**Spiritual Formation**

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J. Robert Clinton has studied leadership from a Bible-centered perspective for four plus decades. He and his students at Fuller seminary have researched case studies of over four thousand Biblical, historical, and contemporary leaders representing men and women from diverse social and cultural circumstances.

From these studies, Clinton (*The Making of a Leader*, p. 14) has developed the following definition of Biblical leadership:

**“Leadership is a dynamic process in which a man or woman with God-given**

**capacity and God-given responsibility influences a specific group of**

**God’s people toward God’s purpose for that group.”**

This process of becoming an effective Christian leader usually involves the following principles:

* + God develops a leader over a lifetime
  + All leaders are disciples, but not all disciples are leaders
  + God sovereignly uses people, circumstances and ministry assignments to shape the life of the leader
  + Effective ministry comes out of a “being” relationship with God
  + If we obey God’s will, we will grow in character and influence. If we do not obey God’s will, we will stagnate in character and influence
  + Mature leadership involves an integration of spiritual formation, ministry formation, and strategic formation:

1. *Spiritual Formation (Character)* – emphasis on developing intimacy with God and integrity
2. *Ministry [Leadership] Formation (Competencies)*  – emphasis on identifying and developing gift mix (spiritual gifts, natural abilities, and acquired skills)
3. *Strategic Formation* *(Calling)* – emphasis on understanding and developing God’s call and unique philosophy of ministry, and being intentional about accomplishing it

**Spiritual Formation**

*Spiritual Formation (Character)* – emphasis on developing intimacy with God and integrity. Clinton, in *Clinton’s Biblical Leadership Commentary*, describes spiritual formation as:

“The shaping activity in a leader’s life which is directed toward

instilling godly character and developing inner life.” (p. 709)

Spiritual formation focuses primarily on the “being” (CHARACTER) aspects of life – who we are and who we are becoming. The Bible is pretty clear on the goal of this process. According to Paul in I Timothy 1: 5,

**“The goal of our instruction is love, which comes from a pure heart and**

**a good conscience and a sincere faith.” (I Timothy 1: 5, NASB)**

Notice here that the GOAL is love and that love comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith.

**Why this is Important!**

Even if we have a goal in mind and know how to accomplish it, we still have to “walk it out.” Becoming a loving person is not an easy path. It will involve us having to face and deal with the complexities and depth of our own selfishness. We must learn to die to ourselves if we are to become the loving people that God intends for us to become.

Over the long haul, we will become more loving as we cooperate with God in the transformation of our hearts through purity of heart, clarity of conscience, and sincerity of faith. This will lead to greater focus in our sense of God’s calling; greater spiritual authority in our service to others; and greater possibilities that we will finish well in our lives and ministries.

Spiritual formation of purity of heart, clarity of conscience, and sincerity of faith has long-term ramifications that provide a resource base for us to be and act in loving ways.

* Purity of Heart > Intimacy with God > Revelation > Focus
* Clear Conscience > Integrity > Authenticity > Spiritual Authority
* Sincere Faith > Faithfulness > Maturity > Finishing Well

**A Firm Foundation**

Remember Jesus’ words about the importance of foundations:

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is

like a wise man who builds his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams

rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it

had its **foundation** on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and

does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.

The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against

that house, and it fell with a great crash.”(Matthew 7: 24-27, NIV, **bold** added)

Notice that the only difference between the wise and foolish builders was the **foundation** on which they built. The wise builder built on a foundation of “hearing and practicing,” while the foolish builder heard, but did not put the words of Jesus into practice. They both built houses (the foolish builder’s house may have been “nicer” than that of the wise builder; we do not know for sure), BUT when the storms of life came, only the wise builder’s home remained standing.

What we build our lives on really matters!