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Worldview

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Traits of a Christian Leader

To be a Christian leader, a pastor, is by itself a great privilege and an awesome responsibility. People count on you and see you as someone to look upon; as an example, and as a pattern of what they should become. They are proud of you and they have great respect for what you do as you help them ‘attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ’ (**Ephesians 4:13; NIV**). Therefore, a Pastor should always be careful of the life he or she is living. A Pastor’s life success or failure will definitely have a direct impact, not just on the ones he or she is leading, but on every one who knows or who hears about that Pastor’s integrity or his or life’s debacle. If a Pastor’s life exhibited a positive influence on his or her congregants, this influence would be a redeeming one. Nevertheless, if the influence displayed is negative, the effect would be catastrophic for everyone else and especially for the Pastor. Jesus puts it this way, “Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. 2 It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin” (Luke 17:1,2; NIV). Consequently, in this philosophical background of this project, I intend to briefly delineate what it takes to be a Christian leader or what should characterize the life of a Pastor?

To be a Christian leader of long tenure and in order to be effective in ministry, one has to cultivate the fear of God. Nowadays, we have great and intellectual preachers and Pastors. They know almost everything in the bible and can teach it impeccably. They know about the great prophecies of the bible; they know all the doctrine of the church, and very admire by the people of God. Yet, when it comes to biblical principles, ethics, standards, disciplines, sacrifice, humility, values, morals, they fall extremely short. They have a different worldview; one that is not biblical. The bible says in Proverbs 9:10 that "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding (NIV). But what does it mean to “fear the Lord”, and why is this fear the beginning of wisdom?

The fear of God is a biblical motif that incorporates an attitude of awe and reverence for the holy one. It is the suitable and fundamental response of a person to God. Simply put, to fear God is to have faith in Him, to obey, to love and to serve Him. The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery advances that “To “fear” God or be “God-fearing” is a stock biblical image for being a follower of God, sometimes it implied contrast to those who do not fear him. The very frequency of the references signals that the fear of God is central to biblical faith, and the relative absence of this ancient way of thinking in our culture should give us pause.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

And the bible asserts in **Deuteronomy 10:12-13** “And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, 13 and to observe the LORD's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good”. Based on this text and other references in the bible, one can say that the fear of God is synonymous with serving God and obeying to his commandments (Deut 31:13; 1 Sam 12:14). The fear of God is connected to wisdom (Ps 111:10; Prov 9:10; 15:33) and is part of the covenant relationship between God and his people (Ps 25:14; 103:17–18). To fear God is to have respect and admiration for him (Ps 33:8; Mal 2:5 [[2]](#footnote-2)RSV) and to trust him (Ps 40:3; 115:11), Fearing God means hating and avoiding evil (Prov 8:13; 16:6). (Dictionary of Biblical Imagery, p 277). The NASB Topical Index states that “One who fears God takes His person and holiness seriously and consequently has a repulsion toward sin and all that is contrary to God’s character (Pr 16:6).[[3]](#footnote-3)

It is equivalent to commit suicide when one in ministry with no fear of God. Ignoring the fear of God is recipe for disaster. When we nurture and cherish the fear of God, it is for our own good. It proves that we love ourselves, our close relatives, the people we have been entrusted to oversee, and that we are genuine leader. A Christian leader should be mindful of the fear of God and make this biblical motif a leading principle to his or her ministry. Ellen white attest to this when she says this: “Men in responsible positions, whose influence is far-reaching, are to guard well their ways and works, keeping the fear of the Lord ever before them (Counsel on Health, p. 360).”

There are many benefits of keeping the fear of the Lord before us. By keeping the fear of the Lord ever before us, it would help us to avoid sinful deeds. The fear of the Lord has the force of a moral imperative. God will bring blessing us (Ps 115:13) and will reveal in us (Ps 25:14). God will have mercy upon us (Lk 1:50). Moreover, those who fear God will gain life (Prov 19:23), knowledge (Prov 1:7) and wisdom (Prov 9:10). The wisdom that instigates the fear of God is faithfully related to knowledge and obedience (Ps 111:10). The fear of God is a central quality of people who identify themselves with God and obey Him.

And these last days, the whole earth is called to “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water." (Rev 14:7). Truly, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” For, those who hearken diligently to the voice of the Lord and cheerfully keep His commandments will be among the number who see God.

To neglect the fear of the lord is to live without God. One would ought to be viewed as a fool to live without God in this world. In our contemporary society we are so concerned with security, protection or safety on the highway, safety in the home, security in old age. We carry insurance for all of these, and we make sure our premiums are paid up. That is the wise thing to do. But, what about eternity? Are you making any plans; do you have insurance for that? Oh, how foolish it is to live this life without God! Or more importantly to be a Christian leader devoid of the fear of the Lord. If one aspires to have a successful and enduring ministry, this person must cultivate the fear of the Lord. For “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”.

In addition to cultivating the fear of God, a Christian leader has to have clear understanding of his or her call to be effective and last in ministry. Many Christian leaders have been badly wounded in ministry, some by their own hand and some by the hands of others. And the reason, sometimes, is a distorted sense of their calling into ministry. God calls everyone to the saving knowledge of His Son. But God does not call everyone to be a leader, a pastor, or ministry director. One ought to evaluate his or her call to see where God has called that person to serve. By learning essential beliefs about calling and a means for more tangibly assessing our own calling, we can be stimulated toward ministry accomplishment while being directed away from ministry jeopardy.

The greatest good one can to do to himself or herself is to examine or evaluate his or her calling to confirm its genuineness. Failure to do that can leave one ambivalent and can lead to ministry fiasco. Thomas Oden declares, “Classical pastoral wisdom has thought it to be testable, and dangerous if unexamined (Oden, p.18).” And the best way to start this examination is to inquire of the One who calls. God is the one who calls; and if we are earnestly desiring to know, He will reveal Himself to us. Sometimes the call could be obvious as in the case of the Apostle Paul. That was a direct confrontation by God, where the almighty made it clear that he has chosen him as his own instrument. The Lord says in Acts **9:15** “This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel” (NIV). But not all calls are done by direct confrontation. It may arrive that one cannot determine if he or she has been called by God. That person has to go on his knee and begs for confirmation from God. This is very important. As Wilson and Hoffmann state, “Without a personal invitation from God to serve as a minister, we lack the distinguishing factor for sustained ministry effectiveness: perseverance. When all else is in doubt, confidence in such an invitation is critical. We must know without question that we’ve been called to do exactly what we’re doing. Sometimes this “knowing” will be the only tangible anchor during the stormy seasons of ministry—and of those, there will be plenty” (p.66).

When we are certain that we have been called by God, we know we are not alone in ministry. The one who calls us is ever present, ever watching, ever providing all the resources we need to be successful in what we are doing. Ministry is not something to be taken lightly. It is not something to be hasten into without conviction of what one supposes to be doing. Hurried decisions often result in lamentable consequences. If we feel we’re serving in a milieu that isn’t beneficial to our calling, we should slow down and allow God to give us lucidity about our situation rather than jump into ministry nightmare. Knowing you are called by God helps one to be committed and to move forward in faith. It gives us a sense of purpose. All that one does, all that one is, and all that one has is devoted with a special consecration, vitality and direction to the one who has placed the call on our life. A call to ministry is God’s invitation to be set apart by God for surrendered vocational service. Therefore, the call of God leaves no place for pride. It requires humility, contentment, integrity, intimacy with God, or simply put: to be like Jesus in everything.

Besides cultivating the fear of the Lord and discerning the call of God in one’s life, the Christian leader that wants to sustain long-term effectiveness in ministry should possess the character traits of Jesus. There are many character traits of Jesus, which need to be emulated by all. We can mention for example: Loving, compassionate, Prayerful, self-control, humble, Patience, committed, forgiving, servant, contentment, integrity, etc. For this project, we will only consider the following: Humility, contentment, and integrity.

According to Tyndale Bible Dictionary, “**HUMILITY** is a condition of lowliness or affliction in which one experiences a loss of power and prestige…Humility is a grateful and spontaneous awareness that life is a gift, and it is manifested as an ungrudging and unhypocritical acknowledgment of absolute dependence upon God.[[4]](#footnote-4) The Christian leader, therefore, ought to be humble. For, one cannot cultivate the fear of the Lord without being humble. “A person cannot be fearing God (worshiping, trusting, obeying, and serving Him) and be filled with selfish pride at the same time”.[[5]](#footnote-5) Humble persons conduct themselves Christ-likely. They do not threaten or challenge another’s rights, nor do they claim more for themselves than has been duly allotted them in life. They even stay a step below or behind their rightful status. “Thus, humility is a socially acknowledged claim to neutrality in the competition of life. Conversely, to attempt to better oneself at the expense of others, to acquire more than others, to strive for honors others currently enjoy are all instances of proud and arrogant behavior”.[[6]](#footnote-6)

The humble are known for their fear of the Lord (Prov 22:4), but false humility comes from the ungodly, who have no place in heaven (Col 2:18, 23). Believers are commanded to assume humility before everyone (Phil 2:3; Titus 3:2) and specially to humble themselves before God (Ex 10:3; Prov 6:3; Mt 18:4; Jas 4:10). We are even to be clothed with humility (Col 3:12; 1 Pet 5:5). Humility is always the proper posture before God and others.

The greatest sin according to Ellen White is pride and self-sufficiency. Those who are not humble tend to be prideful and self-sufficient. There is a danger to the effectiveness of Christian leader to finishing well in his ministry when he or she is devoid of humility. In the book Christ’s object lessons (p.154), she says this: “The evil that led to Peter’s fall and that shut out the Pharisee from communion with God is proving the ruin of thousands today. There is nothing so offensive to God or so dangerous to the human soul as pride and self-sufficiency. Of all sins it is the most hopeless, the most incurable.”

Many people in this country are running after fame and great functions. They want to be noticed and they want to have the approval of people. Almost everywhere in the world, people want to be pastors because a pastor is a highly respected person in the community. However, the Lord has showed us a different model. Our attitude, as Pastors, must be the same as that of Jesus (Philippians 2.5). Jesus has left the throne and glory of heaven to be born as a baby, in a manger. He has identified with the poor and the homeless. He has even taken the role of a servant washing the feet of his disciples. Jesus said to his disciples, in **John 13:14-16**  “Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. 15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. 16 I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. " John the Baptist spoke about Jesus, "He must increase, but I *must* decrease” (John 3.30). Nowadays, pastors must have the same attitude, the same characteristics. Our goal is to exalt Jesus and elevate him as the hope of the world. It means that we have to humble ourselves and erase ourselves so that people see the image of Jesus in us.

Another trait of Jesus that need to be emulated by all and specially the Christian leader is **contentment**. Contentment is defined as a state of happiness and satisfaction. It is that disposition of mind in which one is, through grace, independent of apparent circumstances, so as not to be moved by greed or envy (James 3:16), anxiety (Matt. 6:24, 34), and discontent (1 Cor. 10:10). The Christian spirit of contentment follows the vital commandment of Ex. 20:17 against covetousness. It reverberates the exhortations of the prophets against avarice (*e.g*. Mi. 2:2) and makes supreme the example and teaching of Jesus, who rebuked the discontent which grasps at material possessions to the neglect of God (Lk. 12:13-21). It calls for total confidence in our Father in heaven as He will dispel all anxiety concerning physical supplies (Mt. 6:25-32). A Christian leader that does not learn to be content in all circumstances denies the faith he or she is professing. Christian leaders are not to be anxious about anything but are to be ***content*** in whatever situation they find themselves. And this is the epitome of long-term effective pastoral ministry. To neglect to be content, with appointed wages, with what things one has, with food and raiment, is to embark on the road that leads to the death.

To be content is to accept things as they are; as the wise and loving providence of the compassionate God who knows what is good for us, who so loves us as always to seek our good.

Pastor's work is different from other work. God called pastors for a special mission. Pastor ought to recognize that they do not work for money, prestige or security. We work for the king of the Universe. Everything that the king possesses is ours. And the kind possess everything. Pastors ought to know that they are pastors because God has them called. Jesus said it this way, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit-- fruit that will last" (John 15:16). Therefore, contentment should characterize the life of those who are called by God. For God will never leave nor forsake those he has called. He will provide.

Moreover, another trait that needs to be exhibited by all Christians, specially a Pastor, is integrity or probity. The bible says that “The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity. (Proverbs 11:3). If a Pastor wants his or her ministry to be effective, he or she must have integrity. The word can be defined as the firm adherence to a code of moral values. One person that displays that trait very well was Joseph. He had personal integrity. So, even though, he was a slave in Egypt, Joseph held for himself a certain standard of relationship toward his master. Potiphar had entrusted to him the supervision of his house. And that trust was a bond in Joseph’s eyes. He would not steal his master’s possessions, he would not sabotage his master’s home, he would not touch his master’s wife. Joseph has integrity. He was an integer, a whole number. He was undivided, the same person all the time. Ellen Whites testifies of Joseph’s integrity when she says this: “To the ancient Egyptian nation God made Joseph a fountain of life. Through the integrity of Joseph, the life of that whole people was preserved” (The Acts of the Apostles 9.14). That’s the way a Christian leader should be. A Christian leader preserves lives, not destroy them or self-destroy. When one has integrity, it will be seen in sincerity, truth, pure heart, single eye, honesty, genuineness. Integrity, indeed, is fundamental to true character.

A pastor as a Christian leader must be without blame. He must be respected by people outside the church (1 Timothy 3.2, 7). Pastors must to be trustworthy and are to be known as people who keep their words. Many times, people have lost faith in a pastor who has promised to do something and did not do it. We must be careful about what we say, and not inflate the truth or gossip. A pastor must not share with others what has been said in secret to him. A Pastor must also be completely trustworthy about finances. When people lose faith in a pastor, that pastor's ministry is over. As Paul tells us, the pastor's entire reputation in church and in the  
community must be faultless.

All in all, the role of a Christian leader is of great importance and immeasurable value in the organization and functioning of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In reality, the success or failure of the church as a whole depends largely on the pastor because of the unique and intimate position he occupies in the church where he is called to fulfill his priestly functions. At all times and in all circumstances, the pastor must reflect the life and teachings of Christ in his ministry and his job. For, Leadership is not about popularity or personality or charm. It is about fulfilling God’s purpose in life.

Therefore, the Christian leader ought to cultivate the fear of God; without which, he or she will not endure in ministry. The vocation of the pastor must come from God and his ministry must demonstrate at all times that he or she has been accredited by God himself. If one’s motivation or inspiration for stepping in ministry does not have its source in God, there is a high possibility that this leader may fail. The Christian leader must exhibit Jesus’s traits in his or her life. We must humble and fill with contentment. The Christian leader ought to have integrity. The Pastor must be filled with the Holy Spirit and devoted himself passionately to prayer and the study of the Word of God. His attachment and consecration to God must be absolute. He must be a man of unshakeable faith, noble visions, and moreover, full of love. The pastor, in his ministry, must combine competence and a vast culture with good speech and eloquence. Dignity, courtesy, humility and simplicity will be his attributes. His character will be marked by sincerity, loyalty, tact, patience, kindness, friendliness, seriousness, skill, and consistency. He must be aggressive, zealous, resolute and courageous. In addition, he must be careful, impartial, honest, hardworking, selfless, temperate, gentle, and must have high ideals.

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