

Leadership Tips

on The Spirit-Empowered Leader

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by

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This issue of Tips is a summary of material published in Dr. Leavenworth's book, The Spirit-Empowered Leader Workbook, 2010, Convergence Publishing (available in July 2011 through Amazon.com). There are references to information in chapters of the book that are not fully discussed in this issue.

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Acts 1:8, NIV

This passage is the primary focus and the structure for the book of Acts. When the Holy Spirit comes in Acts 2 it begins a chain reaction that starts in Jerusalem and expands through Judea and Samaria, and ultimately to the ends of the earth. It is the practical outcome of Jesus words to his disciples before his death on the cross:

“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” Matthew 24:14, NIV

This is the context in which we need to understand what it means to be a spirit-empowered leader. We are part of something bigger than what we perceive and experience in our “here and now.” We are to be empowered “witnesses” (Acts 1:8) to the reality of “God’s kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10, paraphrase). This is to be our “testimony” to the nations!

What does it mean to be a witness like this? The word used for witness (*martus*) in Acts 1:8 literally means “martyr, one who bears ‘witness’ by his [her] death...” (Vine, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, p. 680). It also has a forensic or legal sense and means to tell the truth about your experience related to the subject in which you are testifying. The Apostle Paul describes this in terms of our lives being like “jars of clay.” He says:

“But we have this treasure (“Spirit,” see II Corinthians 3:17-18) in jars of clay that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side; but not crushed; perplexed; but not in despair; persecuted; but not abandoned; struck down; but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus (“cross,” see Luke 14:27), so that the life of Jesus (“resurrection,” see I Corinthians 15:20-22) may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body.” II Corinthians 4:7-11, NIV

Do you see what is going on here? The resurrection power of God is manifest through our death to self. As we learn to be grace “martyrs” we experience the power of God to transform and release his spirit in authority through us. We essentially become the living dead. His “all-surpassing power” CONTROLS (Ephesians 5:18) us in such a way that we are (and are becoming) “new creations [in Christ]” (II Corinthians 5:17). Old, sinful patterns (see Galatians 5:19-21), can be broken (see Romans 6:4). We can learn to live in the abundance (John 10:10) manifest by the “fruit of the spirit” (Galatians 5:22-23) and the “greater works” (see John 14:12) that Jesus promised to his disciples.

With this in mind, let’s take a look at some of the primary characteristics of the spirit-empowered life. Let me comment briefly on seven of them:

1. Receiving the Holy Spirit (“seal”) at conversion.
2. Filling (“control”) of the Holy Spirit for life transformation (“sanctification”).
3. Empowering for impacting/equipping others through gift mix (spiritual gifts, natural abilities, and acquired skills).
4. Revelation (“voice of God”) for personal and leadership focus and intentionality.
5. Vision for leadership effectiveness (“fruit” and “much fruit”).
6. Resources (“abiding”) to finish well in life and leadership.
7. Eternal impact through fulfillment of ultimate contributions.

First, **we receive the Holy Spirit (“seal”) at conversion.** We discussed this in chapter 2: Overview of the Nature, Role, and Empowering of the Holy Spirit. The primary Bible passage that we looked at was Ephesians 1:13. Seal (*sphragis*), in this passage, is a verb connected to the word believed (*pisteuo*) and literally means “believing, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit.” With the act of believing comes this “seal” deal. They are connected. So, what does seal mean?

Vine (*Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*) says that:

“*Sphragis* denotes (a) a seal or signet [ring]... an emblem of ownership and security, here combined with that of destination... the person to be ‘sealed’ being secured from destruction and marked for reward... the same three indications are conveyed in Ephesians 1:13... at the time of their regeneration, not after a lapse of time in their spiritual life...” (p. 553)

The seal was used in a variety of activities in the Bible. In the Old Testament, seals were used to identify parties in a pledge (Genesis 38:18); as decorations for priestly garb (Exodus 28:11); and as sealing of letters (I Kings 21:8). In the New Testament, seals were used to seal up scrolls and to ratify a covenant promise or business deal. For our purposes today, seals can be compared to a hand shake of promise between parties who trust one another or a signature on a binding contract.

With the “seal” of the Holy Spirit we have available to us all the resources that we need to become spirit-empowered leaders. We lack nothing in terms of resources. Where we struggle is in application. We have to learn how to activate the resources available through the Holy Spirit for transformation and effectiveness in life and leadership.

Second, **we need to learn how to be filled (“control”) with the Holy Spirit for life transformation (“sanctification”).** We discussed this in chapters 3: The Role of the Spirit in Sanctification and chapter 4: Spiritual Formation.

Sanctification (*qadesh* in the Hebrew and *hagiazō* in the Greek) means “to be separate, set apart” (Young, *Analytical Concordance to the Bible*, p. 834). Vine (*Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*) describes “sanctification” (Greek noun form, *hagiasmos*) as:

“(a) separation to God, I Corinthians 1:30; II Thessalonians 2:13; I Peter 1:2;
(b) the course of life befitting those so separated, I Thessalonians 4:3, 4, 7;
Romans 6:19, 22; I Timothy 2:15; Hebrews 12:14. Sanctification is that
relationship with God into which men [women] enter by faith in Christ, Acts
26:18; I Corinthians 6:11, and to which their sole title is the death of Christ,
Ephesians 5:25, 26; Colossians 1:22; Hebrews 10:10, 29; 13:12 (p. 545).”

For our review here, let me say that:

1. Sanctification involves a “separation” to God from sin, the fallen world system, and the influences of the devil;
2. Sanctification involves the work of the Holy Spirit in transforming the believer from the inside out; and
3. Sanctification involves obedience to the Word and the leading of the Spirit in the individual life choices of the believer.

Again, we are faced with the problem of the heart, but that is not the only issue facing the believer in his/her journey into sanctification. Although, we are the main problem in this, we also have to contend against a fallen world system and the influences of the devil. The Bible states that:

“Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” (Ephesians 6:12, NIV)

I do not want to say much more about this here, but the believer must “work out his [her] salvation” (Philippians 2:12) in the midst of these three arenas: the flesh, the world, and the demonic.

The good news is that God has given us all the power resources we need to gain victory in all of these arenas of life and ministry. The Bible states that we are “more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Romans 8:37, NIV). Sanctification is a process that begins at salvation, increases throughout life, is completed at death/the return of Christ, and is never fully completed in this life (Grudem, *Bible Doctrine*, chapter 23: Sanctification). BUT significant progress is possible! We are no longer slaves to sin!!!! We are “new creations” in Christ (II Corinthians 5:17). We no longer have to be defined by our self-centeredness!

Third, **we need to discover how to be empowering for impacting/equipping others through our gift mix.** We described this in chapter 6: Leadership Formation and chapter 7: Gift Mix. Remember that our gift mix is comprised of:

- Spiritual Gifts
- Natural Abilities
- Acquired Skills

Spiritual Gifts - Clinton (*The Making of a Leader*, p. 255) 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. “ 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 (*Clinton's Biblical Leadership Commentary*, 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 pastoring is included in the word and compassion gifts list because this gift functions to bring understanding and care for those being impacted.

Natural Abilities - Let's now move on to the second aspect of gift mix: natural abilities. I will not go into this very much except to say that we all have abilities that we discover and develop over time. 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 _____." That is an example of a natural ability. We all have them. Some 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 - This leads us to our final aspect of gift mix: acquired skills. The distinction between natural abilities is subtle. 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.

Fourth, we need revelation ("voice of God") for personal and leadership focus and intentionality. We have discussed this in chapter 9: Hearing God's Voice and in greater detail in my *The Bible-Centered Leader Workbook*. We described revelation in its general and special sense and how his "sheep hear his voice" (John 10:4).

Learning to know God and hear his voice involves communication and communication involves the accurate sending and receiving of information between people. Most of us have little difficulty with the sending part of communication. It is easy for us to make our needs known to others and/or to God. Where most of us have difficulty is in the receiving part of communication. We have a hard time listening to others and/or God. God has given us His Word, His Son, and His Spirit as resources and sources to know Him and know His will. But most of us have a difficult time knowing how to use these resources in our daily lives.

Dick Eastman, in his *Challenge the World School of Prayer Manual* (p.159-167), gives fourteen principles of divine guidance that may be helpful in clarifying some of the confusion surrounding hearing the voice of God. These include:

1. It is possible to hear God's voice – Colossians 1:9
2. The purpose of all guidance is to know the Lord Jesus intimately – Philippians 3:20
3. God speaks from where He dwells – Luke 17:21
4. The Holy Spirit is heaven's representative in all true guidance – John 16:13
5. God's word is the final judge in all guidance – II Peter 1:19-20

WARNING: The “voice of God” will never contradict the “word of God” revealed in the Bible!

6. Guidance from God is always accompanied by the peace of God – Philippians 4:6-7
7. God speaks through various means (Biblical examples include prayer, visitations, voices, visions, dreams, prophecy, circumstances, etc.)
8. Most guidance from God comes unawares – Psalms 25:9
9. There are several sources of guidance (see #7 above)
10. Hearing God speak must prompt us to action – James 2:17
11. Divine guidance comes from meeting God's demands – Isaiah 58:10-11
12. Divine guidance does not mean that we will know the future James 5:7-8
13. Guidance is not always pleasant – James 1:2-4
14. Guidance is a skill to be learned – Luke 11:1

As we learn to discern God's voice we will gain a clearer sense of his presence in and purpose for our life and leadership.

Fifth, **we need Godly vision for leadership effectiveness** (“fruit” and “much fruit”). We discussed Godly vision in chapter 10: Leadership Vision. Learning to hear God's voice and vision are part of the same process and are critical for our effectiveness as a spirit-empowered leader.

Barna (*Leaders on Leadership*) defines vision as a “mental portrait” of God's “preferable future” or “a view of the kind of world God wants us to live in” (p. 47-48). In another book (*The Power of Vision*) he describes four prerequisites (chapter 6: Capturing God's Vision) and nine characteristics (chapter 7: The Character of God's Vision) of Godly vision. First let's look at the prerequisites:

1. We need to **know God** – primarily through learning obedience to his word and prayer.
2. We need to **know ourselves** – strengths/weaknesses, personality type, leadership style, gift mix, etc.
3. We need to **know our environment** – culture, values, vision, resources of the organization we serve and lead in.
4. We need to **verify the vision** – check with the truths of the Bible and seek wise counsel.

Humility and submission to God is critical in all of these prerequisites. Remember, “we see but a poor reflection” of reality (I Corinthians 13:12, NIV) even in Godly vision and would be wise to learn to discern the timing (remember what happened to Joseph when he shared the vision prematurely – Genesis 37), team, resources, and strategy. Often times, the vision is just the beginning of a faith process that may bring us to the end of our own resources before God comes through to fulfill “His” purposes through our vision.

Barna gives nine helpful characteristics of Godly vision that are helpful as we try to formulate this important aspect of spirit-empowered leadership:

1. Vision is inspiring for the leader and his/her followers.
2. Vision is change-oriented.
3. Vision is challenging.
4. Vision is empowering.
5. Vision is long-term.
6. Vision is unique to the leader and his/her followers.
7. Vision is strategic and detailed.
8. Vision reveals a promising future.
9. Vision is people-oriented.

Godly vision will take God to fulfill it. We have a role to play. We will have responsibilities to fulfill. And there will be rewards along the way and at the finish line. BUT we will not be able to complete God's vision without God's resources. Remember Jesus' promise to his disciples:

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man [woman] remains in me and I in him [her], he [she] will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” John 15:5, NIV

Sixth, **we need the resources (“abiding”) of the Holy Spirit to finish well in life and leadership.** I have not commented on the characteristics of and barriers to finishing well in this workbook, but have in chapter 12: Finishing Well in *The Bible-Centered Leader Workbook*. Let me give you a brief overview of what I mean by finishing well.

Clinton (*Leaders on Leadership*, Barna (editor), p. 152) 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].” 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.

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!” We need the resources of the Holy Spirit to help keep us from sin so that we can finish well in life and leadership!

Last, **we can have eternal impact through fulfillment of ultimate contributions.** We described focused living in chapter 11: Strategic Formation and introduced the concept of ultimate contributions. We have the capacity as spirit-empowered leaders to impact people in this present life with eternal ramifications. Through our legacy our life can continue to impact generations that follow us.

According to Clinton (*Clinton’s Biblical Leadership Commentary*) an ultimate contribution is “a lasting legacy of a Christian worker for which he or she is remembered and which furthers the cause of [Christ]...” (p. 404-405). Clinton has identified twelve ultimate contributions in his research that relate to one or more of these legacy characteristics. They include (p. 512):

Character:

1. SAINT – a person who has a model life, not a perfect one, but a life others want to emulate.
2. STYLISTIC PRACTITIONER – a person who has a model ministry [organization] style which sets the pace for others and which others want to emulate.

Ministry [Leadership]:

3. MENTOR – a person who is empowering of others through individual and/or small group influence.
4. PUBLIC RHETORICIAN – a person who is empowering others through effective communication to large groups.

Catalytic:

5. PIONEER – a person who starts apostolic (missionary/entrepreneurial) organizations/enterprises.
6. CHANGE PERSON – a person who is able to influence cultures to better organizations and/or correct social injustice in society.
7. ARTIST – a person who is able to impact organizations and/or cultures through innovation and creative breakthroughs.

Organizational:

8. FOUNDER – a person who established a new organization to meet needs or capture the essence of cultural change.
9. STABILIZER – a person who can help fledgling organizations develop and move toward stability, efficiency, and effectiveness.

Ideation:

10. RESEARCHER – a person who develops new ideas and/or concepts from study and/or research.
11. WRITER – a person who is able to conceptualize, contextualize, and communicate ideas in an effective written format.
12. PROMOTER – a person who is able to promote new ideas through motivation and/or networking strategies that expand exposure and buy in.

I trust that this brief overview of what it means to be a spirit-empowered leader who does the “greater works” that Jesus talked about will help spur you on to becoming all that God intends for you to be. There is no greater joy in life than to learn “to give up what we can not have in order to gain what we can not lose” (Jim Elliot). This is the promise and potential of learning how to be a spirit-empowered leader!

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