



The Making of a Leader

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About the Author

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The Summary

What does it mean to be a leader? What does it take to become the leader God wants you to be? What is the process, the cost, and the result? Leadership is a dynamic process in which a man or woman with God-given capacity influences a specific group of God's people toward His purposes for the group.

This is a book about spiritual dynamics. Effective spiritual ministry flows out of being, and God is concerned with our being. He is forming it. The patterns and processes He uses to shape us are worthwhile subjects for leadership study. Those who study, and use the insights they gain, will be better prepared leaders.

Developing leaders includes all of life's processes, not just formal training. Leaders are shaped by both training and experience. God has His ways of developing leaders. If you are aware of them, you are well on your way to responding to God's means of developing you. If you know that God will be developing you over a lifetime, you'll most likely stay for the whole ride. This book will give you insights that will allow you to persevere.

Leadership development theory begins with the concept of formulating a time-line. While every situation is unique, researchers can identify general patterns over time. I have identified five developmental phases in the leadership development process:

1. *Sovereign foundations*. In phase I, God providentially works foundational items into the life of the leader-to-be. Personality characteristics, good and bad experiences, and time will be used by God to lay foundations to build upon later.
2. *Inner-Life Growth*. In Phase II an emerging leader usually receives some kind of training, often informal—it's learning by doing in the context of a local church or Christian organization.
3. *Ministry Maturing*. In Phase III the emerging leader gets into ministry as a prime focus of life. He or she will get further training, often informally. The major activities in this phase are ministry. Training is often incidental, as it is the ministry that seems so all important.

Note: the amazing thing in the first three phases is that God is primarily working *in* the leader, not *through* him. Though there may be fruitfulness in ministry, the major work God is doing is *in* and *to* the leader. Most emerging leaders don't recognize this. They value productivity, but God is quietly trying to get the leader to see that one ministers out of what one is. God is concerned with what we are, not just what we do.

4. *Life Maturing*. In Phase IV the leader identifies and uses his or her gift-mix with power. There is major fruitfulness. This is a period in which giftedness emerges along with priorities.

5. *Convergence*. In Phase V convergence occurs. That is, the leader is moved by God into a role that matches gift-mix, experience, temperament, etc. This phase uses the best that the leader has to offer. Not many leaders experience convergence, where they are truly ministering out of who they are.

In the long haul, God is preparing you for convergence. He is conforming you to the image of Christ, and He is giving you training and experience so that your gifts can be discovered and used. His approach is to work in you, and then through you.

The Big Picture

A great tool to help yourself get an overview of God's activity in your life is a time line, because it reveals the overall pattern of God's work in a life. In a time line we can identify "development phases." These aren't absolutes; they are descriptive overviews- I refer to the five phases previously mentioned. Let's look at those phases in a little more depth.

In Phase I, Sovereign Foundations, God providentially works through family, environments, and historical events, beginning at birth. God is laying foundations in the leader's life (even those leaders whose family or environment may not have been godly). The potential leader has little control over what happens in this phase; his primary lesson is to learn to respond positively and take advantage of the foundations that are being laid.

In Phase II, the Inner-Life Growth phase, an emerging leader seeks to know God in a more personal, intimate way. The leader learns the importance of praying and hearing God. As he grows in discernment, understanding, and obedience, he is put to the test. These early tests are crucial experiences that God uses to prepare the leader for his or her next steps. The growing leader invariably gets involved in some form of ministry. In this context of learning by doing, he gains new inner-life lessons. In this phase God also uses testing experiences to develop character. A proper response allows the leader to learn the fundamental lessons God wants to teach. If the person doesn't learn, he will usually be tested again in the same areas.

In Phase III, Ministry Maturing, the emerging leader reaches out to others. He is beginning to experiment with spiritual gifts and is getting more training to be more effective. Ministry is the focus of the rising leader at this stage. Many of his lessons will zero in on relationships with other people or on the inadequacies in his personal life. God is developing the leader in two ways during this time. Through ministry, the leader can identify his gifts and skills and use them with increasing effectiveness. He will also gain a better understanding of the Body of Christ as he experiences the many kinds of relationships it offers.

Ministry activity or fruitfulness is not the focus of the first three phases. God is working primarily *in* the leader, not through him. Many emerging leaders don't recognize this and become frustrated. They are constantly evaluating productivity and activities while God is

quietly evaluating their ministry potential. He wants to teach us that we minister out of what we are.

By Phase IV, Life Maturing, the leader has identified and is using his gifts in a ministry that is satisfying. He gains a sense of priorities concerning the best use of his gifts and understands that learning what not to do is as important as learning what to do. A mature fruitfulness is the result. The principle that "ministry flows out of being" has new significance as the leader's character mellows and matures.

In this phase the leader's experiential understanding of God is being developed. Communion with God becomes foundational; it is more important than success in ministry. The key to development during this phase is a positive response to the experiences God ordains, which deepens communion with God and becomes the foundation for lasting and effective ministry.

In convergence, Phase V, God moves the leader into a role that matches his gift-mix and experience so that ministry is maximized. The leader uses the best he has to offer and is freed from ministry for which he is not gifted or suited. Many leaders do not experience convergence. Sometimes they are hindered by their own lack of personal development; other times an organization may keep him or her in a limiting position.

Usually between the phases there are "boundary events." Boundary events are change signals. They can include such factors as crises, promotions, a new ministry, learning a major new concept, a divine guidance experience, or a geographic move. They mark the end and then the beginning of a significant time in a leader's life.

Chapter 3: Foundational Lessons: Inner-Life Growth Processes

Let's look at Phase II in more detail. In this phase, God uses four important things to test an emerging leader's character. Three of the items are called checks because of the testing nature of this phase. These are integrity checks, obedience checks, and word checks. A fourth item, the ministry task, is also a testing item, but we will look at it in the next chapter.

The primary biblical qualification for leadership is character, or integrity. An emerging leader becomes aware of the importance of integrity through *integrity checks*—tests that God uses to shape our character. There are three parts to an integrity check: the challenge to consistency with inner convictions, the response to the challenge, and the resulting expansion of ministry.

Daniel experienced an integrity check when his convictions about food were challenged. He was under pressure to violate his convictions, but he stuck to them. God honored his unyielding character, and he was eventually promoted to a top-level government job. *Integrity is foundational for effective leadership; it must be instilled early in a leader's character.* Those who respond well to integrity checks will move on in their leadership development.

A leader must learn obedience in order to influence others toward obedience. An *obedience check* is a process through which a leader learns to recognize, understand, and obey God's voice. The leader encounters this early in his development and repeatedly throughout life. Through it God tests a leader's personal response to revealed truth. In other words, will a leader obey God when he speaks? Abraham heard God, and his obedience had consequences for generations. Leaders are responsible for influencing specific groups of people to obey God. They can only do that if they have first learned how to obey. Obedience is first learned, then taught.

A leader must also have the ability to receive truth from God. A *word check* is the item that tests a leader's ability to understand or receive a word from God personally and then allow God to work it out in life. They are often combined with integrity or obedience checks, because the revealed truth will test one of them (integrity or obedience). A leader who repeatedly demonstrates that God speaks to him gains spiritual authority. One who listens and follows will see God's confirmation and expansion of his or her ministry.

These three checks often work together, and it isn't always easy to differentiate them. Life is complex and a given piece of reality doesn't always fit into neat analytical categories. Often a test involves more than one item.

Chapter 4: Second Lessons: Ministry Maturing Processes, Part I

As a potential leader moves into ministry, God develops his leadership ability by taking him through four stages:

1. *Entry*, where God challenges the leader into ministry.
2. *Training*, where He develops skills and spiritual gifts to enhance the leader's effectiveness.
3. *Relational learning*, where He enables the leader to relate to people in ways that will motivate and influence them. He also teaches him how to set up the means to accomplish these goals.
4. *Discernment*, where He helps the leader see spiritual principles that govern ministry that pleases Him.

Throughout the Ministry Maturing phase the leader learns spiritual principles that touch all four of the stages. He will learn the most in the Discernment stage, because maturity will give him added perspective on God's work in his life. He will learn about the use of power that will challenge any overconfidence he may have in his skills and gifts and force him to discern the ultimate purposes of ministry. Increasing responsibilities, and the need to minister effectively, force him to learn dependence on God and greater faith.

The entry stage is often marked by ministry tasks and ministry challenges. A *ministry task* is an assignment from God that tests a person's faithfulness and obedience to use his or her gifts in a task that has a beginning and end, accountability, and evaluation. From a human perspective the task may not seem significant, but ultimately God is behind it, even though the assignment may have come through a human authority. Knowing this enables a prospective leader to give him or herself fully to whatever the task is at hand.

The *ministry challenge* is closely related to the ministry task. It is the means through which a potential leader is prompted by God to sense the need for and accept a new assignment. Sources for ministry challenge can be external or internal. A challenge can come from someone else or from a leader's own recognition of a need or an opportunity. The most common is an external challenge; the rarest is self-initiated. Self-initiated ministry challenges carry with them the seeds of higher-level leadership. Those who self-initiate often disrupt the status quo and threaten those in authority over them. In the resulting conflict, the promising quality of self-initiative can be overlooked. Current leaders need to recognize the value of this quality in prospective leaders and nurture it.

During the development phase the leader is acquiring new skills. While there are many skills for a leader to learn, learning how to implement change is key for any leader who wishes to have long-term influence. This includes learning how to relate to superiors, colleagues, and subordinates while managing conflict.

A final arena of development in new skill acquisition relates to communication skills. Leadership gifts always include word gifts—those that are connected to communication. Leaders who plateau early reveal a common pattern. They learn new skills until they can operate comfortably, and then they coast, failing to seek to develop new skills.

Throughout this phase the emphasis is on faithfulness. Faithfulness in ministry tasks and challenges, faithfulness in response to testing, faithfulness in developing new skills, etc. *Faithfulness in a small responsibility is an indicator of probable faithfulness in a larger responsibility.*

Chapter 5: Ministry Maturing Processes, Part II

Burnout among pastors and others in ministry is an increasing problem. Many drop out after just a few years. The ones who stay in for the long haul are the exceptions. Those who stay have learned how God uses problems to develop a leader to maturity.

In this chapter we will look at the last two development stages in the Ministry Maturing process: *relational learning* and *discernment*. Relational learning is related to understanding how to relate to people effectively in order to influence and motivate them. The lessons in this stage I call the submission cluster.

All four of the problems discussed here can be barriers or bridges to leadership development. This is particularly true for the authority problem, because leaders need to use spiritual authority as a power base for their ministry. Spiritual authority is delegated by God, and differs from authority based on position or force. Leaders who have trouble submitting to authority will usually have trouble exercising it. Anyone can submit when decisions appear right; it is when the decisions seem wrong or are wrong that submission is difficult. Submission is tested most when there are differences of opinion over crucial issues.

The ultimate goal in authority development is to help a leader understand that spiritual authority is the primary authority base in leadership influence. During this stage leaders learn both positive and negative lessons about the use of spiritual authority. The process often follows a typical pattern:

1. The leader learns negative lessons, usually through experiencing poor leadership.
2. The leader begins to search for an understanding of legitimate authority.
3. A desire to model legitimate authority grows, and with it come new insights about the appropriate use of authority.
4. The leader is increasingly able to use spiritual authority as a source of power.

A second area that God uses to grow leaders is related to conflict. Conflict is a powerful tool in the hand of God and can be used to teach a leader lessons that he would not learn in any other way. Conflict tests a leader's personal maturity; what we truly are is revealed in a crisis. What we *are* in a crisis is much more critical than what we *do*.

One of the most important things to learn from the ministry conflict area is simply that conflict is often necessary. Many insights, including those related to authority, may never be learned apart from conflict.

A third area that leaders face is a special kind of conflict I call "leadership backlash." This refers to the negative reactions of followers, other leaders within the group, and Christians outside the group to a course of action taken by a leader once ramifications develop from his decision. Leadership backlash tests a leader's perseverance, clarity of vision, and faith. A leader experiencing backlash learns through conflict with others to submit to God in a deeper way.

Note: people often forget what life was like before a particular action was taken. Although they may have agreed on the course of action, they now blame the leader for having taken it. A leader's ultimate success brings with it problems. All leaders need to be aware of this and persevere through the trials associated with effective ministry.

The second area of lessons in the ministry maturing phase relates to discernment. In developing a leader to maturity, God increases the leader's understanding of the spiritual realities at work behind physical realities, and teaches him how to depend on God's power in ministry. Biblically, physical situations may well be caused, controlled, or instigated by

spiritual beings. Leaders need discernment to deal with spiritual warfare. A leader also needs power.

God uses several ways to develop power in a leader. By power, I mean enabling a leader to habitually appropriate God's power through faith. One way is learning to operate in spiritual gifts that clearly demonstrate the Holy Spirit's power. A second is learning prayer power—when a situation is resolved through specific prayer in such a way that God's power and the authenticity of the leader's spiritual authority are clearly demonstrated.

The second area where a leader needs discernment concerns the expansion of his or her own ministry. This usually begins with prayer, because vision is birthed there. Prayer is also the place where the leader begins responding to the vision. (Note: if God calls you to a ministry, then He calls you to pray for that ministry). Often during this process the leader is called to take steps of faith in ministry that stretches him or her beyond his or her current understanding.

There are three ways that the ministry maturing phase ends. Two leave the leader where he is, and one leads him on to the next phase: Life Maturing. The first category includes those who plateau at some level of ministry competency and then stop growing. The second consists of those who are disciplined in ministry or set aside from it.

The third group reflects on the meaning of ministry and God's involvement in it. These leaders shift from being competent in doing the ministry to a new effectiveness that flows from being. In this shift spiritual authority becomes the dominant power base.

Chapter 6: Ongoing Lessons—Guidance and Other Multi-Phase Processes

Guidance is one of the crucial elements of leadership. The need for it occurs throughout a leader's lifetime, so the lessons aren't restricted to just one phase—they are ongoing. The basic pattern is simple. A leader first learns about personal guidance for his own life. Having learned to discern God's direction for his own life, he can then shift to receiving guidance for the group he leads.

Guidance development is complicated and delicate. God must teach a leader to discern guidance, without thwarting the leader's personal initiative. He does this while He is creating commitment to follow His guidance and teaching the leader to sense individual responsibility for making decisions. This isn't an overnight lesson—it takes place slowly through many experiences over an extended period of time.

There are several ways this kind of guidance is developed. Mentors are often very helpful. God will also prepare someone for the next steps of guidance by allowing them to go through negative experiences in their current assignment that free a person to move on. Unfortunately, this offers a cop-out for those looking to escape situations they don't like, but it doesn't change the fact that God still uses it. Negative items may include a crisis in job or

ministry, conflict, dissatisfaction with one's inner life or present role, tough living conditions, isolation, restrictions on ministry, etc.

Another way is through what I call the *flesh act*. Flesh act refers to those instances in a leader's life when guidance is presumed and decisions are made either hastily or without proper discernment. Leaders tend to move ahead in major decisions before receiving certain guidance. Such decisions usually involve human manipulation, which brings delayed negative ramifications. We learn lessons about what not to do in the future. Emerging leaders need to learn to distinguish between presumptuous faith and God's situational word upon which faith can rely.

In a lifetime of ministry, there will be times when a leader needs reassurance from God that the ministry is relevant and worthwhile, and that his or her life is indeed counting toward God's purposes. This reaffirmation—usually the need for it is inward—will infuse new life into the leader. Without it many leaders would be tempted to give up. But, with it there is new life and a sense of keeping on with God's approval.

Crises also happen in every stage of development. Crises are special intense pressure situations in life that are used by God to test a leader and teach him Godly dependence. Crises will also teach the leader that God is the one who meets him in all of the major experiences of life with a solution that is tailor-made. Conflict is a preliminary form of crisis that affects a leader both in spiritual formation (development of his inner life) and ministry formation (development of ministry skills).

Chapter 7: The Deepening Lessons—Life Maturing Processes

Throughout a leader's life, God works to deepen character as well as to develop ministry skills. God doesn't stop working on character after moving someone into leadership! This development does not focus on testing to enter ministry, but on the relationship with God. The qualities of love, compassion, empathy, and discernment, among others, are deepened. Such qualities differentiate between a successful leader and a *mature* successful leader. This maturity overflows into ministry, and gives the leader a new level of spiritual authority.

Miles Stanford studied some of the spiritual giants from past years and found that, on average, it was fifteen years after they entered their life work before they began to know the Lord Jesus as their Life, and ceased trying to work for Him and began allowing Him to be their All in all and do His work through them.

A common tool God uses in this process is isolation. This may come through sickness, prison, voluntary or involuntary stepping away from ministry, etc. Although difficult, it is often a significant time of deepening their relationship with God and growing in character and maturity. One of the key ways a leader cooperates with God during this time (and throughout his or her life) is learning to reflect on his circumstances and what God is doing in and

through them. It brings depth of understanding, discernment, and confidence regarding God's activity in every situation.

The upward development pattern occurs throughout a leader's life. It is a spiral of growth in being and doing. In each *being* cycle there is an increased depth of experiencing and knowing God; and in each *doing* cycle there is increased depth of effective service for God. The final result of the upward development pattern is a fusion of being and doing.

Quality leadership does not come easily. It requires time and experience. Mature ministry flows from a mature character, formed in the graduate school of life. Ministry can be successful through giftedness alone; but a leader whose ministry skills outstrip his character formation will eventually falter. Character formation is fundamental; ministry flows out of being.

All leaders go through conflict, crises, and some isolation. You will too. But not all recognize its immense value for their long-term ministry. It is difficult to go through some of these things even if you do understand their long-term benefit; it is much more difficult to go through it without this perspective.

Chapter 8: Integrating the Lessons of Life—Toward a Ministry Philosophy

All leaders have a ministry philosophy. It flows out of their shared experiences with God. As leaders experience different lessons, whether in terms of spiritual formation or ministry formation, they learn from them. These lessons form a growing reservoir of wisdom that leaders use in the future.

A growing awareness of one's ministry philosophy leads to more effective leadership. Following is a three stage model that describes how various leaders develop a ministry philosophy:

Stage I: Osmosis—leaders learn implicit philosophy experientially. Young leaders operate with an implicit philosophy derived from the sponsoring group of which they are a part. They adopt the philosophy of those over and around them.

Stage II: Baby Steps—leaders discover explicit philosophy through experience and reflection. Leaders have experiences that cause them to think, evaluate, and question the assumptions they have been operating under. In the process leaders begin to develop their own, unique philosophy.

Stage III: Maturity—leaders formulate and articulate their unique ministry philosophy to others. As a ministry grows, the leader sees that direction for ministry needs to be more specific and should be more controlled. Previously, direction for ministry had been situationally controlled and reactive. In other words, leaders saw something they didn't want and brought correction or training in response. Instead, mature leaders have become

proactive in training people in the philosophy they have developed. Towards the end of ministry, motivation comes from the desire to pass on to others what has been learned.

Leaders must develop a ministry philosophy that simultaneously honors biblical leadership values, embraces the challenge of the times in which they live, and fits their unique gifts and personal development if they expect to be productive over a whole lifetime.

Chapter 9: Accepting the Lessons of Life—The Leadership Challenge

The leadership lessons shared in this book have been based on the assumption that God is in the business of cultivating leaders and intervening in their lives to develop them for His purposes. Jesus still calls people to follow Him and to influence many others. Here is my definition of a leader:

A leader is a person with God-given capacity and with God-given responsibility to influence a specific group of God's people toward God's purposes for the group.

Leaders in our day face three specific challenges:

Challenge 1: When Christ calls leaders to Christian ministry he intends to develop them to their full potential. Each of us in leadership is responsible to continue developing in accordance with God's processing all our life.

Challenge 2: A major function of all leadership is that of selecting rising leadership. Leaders must continually be aware of God's processing of younger leaders and work with that process.

Challenge 3: If leaders expect to be productive over a whole lifetime, they must develop a ministry philosophy that simultaneously honors biblical leadership values, embraces the challenges of the times in which they live, and fits their unique gifts and personal development.

The leadership gap is enormous. There is a great need for effective leadership. In my opinion, the three challenges I have given get at the heart of the problem. Each leader personally must be what God wants him or her to be. Each leader must be involved in raising up other leaders. Leaders must be in tune with God's purposes for them.

Leadership evolves and emerges over a lifetime. Understanding how God develops leaders enables each of us to cooperate with Him and become the leader He intends us to be, and have the impact He intends us to have.



From the Pastor's Perspective

Clinton does a good job of outlining how God develops a leader over time. I think having this overall perspective is incredibly helpful. It is so easy to get caught up in the moment, and if circumstances are difficult, it can be discouraging. Understanding that God is using all circumstances for my good, to develop me as a person and a leader, can give the perspective needed to persevere. In one sense, this is an old truth—one that most pastors have probably taught. Clinton's unique contribution is identifying specific phases of God's activity and God's priorities during those phases.

There were two particular "take-aways" I have from reading this book.

The first is recognizing God's overall purpose—that He is looking to develop a certain kind of person, one whose ministry flows from him or her and not an activity they are engaged in. I've seen, and experienced, ministering out of gifts and skills rather than identity; it never has the depth of impact hoped for.

To do this God uses all kinds of tools—"positive" experiences like training and encouragement, and also "negative" experiences like isolation, conflict, crises, and backlash. Understanding that all of these are more about what kind of person I am becoming than the specific things I do in response is critical.

The second takeaway is related to developing a philosophy of ministry. I think most of us stop at stage I—we adopt the philosophy of those around us, and don't go on to do the thinking and reflecting necessary to develop our own. But, I am more aware than ever that developing your own unique philosophy of ministry, rooted in the experiences you have had and the convictions you have developed, is crucial for significant, long-term impact. There is a moral and spiritual authority that flows from those who have, and operate from, a clear philosophy that they build into their churches or ministries.