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Article

## Finishing Well

The Challenge of a Lifetime

Plenary Address Given to 1994 Leadership Forum  
Estes Park, Colorado  
Sponsored by Interest Ministries

by

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### Abstract

This is the written manuscript for a plenary address given to the 1994 Leadership Forum at Estes Park, Colorado sponsored by Interest Ministries. Using Paul's triumphant closing words to Timothy, this talk exhorts leaders to finish well.

The talk addresses the issue of *Finishing Well as a Leader*. Four Scenarios illustrate the idea that relatively few leaders finish well, some of the barriers to finishing well, some things that can be done to finish well, and the characteristics of a leader who finishes well.

A comparative study of leaders who fail to finish well identifies six barriers which can block leaders from finishing well. Five things noted comparatively in leaders who finish well are also suggested. Six characteristics of leaders who finish well are presented. The Old Testament classic leader who illustrates the six characteristics is Daniel. The New Testament classic church leader who illustrates these same six characteristics is Paul.

Finally, the concept of finishing well is related to character. Character is shaped early in ministry, is tested during the middle stages of life, and essentially controls the finish. Leaders reap the results of a character that has been shaped and tested. The challenge of a lifetime is to begin well, continue well, and finish well in such a way to inspire others to desire to finish well.

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## FINISHING WELL—The Challenge of a Lifetime

### Introduction

I'm going to begin by reading a somewhat familiar passage. It contains a **challenge**. This **challenge** may seem somewhat far removed from you. Maybe you have never even thought of it. Then I want to suggest in 4 scenarios that the **challenge** is real for you now. They will help us feel this **challenge**. I will next suggest the difficulty of the **challenge**. I'll go on to explain why some fail at my **challenge** and why some succeed at my **challenge**. Finally, I will close by connecting my **challenge** to the general theme being developed by the conference as a whole. I hope you will see that it is the **challenge** of a lifetime—in fact a whole lifetime, not just the end.

Then read Paul's triumphant finish in **2 Timothy 4:1-5, 6-8**. Use Brengle's technique in reading the passage.

He is an old man now. He has seen a lot of life. He is advising a young friend, one embroiled in a complex church situation. We know the advice he gave this young friend. But now we want to see his final words, his closing **challenge**. In fact, it is the **challenge** of a lifetime. Do you see the **challenge**? Can you accept the **challenge** now?

#### 2 Timothy 4:1-5

1 In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: 2 Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage — with great patience and careful instruction. 3 For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. 4 They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. 5 But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.

#### 2 Timothy 4:6-8

6 For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day — and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

Did you catch the **challenge**? Simply stated here it is.

**I am finishing well.** The **challenge** of a lifetime.

Almost 44 years ago to the day, I was speaking to another group. The occasion—my eighth grade graduation. I was co-valedictorian and therefore had the honor of addressing my class. I still remember the central thrust of that speech, captured in a quote from Shakespeare:

**ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.**

Would that many who hear me speak would utter their personal heart cry affirming Mr. Shakespeare,

**I WANT TO FINISH WELL.**

In a major address to congress, in fact his farewell speech, Douglas MacArthur, General of the Army, climaxed his memorable speech with these now famous words:

I am closing my 52 years of military service. When I joined the Army even before the turn of the century, it was the fulfillment of all my boyish hopes and dreams. The world has turned over many times since I took the oath on the Plain at West Point, and the hopes and dreams have long since vanished. But I still remember the refrain of one of the most popular barrack ballads of that day which proclaimed most proudly that—

**OLD SOLDIERS NEVER DIE; THEY JUST FADE AWAY."**

And like the old soldier of that ballad, I NOW CLOSE MY MILITARY CAREER AND JUST FADE AWAY—AN OLD SOLDIER WHO TRIED TO DO HIS DUTY AS GOD GAVE HIM THE LIGHT TO SEE THAT DUTY.

Good Bye.

What happens to Old parachurch leaders? Old Church planters? Old Christian businessmen? Old lay leaders? What is their final good bye? Let me suggest four scenarios I have been seeing repeated in various local church settings and parachurch situations around the country—perhaps they are in some ways similar to what may be happening in your own experience.

**Scenario 1. Bible Teacher William—Bi-Vocational Worker**

William, a Bible teacher, in a local assembly had for several years conducted home Bible studies. From the time he was 25 till he was 35 he devoted at least one full day a week to study of the Bible. Gradually he gained a reputation for knowing the word. Frequently, he shared on Sunday mornings in the assembly. He was well respected in the group and had been commended to other assemblies as a leader with a powerful teaching

ministry. His business allowed him to take off from time to time and minister in various locations around the country.

For some reason or other in his mid-thirties he slacked off in his disciplined Bible study. He knew his Bible fairly well, certainly better than anyone else in the assembly. His slacking off in his study discipline spilled over to his devotional life as well. In his early 40s, reasonably prosperous, William became restless. He no longer seemed to be challenged about teaching the Bible or contributing to his local assembly and the regional meetings. There was also another reason.

It had started so casually. He had known her for two years. For she was his secretary at work. She was kind and gentle in her relationships with others. She was efficient in her work--almost having the ability to guess ahead to what William wanted. She was physically attractive and took care of herself. She was always well dressed. She was a number of years younger than William. Well, one thing led to another as from time-to-time she empathetically listened to William talk about his life as if it were passing him by. There were lunches together. They enjoyed spending time together. William felt young again. Eventually it led to a physical relationship. It became addictive. William and Mary knew it was wrong—but they didn't care. They just had to. The relationship was covered up for several years. But a chance encounter in a distant city in which a member of his local assembly actually saw the two coming out of a motel room in the morning proved the undoing of William. Eventually, the accusation, which was at first denied gained momentum. And finally with a guilt ridden conscience, William admitted it. The fall out was tremendous, for William was the leading Bible teacher of a prestigious 600 member assembly.

Do you know what happens to Christians who idolize a well respected Bible teacher? when that Bible teacher falls? Especially young Christians? Do you know what happened to William's wife? His grown children, one of whom was an emerging as an elder in a nearby local assembly. Not to mention Mary's husband and younger children still in junior high. And to the rest of us in leadership?

What kind of legacy did William leave behind? Eventually, William faded away—remembered not for his inspiring and challenging Bible teaching ministry, the major Bible Conferences he had participated in or for the two assemblies he had a part in starting, for his hundreds of people blessed by his teaching. If remembered at all, it is for the mighty fall which took so many with him.

**A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches  
and loving favor rather than silver and gold—or sensual  
pleasure. Proverbs 22:1**

### **Scenario 2 Richard The Parachurch Worker**

He had been a good Christian worker once. Richard was in his early 60s. Now it seemed that no matter what he did he faced opposition in the organization. In the early

days he had been a rather heavy handed leader, somewhat opinionated. But people accepted it then because he got things done. People were reached by the evangelistic ministry of the organization and greatly helped by the social outreach. In those days Richard preached with anointing. He took part in the evangelistic meetings. He oversaw one of the rehab homes. But little by little over the years he lost it. He had been winging it for some time now. He had been moved through several departments. In each one he lasted for several years. Now he was getting too old to start over. He had been in this last organizational position for six years. His relational problems with staff under him emerged more quickly these days. Now very few responded to his ideas or seemed to be challenged by him. Wainwright, who headed up the financial committee for the organization and was concerned with budgeting had for sometime sensed that Richard could no longer cut it. He became a formidable opponent. The heart of Mr. Wainwright's attacks was that God no longer was in Richard's ministry. He was going through the motions but had no unction from the Spirit. Richard wondered how much longer he could last. He needed another three years in order to be eligible for the better pension plan his organization had set up about ten years ago. He would have trouble trying to get health insurance too if he had to leave now. Could he hang on?

What kind of legacy will Richard leave behind? What will he be remembered for? Not for the fine ministry of evangelism and social work of the early days but a string of conflictual situations and a mediocre life, if at all. He illustrates the many Christian workers who have plateaued and have stopped growing.

Christian workers who plateau in their ministry do a disservice to all—their families, their local assemblies, their organizations or their selves and most of all to God. When people have to go to extreme means to get rid of Christian workers because these workers are no longer growing, life giving leaders then we have an intolerable leadership situation. Two of the saddest verses in the Bible, from a leadership standpoint, are:

...But he did not know that the Lord had left him. Judges 16:20

Speaking of Samson after he lost his strength in the affair with Delilah.

She named him Ichabod, saying, The glory has departed from Israel.

**1 Samuel 4:21**

Speaking of the wife of Phinehas, naming her son as she died in childbirth. Eli had just died upon hearing that the Ark of the Covenant had been captured by the Philistines.

Before me, perhaps, are some Christian workers who need renewal, who have run out of gas, who have hit the wall in the marathon, who need a second wind, in short, who have plateaued. Those observing their ministry are whispering Ichabod.

**A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches  
and loving favor rather than a job held on to for security purposes.  
Proverbs 22:1**

### **Scenario 3. Tom and Jerry**

As young lads they had both made commitments to serve the Lord with their lives. Tom was obviously a brilliant entrepreneur. All during high school he had started a janitorial cleaning service which became a small company. By the time he had graduated from high school it was grossing \$300,000 a year. He was talented. He sensed that God wanted to use his business skills. He wanted to earn money but not for himself. He wanted to help finance new church plants. He had caught the vision for starting new works. It was just as obvious that Jerry had an unusual combination of gifting. He had persuasive evangelistic abilities as well as a ministry of teaching the word. He started evangelistic Bible studies. During his junior and senior year while in high school he worked with a more experienced Christian worker to establish a church. Jerry did evangelistic Bible studies. In addition, he started an evangelistic training program, which really appealed to young people.

Both Tom and Jerry attended the same Christian college. Tom took the business major option. Jerry took the religion major--especially studying New Testament Greek. In their sophomore year at a retreat they felt led to recommit their lives to the furtherance of the Kingdom. They had gone forward together at the speakers challenge. And while praying together in the after meeting they were led to partner together. Tom committed himself to financing Jerry in church plants. Jerry committed himself to beginning three churches over the next ten years. They both committed themselves to meeting on a weekly basis and praying together.

For almost ten years the partnership flourished. Tom greatly prospered. His businesses prospered and by the time he was 35 he was a multi-millionaire. Jerry planted one church in five years. Tom committed himself to provide the bulk of the funds for the Church Planting Organization that Jerry had started. There were only two full time workers. Jerry and a young intern. Tom took part in that church. Since both were in that church their lateral mentoring relationship continued. Each held the other to those values they had agreed upon as sophomores. After five years Jerry transitioned out of Church #1. He moved to a rapidly growing area about 35 miles away. He began to plant church #2. Now Tom and Jerry only met about once every month or so. They were still committed. But Tom was being sucked away from his church life. The expanding business demands were great.

In two years, church #2 was self-supporting. The young intern dropped from the organization to remain as the founding pastor. Jerry moved on to church #3. He was 34 now. He did not recognize how great a toll the two church plants had taken out of his family. His wife and kids had taken a back seat often because of the demands of the ministry. His family was not excited about moving to a new location, new schools, etc. Two years into the third church plant the whole thing fell apart. Jerry's family was not with him in the ministry. They had no heart for uprooting and making new friends.

Tom and Jerry had grown apart, first from neglect, then due to some disagreements on spending of money. Finally, the two had an open break. Tom eventually lost his business. Jerry's wife and children left him. A partnership with promise which had started so well went astray. Both Tom and Jerry had such promise. What had gone wrong? Why do those early commitments not hold up over a lifetime?

Church planting is difficult at best and takes a heavy strain upon the church planter and his family. Usually finances are always tight. The family must sacrifice. While finances were apparently not the problem here in a way they were. A young businessman who as a youngster had such high ideals for the Kingdom eventually was led astray by the money and power he amassed. Eventually it led him away from the Lord and his part in the partnership.

#### **Scenario 4 Pastor Harry**

The civic auditorium was packed. Over 8000 had gathered for the tribute. He was an old man now, in his early 80s. He was a picture of gentleness and peacefulness. They said as you looked at his face, you saw the lines of Jesus. There was an aura of spiritual authority about him that struck you as you looked at him. He had not called the meeting. In fact, he had opposed it. But those leaders of the local independent church and especially several of the leading lay persons of his three former major churches he had pastored wanted to honor God, to honor Pastor Harry, and to challenge the younger emerging leaders with a model of one who was finishing well. Tribute after tribute came. It was clear from the testimonies that Pastor Harry had a personal ministry which touched individuals. Incident after incident, many of them secret ones—that no one but God, Pastor Harry, and the individual knew about came to light in which Pastor Harry had radiated the love of God to a given situation. Sometimes quietly by a personal gift of money. Sometimes by an important piece of advice that had changed a life direction for ever. Sometimes by a prayer that brought the intervention of God into a situation. Sometimes by a word of blessing spoken in faith. There was praise for his public ministry also. God's powerful presence was upon his public ministry as well as many testified.

One person who had known him for the entire 59 years of his ministry said, "I remember as a junior high youth that what impressed me about Pastor Harry was his ability to get a word from God from the Scriptures which became promises for Pastor Harry and Gloria. I remember one promise claimed in 1949. God has honored that promise over these many years." Pastor Harry showed me God can be trusted to honor his word.

One person said, "Christianity works. God promises to conform us to the image of his dear son. The fruit of the Spirit is real. It is this godly character which I think makes Pastor Harry and Gloria so refreshing to be around. You know you don't want to be around some old people. But it is always good to be around Harry and Gloria, for their love, joy, peace and gentleness are so encouraging. I know Christianity works."

Many people cited their many achievements left behind.

A few remembered the prophetic promise that had come upon them as teenagers and which had been fulfilled.

One person spoke of a recent time that he and Harry had prayed together in his home. He said it was his personal vibrant relationship with God that was so striking. He carried me right to the throne of God. I knew that here was one who knew God intimately. I saw that intimacy with God was the key to his long life of service to God.

Another spoke of Harry's ability to learn. In his eighties he was still reading, still listening to others, and still studying his Bible—and getting fresh truth from all these sources.

One of the most important tributes came with the recognition of his wife's role in his ministry. She was rock stable, a woman of godliness, faith, and sacrifice as well as a powerful minister in her own right. Both had had public ministries accompanied by the outpouring of God. Their oneness and dual love for each other, and God, challenged everyone who knew them. Their children now in their 40s and 50s walked with God in power. They always spoke of mom and dad as the inspiration for their own lives.

Pastor Harry and his wife Gloria were finishing well.

(From here on, Skip italicized notes—backup only. Flow of argument in normal type. Use some in part if time available.)

### **Transition to Few Leaders Finish Well—Biblical Background**

The Bible mentions about a 1000 leaders.<sup>1</sup> Some are merely mentioned by name, perhaps by role also. Some receive a bit more attention but really only scant notice. [*Such as the prophet Ahijah (I Kings 11), the unknown man of God (I Kings 13), Micaiah (I Kings 22), Nathan and Gad, two of David's personal prophets. These appear fleetingly on the Biblical stage, perform some leadership function or two and are heard of no more. Numerous Jewish local civil leaders in the Old Testament are listed in special lists, several in the Pentateuch and several in I Chronicles, with nothing more than a name mentioned. See also Nehemiah and Ezra for other such lists. ]*

Others receive prolonged treatment. Leaders like Moses, David, Paul, and Jesus have an overwhelming amount of material to analyze. Many have some data. Even those having data do not always give the data needed to ascertain how they finished.

Recently I listed 100 of the more prominent leaders and did some research on their leadership. [*I listed Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Job, Joseph, Moses, Miriam, Aaron,*

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<sup>1</sup>See position paper *Listen Up, Leaders !* available from [BobbyClinton.com](http://BobbyClinton.com) (resource page) for findings for this Biblical research. Three other major findings are also given.

*Eleazar, Joshua, Caleb, Othniel, Ehud, Deborah, Barak, Gideon, Abimelech, Tola, Jair, Jephthah, Iban, Elon, Abdon, Samson, Eli, Samuel, Saul, David, Absalom, Solomon, Jeroboam, Rehoboam, Abijah, Baasha, Asa, Omri, Ahab, Elijah, Micaiah, Jehosaphat, Joram, Elisha, Obadiah, Jerhoram, Jehu, Joel, Ahaziah, Athaliah, Joash, Jehoahaz, Jehoash, Amaziah, Jeroboam II, Jonah, Amos, Uzziah, Zechariah, Shallum, Menaham, Jotham, Pekahiah, Pekah, Hosea, Micah, Isaiah, Hoshea, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Manasseh, Nahum, Amon, Josiah, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Jeremiah, Jehoahaz, Daniel, Jehoakim, Jehoachin, Zedekiah, Ezekiel, Esther, Mordecai, Zerubabel, Joshua, Zechariah, Haggai, Ezra, Nehemiah, Malachi, Jesus, Peter, James, John, Barnabas, Paul, Stephen, Phillip, Titus, Timothy. ]*

These included some of each of the major Old Testament types: patriarchal, military, civil, formal religious (priests), informal religious (prophets), charismatic. They also included the major New Testament types: apostles, prophets, evangelists, teachers, pastors. Of the 100 listed only about half of them had enough information to tell how they finished. I actually made judgments of this for 49.

*[I identified several categories of finishes:*

- 1. cut off early,*
- 2. finished poorly,*
- 3. finished "so so" (limited somehow),*
- 4. finished well,*
- 5. can't be sure.*

*Cut off early means they were taken out of leadership (assassinations, killed in battle, prophetically denounced, overthrown). Some of these were traced directly to God's doing. Typical examples of those cut off early include: Abimelech, Samson, Absalom, Ahab, Josiah, John the Baptist, James. Now some of these are good leaders but most of them are bad.*

*Finished poorly means they were going down hill in the latter part of their ministry. This might mean in terms of their personal relationship with God or in terms of competency in their ministry or both. Some who in my opinion are typical examples of "finished poorly" include: Gideon, Samson, Eli, Saul, Solomon.*

*Finished "so so" means they did not do what they potentially could have done or should have done. They did not complete what God had for them to do. This might mean that there were some negative ramifications from their ministry or reign which lingered on even though they were walking with God personally at the end of their lives. Some who in my opinion are typical examples of finished "so so" include: David, Jehosaphat, Hezekiah. There are also many who seem to bridge more than one category (cut-off and finished poorly, cut-off and finished "so so", finished "poorly" and "so so" or finished "so so" and "somewhat well." The categories are not always mutually exclusive.*

*Finished well means they were walking with God personally at the end of their lives and probably contributed to God's purposes at some high realized level of potential. In fact, I have identified 6 characteristics of leaders who finished well. I'll come back to this later. Some leaders who receive scant treatment probably did finish well but data concerning their finish is not available in the Bible. Some who in my opinion are typical examples of "finished well" include: Abraham, Job, Joseph, Joshua, Caleb, Samuel, Elijah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Jesus, John, Paul, Peter.]*

Now the data isn't conclusive. And one might question what I mean by finish well. More on that later. But there is enough information to justify a first major observation from the Bible concerning leadership.

### **FEW LEADERS FINISH WELL!**

Of those on which information was available less than 25% finished well. Now that is a startling conclusion.

Now perhaps you can see why I suggested these four scenarios. **One**, there is one finishing well, Pastor Harry, and four not finishing well, William, Richard, Tom, and Jerry. That's about the ratio of those finishing well to those not finishing well. About 1 out of 4 or 5 Biblical leaders finished well—our contemporary track record is probably similar. Look around you. Many of these will not finish well. I hope your heart cry is to be one who will finish well. **Two**, many of us learn best by examples.

What a joy to see leaders finishing well! Every Wednesday my own faculty, the School of World Mission, gathers for two hours of sharing, praying, and fellowship. There are usually about 14 gathered. This quarter it has been our privilege to have three who are finishing well to be with us. One is in his early 80s. One is 79. And one is in his early 70s. All are in semi-retirement—but still ministering. What a joy to see their godly character shine forth! What encouragement to hear their stories of faith as we face difficult times! What inspiration to hear them talk to God! How good it is to see leaders finish well!

These scenarios and this conclusion that **few finish well** should frighten any present day leader who desires to count for God. But what can we do about it?

**One**, I want to suggest that we can study why these leaders failed to finish well. Two New Testament passages, I Corinthians 10:6 and Romans 15:4 point out to us that history in the Bible is meant to teach us lessons for our own lives, today. I've done this. I've also related my findings to present day leaders. **Two**, I want to suggest that we can also study those leaders who finished well and learn some things that happened to enhance their good finishes.

## 6 Barriers to Finishing Well

**Proverbs 22:3** tells us that,

Sensible people will see trouble coming and avoid it, but an unthinking person will walk right into it and regret it later.

Let me share with you six barriers to finishing well that I have identified. We need to look ahead in our lives and not walk right into these barriers. We need to avoid being entrapped by them.

### **Barrier 1. FINANCES—THEIR USE AND ABUSE**

Leaders, particularly those who have power positions and make important decisions concerning finances, tend to use practices which may encourage incorrect handling of finances and eventually wrong use. A character trait of greed often is rooted deep and eventually will cause impropriety with regard to finances. Numerous leaders have fallen due to some issue related to money.

**Biblical Example:** Old Testament: Gideon's golden ephod.  
New Testament: Ananias and Sapphira.

### **Barrier 2. POWER—Its Abuse**

Leaders who are effective in ministry must use various power bases in order to accomplish their ministry. With power so available and being used almost daily, there is a tendency to abuse it. Leaders who rise to the top in a hierarchical system (even an informal one) tend to assume privileges with their perceived status. Frequently, these privileges include abuse of power. And they usually have no counter balancing accountability.

**Biblical Example:** Uzziah's usurping of priestly privilege.

### **Barrier 3. PRIDE—Which Leads To Downfall**

Pride (inappropriate and self-centered) can lead to a downfall of a leader. As a leader there is a dynamic tension that must be maintained. We must have a healthy respect for our selves, and yet we must recognize that we have nothing that was not given us by God and He is the one who really enables ministry.

**Biblical Example:** David's numbering.

#### **Barrier 4. SEX—Illicit Relationships**

Illicit sexual relationships have been a major downfall both in the Bible and in western cultures. Joseph's classic integrity check with respect to sexual sin is the ideal model that should be in leaders' minds.

**Biblical Example:** David's sin with Bathsheba was a pivotal point from which his leadership never fully recovered. It was all downhill from here on.

#### **Barrier 5. FAMILY—Critical Issues**

Problems between spouses or between parents and children or between siblings can destroy a leader's ministry. What is needed are Biblical values lived out with regard to husband-wife relationships, parent-children, and sibling relationships. Of growing importance in our day is the social base profiles for singles in ministry and for married couples.

**Biblical Example:** David's family. Ammon and Tamar. Absalom's revenge.

#### **Barrier 6. PLATEAUIING.**

Leaders who are competent tend to plateau. Their very strength becomes a weakness. They can continue to minister at a level without there being a reality or Spirit empowered renewing effect. Most leaders will plateau several times in their life times of development. Some of the 5 things for enhancing a good finish will counteract this tendency. There again is a dynamic tension that must be maintained between leveling off for good reasons, (consolidating one's growth and/or reaching the level of potential for which God has made you ) and plateauing because of sinfulness or loss of vision.

**Biblical Example:** David in the latter part of his reign just before Absalom's revolt.

### **5 Things To Enhance Good Finishes**

Just as we can learn from those who didn't finish well we can also study those leaders who finished well and learn some things that happened to enhance their good finishes. There are items which help leaders continue well and to finish well in ministry. Five such items are repeated in a number of leader's lives who finished well. Not all five are in every life but several are.

#### **Enhancement 1. PERSPECTIVE.**

We need to have a lifetime perspective on ministry. **Effective leaders view present ministry in terms of a lifetime perspective.** This is one of 7 major leadership lessons seen

in effective leaders' lives. We gain that perspective by studying lives of leaders as commanded in Hebrews 13:7,8. I have been doing intensive study of leaders' lives over the past 13 years. Leadership emergence theory is the result of that research. Its many concepts can help us understand more fully just how God does shape a leader over a lifetime. My findings are available in two books, **The Making of A Leader**, published by Nav Press in 1988 and a lengthy detailed self-study manual, **Leadership Emergence Theory**, that I privately publish for use in classes and workshops. In addition, my latest research is available in position papers published by Barnabas Publishers. See [BobbyClinton.com](http://BobbyClinton.com) (resource page).

### **Enhancement 2. RENEWAL.**

Special moments of intimacy with God, challenges from God, new vision from God and affirmation from God both for personhood and ministry will occur repeatedly to a growing leader. These destiny experiences will be needed, appreciated, and will make the difference in persevering in a ministry. All leaders should expectantly look for these repeated times of renewal. Some can be initiated by the leader (usually extended times of spiritual disciples). But some come sovereignly from God. We can seek them, of course, and be ready for them.

Most leaders who have been effective over a lifetime have needed and welcomed renewal experiences from time to time in their lives. Some times are more crucial in terms of renewal than others. Apparently in western society the mid-thirty's and early forty's and mid-fifty's are crucial times in which renewal is frequently needed in a leader's life. Frequently during these critical periods discipline slacks, there is a tendency to plateau and rely on one's past experience and skills, and a sense of confusion concerning achievement and new direction prevail. Unusual renewal experiences with God can overcome these tendencies and redirect a leader. An openness for them, a willingness to take steps to receive them, and a knowledge of their importance for a whole life can be vital factors in heeding step two for finishing well. Sometimes these renewal experiences are divinely originated by God and we must be sensitive to his invitation. At other times we must initiate the renewal efforts.

### **Enhancement 3. DISCIPLINES.**

Leaders need discipline of all kinds. Especially is this true of spiritual disciplines. A strong surge toward spirituality now exists in Catholic and Protestant circles. This movement combined with an increasingly felt need due to the large number of failures is propelling leaders to hunger for intimacy. The spiritual disciplines are one mediating means for getting this intimacy. Such authors as Eugene Peterson, Dallas Willard, and Richard Foster are making headway with Protestants concerning spirituality. See also my section on spiritual guides and the appendix on the disciplines in **The Mentor Handbook**, available from [BobbyClinton.com](http://BobbyClinton.com) (resource page). Leaders without these leadership tools are prone to failure via sin as well as plateauing.

*[Helpful categorizations for me which I derived from my study of Willard include the following: 1) Disciplines of abstinence such as solitude, silence, fasting, frugality,*

*chastity, secrecy, sacrifice; 2) Disciplines of engagement such as study, worship, celebration, service, prayer, fellowship, confession, and submission; 3) Some other miscellaneous disciplines such as voluntary exile, keeping watch, Sabbath keeping, practices among the poor, journaling, and listening. I have defined many of these disciplines and given some practical suggestions for them in my spiritual dynamics course I teach at Fuller Seminary. See Dallas Willard's **The Spirit of the Disciplines** and Richard Foster's **Celebration of Discipline**. We need to guard our inner life with God. The spiritual disciplines have proven helpful in this regard to many earlier generations of leaders. Spiritual disciplines can be generally defined to include activities of mind and body which are purposefully undertaken in order to bring personality and total being into effective cooperation with the Spirit of God so as to reflect Kingdom life. ]*

I concur with Paul's admonitions to discipline as a means of insuring perseverance in the ministry. When Paul was around 50 years of age he wrote to the Corinthian church what appears to be both an exhortation to the Corinthians and an explanation of a major leadership value in his own life. We need to keep in mind that he had been in ministry for about 21 years. He was still advocating strong discipline. I paraphrase it in my own words.

I am serious about finishing well in my Christian ministry. I discipline myself for fear that after challenging others into the Christian life I myself might become a casualty. 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

Lack of physical discipline is often an indicator of laxity in the spiritual life as well. Toward the end of his life, Paul is probably between 65 and 70, he is still advocating discipline. This time he writes to Timothy, who is probably between 30 and 35 years old.

...Take time and trouble to keep yourself spiritually fit. Bodily fitness has a limited value, but spiritual fitness is of unlimited value for it holds promise both for the present life and for the life to come. (1 Timothy 4:7b,8 Phillips)

Leaders should from time to time assess their state of discipline. I recommend in addition to standard word disciplines involving the devotional life and study of the Bible other disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, frugality, chastity, secrecy. My studies of Foster and Willard have helped me identify a number of disciplines which can habitually shape character and increase the probability of a good finish.

#### **Enhancement 4. LEARNING POSTURE.**

The single most important antidote to plateauing is a well developed learning posture. Such a posture is also one of the major ways through which God gives vision. I will describe more about how to do this in the commentary which follows.

Another of the major leadership lessons is *Effective leaders maintain a learning posture all their lives*. It sounds simple enough but many leaders don't heed it. Two Biblical leaders who certainly were learners all their lives and exemplified this principle were Daniel and Paul. Note how Daniel observed this principle. In Daniel 9 when he is quite old we find that he was still studying his Bible and still learning new things from it. And he was alert to what God wanted to do through what he was learning. Consequently, Daniel was able to intercede for his people and become a recipient of one of the great messianic revelations. Paul's closing remarks to Timothy show he was still learning. "And when you come don't forget the books Timothy!" (2 Timothy 4:13).

*[In western culture, maintaining a learning posture usually involves reading. Countless materials are available on leadership. You should acquire skills which will allow you to read broadly and selectively the many resources that are now being published. I have learned selective reading techniques which have allowed me to learn what I need to know without reading every word of a book. This has helped me to increase the range and number of books I read. I have developed a reading continuum which identifies different techniques for approaching the reading of a book for information. The continuum moves from less intense and less in-depth reading to highly intense and in-depth reading. Methodologies along the continuum include scan, ransack, browse, pre-read, read and study levels. Each type of reading has different goals and employs different techniques for getting information leading to those goals. See my **Reading on the Run—A Continuum Approach to Reading** available at [BobbyClinton.com](http://BobbyClinton.com) (resource page).*

*A helpful accountability model I have used is the buddy reading model. I have a reading buddy. We covenant together to read a book, do certain exercises in conjunction with the book, and then meet to share our learning. We alternate choices of book. My buddy picks it for one month. I do so the next month. This model could be generalized to any kind of special learning activity like listening to tapes and experiential visits to ministry happenings or the like. The dynamics of the model include co-mentoring, accountability, committal to learning and some kind of learning experience. ]*

There are many non-formal training events available such as workshops, seminars, and conferences covering a variety of learning skills. Take advantage of them. A good learning posture is insurance against plateauing and a helpful prod along the way to persevere in leadership. An inflexible spirit with regards to learning is almost a sure precursor to finishing *so so* or *poorly*.

### **Enhancement 5. MENTORING.**

Comparative study of many leaders lives indicates the frequency with which other people were significant in challenging them into leadership and in giving timely advice and help so as to keep them there. Leaders who are effective and finish well will have

from 10 to 15 significant people who came alongside at one time or another to help them. Mentoring is also a growing movement in Christian circles as well as secular.<sup>2</sup>

The general notion of mentoring involves a relational empowerment process in which someone who knows something (the mentor) passes on something (wisdom, advice, information, emotional support, protection, linking to resources) to someone who needs it (the mentoree, protégé) at a sensitive time so that it impacts the person's development. The basic dynamics of mentoring include attraction, relationship, response, accountability and empowerment. My observations on mentoring suggest that most likely, any leader will need a mentor at all times over a lifetime of leadership. Mentoring is available if one looks for specific functions and people who can do them (rather than an ideal mentor who can do all). God will provide a mentor in a specific area of need for you if you trust Him for one and you are willing to submit and accept responsibility.

Simply stated a final suggestion for enabling a good finish is find a mentor who will hold you accountable in your spiritual life and ministry and who can warn and advise so as to enable you to avoid pitfalls and to grow throughout your lifetime of ministry. I will deal with this more fully in my workshop times today.

## **6 CHARACTERISTICS OF THOSE FINISHING WELL**

For those who have finished well I have done comparative study and have identified 6 descriptors: (for these ad lib Biblical characters illustrating them.)

### **Characteristic 1.**

They maintain a personal vibrant relationship with God right up to the end.

### **Characteristic 2.**

They maintain a learning posture and can learn from various kinds of sources--life especially.

### **Characteristic 3.**

They evidence Christ likeness in character as seen by the fruit of the Spirit in their lives.

### **Characteristic 4.**

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<sup>2</sup>See my manual co-authored with my son, **The Mentor Handbook**, available at [BobbyClinton.com](http://BobbyClinton.com) (resource page). See also my book co-authored with Paul Stanley, **Connecting** (available from NavPress). Both of these explain in depth the concept of mentoring and how it can be used in churches.

Truth is lived out in their lives so that convictions and promises of God are seen to be real.

### Characteristic 5.

They leave behind one or more ultimate contributions (saint, stylistic practitioners, mentors, public rhetoricians, pioneers, crusaders, artists, founder, stabilizers, researchers, writers, promoters).<sup>3</sup>

### Characteristic 6.

They walk with a growing awareness of a sense of destiny and see some or all of it fulfilled.

The classic example in the Old Testament of a good finish is Daniel who manifests all six characteristics.

The classic example in the New Testament other than Christ is Paul.

There are gradations of finishing well. Some finish well but not quite having all six or lesser intensity on one or the other major characteristics.

### Can It Be Done?

Daniel did it! Ad lib from Daniel 5, 9, 10. Point out six characteristics seen in his life.

Paul did it! Ad lib from 2 Timothy 3,4 and other backup material from epistles.

Now listen carefully. It is clear in Daniel and Paul that character is crucial. That is what this conference will be dealing with. Ministry essentially flows out of being. A careful study of Paul's last two epistles to Timothy highlight this mentoring advice. Timothy, take care of yourself, your character. Listen to just a few of his character challenges.

1 Timothy 4:12 Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.

1 Timothy 4:16 Watch your **life** and **doctrine** closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

1 Timothy 6:11 But you man of God, flee from all this and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witness.

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<sup>3</sup>See position paper on *Ultimate Contribution* available from [BobbyClinton.com](http://BobbyClinton.com) (resource page) for explanation of these types.

2 Timothy 2:22 Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

Remember, **Few Finish well.**

Of those who do not finish well--almost all of their failures can be traced back to character flaws. These leaders failed to respond to God's shaping on some essential character issues.

Of those that finish well, all have solid character; solid inner life; solid integrity. This is foundational to a good finish.

Listen carefully as each of the plenary speakers talk about character. For I hope you want to finish well.

**Finishing Well is a lifetime challenge.** It is not just the challenge of the end of life. All of life is wrapped up in the finish. You must **begin well** and **continue well** if you are to **finish well**.

In the early portion of ministry the **challenge** is to see character formed, move with God's shaping hand. You must begin well.

A different **challenge** faces a leader in the middle portion of ministry. There the foundational character will be tested. To remain true to that early character shaping when the ideals of life have worn off—that is the **challenge** of middle ministry. You must continue well.

And finally if you have begun well and continued well the final **challenge** is to model well the fruit of a character shaped by God and a character tested by God. You must leave behind a legacy that will inspire younger leaders to want to finish well.

In closing I want to suggest that you use a principle now well established in leadership theory. If your aim is to be a Pastor Harry or at least to end like he did then,

### **BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND**

Or if you are right now in William's or Richard's or Tom and Jerry's shoes then

### **BEGIN AGAIN WITH THE END IN MIND.**

And the end I hope you have in mind is to **finish well—a lifetime challenge.**

**Do you want to finish well?**

**Will You Finish Well?**

## Application

1. If you were to assess the 6 characteristics of finishing well at this present moment in your life, which one or two would do you feel needs the most attention?  
 a. maintain a personal vibrant relationship with God right up to the end.  
 b. maintain a learning posture and can learn from various kinds of sources--life especially.  
 c. give evidence Christ likeness in character as evidenced by the fruit of the Spirit in their lives.  
 d. truth is lived out in their lives so that convictions and promises of God are seen to be real.  
 e. leave behind one or more ultimate contributions (saint, stylistic practitioners, mentors, public rhetoricians, pioneers, crusaders, artists, founder, stabilizers, researchers, writers, promoters).  
 f. walk with a growing awareness of a sense of destiny and see some or all of it fulfilled.
  
2. For which of the barriers to finishing well are you the most vulnerable?  
 a. misuse of finances or tendency toward greed or materialism  
 b. abuse of power  
 c. pride  
 d. sexual  
 e. family  
 f. plateauing
  
3. Which of the 5 enhancements are you strongest on?  
 a. lifelong development perspective     b. renewal  
 c. disciplines     d. learning posture     e. mentoring
  
4. Which of the 5 enhancements do you need to work on the most?  
 a. lifelong development perspective     b. renewal  
 c. disciplines     d. learning posture     e. mentoring

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Comment: Introduces an approach for effective reading for leadership information. So much information is now available that leaders can not read all of it at the same depth. This study booklet introduces a set of reading approaches along a continuum from a lesser involvement to an in-depth involvement with the material: scan, browse, ransack, pre-read, read, and study. Guidelines and Worksheets help the reader focus on findings from each type of reading. Encourages effective information gathering.

1988 **The Making of A Leader.** Colorado Springs: NavPress.

Comment: A more popular treatment of a lifetime perspective on the development of a Christian leader. Organized around a six stage time-line it identifies, labels, and defines processes that God frequently uses to shape a leader for a lifetime of ministry.

1989 *The Ultimate Contribution.* Altadena: Barnabas Publishers.

Comments: A 19 page position paper which gives the results of a comparative study of 40 outstanding missionaries in terms of legacies left behind. Categorizes 11 basic types of legacies and defines patterns leading to these achievements.

1989 **Leadership Emergence Theory—A Self-Study Manual For Analyzing the Development of a Christian Leader.** Altadena: Barnabas Publishers.

Comment: This self-study manual gives a comprehensive overview of the three major factors (processing, time, and leader response patterns) that interweave together to help explain how God shapes a leader over a lifetime spiritually, ministerially, and strategically to bring about His purposes and resulting ultimate contribution. Highly recommended for mid-career Christian workers who want to evaluate their lives and set new direction in order to finish well.

1989 *Listen Up Leaders!* Altadena: Barnabas Publishers.

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