***The Holy Spirit’s Role in Raising Up Spiritual Leaders.***

In my final paper for a graduate course in Foundations of Christian Leadership, there were five questions or issues I was to address. My purpose was to develop each of the assigned sections into a statement of principles that would serve as foundations for my responsibilities and continuing growth as a Christian leader. After completing the course, I was to develop a teaching or study to share with others. What follows is the first section of the paper, tweaked just a bit to make it into a study for others to read and consider.

In the first question or section, I was to affirm the role of the Holy Spirit in the emergence and raising up of Christian leaders. I found this to be very appropriate, because it seems to me that recognizing the Spirit’s role is key to everything else of importance in the realm of Christian life, leadership, and ministry. Let me first explain why I believe that…

***Why do we say the Spirit’s role is preeminent and crucial?***

***Biblical Foundations***

It is the Spirit who brings conviction to us and reveals Christ to our hearts. (Jn. 16:8; Matt. 16:17) It is through His agency that we are born again or regenerated. (Titus 3:5, 6) In other words, it’s by the work of the Spirit that we become Christians in the first place, and no one can even be a Christian without the work of the Holy Spirit! (Jn. 3:5; Ro. 8:9) When we accept Jesus as Lord and Savior, the Spirit then baptizes or immerses us into the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13), which makes us part of the Lord’s Church in the first place.

In addition, just as God has created our physical bodies with each organ and part in its place, scripture makes it plain (1 Cor. 12:18), that the Holy Spirit places us where He wants us in His Church and equips us with the gifts He wants us to have for the ministry to which He has called us. Jesus told His first apostles that they had not chosen Him, but He had chosen and ordained them to bear much fruit in their apostolic ministries. (Jn. 15:16) Likewise, Eph. 4:11 & 12 makes clear that God, by His Spirit, gives the ministerial gifts of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to the Church to equip all the members for the work of ministry. What all this means is that those called into the ministry are called by the Holy Spirit, and are likewise equipped by Him for the work they are to do.

This is true regarding the inner gifts and abilities all leaders have, and it must also be true regarding such things as the orchestration of events in our lives which bring us to awareness of God’s calling and purposes for us, and the development of our major emphases and foci in life. As Edgar Elliston points out in his book, *Home-Grown Leaders*, “The Holy Spirit plays the key role in the development of leaders.” (Elliston, 95)

***Personal History and Experience***

In my own life and in hindsight, I can certainly see that this is true. God used my grandparents and my parents, especially my mother, to bring me and my whole family to salvation in Christ. The Spirit inspired them to pray for us unceasingly so that His will could be accomplished. That’s how I came to Christ in the first place and how I was kept from falling away in the early years of my Christian life. During that time, God also led me through many witnessing experiences that brought about my interest in evangelism and apologetics. Then He used a friend to inspire me to go to Bible College and take the first steps toward ministry.

Later, I joined a small church where the pastor told me he saw God’s hand upon me for ministry, and began taking me on trips with him so I could learn from his example. It surely was the Spirit who gave that pastor the discernment to see that God was calling me. Likewise, He gave the elders of that same church discernment to recognize and set me apart as an evangelist. They called me one day to tell me they believed they should do this, and later presented me to the whole congregation and laid their hands upon me for this ministry.

God’s presence in my life motivated me inwardly, and caused doors to open before me, resulting in my leading Bible studies, taking over the youth group for a year, and leading teams out on the streets for evangelism. The Spirit inspired me and opened the doors for me to begin preaching in a juvenile detention facility, as well as in local jails, and on the streets. Also during my years at that church, I twice received prophetic words from visiting ministers, who spoke of my future involvement in missions and evangelism, and told me that I was to both evangelize, reaching out to the unsaved, and work within the Church, equipping the saints. These were all manifestations of the Holy Spirit, His way of preparing and training me through various servants of God.

In hindsight, I can see how the many experiences I was led through also worked character into my life. I was sometimes rebuked or corrected by my elders, but I was also assigned greater responsibilities as I was able to handle them, so that I was always being stretched, but never given more than would have been wise for me, never given responsibilities that would have overburdened or harmed me or the people I served.

At one point I even had marriage difficulties and my wife and me had to separate for several months. That got me into counseling, and caused me to see wrong attitudes and behaviors in my life that needed to change. So God used pastors, counselors, friends, and even people who were hostile to me to mold my character and prepare me for greater works as time went on. In looking back, it is easy to recognize that the Holy Spirit was in charge of my life, and He is the One who called and prepared me for ministry. (This wasn’t always that easy to see when going through these things!)

Now you might say, “That’s all well and good, Warren, but what does it have to do with me, or the subject of Christian leadership in general?” Well, you’re right, this is the story of my own personal development as a leader. But though each of us is unique as an individual, I believe it’s obvious the Holy Spirit’s role in raising us up for ministry is one thing all Christian leaders have in common. The earth is the Lord’s (Ps. 24:1), the Church is the Lord’s (Acts 20:28; Eph. 1:23), and the harvest is His as well. (Matt. 9:38) Every Christian worker or leader is called to work in the *Lord’s* vineyard (Matt. 20:1), and we are called, not to build our *own* kingdoms, but to allow the Lord to work through us to build *His*.

In comments he wrote concerning the Book of Acts, New Testament scholar Gordon Fee said, “You will notice as you read that at every key juncture, in every key person, the Holy Spirit plays the absolutely leading role. According to Luke, all of this forward movement (the advance of God’s Kingdom) did not happen by human design; it happened because God willed it and the Holy Spirit carried it out.” (Fee, 117, 118) This is so very true, and so important for all of us to remember! The work of the Church is the work of God’s Spirit.

***What this all means for us today.***

All of this being the case, what are the implications for us as believers, especially if we are currently serving as leaders, or have an inner stirring to become Christian leaders?

***For those who are only beginning to “emerge” as leaders or potential leaders***

If you are not yet a leader, but you feel an inner stirring or motivation to minister to others or reach others for Christ, what God would have you understand is that this very stirring within comes from His Holy Spirit. Not all believers sense such a stirring. That reality should encourage you. If God has called you to ministry, He is the One motivating you within. You need not worry or fret about how you’re to realize this calling or bring it to pass. I can tell you from my own experience that if God has called you, He will make a way for you to do what He wants you to do. Be encouraged by that, and rest in the fact that God will open the doors for you in His time.

In the meantime, pay attention to your walk with Him. Spend time each day studying His Word and developing your prayer life. Be sure to “plug in” to your local church and do all you can to serve there. Speak to your leaders and share with them what’s stirring in your soul. Be alert to opportunities that might come your way to serve, and be willing to step up to the plate whenever you get the chance. Then just be patient. If you’re faithful to do your part, God will get you where you need to be!

***For those who are currently serving as leaders.***

Now then, what about those of us who are already in positions of leadership? What are we to do as we recognize and remember the crucial role of the Holy Spirit in raising up leaders? There are two implications of this reality we must particularly pay attention to:

***“Keep your heart with all diligence” (Prov. 4:23)***

First, just like the emerging and hopeful leaders, we must strive to always maintain our own sensitivity to the work of the Holy Spirit in and around us. This means we must obey the many exhortations in scripture to “abide in Christ,” (Jn. 15), to “walk (or live) in the Spirit,” (Gal. 5:16, 25), to be “led by the Spirit,” (Ro. 8:14), to “keep ourselves in the love of God,” (Jude 20), or to “keep our hearts with all diligence,” (Prov. 4:23) In this way, we develop and maintain our relationship with God through His Spirit, such that we are spiritually minded, in tune, and in line with the will of God.

Only this kind of real and daily relationship with the Spirit enables and empowers us to be examples to others and truly love and serve them with God’s grace and power. As a branch bears fruit only by abiding in the vine, so we bear fruit only by staying in a living relationship with God through His Spirit. (Jn. 15:5) If we ignore this or take it lightly, we won’t be the examples and models God wants us to be. Our effectiveness will be greatly hindered.

***Be alert to the Spirit’s work in others around you.***

The second important implication of the primacy of the Spirit’s role in raising up emerging leaders is that we as current leaders must be alert to the Spirit’s work in others with whom we might have influence. If we are attentive, we will be able to see that the Spirit is working in this person or that and has given them gifts for ministry and a calling to use them.

I thank God for the ministry of intercession my grandmother and mother exercised in my behalf, empowered and led by the Spirit. I thank God for the pastor and elders who saw potential in me, and for the prophetic ministers who heard the Spirit telling them to give me a word from the Lord. There have also been godly professors and others along the way who have encouraged me or guided me.

Ultimately, it was the Holy Spirit who used these men and women in my life to accomplish His purposes. But at the same time, I recognize that, had they not been walking with the Spirit, they might not have noticed me. They might not have encouraged me or spoken words of guidance to me. The point here is that, as the Spirit has blessed and directed us, we must be sensitive to any way in which He might want to use us to help raise up others. This is a foundational principle of recognizing the Holy Spirit’s role in the emergence of Christian leaders.

Questions for consideration:

1. Are you currently in a position of spiritual leadership? If so, how did you sense the Spirit’s work within, to bring you to this place?
2. Do you currently sense a calling within, to serve God and His people in some way? What makes you believe this is a calling from God? What steps can you take to respond to it?
3. How do you differentiate between that which is of the Holy Spirit and that which might just be your own thoughts or desires? Are there any resources beyond yourself that you could take advantage of to help you in this regard?