Exploring Behavioral Exhibition of Servant Leadership Toward Developing a 'Heart of Service' in Contemporary Church

Adeola Opeyemi Faniyi

Introduction

The leadership of every organization is essential since it tells on the fulfillment of the organizational aims and objectives. The church as an organization needs leaders who can be vouched for, leaders who are ready to live and lead like Jesus, leaders who are prepared to lead like Christ with a servant-leader heart. This paper seeks to explore the behavioral exhibition of servant leadership toward developing a 'heart of service' in contemporary church leaders. It argues that contemporary church leaders among other things must cultivate the heart of service. It thus raises four pertinent questions – first, what is the concept of servant-leadership? Second, what has Jesus to do with servant-hood/ servant-leadership? Third, what are the essential marks of servant-leadership? Fourth, what are some principles of servant-leadership? And fifth, what are steps to take towards developing a servant-leader heart of service? All of these have been attended to in the paper. By way of definition, contemporary church leaders throughout this paper are viewed as God-called persons who have been saddled with the responsibility of leading the people of God in this contemporary time and as such are expected to lead their Christ the master leader.

The Concept of Servant-leadership

The term 'servant leadership' according to Smith (2005:3) was first proposed by Robert K. Greenleaf in 1970 as a theoretical framework that advocates that the primary role of a leader is to serve. This statement indicates that the proponent of servant leadership intends to pass across to leaders that leaders primarily are servants to the people they lead. However, this is not to say they are slaves, but they are to motivate their followers through their act of service as they serve in their leadership position(s). Also, while defining servant leadership according to the proponent – Robert K. Greenleaf (1996:33) Smith (2005:4) says it is "a new kind of leadership model – a model which puts serving others as the number one priority. Servant-leadership emphasizes increased service to others; a holistic approach to work; promoting a sense of community, and the sharing of power in decision-making." Therefore, leaders are expected to put their followers first in everything they do.

In addition, Adedokun (ny: 51) describes servant-leadership from a biblical point of view as "a term that describes the pattern and process of guiding people according to the instruction and model that Jesus gave." This description suggests that servant-leaders are those who carry out their leadership responsibilities in a manner that is consistent whit Christ's model of leadership. Therefore, Christian leaders must do accordingly as they discharge their leadership duties. This corroborates Spares (2005:2) description of a servant leader while quoting Greenleaf "one who is first a servant, it begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve first before being served." Therefore Christian leaders must be prepared to serve others before themselves.

Jesus and Servant-leadership

Christ is the model of servant-leadership. Wilkes (2015:11) opines that leading through the act of service is what Christ Jesus modeled among His disciples. The act of true servant-leadership begins with following the leadership style and teachings of Jesus on leadership in total obedience. Therefore, this attests to the fact that Jesus is the model of true servant leadership. This corroborates what is recorded in Mark 10:42-45

> *And calling them to Himself, Jesus said to them, you know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. But it is not to so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. For even the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.*

It can be deduced from the above scriptural passage that Christ firmly opines that serving is the essence of being called a leader and not the other way round. Hence, he called His disciples to follow his steps in leadership. This corroborates the Sanders (ny:23) who observes that Jesus taught extensively on being a servant-leader and He suffered not just to inspire good behaviour but to inculcate in them the spirit of servant-hood and a sense of personal commitment unto the point of death. Therefore, Christian leaders who claim to be Disciples of Christ must replicate this in their ministry.

Also, the Bible records that Christ during His earthly ministry exemplified this while He led the twelve disciples by washing their foot (John 13:1-17). Also, His response to the question of who the greatest is among His disciples in the latter part of Luke 9:46-48 "…for who is least among you all – he is the

greatest." Show that indeed Christ is an advocate of servant leadership.

Furthermore, Christ's selection of ordinary men further proved that He was and is a leader per excellence. Youssef (2013:12) opines that Christ is the ultimate model of effective leadership because He worked with and through people during His ministry on earth to achieve His ultimate goal – fulfilling the mission of His Father which is reconciling men to God. He started this by calling twelve men to Himself, twelve men from different walks of life including men who were not schooled but skilled in different areas. He called men like Simon, Andrew, James and John who were fishermen, Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot who were known to be political extremists, and people who worked with the government such as Matthew the tax collector. Christ throughout His being with them taught and challenged them towards fulfilling the ultimate vision of His Father who sent Him and as they followed Him they could testify that He was truly the Messiah who will save His people and at the end He founded and established His church through them. Therefore, Christian leaders must emulate this as they lead others towards reaching the ultimate goal of God's kingdom.

Marks of Servant-leadership

From the foregoing discussions, it can be stated emphatically that the ultimate mark of a true servant-leader is exhibiting Christ-like qualities in one's leadership responsibilities. Blanchard, Hybels, and Hodges (1999:23) say that Christ throughout His earthly ministry exemplified what it means to be a servant leader. He had a mission first to fulfill the assignment of His father and then committed His disciples to do carry on with the same. He transformed the lives of people within and around Him through his personal teachings and relationship with them. The ability to carry out God's mission and also train others to complete the mission is germane to the practice of servant-leadership in a local church. Therefore,

this indicates that a true servant-leader is one who is able to relate with his followers to the extent of transforming them into becoming what God intends and also lead them towards reaching the ultimate goal.

Furthermore, Smith (2005:4), Spares (2005:3-4), Toler (2007: 174-175), Blandino (ny: 1-15), Lichtenwalner (2008:np), and Gwana (2019:19-20) all identified the following as characteristics of servant leaders – having a listening ear, a heart to empathize, supporting others to find wholeness in oneself, awareness of issues going on with the followers, persuading others to reach the goal, ability to conceptualize solutions to foreseen problems, having foresight, having the heart of a steward, commitment towards developing and reproducing others, having a heart of service, compassionate, decision and courage, discipline, and ability to build community of people while they lead the way. All of these suggest that servant leaders are persons with a large heart and not driven by personal goals and achievement. Therefore, like Christ servant leaders must emulate this.

Also, Waddell (2014:8) posits that servant-leadership is a Christ-centered form of leadership. Hence the following are qualities of a servant-leader – the servant leaders serves those he leads by working with them to achieve a common goal, he nurtures those he leads so they may grow into mature persons in order to achieve great success, he serves solely to do the will of God, inspires others to do the same through his leadership skills and qualities, and a servant-leader is one who grow others to become servant-leaders. In agreement with this author's position, this researcher submits that only leaders who exhibit these qualities are worthy to be called servant leaders.

Furthermore, Ogden (2011:185) identifies six essential marks of servant-leadership in the church –

i. Security – servant-leaders feel secure and also believes in the value God placed over their lives as well as others without feeling threatened. It has been observed in noticeable numbers of leaders in the contemporary times that they feel threatened at the sight of a noticed grace in the life of a subordinate and that makes them do everything in their capacity to shut such a person up. However, in Christian leadership, this should not be the case.

ii. Finding joy in supporting and encouraging others – servant-leaders do all their best to develop and bring out the best in members of their team. They treat members as an important part of the team. They give room for individual differences.

iii. Servant-leaders do not clamour for praise or credit for their ideas and vision for their team they are rather concerned with doing whatever brings glory to God.

iv. Servant-leaders value relationships above all other things and they do their best to motivate instead of coercing them to work.

v. Servant-leaders shun the trap of authority and being too position conscious – they are good advocates of simplicity in their leadership responsibilities. Everyone to them is treated as important and equal before Christ.

vi. Servant-leaders base their leadership on character and not necessarily on the position they occupy.

In the same vein, Falotico during the 25th conference proceedings of Robert K. Greenleaf (p, 3) states the proponent believes of who a servant leader is. These can be adapted as marks of a servant leader. They are –

> servant leadership is a way of being that leads to a way of doing, and a way of doing that leads to a way of being, it is built upon principles of trust, awareness, empathy, and community. Servant-leaders embraces many paradoxes and profoundly of serving and leading. They are intimately personal and profoundly professional woven into fabric of whom one is with family, friends, colleagues, and community. They respect and welcome differing values, viewpoints, experiences, and draw upon one's best skills and behaviours to foster a culture that calls for being the best. They have the heart of service and a head for result.

The above indicates that servant-leaders are embodiment of humility and selflessness in the discharge of their duties and avoiding distractions and the pressures that come with the task of leadership. This is bolstered by George, Sims, McLean, and Mayer (20011:169-170) who opine that "the values that form the basis for authentic leadership are derived from your beliefs and convictions, but you will not know what your true values are until they are tested under pressure." Therefore, Christian leaders in discharging their leadership duties must be prepared to serve and not to be served.

Principles of Servant-leadership

Principle, according to Oates and Enquist (2010:76) is defined as "a noun that means a rule, tenets, or basic truth." In other words, principles are a set of guiding rules. Also, Macdonald (2009:98) defines principles as "normative in that they regulate the relation of actuality and potentiality as well as

operate across time, from the past and present to the future." It can be deduced from this definition that principles are good ways of balancing operation in all seasons. For leadership, George, Sims, MacLean, and Mayer (2011:170) views principles as "values translated into action." Therefore biblical principles of leadership in line with this definition are born out the leader's value and are put into action while leading. It should be noted, however, that biblical principle is relevant for all times and applicable to all seasons.

Oftentimes, principles are usually found in a manual of operation. The only manual of operation in Christendom is the Holy Bible. Hence, principles for servant leadership are drawn first from a biblical point of view. Gillcash (2010:40) opines that the servant-leadership principle is Christ's revolutionary way of the heart which engrosses one's principal belief and values, rivets one's affection on Jesus and compels one to live like Him. Therefore, the principles of servant-leadership revolve around the servant-leader Himself – Christ.

Wilkes (2015: 7) and Adedokun (ny: 51) identify seven principles of servant leadership from the Bible as exemplified by Jesus. These are – principle of humility and perseverance (Luke 14:7-11), following Jesus rather than seek position or title (Mark 10:32-40), give up personal rights in order to find fulfillment in service to others (Mark 10:41-45), take risk in serving others believing that God is in control of their lives (John 13:3), take up towel and basin-like Jesus in order to meet the needs of others (John 13:4-11), share responsibilities with others to achieve great success (Acts 6:1-6), and reproduce other servant leaders by empowering them to lead (Exodus 18:17-23). Therefore, since all of these principles have been noted in the life of Jesus the servant-leader, it is expected that contemporary leaders replicate these in the discharge of their duties.

Steps towards Developing a 'Heart of Service' in Contemporary Church Leaders

The heart is the seat of all decisions made in life, good or bad. It is therefore essential to be careful with issues that go on in the heart. No wonder the scripture warns "above all else, guard your heart for everything you do flows from it (Proverbs 4:23)." This warning is imperative for all who intend to make reasonable headway in life, especially as Christian leaders. Martin (2009:1) opines that

> The heart is the very seat of our soul, our emotions, and our passions. It is the very essence of our being and that which drives our thoughts and our motives…. The heart of a leader is the foundation of his or her life. It is what drives his or her passion for the lord and the passion for service in the kingdom. No doubt most of us feel called to lead in a deep way from the bottom of our hearts. Yet, with seemingly little notice, out of our hearts can spew some of the most ungodly thoughts and attitudes – even in the midst of ministry.

The above further bolsters the importance of the heart of every Christian leader. Their heart must be diligently guarded and taken care of because as it can be deduced from the above, the heart is the driving force. No wonder the scripture says "as a man thinks so he is (Proverbs 23:7)." Therefore, Christian leaders must pay attention to their hearts and take deliberate steps towards developing a heart that leads like Christ. Below are notable steps to take.

First, contemporary church leaders must understand that reproducing other leaders is crucial to leading like Jesus. Christ during His earthly ministry called twelve men to be with Him in order to carry on with the mission even after He must have left them. However, in most churches today it has

been observed that most leaders are rather selfish in their approach to leading. They fail to reproduce others because they feel in-secured this is substantiated by Surratt (2009: 22-29) who opines that one of the major ways of succeeding in a team-based ministry is delegating and also realizing that things that seem to be a burden to one are a blessing to another. Church leaders are supposed to prepare the people of God to serve God but instead of doing that most church leaders do not and so they end up frustrated and exhausted thereby becoming a major obstacle to the growth of the people of God. It can be deduced from this discourse that church leaders are expected to build up others but the reverse is the case and the reason can be traced to in-security. Therefore, church leaders must understand that God is the owner of the church and not them and if Christ had not reproduced Himself in His disciples the Gospel will not endure till now.

In addition, while drawing leadership lessons from Christ, Toler (2007:171) pointed out that the lives of His disciples never remained the same after they had had an encounter with Him. He did everything in His capacity to help them achieve their best. He sent them out in pairs and later in greater number just to train them for the time they will no longer have Him around. It was later said that although Peter is un-schooled he was said to have been with Jesus because of the way he taught and presented the Gospel. Therefore, Christian leaders like Jesus must ensure that the lives of the people that come in contact with them in life must be better off than the way they were when they had not come in contact with them. It must be noted that Christ did not coerce the people to do the things they did instead they were motivated to do them and that is true leadership. Novak (2013:20) defines leadership as “the art of getting someone to do something you want to be done because he wants to do it.” Hence, Christian leaders must emulate Christ.

Second, contemporary church leaders must understand that leading starts with following. A good leader is often said to be

a good follower. Leaders at every point of their lives are expected to follow Christ and receive from Him on a daily basis as they lead His people also they are expected to have persons they look up to in their ministry. Toler (2007:211) opines that leader's permission for directing God's people comes from God as they yield to His leading for their lives. Therefore, leaders must decide to submit to God's leadership every day and also listen to godly counsels. This corroborates George, Sims, MacLean, and Mayer (2011: 173) who communicate that leaders on their own cannot achieve reasonable successes; even the smartest of executives need the support and advice of others because it is easy to lose one's way when these are missing. However, to say one is a follower does not mean leaders who have mentors must follow blindly. Toler (2007:211) states that "followership is not blind acceptance, nor is it a sign of personal weakness. Rather, it is an important character trait for any person who hopes to be effective in leading others." Hence, leaders must have the trait of being a good follower of Christ the ultimate leader and a wise follower of those who has gone ahead in the ministry.

In addition, Martin (2009:1) opines that in order to be a servant leader, leaders must keep in mind the fact that they are first servants before being a leader and as such it is expected that they model Christ-like servant-hood in all situation of leading and always remember they are answerable to God for their leadership. This further bolsters the fact that leaders must learn to see themselves as followers. Hence, contemporary church leaders must be prepared to first see themselves as servants who have been given the privilege to lead others and not as Lords of the people they lead. This corroborates the view of Witmer (2010: 41) who observes that throughout the New-Testament, there are no traces or evidence of hierarchy among the elders instead they operated in unity and parity. Therefore, Christian leaders must be mindful of leading their lives like the boss while others are subordinate.

Third, contemporary church leaders must understand that the fact that they are church leaders does not qualify them to be called spiritual leaders an encounter with Christ is essential. Toler (2007:210) notes that "being a minister does not make one a spiritual leader. You must get close to God, know His mind and heart, and then represent Him to your people." This statement indicates that there is more to being called a spiritual leader. Gangel (2011:117) substantiates this by saying that leadership can only be biblical when God-called men and women respond in obedience to God's call and they understand and give due recognition to preparation and the place of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, contemporary church leaders must first get connected to Christ. This corroborates the view of Toler (2007:170) who opines that

> Your power for leadership is in your connection to Jesus Christ. A Christian leader will never lead people forward for Christ without first taking his or her own trip to the cross. Without the electricity of Calvary's flow, human leaders are powerless. There is no bypass. Personal faith in Jesus Christ and the empowerment of His spirit is the great prerequisite for Christian leadership.

The above statement indicates that the only requirement for a leader to be called a leader in the Christian fold is an encounter with Christ for it is in this encounter that they are able to grow daily towards developing the heart of the Servant-leader. This suggests that the personal life of a leader is germane to his ability to develop a heart of a servant leader. Walker (2007:114) opines that "how a leader manages his personal life affects every other area of his life; his work, family, and his friends." Therefore, contemporary church leaders must take care of their personal life.

Also, church leaders must be mindful of their prayer life. The leader must live and lead a prayer life worthy of emulation.

The prayer life of a servant-leader must be second to nothing. Wilkes (2014:36) while quoting Sanders posit that "in nothing should the leader be ahead of his followers more than in the realm of prayer yet the most advanced Christian is conscious of the possibility of endless development of his prayer life." This position suggests that the leader in all must be able to prayerfully receive from God for his followers. Christ modeled this during His earthly ministry. On many occasions, it was recorded that he withdrew to places to pray – Luke 5:16; 6:12; 9:28 and 11:1 among other passages. Therefore, Christian leaders must pray for and with those they lead.

Fourth, contemporary church leaders must be humble. Humility is a crucial character trait of a leader who aims at developing a heart of service. Such leaders must learn not to look out for credits from people instead let God reward all efforts. Toler (2007:173) communicates that leaders who look out for people's credit and applaud all the time will end up a frustrated solo performer because no team will work with a selfish leader. Therefore, contemporary church leaders must be humble and never lookout for the failure of others before they succeed. It has been observed by this researcher that noticeable numbers of church leaders in the contemporary times tend to look out for the failure of others and also feel bad when credit or applause is not given to them. However, Christ during His earthly ministry modeled humility and often tells those He healed to rejoice in God instead of shouting it. Of a truth the empty barrel makes the loudest noise as the saying goes. Leaders must be humble even when their works are yet to be rewarded or acknowledged.

Fifth, contemporary church leaders who aim at developing a heart of service must dare to be different. They must be different in their leadership administrations not following worldly standards instead of those found only in the scriptures. Gangel (2011: 184-185) posits that "servant-leadership is not non-leadership instead servant leaders lead with a style not reflective of popular culture." Considering this,

would be forced to ask what if they are against me? The response is not farfetched because even Christ in His days on earth was opposed because of His leadership styles and principles. Hence Christian leaders must expect that they will be opposed to doing things contrary to worldly standards. It is the culture of the world that leaders coerce followers and bring them to subjection under their 'rulership' while in the standard of God's kingdom, everyone is treated as an important member of the family of God. The concluding words of Adedokun (ny: 51) further bolsters this

> Servant-leadership is not weak leadership. It is subservience to those who are being led. It is not acting to please followers. It is not a failure to assert authority. It is not inability to take decision, cast the vision, and provide direction. Servant-leadership is a service-oriented ministry. It is leading with a lifestyle of giving priority to giving rather than receiving. The greatest example of this is, of course, Jesus Himself who gave up all His rights and became a mortal to save the world. If we will lead biblically, then we must do so according to Jesus' pattern.

Therefore, Christian leaders must be prepared to lead like Christ did since He is the ultimate example. They must lead the church to be a community of service where servings others is a lifestyle. Wilhoit (1991: 29) opines that until service becomes a natural part of church members' lifestyle the church is not qualified to be called a serving church. Therefore, Christian leaders must teach their members to serve as they as well serve.

Conclusion

God-called leaders must emulate Christ the leader of all leaders who throughout His earthly ministry was said to be servant-leader. Developing a heart of service is crucial to having a successful ministry. However, developing the heart of a servant-leader cannot be possible if deliberate steps are not taken. This paper has been able to explore behavioral exhibition of servant leadership toward developing 'heart of service' in contemporary church leaders. It has carefully proffered solutions to the questions raised above. It is thus sufficient to conclude that contemporary church leaders among other things must cultivate the heart of service.

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