

# DISCERNMENT

*Theology and the Practice of Ministry*

---

Volume 7 | Issue 2

Article 3

---

2021

## An Adaptive Change Project in Developing Leaders

Scott Laird  
slaird.gfcc@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.acu.edu/discernment>



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

---

### Recommended Citation

Laird, Scott (2021) "An Adaptive Change Project in Developing Leaders," *Discernment: Theology and the Practice of Ministry*: Vol. 7: Iss. 2, Article 3.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.acu.edu/discernment/vol7/iss2/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Digital Commons @ ACU. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Discernment: Theology and the Practice of Ministry* by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ ACU.

# DISCERNMENT

*Theology and the Practice of Ministry*

## **An Adaptive Change Project in Developing Leaders**

*Scott Laird*

---

*Abstract: This study investigates a process for developing local church members to become leaders, people of spiritual influence. Organic, reproducible leadership development in a church located in a mission field is crucial for churches to survive and thrive.*

*Applying Robert Clinton's "Leadership Emergence Theory," where spiritual influence is a function of time, process items within life, and our responses allowed church members to discover and use their spiritual influence to bless others. We intentionally explored the theological concepts of discipleship, providence, giftedness, and community as being foundational in developing leaders. In addition, each person applied "Leadership Emergence Theory" to their own life by writing and sharing their life narrative.*

*Evaluating the effects of the intervention over a period of three years and drawing conclusions to enhance future ministerial practice made the methodology a case study in leadership emergence within a mature mid-sized church.*

*The practical application of "Leadership Emergence Theory" opened the participants to the providential work of God within the community of God and their own lives. They discovered they have a story worth sharing and that they are part of God's story. Often the first year of processing one's life was painful but during the second year, participants embraced the painful moments of life as opportunities for ministry through enhanced spiritual influence. New ministries and leaders were launched within the local church based on God's transformation of participants, not a predetermined outcome. Developing deep trust within the groups provided a framework for vulnerability and transformation. Using this approach to develop spiritual leaders—people of spiritual influence—continues to develop leaders in the local church and has the potential to work within other congregations.*

### Statement of the Problem

The Great Falls Church of Christ<sup>1</sup> has not established an effective long-term leader development model and I, as the minister since November 1994, have sought easier fixes than a long-term commitment of mentoring to develop local leaders. Average attendance for GFCC over the past ten years was 238.<sup>2</sup> As a mid-sized church we predominantly relied upon programs for growth<sup>3</sup> while employing my administrative skills to facilitate ministry.<sup>4</sup> I developed and implemented several programs to produce leaders since my arrival in Great Falls but have consistently been disappointed by the results. Some of these included a thirteen-week class on elder training followed by a one-year small group program to provide skills and tools for potential elders. A summer preaching series to provide an opportunity to explore preaching gifts and develop skills. Three Shepherds' Networks<sup>5</sup> to connect, inspire, encourage, and develop existing and future elders in the Northern Plains of the United States and Canada. Men's and women's groups have been in existence since 1995. Small groups called LIFE Groups (Love, Involvement, Fellowship, Evangelism) have existed since 2001 to provide heart-to-heart, face-to-face interaction<sup>6</sup> with a secondary focus of using small groups as a training ground for new leaders. These programs blessed the church but did not solve our leader shortage. It could be that a program-based model has not been an effective structure because it does not employ God's transformational work in developing spiritual leaders. These programs increased ministry skills but were not transformational. Consider the following insight from Bob Logan, church planter, consultant, and coach:

We are experienced enough in programs to know that they generally do not work. No program, however good, can

---

<sup>1</sup> The Great Falls Church of Christ will be referenced as GFCC hereinafter.

<sup>2</sup> "Church Record," Great Falls Church of Christ, Great Falls, MT, 1948-2018. All the statistics concerning the Great Falls Church of Christ come from these records.

<sup>3</sup> Gary McIntosh, *One Size Doesn't Fit All* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1999), 30-35.

<sup>4</sup> Gary McIntosh, *Taking Your Church to the Next Level: What Got You Here Won't Get You There* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), 147-48.

<sup>5</sup> "Church Record," 2011-2018. The Shepherds' Network Northwest Connection has been a joint training venue provided by Harding School of Theology and the Churches of Christ in Montana.

<sup>6</sup> John W. Ellas, *Small Groups and Established Churches: Challenge and Hope for the Future* (Houston, TX: Center for Church Growth, 2005) 54-55.

provide what a church needs to develop leaders. . . . They might be helpful if they are part of something larger, but all by themselves they won't do it.<sup>7</sup>

Part of the problem in developing leaders through programs lies in an expectation of a predetermined outcome. Our congregation has looked for positional leaders, elders, deacons, teachers, etc., rather than explore the potential of transformational leadership where individual Christians are encouraged, mentored, and equipped to discover their giftedness and the good works God has prepared for them to do.<sup>8</sup>

### Review of Some Related Literature

The development of spiritual leaders is a pressing topic within the local church.<sup>9</sup> Spiritual leadership is a gift from God (Rom 12:3-8) that can lie dormant and undetected until the circumstances of life and providence of God provide an opportunity for it to be discovered and developed (Ex. 3:1-4:17).<sup>10</sup> Discipleship to Jesus Christ calls every follower to grow and develop. This includes how and whether an individual is called to lead. Robert Katz argues that leaders “are not necessarily born but may be developed,”<sup>11</sup> providing encouragement for emerging leaders to know that God can develop their spiritual influence.

Three books provided a helpful overview of the development of leadership theory as it applied to this project and Leadership Emergence Theory (LET).<sup>12</sup> *Bass & Stogdill's Handbook of Leadership: Theory, Research, and*

---

<sup>7</sup> Robert E. Logan and Tarra Miller, *From Followers to Leaders* (St. Charles, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 2007), 205.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Pet 4:10-11; Eph 2:10. All scripture references will use *The Holy Bible, New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), unless otherwise noted.

<sup>9</sup> Three books by Malphurs are a small indicator of the interest in spiritual leadership. Aubrey Malphurs, *Being Leaders: The Nature of Authentic Christian Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003). Aubrey Malphurs, *Leading Leaders: Empowering Church Boards for Ministry Excellence, a New Paradigm for Board Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005). Aubrey Malphurs and Will Mancini, *Building Leaders: Blueprints for Developing Leadership at Every Level of Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> J. Robert Clinton, *The Making of a Leader: Recognizing the Lessons and Stages of leadership Development*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: NAVPRESS, 2012). The entire book deals with leader development. Moses serves as an example.

<sup>11</sup> Robert L. Katz, “Skills of an Effective Administrator,” *Harvard Business Review* (January – February 1955): 42.

<sup>12</sup> The specific leadership theory called Leadership Emergence Theory will be identified as LET for the rest of the paper.

*Managerial Applications*<sup>13</sup> is an exhaustive treatment of leadership from a primarily secular perspective. Robert Clinton's *A Short History of Leadership Theory*<sup>14</sup> relies heavily upon the work of Bass and Stogdill to develop a timeline illustrating an overview of the field of leadership study from the pre-modern era (before 1881) through 1986. He then identifies ways in which these leadership paradigms influence his LET.<sup>15</sup> *Reviewing Leadership: A Christian Evaluation of Current Approaches*<sup>16</sup> by Ledbetter, Banks, and Greenhalgh, explores numerous leadership theories and their connections to Christian leadership.<sup>17</sup>

Clinton's LET argues that God works in sovereign and providential ways over time to foster spiritual, ministerial, and strategic formation.<sup>18</sup> His theory suggests that if a Christian recognizes God's work throughout his or her life then that individual will be empowered, encouraged, and motivated to serve God to the fullest while also helping others recognize God's impact in their lives and the subsequent call to become a leader, a person of influence.

This project used two primary resources for the participants, *The Making of a Leader* and *Deep Mentoring*.<sup>19</sup> Clinton's *The Making of a Leader* distills his findings from *Leadership Emergence Theory*. In *Deep Mentoring*,

---

<sup>13</sup> Bernard M. Bass and Ralph M. Stogdill, *Bass & Stogdill's Handbook of Leadership: Theory, Research, and Managerial Applications*, 3rd ed. (New York: Free Press, 1990), the entire book is devoted to exploring leadership theories.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Clinton, *A Short History of Modern Leadership Theory* (Altadena, CA.: Barnabas Publishers, 1992).

<sup>15</sup> Clinton, *The Making of a Leader* and J. Robert Clinton, *Leadership Emergence Theory: A Self-Study Manual for Analyzing the Development of a Christian Leader* (Altadena, CA: Barnabas Resources, 1989). Both books employ Clinton's Leadership Emergence Theory (LET). Clinton, *A Short History of Leadership Theory*, 21, connects LET to the Great Man Era; 23, footnote 18 on page 23 highlights the importance placed on biographical and case history data by Stogdill; and 29-30, Emory S. Bogardus employed a leadership biographical methodology. Clinton's LET relies heavily on a biographical methodology as a legitimate means for developing a leadership theory as demonstrated by the works of Stogdill and Bogardus.

<sup>16</sup> Bernice M. Ledbetter, Robert J. Banks and David C. Greenhalgh, *Reviewing Leadership: A Christian Evaluation of Current Approaches*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 65-90. Of special note is the section on "Biblical Life-Story Approach to Leadership," 75-81, which summarizes Clinton's LET. As an extra note, this book is very well referenced and provides a wealth of information for additional studies on many aspects of leadership.

<sup>18</sup> Clinton, *Leadership Emergence Theory*, 9.

<sup>19</sup> Randy D. Reese and Robert Loane, *Deep Mentoring: Guiding Others on Their Leadership Journey* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2012).

Randy Reese and Robert Loane provide a means to explore Clinton's LET in a more engaging and popular fashion. They apply some of Clinton's terms and invite the reader into a process that enables an emergent leader to personalize Clinton's leadership timeline. Reese and Loane suggest the timeline, though not absolute, provides (1) a general description of development, (2) predicts what others might encounter, and (3) prescribes what is next in developing leaders.<sup>20</sup>

The process of implementing LET into a church's DNA requires personal and congregational change. Therefore, current discussions and theories concerning change were important to this project. For example, Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky explore change by comparing/contrasting the difference between technical challenge (where the problem and solution are clear, enabling one in authority to provide solutions) and adaptive challenge (where both problems and solutions require learning, and stakeholders must be engaged to discern solutions).<sup>21</sup> Heifetz and Linsky indicate "the major reason for leadership failure occurs when adaptive challenges are treated like technical problems."<sup>22</sup> **I believe this statement indicates why my previous approaches to leader development were not sustainable. Leader development has been approached as a technical change where a new class, a new program, a new something added to our existing programs would develop leaders. It has not worked.** This project challenged both the church and me to move from a technical change involving program development to an adaptive change.

### Theoretical Framework

Clinton's LET provides a reproducible process where, through mentoring, disciples of Jesus Christ discover God's previous work in their lives with the expectation of devoting their lives deeper into the Ephesians 2:10 works that God has prepared for them. Clinton's LET states that God develops a leader over a lifetime in three primary areas: inner life, ministry,

---

<sup>20</sup> Reese, *Deep Mentoring*, 65-66.

<sup>21</sup> Ronald A. Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Martin Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2009), 20.

<sup>22</sup> Ronald A. Heifetz and Martin Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002), 14. Peter Guy Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (Los Angeles: SAGE Publication, 2015), 257-78, provides a succinct explanation of Heifetz theory.

and life maturing.<sup>23</sup> These cannot be adequately addressed through programs. However, mentoring within the local church provides the interaction and time necessary to uncover God's work in the life of an individual.

Clinton's theory argues leader development is a function of process items, the individual's timeline (this reveals providence), and the individual's responses to God's providential work.<sup>24</sup> Process items include providential events, people, circumstances, etc., which God uses to develop and/or confirm leaders.<sup>25</sup> The reference to time indicates leader development is an ongoing process. Individual response notes that each person is accountable for their reaction to process items and this response either supports leader development or thwarts development depending on personal choices and actions.

Clinton continues by stating that understanding LET will accomplish four things: (1) develop an understanding of God's providence, (2) provide a sense of God's work in an individual's past, (3) create anticipation that God will use that same individual in the future, and (4) inspire a more deliberate attempt to influence others for God.<sup>26</sup> Clinton's theory provides a foundation for mentoring both couples and individuals while recognizing God's work of transforming disciples into the leaders God has called them to be, rather than by attempting to manipulate specific leader outcomes through a program or to fit into predetermined organizational roles.

Our struggle to develop leaders involved an adaptive challenge that required new learning to identify both the problem and solution while also enlisting those involved in the change to supply the solution.<sup>27</sup> Heifetz identifies two characteristics that signify an adaptive challenge has been encountered. They are (1) a cycle of failure and (2) a persistent dependence upon authority.<sup>28</sup> Both of these indicators were present in GFCC's struggle to develop long-lasting leaders in a transitional environment.<sup>29</sup> While GFCC

---

<sup>23</sup> Clinton, *The Making of a Leader*, 44-47. These are three stages on Clinton's generalized timeline containing unique learning opportunities and challenges or process items.

<sup>24</sup> Clinton, *Leadership Emergence Theory*, 27-29.

<sup>25</sup> Clinton, *The Making of a Leader*, 260.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>27</sup> Heifetz, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 20.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 71-74.

<sup>29</sup> Great Falls is home to Malmstrom Air Force Base. Many of our members are associated with the base and are stationed in Great Falls for two to four years. At times we

demonstrates many signs of health, we have consistently failed to develop a process that encouraged every Christian to pursue spiritual influence through the employment of their gifts. Instead, we relied on programs prepared and administered by the ministry staff to produce new leaders.

LET provided a model where Christians explored and learned to discern God's work in their lives. It also provided direction for the participants as they sought ways to invest their lives into the lives of others to develop new leaders.

## Methodology

### Phase One

The first phase in changing the paradigm from a program-based approach to a more organic leader development model involved mentoring selected leader couples. Two married couples<sup>30</sup> volunteered to participate in this process and began working with my wife and me in October 2015, eventually becoming known as the Initial Leadership Emergence Team (ILET).<sup>31</sup> In 2016, we explored LET through monthly times of table fellowship and study that lasted two and one-half to three hours. Throughout the year we developed our personal narratives and shared them with each other toward the end of the phase.<sup>32</sup> In anticipation of ILET discovering how God had been involved in our lives, we consented to share this journey with others who would join us in the following phases. All three couples were already serving as leaders and were trusted by the church and other leaders.

---

have witnessed up to a 30% turnover in the church in one year. "Church Record," 1948-2018.

<sup>30</sup> John W. Ellas, *Church Growth Through Groups: Strategies for Varying Levels of Christian Community* (Houston: Center for Church Growth, 1990), 136, identifies groups numbering in the three to seven range have the most efficient face-to-face interaction. A second reason for choosing this size was a decision made by the group. They believed the depth of sharing we achieved would be hindered by the introduction of another couple or two. The third reason for this size was that it reflected what each couple would do as they worked with one or two other couples in the future.

<sup>31</sup> From this point on in the dissertation, these three couples will be designated ILET.

<sup>32</sup> Clinton, *Leadership Emergence Theory*, 70, speaks of leadership emergence study and provides a detailed list of what a narrative might include. Reese, *Deep Mentoring*, 95-97 123-24, 144-45, provides instruction for writing a narrative. Terry Walling, *Perspective Workbook* (San Bernardino, CA: Leader Breakthru, 2013), provides a tool for narrative development.



## Phase Two

ILET completed the narratives in November 2016 and immediately began planning to participate in Phase Two of this project which began in February 2017. Phase Two involved each couple partnering with at least one other new couple to expose them to LET. This included leading them through the same monthly discovery process as Phase One that culminated in the writing and sharing of their narratives and discerning how God had already been at work in their lives. My equipping role transitioned into coaching ILET while leading one more group through LET. This was “an intentional proactive intervention into the system, evaluating the effects of the intervention, and drawing conclusions in order to enhance future ministerial practice”<sup>33</sup> which made the methodology of this project a case study in leadership emergence pattern within a mature mid-sized church.

To determine the couples that ILET would work with in Phase Two, I requested input from the GFCC elders in December 2016 and submitted the potential list of couples to ILET who then chose and invited the Phase Two participants.<sup>34</sup> This cooperation with the elders reduced anxiety and increased trust. By the end of Phase Two all our elders had participated in the project. The basic criteria for selecting Phase Two couples included (1) a degree of spiritual maturity as demonstrated by their involvement with GFCC and (2) a high probability of staying in the Great Falls area for an extended period to facilitate long-term leader development. The second criteria was a consequence of GFCC’s highly transient membership due in part to our local Air Force base.

## Phase Three

Phase Three lasted from January through December 2018. The basics of Phase Two were replicated throughout the year. The major differences between Phase Three and Phase Two were (1) we established four groups of three couples instead of the previous phase of two groups with three couples and one group with two couples, (2) every group, except the one I led, had two couples who had completed at least one year of processing LET, and (3) we did not conduct quarterly follow-up meetings with group leaders.

---

<sup>33</sup> Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 144.

<sup>34</sup> This example of group involvement was employed throughout the process and was one indication of the organic nature of the project.

### General Timeline

A total of twenty-six people participated over three years and represented 12% of GFCC.<sup>35</sup> Twenty of these twenty-six participants were first-generation Christians. Throughout the process, I evaluated leadership development through field journaling and ILET feedback. I continued to use ILET to confirm or adjust my evaluations. A third verification occurred through an onsite visit from my major professor.

### Theology

Four questions help frame a theological understanding of leader emergence for GFCC.

1. How does discipleship equip Christians to develop spiritual influence and become servant leaders?
2. How do spiritual gifts enable Christians to influence others?
3. How does discerning the providential work of God develop spiritual influence?
4. What is the role of the local church in developing people who have spiritual influence to become servant leaders?

These questions help reframe our leader development paradigm from a program-based approach, that expected predetermined results by using the “right” programs, to an approach that seeks to discern God’s work which is already in progress in developing leaders. J. Oswald Sanders states, “God is always at work, unperceived by men, preparing those of his choice for leadership.”<sup>36</sup> Let us examine how these questions frame the theological discussion of Christian servant leader development at GFCC.

### Discipleship Preparation

How does discipleship equip Christians to develop spiritual influence and become servant leaders? This question explores the root motivations of those who follow Jesus and their understanding of what the Lord expects from their lives.

Adam and Eve were created in the image of God with the responsibility of administering delegated authority. They were to lead as God intended. The Fall corrupted this delegated authority and “the ideal of dominion degenerated into domination, and lies and mistrust undermined

---

<sup>35</sup> “Church Record,” January 2018 membership rolls.

<sup>36</sup> J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1967), 133.

the basis for teamwork.”<sup>37</sup> Through Jesus, however, God’s design for leadership through delegated authority was perfectly demonstrated. Paul’s insight into Jesus’ example as a servant leader is profound:

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! (Phil 2:6–8)

It is when people consider Jesus, his life, his service, his relationship of submission to the Father, and his sacrifice that they begin to see leaders, servant leaders, as God designed and as something to be imitated.

Jesus defined leadership, making it clear to his disciples that leading must be rooted in service to God and others. In describing greatness Jesus said, “whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:43b–45). Being a disciple of Jesus calls for leaders who serve.

Jesus becomes the ultimate example: “Then he said to them all, ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me’” (Luke 9:23). Paul wrote, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1). “Discipleship, as patterning our lives after Jesus, means that Jesus’s model and teaching become the standard by comparison to which we evaluate our innermost attitudes and our outward actions.”<sup>38</sup>

Consider what the coming and life of Jesus means as we discern discipleship’s relationship to servant leaders. Jesus serves as the model for us to imitate as we “have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator” (Col 3:10). The *new self* changes the narrative of our lives. We no longer interpret our lives solely from the perspective of self, but Jesus places us within his narrative where our old identity is destroyed and a new identity, the identity of a disciple of Jesus,

---

<sup>37</sup> Perry W. H. Shaw, “Vulnerable Authority: A Theological Approach to Leadership and Teamwork,” *Christian Education Journal* 3 1 (2006): 122.

<sup>38</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 292.

emerges. Our lives now have purpose and direction because they are tied to the ongoing work of God.<sup>39</sup>

Embracing the concept of putting on the *new self* impacts every area of life, even those where an individual is not specifically gifted. Disciples are generous, holy, part of God's community, etc., because God demonstrates these attributes first. Discipleship goes far beyond an attitude which seeks to do the minimum to be saved and embraces the desire to be completely transformed into the likeness of God. A discipleship application of transformation into the likeness and narrative of Jesus includes developing as a servant leader in all areas of life to the degree God gifts and enables, even if one does not possess the specific gift of leadership.

Consider the example of Timothy. Paul shares, "I have no one else like him who takes a genuine interest in your welfare" (Phil 2:20). Paul reminds the church of the servant leadership of Jesus which was modeled by Timothy to the church in Philippi. Timothy was "faithful in the Lord" (1 Cor 4:17). The church in Corinth received this instruction concerning Timothy, "when Timothy comes, see to it that he has nothing to fear while he is with you" (1 Cor 16:10). Timothy, though faithful, seemed to struggle with fear and needed encouragement to fulfill the leader roles he received. There is an appearance, if not an actual resistance, by Timothy to some aspects of leading. This struggle was highlighted as Paul commanded Timothy to not neglect his gift,<sup>40</sup> and later encouraged him to fan his gift into flames.<sup>41</sup> Yet, Timothy's reluctance did not result in rebellion to the will of God. Discipleship to Jesus Christ so transformed Timothy that he faithfully took up the responsibility of being a servant leader despite personal fears.

Timothy's struggles suggest that his leadership burden was not primarily based upon his natural giftedness, but instead, it was the call of discipleship to Jesus Christ that ultimately transformed Timothy into a servant leader. Concentration on discipleship and calling changed Timothy, and this understanding may be a key in helping every Christian strive to fully develop as a servant leader. Bob Logan notes that almost all Christian leadership concerns are fundamentally discipleship issues. "Discipleship is

---

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 292-93.

<sup>40</sup> 1 Tim 5:14. In the context, it appears this gift involves both teaching and preaching.

<sup>41</sup> 2 Tim. 1:6.

the often less visible but absolutely essential foundation upon which leadership must rest. Without it, everything else collapses.”<sup>42</sup>

This section began with the question, “How does discipleship prepare for the emergence of servant leaders?” A discipleship response to Jesus places everything one has, is, and will be under the lordship of Jesus Christ. This perspective enables God to fully utilize one’s God-given capacity and calls disciples to explore growth in every area, including becoming servant leaders.

### Spiritual Gifts

How do spiritual gifts enable Christians to influence others? In churches where I have served the focus has often been to enlist individuals to fill a specific need regardless of spiritual giftedness rather than allow their gifts to determine where and how to serve. In smaller churches, it is important to serve where one is needed. However, providing an environment for servant leaders to develop requires giving greater attention to spiritual gifts and not just congregational needs.

The gift of spiritual leading is from God:

We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully (Rom 12:6-8).

The gift of leading is specifically identified in this text. The word translated “to lead” is *προιστανόμενος* (root: *προΐστημι*) and signifies “to exercise a position of leadership, rule, direct, be at the head (of).”<sup>43</sup> It is translated in the NIV as “care for” (1 Thess 5:12), “manage” (1 Tim 3:4, 5, 12), and “direct”

---

<sup>42</sup> Robert E. Logan and Tara Miller, *The Leadership Difference* (San Bernardino, CA: Logan Leadership 2017), 19. Reese, *Deep Mentoring*, 222, agrees with this fundamental conclusion.

<sup>43</sup> Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature*, 3rd ed., rev. and ed. Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 870.

(1 Tim 5:17). It appears this gift encompasses the general ability to direct or manage.<sup>44</sup>

A short list of leadership gifts given by God to the covenant people is revealed in Ephesians 4:11. These include the leadership roles given to different types of servant leaders: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. These gifts all include a word gift<sup>45</sup> necessary to lead a larger group of God's people.<sup>46</sup> God's instruction to those with these roles includes the equipping of others for works of service (Eph 4:12). These roles function as leadership gifts because they require followers and they influence the body of Christ. Additional gift lists are contained in Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, 28-30; 14:26 and 1 Peter 4:10-11. As Ephesians 4 contains the injunction to "equip others," so these additional gifts are for "the common good" (1 Cor 12:8) or to "serve others" (1 Pet 4:10). The goal of these gifts is to serve and influence others.

The potential for leading through influence inheres in every spiritual gift. Clinton notes, "one who consistently exerts influence over a group is said to manifest leadership."<sup>47</sup> Malphurs warns against a broad expectation for all disciples to serve as leaders, however, "it is unbiblical to assume that all disciples have either the spiritual gift of leadership or unique God-given leadership abilities."<sup>48</sup> While Malphurs position is valid when specifically identified with a leadership gift, especially a word gift exercised in a group, it misses the potential every gift has for influencing others. In other writings Malphurs admits this perspective, "Unlike some of the other distinctives, it is not mandatory that believers have the leadership gift to lead, just as it's not necessary that a person have the gift of evangelism to share his or her faith."<sup>49</sup> Every Christian, every spiritual gift, fulfills a role in building up the church. **All spiritual gifts contain the potential for influence because they are vested with divine authority.**<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> J. A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 33 (London: Yale University Press, 2008), 649. L. Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1988), 442.

<sup>45</sup> Clinton, *The Making of a Leader*, 263, defines word gift as "a term describing the gift-cluster that is specifically used by God to reveal and clarify truth about Himself and His purposes and that will edify the believers and instill hope in them concerning God's present and future activity." These include exhortation, prophecy, teaching, evangelism, pastoring, wisdom, knowledge, and faith.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 56-57, argues that the ability to lead a group requires a word gift.

<sup>47</sup> Clinton, *Leadership Emergence Theory*, 40.

<sup>48</sup> Malphurs, *Building Leaders*, 190.

<sup>49</sup> Malphurs, *Being Leaders*, 21.

<sup>50</sup> Shaw, 127.

Consider Timothy and his spiritual gifts. Ephesus provided a challenging ministry context that required dealing with false teachers, establishing church leaders, addressing the needs of various groups, appropriate attitudes toward money, and other responsibilities. Timothy struggled with his role and appears to have desired a less demanding task than serving as the evangelist for the church in Ephesus. Paul encouraged Timothy to be the good soldier of Jesus Christ, the victorious athlete, and the hardworking farmer (2 Tim 2:3-7). However, Paul also understood that these ministry challenges demanded that Timothy remember and engage his gifts rather than just work harder. Paul admonished Timothy, “Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you” (1 Tim 4:14).<sup>51</sup> Paul later shared, “For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands” (2 Tim 1:6). Paul clearly expected Timothy’s gifting to influence others: “Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress” (1 Tim 4:15). Timothy’s employment of his spiritual gifts was essential to leading the church in Ephesus.

How do gifts enable individuals to influence others as servant leaders? Some gifts—the specific gift of leading and other verbal gifts, such as teacher or evangelist—require deliberate interaction between leader and followers. Other gifts provide an example that reflects God and calls others higher. When servant leadership is understood in terms of influencing a group over time, then all spiritual gifts contain the potential for influence because they are vested with divine authority.<sup>52</sup>

### Providence

How does discerning the providential work of God develop spiritual influence? This question is at the heart of Clinton’s LET. It takes seriously both the work of God and our response to divine care.

The doctrine of God’s providence assures God’s people that God foresees throughout all time and God acts to accomplish divine purposes.<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup> William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), 159, argues that Paul is reminding Timothy of an event that occurred as he was sent out from Lystra. T. D. Lea and H. P. Griffin *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, vol. 34 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 139, argues the event under discussion cannot be absolutely discerned.

<sup>52</sup> Shaw, 127.

<sup>53</sup> W. A. Elwell and B. J. Beitzel, “Providence,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 1792. J. E. Alsup, “Providence,” in *The*

“Providence is the sovereign, divine superintendence of all things, guiding them toward their divinely predetermined end in a way that is consistent with their created nature, all to the glory and praise of God.”<sup>54</sup>

Paul points to God’s previous activity in the lives of Christ’s disciples, “we are God’s workmanship” (Eph 2:10a). God designed, blessed, adopted, redeemed, and gave God’s people life. God’s fingerprints cover the lives of every Christian. Paul then proclaims, we are “created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Eph 2:10b). God preplanned and prepared good works for God’s people to accomplish. Christians are not left to their own devices, instead, they can trust and discover the works God has prepared.

Abraham, when asked by Isaac about the sacrifice that he and his father were to give, replied, “God himself will provide” (Gen 22:8). After God provided the ram for the sacrifice, “Abraham called that place The Lord Will Provide. And to this day it is said, ‘On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided’” (Gen 22:14). God foresaw the need and provided what was needed to accomplish God’s will.

In the New Testament Paul hints at God’s providential work in his short letter to Philemon as he addresses God’s work in the life of Onesimus, “Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever – no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother” (Phlm 15-16a). Paul proclaimed the truth concerning God’s providence to the Areopagus in Athens, “From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out the appointed time in history and the boundary of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him” (Acts 17:26-27). This text points to God’s providential work in the lives of all people.<sup>55</sup> Paul engages their belief that “gods rule their

---

*HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, 3d ed., ed. M. A. Powell (New York: Harper Collins, 2011), 841. W. A. Elwell, “Providence of God,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 650.

<sup>54</sup> Elwell, “Providence of God,” 650.

<sup>55</sup> There is a debate on the concepts of time and the lands in verse 16. Time could describe seasons or historical epochs and lands may indicate habitable areas or national boundaries. Darrel L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 566, concludes the purpose of Paul’s statement is to point to God’s sovereignty but there is uncertainty concerning specific definitions. He does provide resources for exploring the topic further. Carl R. Holladay, *Acts: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 344, and Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 735, both conclude Paul is referencing historical epochs indicated by the



worlds by providence"<sup>56</sup> by proclaiming the providential work of the one true God.

Clinton's LET references the early years of an individual's life as being their sovereign foundations. "God providentially works foundational items into the life of the leader-to-be. Personality characteristics, both good and bad experiences, and the time context will be used by God."<sup>57</sup>

Timothy's early years demonstrate God's providential work. Timothy's mother and grandmother established a foundation of faith that would shape Timothy's life (Acts 16:1; 2 Tim 1:5; 3:14-15). Timothy's Jewish heritage through his mother (Acts 16:1) eventually allowed him access, with Paul and Silas, into the synagogues for the preaching of the gospel. It is also possible that Timothy's culturally mixed home, Gentile father and a Jewish mother (Acts 16:1), meant he spoke more than one language and could adapt to the cross-cultural settings the mission field demanded.<sup>58</sup> One more piece of God's sovereign foundation in Timothy's life includes the impact of Paul's stoning and being left for dead in Lystra (Acts 14:19-20). Paul reminds Timothy of that time of persecution (2 Tim 3:10-11) as a means of motivating Timothy to not give up but to fight the good fight of the gospel. Even the hardship of persecution in Paul's life was providentially used to encourage Timothy.

How does discerning the providential work of God encourage leader development? When disciples recognize the providential work of God, they are provided a framework from which to begin to make sense of both the good and the bad in their lives by understanding that God has been and remains at work. Perceiving God's providence enables one to anticipate God's participation today and tomorrow. This confidence encourages disciples to step out by faith and live as servant leaders who influence others because their previous experiences now have a redeemed meaning. God's providence provides great hope to leaders because it means that God is somehow at work in all situations to eventually accomplish God's sovereign will.

---

rise and fall of nations. Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 315, notes this is a standard statement of God's creative power.

<sup>56</sup> Schnabel, 735.

<sup>57</sup> Clinton, *The Making of a Leader*, 26.

<sup>58</sup> Neil Cole, *Journeys to Significance: Charting a Leadership Course from the Life of Paul* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 54-55.

### Community/Church

What is the role of the local church in developing people who have spiritual influence to become servant leaders? Leaders do not emerge from a vacuum. Leader emergence requires a community where individuals function as leaders and followers, with roles often reversing depending on the responsibilities and tasks. Concerning leadership, Clinton states, “One who consistently exerts influence over a group is said to manifest leadership.”<sup>59</sup> Bass nuances the definition of leadership but recognizes leadership as the exercise of influence upon followers.<sup>60</sup> Northouse states, “Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.”<sup>61</sup> The Center for Creative Leadership views “leadership as the process of producing direction, alignment, and commitment in collectives.”<sup>62</sup> Zenger and Folkman conclude, “the best way to understand leadership is to examine the impact leaders have on the people they lead.”<sup>63</sup> Each definition includes an image of some type of community in connection with a leader.

The community of the local church provides an environment where the character of servant leaders is developed and employed. At its root, Christian character is meant to reflect the image of God. Consider Exodus 34:6-7a as a character snapshot: “And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished.”” Grace, faithfulness, love, justice, and more are all represented in God and meant to be reflected in the servant leader. Character involves letting the Spirit produce divine fruit (Gal 5:22-23) along with the proper ordering of life regarding self, others, and God. The church plays a tremendous role in character development through her teachings and examples, but the family typically provides the starting point for character development within the community. Kevin Youngblood argues individuals grow in character; first within the family, then as they function

---

<sup>59</sup> Clinton, *Leadership Emergence Theory*, 40.

<sup>60</sup> Bass, 14-15.

<sup>61</sup> Northouse, 6.

<sup>62</sup> Cynthia D. McCauley, Ellen Van Velsor, Marian N. Ruderman, “Introduction: Our View of Leadership Development” in *Handbook of Leadership Development*, eds. Ellen Van Velsor, Cynthia D. McCauley, Marian N. Ruderman (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 21.

<sup>63</sup> John H. Zenger, and Joe Folkman, *The Extraordinary Leader: Turning Good Managers into Great Leaders*, rev. ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2009), 10.

in the social community, and eventually operating as individuals who testify to God's wisdom in the larger society.<sup>64</sup> In *The Ascent of a Leader*, Thrall, McNicol, and McElrath argue for a particular type of family environment, a safe community, that extends grace and provides the foundation for learning principles that reflect the character of God.<sup>65</sup> Character development is essential for the servant leader. The family and local church play a crucial role in that development.

Consider the impact of both the family and the church upon the life of Timothy. Paul testifies about Timothy's family, "I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also" (2 Tim 1:5). Paul continues by reminding Timothy of his first encounters with scripture, "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures" (2 Tim 3:14-15a). The family and church powerfully shaped Timothy.

Luke points to the testimony of the larger community of the church as a place where Timothy continued to develop his character before he joined Paul: "Paul came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was Jewish and a believer but whose father was a Greek. The believers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him" (Acts 16:1-2). Timothy's character developed within the communities of the family and the church. This enabled Timothy to grow in his sphere of influence as a servant leader.<sup>66</sup>

The church continued to influence Timothy throughout his ministry. He accompanied Paul and his companions (Acts 16:6) as they preached in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. Even when Timothy was tasked with staying behind in Berea (Acts 17:14) he was accompanied by Silas. Timothy was not expected to become a leader on his own. Within the community of God's people, especially with Paul, Timothy was mentored while encountering opportunities to lead.

What is the role of the local church in developing servant leaders? The church provides the environment essential for character development

---

<sup>64</sup> Kevin J. Youngblood, "Cosmic Boundaries and Self-Control in Proverbs," *Restoration Quarterly*, 51, no. 3 (2009): 140.

<sup>65</sup> Bill Thrall, Bruce McNicol, and Ken McElrath, *The Ascent of a Leader: How Ordinary Relationships Develop Extraordinary Character and Influence* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1999), 34-36.

<sup>66</sup> Youngblood, 140.

needed in servant leaders. The church fosters mentoring. The church is meant to be a place of grace where disciples try, fail, receive grace, and try again, eventually growing into the servant leaders God called them to become. Good local churches provide a foundation where servant leaders can develop.

### Theological Conclusions

Discipleship, giftedness, providence, and community provide a theological foundation for leaders to develop and reproduce in Great Falls. Consider again these concepts through the four questions posed at the beginning of the chapter.

1. How does discipleship equip Christians to develop spiritual influence and become servant leaders? Discipleship to Jesus Christ is essential in developing servant Christian leaders at GFCC. The desire to be transformed into the image of Christ propels an individual to fully explore their God-given capacity as a servant leader in both attitude and skills to the degree God enables.
2. How do spiritual gifts enable Christians to influence others? All gifts are from God and are part of our God-given capacity. Some gifts like leading, teaching, shepherding, and evangelism include leadership influence since they involve both a leader and followers. On the other hand, utilizing other gifts from God often provides opportunities to influence through their usage.
3. How does discerning the providential work of God develop spiritual influence? God is deeply involved in all creation. When members of GFCC reflect upon their lives and how things have worked together, both good and bad, a window into God's providential work is opened. As we learn to see what God has been and is doing, trust in God grows. We understand God will continue God's work both in our lives and in the lives of those we lead.
4. What is the role of the local church in developing people who have spiritual influence to become servant leaders? The community of God's people can provide a setting where (1) the character and skills of servant leaders develop, (2) mentoring occurs, and (3) servant leaders practice leading in an environment of grace.

### Evaluation

I anticipated (1) making adaptive changes in my life necessary to equip leaders, (2) equipping participants to recognize God's work in their

lives, (3) facilitating the discovery of participants' giftedness, ministry burden, or calling, and (4) launching leaders to mentor one or two other couples in the LET process. I also expected this project to help GFCC grow beyond the program-based focus of a mid-sized church to aspects of a large church; demonstrated by leadership structures changing from a stretched cell to multiple cells<sup>67</sup> and congregational decisions moving from need-based to mission-based.<sup>68</sup> The two major theories explored throughout the project were Clinton's Leadership Emergence Theory<sup>69</sup> (LET) and Heifetz's theory concerning adaptive change.<sup>70</sup> Additional principles and theories were also applied. So how did it go?

### Adaptive Changes

At GFCC leader development had been approached as a technical change where a new class, a new program, a new something added to our existing programs would develop leaders. It has not worked. The first move in leader development required me to change, and change is hard. The predominant gift throughout my life in Christ has been evangelism. Shepherding and teaching represent two additional primary gifts, while an administrative gift also fits.<sup>71</sup> This project challenged me to transition into a leader who develops leaders. I needed to make an adaptive change, which meant a need to adjust my unrealistic expectation<sup>72</sup> that I could add this project into my already busy life. To gain leaders for GFCC meant sacrificing something, specifically my emphasis on personal evangelism.

In *The Effective Executive*, Peter Drucker concludes that a leader who impacts their organization turns his "attention away from his own specialty, his own narrow skills, . . . and toward the performance of the whole."<sup>73</sup> In other words, there are times personal interests must reside in the background while the leader employs gifts to transform the entire organization.

---

<sup>67</sup> McIntosh, *One Size Doesn't Fit All*, 37-46.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 73-82.

<sup>69</sup> Clinton, *Leadership Emergence Theory* and *The Making of a Leader*. Both books explore LET.

<sup>70</sup> Heifetz, *Leadership on the Line* and *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*. Both books explore this theory.

<sup>71</sup> Experience, community confirmations, and numerous spiritual gifts inventories have consistently highlighted these areas as being my primary areas of giftedness.

<sup>72</sup> Heifetz, *Leadership on the Line*, 13-15.

<sup>73</sup> Peter F. Drucker, *The Effective Executive: The Definitive Guide to Getting the Right Things Done* (New York, NY: Harper Business, 1967), 53.

My adaptive change involved a substantial time commitment while learning and applying new information as anticipated by Heifetz' adaptive challenge theory.<sup>74</sup> My work involved developing project tasks and goals, organizing meetings and agendas, communicating with project participants, leading a group, and mentoring other leaders. I anticipate the time commitment needed to continue to develop leaders using this model to be significant, possibly up to 200 hours per year or 10% of the workweek going forward.

The team readings, projects included in the agendas, and narratives meant the participants experienced an adaptive change. An indicator that this was an adaptive change in the lives of the participants was demonstrated by their struggles. During the Huffard site visit, one participant after another shared how hard this process of discovering God's work in their lives was. Participant P26<sup>75</sup> shared that she did not sleep well for weeks before sharing her story because it was so hard. She continued by stating it was God's story now and she demonstrated that by sharing her narrative with her children to help them see God's work in her life. P25 related that he went home after the first meeting thinking this was really stupid. Through the encouragement of P8, P25 continued the process and experienced one of the most compelling examples of the church's role in reinforcing the truth of God's forgiveness. When P25 finished sharing his narrative he was deeply grieved. Rather than let that grief go unanswered, P3 spoke into P25's life and said, "You are forgiven." P25 experienced a physical manifestation of God's great grace through the words of P3. P25 went from considering the process as being "stupid" to wanting to grow deeper. P22 revealed the first time she developed her narrative she had to relive feelings of abandonment but in the second sharing she was liberated and her pain could now be employed to minister to others. These are just a few of the personal stories shared by the participants which demonstrate an adaptive change is painful and hard, but worth it.

Transitioning to a mentoring role was a big part of my adaptive change. A principle from *The Leadership Baton* speaks to the importance of mentoring and highlights my mentoring challenge:

---

<sup>74</sup> Heifetz, *Leadership on the Line*, 14-15.

<sup>75</sup> Twenty-six individuals participated in the three-year project. These individuals will be identified as P followed by a number to provide confidentiality. This format will be used throughout this paper. The notes from the Huffard site visit are contained in my dissertation.

For mentoring to be ingrained in the culture of the church, it must begin with the senior pastor. Since other leaders tend to pattern their way of doing ministry after the examples of those who lead them, unless the senior pastor makes mentoring a priority it never becomes a core value in the church's culture. . . . This value is especially critical in churches that give preference to a strategy of leadership *development* over one of leadership *acquisition*.<sup>76</sup>

This insight is especially significant in my context because GFCC must develop leaders. Acquisition is not an option due to our location in the Northern Plains, far removed from Church of Christ training resources. Organic, in-house, development of disciples who properly exercise spiritual authority is essential.

This project revealed there remains a strong pull for me, as the minister, to move from a mentoring role back to leading and managing more than mentoring.<sup>77</sup> Jesus mentored the twelve. The principle of focusing on the development of a few faithful leaders of influence is God's design. However, a mentoring model faces strong headwinds in a medium-sized, program-oriented, administrator-led church.<sup>78</sup> My context may make this even more difficult as I have preached weekly at two assemblies during the past fourteen years. Each of these assemblies identifies as a small church that expects the minister to be relational and available.<sup>79</sup>

#### Trust: A Key to Equipping, Discovery, and Mentoring

Trust is a crucial component that was not on my radar at the beginning of the project. Our experience suggests **developing trust precedes and facilitates employing LET as a model for leader development**. This supports Thrall's principle where environments and relationships of grace are essential to empower emerging leaders:

---

<sup>76</sup> Rowland Forman, Jeff Jones, and Bruce Miller, *The Leadership Baton: An Intentional Strategy for Developing Leaders in Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 167.

<sup>77</sup> Evertt W. Huffard, *LeaderLoop*, Unpublished Paper, Leadership Development, Harding School of Theology, Spring 2019, 39.

<sup>78</sup> McIntosh, *One Size Doesn't Fit All*, 18-34, 59-70. Huffard, *LeaderLoop*, 39, also notes mentors face institutional and organizational headwinds.

<sup>79</sup> McIntosh, *One Size Doesn't Fit All*, 59-70.

Where do we begin the process of cultural change? It seems logical to start with principles, move to application in relationships, then hope for an environment to emerge. While this may sound logical and linear to a leader attempting to foster change, individuals rarely respond in such a planned fashion. Instead, they seem to embrace change from the opposite direction. First, they intuit the environment, feeling for a sense of safety and affinity before they enter into more intimate relationships. And only after relationships begin to “work” for them will they begin to understand, articulate, and espouse the underlying principles behind the process they have been through.<sup>80</sup>

I anticipated that the development of personal narratives would help us recognize God’s work in our lives because of personal experience.<sup>81</sup> This assumption was confirmed through a Likert scale questionnaire where every participant agreed or strongly agreed that they developed a greater recognition of God’s work in both their lives and the lives of others as they participated in the project. However, I did not anticipate the raw emotions experienced by the groups when the narratives were shared. Nor did I foresee the intense bond of trust this common journey would develop and how important trust-building experiences were. Stephen Covey’s trust formula states, “Trust always affects two outcomes – speed and cost. When trust goes down, speed will also go down and cost will go up. When trust goes up, speed will also go up and costs will go down.”<sup>82</sup> For us, this meant that raising trust decreased the fear of being vulnerable (cost) while enabling participants to authentically interact with each other within a few months (speed). Vulnerability is a crucial component of LET. Scripture bears witness that every biblical character who finished well was vulnerable.<sup>83</sup> **Therefore, trust is an essential component in the adaptive**

---

<sup>80</sup> Bill Thrall, Bruce McNicol, and Ken McElrath, *The Ascent of a Leader: How Ordinary Relationships Develop Extraordinary Character and Influence* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1999), 34-35.

<sup>81</sup> Evertt Huffard, Class Lecture Notes, Spiritual Leadership, Harding School of Theology, Spring 1997. I wrote a leadership emergence paper or narrative and it had a profound impact on how I understood God’s work in my life. My experience suggested the process would help others.

<sup>82</sup> Stephen M. R. Covey, *The Speed of Trust: The One Thing That Changes Everything* (New York: Free Press, 2008), 13.

<sup>83</sup> Clinton, *The Making of a Leader*, 204-05. Clinton speaks of maintaining a learning posture in order to finish well.



**change of leader development.** The following are some insights concerning trust gleaned from the project.

1. Trust was high as I began this project and remained high. Participation by key leaders reinforced the influence of previously established trust and allowed this process to begin, flourish, and continue.
2. Trust must be mutual for organic change to take root and grow. A reason this process was organic and reproducible lies in our willingness to trust each other to develop collaborative solutions to challenges.
3. Trust requires confidentiality.
4. The journey of seven or eight months where participants in the small groups grew to know each other through table fellowship and common assignments helped develop the trust needed to share honestly and deeply about their lives in the narratives. Our experience cautions against trying to get into the narratives any quicker. The time together was enhanced by limiting the group to six people, which created a manageable number of relationships.<sup>84</sup> This is considered an appropriate size for a primary group which is in the process of developing values.<sup>85</sup>
5. Trust development was verified in Dr. Huffard's site visit. During a debrief session several participants expressed how close they got to others in their groups. What surprised me was that trust went beyond the individuals within each group but was extended to others who had participated in the process.
6. Trust relies on personal relationships. P25 shared the only reason he kept participating with the process was that P8 invited him to experience LET and encouraged him to continue. **Trust produces influence.**

---

<sup>84</sup> Relationship formula  $R=N*(N-1)$  determines the number of relationships (R) in the group and is based on the number of people in the group (N). The dynamics of one more couple, our going from a group of six to a group of eight, would have almost doubled the potential relationships from 30 to 56.

<sup>85</sup> Ellas, *Small Groups and Established Churches*, 54-55. These groups can contain as "few as five or six members and can manageably stretch to fifteen or sixteen for short periods." Ellas also describes group typology and the interaction of relationship and task orientation, 65-75.

7. An important foundation for trust development lies in our church's long experience with LIFE Groups. These congregational small groups have built a culture of openness and confidentiality.
8. Another factor in developing a level of trust that enabled twenty-five of the twenty-six participants to be vulnerable enough to share the good, bad, and ugly in their lives is that I went first. I was the first to be vulnerable in year one by sharing hurtful and shameful moments and seasons of my life. I also went first in years two and three. Modeling vulnerability increased trust and provided me the opportunity to coach the other group leaders to go first. **Leaders must go first to influence a deeper trust.**

Based on the trust developed in community, twenty-five of the twenty-six participants prepared and shared a life narrative that explored the works of God and their responses. These narratives coupled with group assignments encouraged participants to explore their giftedness, including their influence upon others. Employing a Likert scale to determine the impact of the project on participants' perspectives revealed that twenty-two of the twenty-six participants agreed or strongly agreed that they more fully recognized their spiritual gifts with four participants indicating it had remained the same. However, twenty-five of the twenty-six shared that they agreed or strongly agreed that they were more willing to influence/mentor others to embrace God's work in their lives. One participant was neutral. The process of exploring LET within a trusting community deepened most participants' understanding of giftedness while instilling a greater desire to influence/mentor others.

Without trust, this project would not have developed Christians who were empowered to influence others. **We do not need the greatest skill set to influence others, but we do need to be trusted.** Bridges statement rings true, when people trust their leaders "they're willing to embrace change even if it scares them."<sup>86</sup> Our experience in trusting relationships took us to a level of community beyond LIFE Groups and laid a foundation for greater vulnerability, grace, growth, and influence.

### Growing Beyond a Program-Focused, Needs-Based Mid-Sized Church

LET marginally encouraged another step toward developing a multiple cell leadership structure. GFCC already incorporated aspects of

---

<sup>86</sup> William Bridges, *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 2009), 109.

multiple cells through two worship assemblies, an eldership, LIFE Groups, deacons operating as servant leaders, a strong women's ministry, and an apprenticeship program. This project developed another identifiable cell of new leaders in preparation for growth, but it did not make us a multi-celled church.

Rather than moving from needs-based decisions to mission-based, LET has developed some gift-based ministries. New evangelistic studies, a new hospital ministry, and raising up a new event coordinator were not predetermined mission-oriented outcomes. Other unanticipated new ministries have sprung up around LET participants. P5 has developed an acapella singing training ministry targeted at the high school and middle school students. P15, P25, and P24 have established a safety team.<sup>87</sup> P25 and P26 initiated a ministry to support our young adults. Since the completion of this project, other members have participated in LET and these participants have begun or are beginning a divorce care ministry and an abuse care ministry.

### **Conclusion**

We are still a program-focused mid-sized church. However, as a key leader in the church, I have been deeply changed. I have recognized a ministry burden to equip others and become a mentor of equippers. The church is developing new cells and expanding its ministries. It is especially encouraging to witness how this process transformed lives in the context of a grace-filled community and how it has empowered others to influence/lead.

The process of exploring one's life through the lens of LET in community while engaging with instructive material and discerning the works of God in a written and shared narrative has proven to be transformational. The process is challenging and often painful; however, when supported by a loving and trusting community one's struggles can be reframed to recognize the amazing work God has done and then embrace the good works God has prepared for us to continue to do. Recognizing God's work in our lives has motivated us to engage in the lives of others.

---

<sup>87</sup> This is in response to recent shootings and fits well with our child-safe program.

**Scott Laird** - Scott Laird became a Christian through the campus ministry at Montana State University in Bozeman, MT in 1978. There he met his wife of almost forty years, Patty. They have two married children and two granddaughters; twins will be added soon. Scott and Patty served as missionaries to Canada for twelve years before returning to Montana to serve as the evangelist for the Great Falls Church of Christ. Scott began his twenty-seventh year there on November 1, 2021.

Outside of the traditional roles of preaching and teaching, Scott invests in the wellbeing and unity of the churches in the northwestern plains of the United States and into Canada as a consultant and leader. Scott has partnered with Harding School of Theology by spearheading the past three Shepherds' Networks hosted in Montana. Scott consults and speaks for churches in the northwest. His primary areas involve leadership, evangelism, and small groups.

After receiving his Bachelor of Science in Business Management from Montana State University, Scott pursued a theological education beginning in 1997. Since then, he has completed the Master of Arts of Christian Ministry, earned the Master of Divinity equivalency, and in 2019 finished his Doctor of Ministry at Harding School of Theology. He is currently serving as an adjunct professor at Harding School of Theology.