

Leadership 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

Leadership Formation

Ministry [Leadership] Formation (Competencies) involves the identifying and developing of your gift mix (spiritual gifts, natural abilities, and acquired skills). This is not a stand alone formation, for it to be effective it must come out of an established, maintained, and enlarging capacity for spiritual formation. Competencies without character produce only superficial results – they may look good on the outside, but have no substance or lasting qualities. Remember, leadership involves influencing people towards God’s purpose.

In the leadership formation stage we discover and develop our gift mix which include our spiritual gifts, natural abilities, and acquired skills. Let’s take a look at each of these briefly here.

Spiritual Gifts

Clinton defines a spiritual gift as “a God-given unique capacity imparted to each believer for the purpose of releasing a Holy Spirit empowered ministry via that believer” (p. 620). The Bible describes spiritual gifts (*charisma*) in Romans 12: 3-8; I Corinthians 12-14; Ephesians 4: 11-13; and I Peter 4: 8-11.

It is important to note that in all of these passages, the authors state or infer that spiritual gifts must be exercised in love in order to be effective and impacting.

What are the spiritual gifts mentioned in the Bible? Clinton (p. 620-621) divides the gifts into three general categories: word gifts, love (compassion) gifts, and power gifts. I will use the phrase “compassion gifts” for his love gifts, as all gifts are intended to be love gifts. Let’s take a look at the spiritual gifts represented in each of these categories:

- Word gifts – exhortation, teaching, apostleship, ruling (leadership), prophecy, faith, pastor, evangelism, word of wisdom, word of knowledge
- Compassion gifts – governments (administration), giving, mercy, helps (service), pastoring, evangelism, healing, word of wisdom, word of knowledge
- Power gifts – faith, word of knowledge, discerning of spirits, miracles, tongues, interpretation of tongues, healing, word of wisdom, prophecy

Clinton’s lists are from the King James Version of the Bible, so I have given the NIV translation for a couple of them in parentheses. Each category has a primary purpose:

- Word gifts > Understanding
- Compassion gifts > Care
- Power gifts > Demonstration

Also, note that there is an overlap in the lists because some of the gifts have more than one function. For example, the gift of pastor is included in the word and compassion gifts list because this gift functions to bring understanding and care for those being impacted.

Natural Abilities

Natural abilities might include athleticism, artistic skills, language abilities, math and science orientations, being a people person, and multiple others. Have you ever heard someone say, “You’re a natural at _____ (fill in the blank).” That is an example of a natural ability. We all have them. Some of us are more aware of them than others, but we all have them (and they are part of who we are and our destiny). There is overlap between natural abilities and acquired skills. It is hard to know which is which, so I will cover competencies that are important for effective and impacting leadership in the next section on acquired skills.

Acquired Skills

Natural abilities are already part of us and need to be discovered and developed, while acquired skills are something that we have to learn along the way. Either way, we need them and can develop them over time.

Let's take a look at George Barna's (editor, *Leaders on Leadership*) list of competencies needed for effective Christian leadership:

- Effective communication skills
- Identifying, articulating, and casting vision
- Motivating people
- Coaching and developing leaders
- Synthesizing information
- Budget management
- Administrative functions
- Persuading people
- Initiating strategic action
- Engaging in strategic thinking
- Resolving conflict
- Developing resources
- Delegating authority and responsibility
- Reinforcing commitment
- Celebrating successes
- Decision making
- Team building
- Time management
- Effective evaluation
- Creating healthy corporate cultures
- Maintaining focus and priorities
- Upholding accountability
- Identifying opportunities
- Modeling character and qualities consistent with God's character
- Managing self and others