

Finishing Well

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A leadership study of 100 Bible leaders revealed that one out of four finished well in life and ministry. (Clinton, Listen Up Leaders! Forewarned is Forearmed!) In fact, Clinton discovered that only 11 of the 100 finished well, while there was not enough information to determine how another 14 finished – so, somewhere between 1 in 10 and 1 in 4 Bible leaders finished well. Unfortunately, historical and contemporary leaders have not fared much better!

What a wake up call this is! Just because you start “fast” in your Christian life does not mean that you will finish well. Remember, it is “not by might, not by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord Almighty” (Zechariah 4: 6, NIV). In our enthusiasm for our new found relationship with God we can get pretty excited and even zealous. BUT that alone is not enough to make it to the finish line. That takes another dynamic called “discipleship,” or learning how to “abide” in Christ. I have written workbooks on each of these two topics to help younger emerging leaders build the necessary foundation for the long haul so that you may be better equipped to finish well (see Appendix H: Further Study for more information).

So, what does it mean to finish well? What are we talking about here? Clinton defines “finishing well” as, “At the end of a person’s life, they have a vibrant, growing relationship with Christ, and they have essentially fulfilled their calling and left behind a legacy of righteousness [for generations to come].” (Clinton, *Leaders on Leadership*, Barna (editor), p. 152). Note the six components to this definition:

1. They maintained a *vibrant relationship with God* to the end;
2. They maintained a *learning posture* throughout life;
3. They modeled *Christ-like character* through the fruit of the Spirit throughout life;
4. They lived their lives in such a way that their *convictions and the promises of God were seen to be real* in their lives and ministries;
5. They left behind one or more *ultimate contributions or a lasting legacy*; and
6. They lived their lives with a *growing sense of destiny and made the necessary sacrifices to realize this* to a significant degree

Not all the leaders who finished well had all of these components fully developed in their lives but they all had many or most of them. They learned over the long haul how to depend on God to provide the strength to run the race with endurance.

Barriers to Finishing Well

With so few leaders finishing well, the logical question is, “Why?” What is it that causes folks to not finish well? Clinton studied the lives of those who did not finish well and discovered seven primary barriers:

1. *Sexual immorality* – Samson (Judges 13-16)
2. *Misuse of finances* – Judas (Matthew 26, John 13)
3. *Abuse of power* – Saul (I Samuel 18-19)
4. *Self-centered pride* – Solomon (I Kings 6-7)
5. *Problems with marriage and family* – David (II Samuel 15-18)
6. *Life and ministry plateauing* – Gideon (Judges 6-8)
7. *Emotional wounding* – Jonah (Jonah 4)

In each of these cases, the person gradually “gave in” to the sins that ultimately brought him/her down. Sin is like cancer - it keeps growing until it kills, unless it is killed. It is “kill or be killed!”

Characteristics for Finishing well

Clinton has identified seven characteristics of those who finish well. This list is helpful for us as we become Bible-centered leaders. It gives us a road map or GPS perspective on the types of qualities that we need to incorporate into our lives if we want to finish well.

1. They had a *long term perspective on life and ministry*. These leaders understood that every decision matters. There are no short cuts! God sees our every action (and attitude), and every action (and attitude) will have consequences.

2. They had an *expectancy and periodic experiences of personal renewal*. These leaders understood the “depravation” process that God uses to expand our foundations (Matthew 7: 24-27), force our roots to grow deeper (Psalm 1: 3), or prune our braches to make us more fruitful (John 15: 1-2).

3. They practiced *spiritual disciplines* as a means of developing and maintaining intimacy with God. Those who finished well understood that the spiritual disciplines were access points to intimacy with God and integrity. They understood the necessity of “dying to selfishness,” and embraced this process through learning to submit to God through practicing spiritual disciplines.

4. They had a *learning posture throughout life*. These folks understood that life is a journey toward finishing well. They never completely arrived at their ultimate destination in this life (although they made progress). They understood that they “were aliens and strangers on earth” (Hebrews 11: 13).

5. They were *accountable to others in mentoring relationships*. They understood that no one makes it alone. We need one another. Paul exhorts believers to “carry each other’s burdens, and in this way [we] will fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6: 2, NIV).

6. They invested significantly in the *next generation* through mentoring relationships. Those who finished well invested significantly in younger emerging leaders. They understood the importance of the “parental” blessing on the younger generation in order for them to realize grace to pursue God’s purposes for their generation (which usually looks a lot different than his purposes for the older generation).

7. They ordered their lives and ministries in a *focused* way in order to accomplish God's calling . Those who finished well figured out their calling and focused their life's resources (time, energy, money, etc.) on faithfully hitting the "bull's eye." They had a growing sense of purpose and became intentional about ordering their lives in such a way as to realize this purpose.

The bottom line is that if we learn to be faithful, we will not miss God's calling and will gradually order our lives in such a way that we will fulfill it. Remember, we can be "confident of this, that he who began a good work in [us] will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1: 6, NIV). God is more committed to us finishing well than we are. If we are faithful over the long haul, we will finish well and hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" (Matthew 25: 21, NIV).