

LIFT

Ministry Group Nov.-Dec. Resource

“The Five”

Ways to counteract a tendency to plateau.

Clinton discusses five enhancements that leaders can employ to counteract the plateau many ministers face. (3)

Enhancement 1: Perspective

They don’t measure success only by what happens this week, this year, or even during their own tenure. Instead, they see ministry as a long-term calling—one that outlives their position and continues through the people they develop.

Discuss: How can we tell whether we are building something that will last beyond our own leadership?

Enhancement 2: Renewal

Most leaders who remain effective over a lifetime regularly seek and welcome seasons of renewal. They intentionally make space to hear from God, engage in extended spiritual disciplines, and receive fresh direction from the Holy Spirit. These moments recalibrate their hearts, restore their passion, and realign them with God’s purposes.

Discuss: What practices help you recognize when it’s time for a season of spiritual renewal?

Ministry Plateaus

Recently I was reading a book by Dr. Robert J. Clinton entitled: *The Making of a Leader: Recognizing the Lessons and Stages of Leadership Development*.

He made an observation that hit very close to home with me:

“Leaders who plateau early reveal a common pattern. They learn new skills until they can operate comfortably with them, but then fail to seek new skills deliberately and habitually. They coast on prior experience.” (1)

Discuss: Have you ever caught yourself coasting on prior experience?

Coasting looks like progress on the outside, because things are still moving, but the movement isn’t driven by current passion, learning, or vision. Instead it is forward motion fueled by yesterday’s efforts.

When we reach these ministry plateaus we move forward by relying on past experiences, past victories, and past spiritual momentum rather than pursuing fresh growth through intentional effort or a renewed dependence on God.

Clinton suggests several symptoms to watch for that may indicate you are entering a ministry plateau:

(1) Robert J. Clinton, *The Making of a Leader: Recognizing the Lessons and Stages of Leadership Development*, (Colorado Spring, NAVPress, 2012), 76.



Enhancement 3: Disciplines

Leaders need discipline in every area—character, maturity, physical health, and spiritual vitality. When these disciplines slip, so does growth. A lack of discipline is one of the quiet pathways to a ministry plateau. Without regular evaluation and intentional habits, leaders begin drifting into maintenance mode rather than development.

Assessing one's personal disciplines becomes essential because it reveals where momentum has stalled, where complacency has taken root, and where renewed effort is needed to keep growing.

Discussion: Where has momentum stalled for you?

Enhancement 4: Learning Posture

The most powerful safeguard against a ministry plateau is a well-developed learning posture. Leaders who remain teachable, curious, and open to new ideas continue to grow, while those with rigid, inflexible spirits—resistant to feedback or new approaches—are highly likely to stagnate. A commitment to learning ensures that momentum is built on current effort, not just past successes.

Discussion: What is the most influential book you've read, conference you've attended, or training you've received in the past 12 months?

Enhancement 5: Mentors

Leadership is rarely developed in isolation. The guidance, challenge, and support of others are key catalysts that keep leaders from plateauing and propel them toward lasting effectiveness.

Discussion: Who are you allowing to speak into your life? Hold you accountable? Challenge your spiritual and leadership growth?

(3) Clinton, *The Making of a Leader*, 210-215.

1. Lack of interest in spiritual formation.

Often, those who are plateauing are not just coasting when it comes to their ministerial or leadership development, but there is a lack of interest in spiritual formation. Although they may be committed to prayer, worship, and the Word (foundational disciplines); they never challenge themselves to grow in new ways.

Discuss: When is the last time you challenged yourself in the area of spiritual formation? What new disciplines have you incorporated that have enhanced your time with God? (Sabbath, solitude, silence, fasting)

2. No personal growth objectives.

Those who plateau in ministry stop investing in their growth (ministerial or leadership). Coasting makes them think they don't need to "pedal," mistaking present momentum for lasting progress built on past successes.

Discuss: When is the last time you intentionally read a book to enhance your ministry skills? Or attended a seminar to improve interpersonal relationships with your congregation? Or sat in a conference that discussed leadership principles?

3. Tendency to take the "easiest way" in conflict situations.

Conflict avoidance keeps leaders safe, but it also keeps them stuck—making ministry plateau inevitable. Without engaging the discomfort that leads to maturity, both the leader and the ministry settle into maintaining rather than advancing. It prevents the hard conversations and corrective actions that fuel growth. Growth requires tensions. Plateaus form where challenges are ignored.

Discuss: Are you conflict avoidant? Can you share about a time where avoiding addressing a difficult situation resulted in forward progress being stagnated?

4. Lack of interest in developing other leaders.

When someone reaches a ministry plateau, one of the clearest signs is a diminished desire—or ability—to invest in future leaders. Instead of pouring into others, they begin to protect what they already have. Ultimately, a lack of leader development is both a symptom and a cause of a ministry plateau. (2)

Discuss: When leaders stop raising up others, the ministry becomes limited to their personal capacity and eventually stalls. Who are you raising up, mentoring, or pouring into?

(2) Clinton, *The Making of a Leader*, 233.