develop a strategy or a plan. (Strategising)

The close relationship between these aspects is very important. A schematic view of the relationships will look like this;

Circle 1: Spiritual (Praying and discerning) A research process in minis-



try and mission must be done from a relationship with God. God will lead you in the process and guide you to get the information you need. You need to make sure you are connected to God

Him.

Circle 2: Data (Searching and Sorting)

All possible means and important sources needed to gather data, sort it, interpret and document it. Dealing with data is to get the best results. If the data is not dealt with properly, the conclusions will not be reliable and trustworthy and will lead to wrong interpretations and conclusions

Circle 3: Strategizing (Evaluating and Strategizing)

There must be a purpose to do research. To work out a strategy, plan better or be more effective in ministry. We do not want to gather information merely for the sake of having information. Information gathered within a clear goal and focus will lead to a better understanding and interpretation of the where the ministry is with regards to God's plan.

A description of the process using the arrows: Arrows: God knows the best strategy. (Straight Arrow from Spiritual to Strategy). He can give it to us in any way He chooses. He more often chooses to let us go through a process (Bend Arrow from Spiritual via Data to Strategy), in order to discover the information ourselves. In that way He prepares us for the task ahead of us. Very often, He gives us a strategy to follow that does not correspond with the data gathered but then we are pre-

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prepared to follow Him. It is an important part of the process to get prepared for a task ahead of us. We are prepared for doing His work and ministry by the process of gathering data or doing research. Thus, it is important to view a research project as a preparation process for the work that God wants you, the ministry, mission or Church to do.

To summarise this part, we are only discovering what God is busy doing (Missio Dei) so that we can take His hand and be part of His plan and not follow our own plan.

Important steps and Elements in a Research Process

The following is just a few aspects and elements that could form part of a research project. Some of these will always be part of any project, other aspects will depend on a project, goal and methodology:

- Home research • Analysis
- Field Research • Questionnaires
- Documentation • Security
- Interpretation • Prayer
- Interviews • Getting others to pray

Is Research Biblical?

God is using information and research principles through all of scripture to reveal Himself and His plan. One example of a specific research project and its results are in Numbers 13 and 14 when the 12 spies were sent out by Moses. Luke 1:1-4 describes the research methodology Luke used to write his research report. A number of census operations are recorded in the Old and New Testament. The history of what happened in Ai (Joshua 7 and 8) shows that the facts are not as important as obedience to God.

There is no strategy recorded in scripture that was applied twice by Israel in taking the Promised Land. Every research project, every outreach strategy requires fresh marching orders from our Commander, Jesus Christ that will guide us as He promised in Matt 28:18-20.

Let us be ready to grow in our relationship with God, gather the information required and allow the Father to prepare us for the tasks He

wants us to use for reaching the unreached.

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