

# Perspectives on Leadership:

## *Finishing Well*

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### **Few Leaders Finish Well**

A few years ago, Dr. Robert Clinton, professor of leadership at Fuller Theological Seminary, did a comprehensive study of leaders in the Scriptures. According to Dr. Clinton, "there are approximately 1000 leaders mentioned by name in the Bible. Most of these leaders are mentioned by name only or are mentioned in connection with a role. Some of the leaders receive a bit more attention but not very much information is given about their lives. There are about 100 prominent leaders described in the Scriptures. Of the 100 or so prominent leaders, only 49 have enough information given about them to ascertain how they finished their life and ministry."

As he analyzed the lives of these leaders he discovered that there were four types of finishes:

#### *1) Those cut off early:*

These leaders were taken out of leadership by assassination, killed in battle, prophetically denounced, or overthrown. Some of this activity was directly attributed to God. Some of these were positive, some negative.

- Examples: Abimelech, Samson, Absalom, Josiah, John the Baptist, James

#### *2) Those that finished poorly:*

These leaders were going down hill in the latter part of their lives and leadership. This might be reflected in their personal relationship with God or in terms of their leadership competency.

- Examples: Gideon, Samson, Eli, Saul, Solomon

#### *3) Those that finished so-so:*

These leaders did well but were limited in some areas of their leadership because of sin. They had some negative ramifications surrounding their lives and leadership even though they personally were walking with God.

- Examples: David, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah

#### *4) Those that finished well:*

These leaders were walking with God at the end of their lives. They contributed in God's purposes at a high level. They fulfilled what God had for them to do.

Examples: Abraham, Job, Joseph, Joshua, Caleb, Samuel, Daniel, Jesus, Peter, Paul

Dr. Clinton admits that the data is not conclusive, but there is one overwhelming conclusion that can't be denied: *in the Bible, few leaders finished well!* As a matter of fact, in researching approximately 1300 spiritual leaders from scripture, church history, as well as current leaders, on average only one in three finishes well!

## Seven Barriers to Finishing Well

In his comprehensive study of leaders in the Scriptures, Dr. Clinton compared the lives and leadership of those who finished well with those who didn't. In doing so, he discovered six barriers to finishing well – I've added the last one – barriers that still apply to those called to leadership by Jesus.

### *1) Finances*

Leaders make important decisions with regard to finances. A character trait of greed or a lack of personal integrity will often lead to the improper control and use of money. A number of leaders have faced this temptation and failed.

- Examples: Gideon (Judges 8); Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5)

### *2) The Abuse of Power*

Leaders operate out of a God-given power base, both out of their inner man and out of a God-given role/position. The abuse of power can manifest itself in leaders through manipulation and control, by gaining inappropriate privileges from those whom they are leading, etc.

- Example: Uzziah (2 Chronicles 26)

### *3) Pride*

Self-centered pride can lead to the downfall of any leader. We must truly recognize deep within that "apart from God we can do nothing" (Jn.15:5). Pride in a leader can easily lead to poor decisions and sinful behavior.

- Example: David (1 Chronicles 21); Hezekiah (Isaiah 39)

### *4) Sexual Misconduct*

This has been the cause of major downfalls in leadership from the Biblical era to now. Countless leaders have disqualified themselves from leadership because of sinful activity in this realm.

- Example: David (2 Samuel 11)

### *5) Family Relationships*

Problems between spouses, parents and children, or among siblings, can also destroy one's life and leadership influence. Failure to meet the needs of a leader who is single can also lead to problems.

- Examples: Eli (1 Samuel 2-4); Solomon (1 Kings 11)

### *6) Plateauing*

Leaders who are competent tend to plateau in their growth. It is possible to lead at a level of competency without engaging the needed presence of the Holy Spirit! In other words, leaders have developed skills that can be performed well in the flesh as opposed to operating out of dependence on the Spirit.

- Example: Absalom (2 Samuel 15-18)

### *7) Untended Emotional Wounds*

Leaders who don't address hurts, wounds and disappointments can become emotionally crippled and rendered internally helpless or powerless. This lack of 'tending one's soul' can lead to relational breakdowns and to vulnerable places where the enemy can build strongholds.

These certainly are not the only barriers one could list as hindrances to finishing well, but they seem to be the most common. Present and emerging leaders need to look ahead and see these potential barriers and take immediate steps not to walk right into them.

## Six Characteristics of Those Finishing Well

One of the things that we can learn from leaders in the Scriptures is how to finish well. *A leader can finish well with God's help!* Dr. Clinton has discovered six characteristics in the lives of Scriptural leaders who finish well. Not every leader necessarily had all six of these characteristics operating in their lives, but they walked in most of them.

*1) Relationship with God*

This one seems rather obvious, but needs to be mentioned. This relationship is marked by intimacy, passion, obedience and faithfulness. The leader that maintained a personal vibrant relationship with God right up to the end of their life finished well.

*2) A Learning Posture*

The leader maintains an open learning posture and actively learns from various sources – people, mentors, schooling, books, life experiences, etc. The leader needs to walk as a perpetual student in life and deliberately learns the lessons God reveals from it.

*3) Christ-like Character*

This is manifested in the form of the fruit of the spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control, and by operating out of the ways of God.

*4) Maintains Convictions and Truth*

The leader lives their life based on the convictions and truths that God has revealed to them. The promises and guidance of God are received by faith, and decisions are made on the basis of them.

*5) Accomplishes God's Purposes*

Leaders who finish well leave behind an 'ultimate contribution' or legacy which is a testimony of their God honoring life. There are many different kinds of legacies that are left behind, but many are centered on how the leader lived their life to glorify God, and/or around what the leader accomplished in their life and ministry.

*6) Fulfilled Sense of Destiny*

A leader who finishes well lived their life in a growing awareness of their destiny, seeing most or all of it fulfilled in their lifetime. Choices and life decisions were made on the basis of this sense of destiny.

Again, as stated earlier, not every leader that has been studied by Dr. Clinton has all six characteristics strongly in place. However, those who serve as leaders now, or are emerging leaders, would do well to use these characteristics as a measuring stick for shaping their life and leadership.

### **Five Enhancements to Finishing Well**

There seems to be no guarantees that any leader will finish well. However, there are a number of things that we can do in order to enable us to gain strength each year of our lives (vs. being depleted) and enhance our ability to finish well! I want to take a brief look at the five enhancements that can enable a leader to finish well.

*1) Perspective*

It is very important to have a lifetime perspective on our lives and leadership. Having perspective on what is happening in our lives will allow us to understand how to respond to God in any given situation. This allows us to see more clearly what God is up to in and through us, including: deepening our dependence on Him, teaching us about prayer, faith or spiritual authority through conflicts, or even when we should be stepping into new leadership roles. We can gain this kind of perspective by studying the leadership development processes in the lives of past and present leaders.

In Dr. Clinton's studies on leadership, he has observed 'seasons' of development within a leader's life. Put on a time-line, a leader's development will look *generally* something like this:

Birth – 18	20-30	30-40	40's-50's	60's+
- Sovereign Foundations	- Character - Commitment - Calling Glimpses	- Unique Methodologies - Clear Purpose Statement	- Major Role - Convergence	- Afterglow

When one can grasp where they are in God's sequence of leadership development, decisions related to life, family, leadership and future can be made with wisdom and understanding.

### 2) *Times of Renewal*

From time to time leaders need to experience renewal in their relationship with God. It can come in a number of different ways. These are special moments of intimacy with God or times when God challenges the leader in a significant way.

Every leader should look for and expect these kinds of things to be happening in their lives. There are times that God initiates the renewal, and there are times when a leader can position themselves to receive from God in a more intimate and personal way. The second way mentioned here can often occur simply through the regular application of the spiritual disciplines to one's life (prayer, fasting, worship, time in the Word, etc.)

It is interesting to note here that most adults, somewhere in their late-thirty's to late-forties tend to go through a critical period of transition. During this season of one's life, discipline tends to slack off and there is a real tendency to plateau. This person relies on their past experiences and skills to get them by. This is usually surrounded by a time of confusion about identity and purpose and the need for new vision. An unusual renewal experience with God often helps the leader overcome these tendencies and redirects their focus.

### 3) *Spiritual Disciplines*

The spiritual disciplines are one of the key means for growing in intimacy with God. Effectiveness at practicing such disciplines is one of the primary enhancements toward finishing well. A regular practicing of them enables the leader to focus on God's priorities and will help them to eliminate behaviors and attitudes that could lead to their downfall. These include: prayer, fasting, worship, reading, reflecting and applying the Scriptures to one's life, waiting on God, growing in a working knowledge of the ways of God, giving, etc.

Books like Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline* can be very helpful to a leader who has the need to establish, or reestablish, these disciplines in their lives.

### 4) *A Learning Posture*

The single most important antidote to plateauing is to have a well developed learning posture. If a leader is continually learning from a multitude of people and sources, it provides God with many opportunities to release new energy, vision, and ideas that will greatly help the leader to continue in their development.

Leaders need to develop attitudes and skills concerning learning. Life is a great teacher, and different kinds of experiences can teach one many things. Learning from failure, as well as success, is important.

In western culture, one of the best ways to maintain a learning posture is to read broadly. Leaders need to look for ways to grow, to 'carve out' new territory of learning, and find someone to hold them accountable to it.

We need to guard ourselves against becoming inflexible leaders as it relates to learning new things. If we become inflexible, we will certainly plateau.

### 5) *Mentoring*

Finding mentors and mentoring others is an essential part of finishing well. Mentors are there to encourage, challenge, walk with in accountability, and to develop and release. Dr. Clinton defines mentoring as *a relational process in which one person (the mentor) empowers another person (the mentee) by sharing God-given resources (timely advise, wisdom, information, emotional support, protection, resources, opportunity, etc.) with them.*

There are many different types of mentors and mentoring functions that a leader needs along the way in their development. Dr. Clinton lists the following eight kinds of mentors and the specific roles that each plays within the life of a mentee. Each kind of mentor varies as it relates to active, occasional, and passive mentoring. The eight different types of mentors, and their functions in brief, include:

- 1) Discipler Mentor – helps to establish healthy foundational HABITS in new believers
- 2) Guide Mentor – EVALUATES growth and needs for one's spiritual development
- 3) Coach Mentor – equips the mentoree with SKILLS that are needed in life and ministry
- 4) Counselor Mentor – provides ADVICE at crucial times within one's life and ministry
- 5) Teacher Mentor – transfers various kinds of KNOWLEDGE to those they are mentoring
- 6) Sponsor Mentor – serves as a RESOURCE/PROTECTION in career development areas
- 7) Contemporary Model Mentor – models godly VALUES that inspire emulation
- 8) Historical Model Mentor – the life of a past leader that brings INSPIRATION and HOPE