

THE MARKS OF A SUCCESSFUL PASTOR

John Olu Adetoyese

Introduction

It is noteworthy that pastoral ministry is not a mere or ordinary ministerial assignment. Pastor holds and occupies an awesome position in the church of Christ.¹ Adetoyese wrote that the call into the pastoral ministry is an essential fact of the ministry.² Thus, ‘calling’ is of immense note in pastoral ministry. It is beyond preaching every Sunday. Adetoyese comments that preaching every Sunday is an iota part of the pastoral ministry. Many are the things to be reckoned with in relation to the marks of a successful pastor.

Someone rightly describes leadership as service. The question then is, ‘what type of service? Is it to self or to humanity?’ Little wonder that there is a tensed problem in the leadership structure within and outside the country. The question that comes to mind is that “leadership and administration, which should be preferred? The argument is not on this issue but it centers on leadership (in pastoral context) within the church context. Casey opines that a leader shows the way, gives and directs.³ Thus, there is much to do as leadership in the church is concern. Thus, the pastor models the way. This is like a recap as relating to pastoral ministry. The point of argument is on the marks of a successful pastor or minister. However, defining some key variables will enhance adequate comprehension in this succinct research.

¹ Jim & Carolyn Murphy, *An International Minister's Manual* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publisher, 2000), 125

² John Olu Adetoyese, *A Handbook in Pastoral Theology* (Oyo, Nigeria: Refrost Nig. Limited, 2014), 11.

³ Casey Treat, *Church Management: Leading People in Church Growth* (Benin City, Nigeria: Anointed Ministries Publication, 1989), 2.

Definition of Terms

PASTOR: An officer put over a church as God's representative to preach the truthful and religious ways to the members of a church. He is often referred to as a shepherd in charge of a flock.⁴ A pastor is concerned about the well-being of the church of God. He is accountable to God who has placed him there as overseer. It is good to note that the ministry of a pastor is all encompassing. He is doing jack of all trade but master of all. Furthermore, one can say that individuals who are divinely called, ordained, commissioned, or licensed by a religious body constituting a church or church denomination. This is an individual who is to tender or take care of the flock. One could liken pasturing to tending the Lord's flock.⁵ They are given the authority to conduct religious worship, perform sacerdotal functions, and administer ordinances or sacraments according to the prescribed tenets and practices of that church or denomination.⁶ If a church or denomination ordains some ministers and licenses or commissions others, anyone licensed or commissioned must be able to perform substantially all the religious functions of an ordained minister to be treated as a minister for social security purposes.

SUCCESS: A successful man from conventional standing point is one who is wealthy (though relative). One could refer to the likes of Wale Adenuga; Femi Otedola; Dangote (in Nigeria context); the likes of Bill Gates and others as successful people. But success from the spiritual perspective goes beyond that. Success in this context has to do with spiritual exploit and the wisdom to pilot the affairs of the people of God. The latter form of success is upheld in this research.

The Pastoral office is generally believed to be found in the New Testament and this is the stand of the Baptist.⁷ The New Testament makes it clear that Jesus Christ is the head of the church, the supreme authority

⁴ Frank R. Paris, *Acts Biblical Gifts* (International Edition, 2001), 23.

⁵ Adetoyese, 13.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Osadolor Imasogie, *Deacons in the Local Church* (Ibadan: Baptist Press Nig. Ltd 1996), 71.

in the church but He works through believers. He is into a Spiritual Leadership.

Pastor as a Spiritual Leader

The researcher defines spiritual leadership as knowing where God wants people to be and taking the initiative to use God's methods to get them there in reliance on God's power. The answer to where God wants people to be is in a spiritual condition and in a lifestyle that displays his glory and honors his name. Therefore, the goal of spiritual leadership is that people come to know God and to glorify him in all that they do. Spiritual leadership is aimed not so much at directing people as it is at changing people. If we would be the kind of leaders we ought to be, we must make it our aim to develop persons rather than dictate plans. You can get people to do what you want, but if they don't change in their heart you have not led them spiritually.

Biblical spiritual leadership contains an inner circle and an outer circle. The inner circle of spiritual leadership is that sequence of events in the human soul that must happen if anyone is to get to first base in spiritual leadership. These are the absolute bare essentials. They are things that all Christians must attain in some degree, and when they are attained with high fervor and deep conviction they very often lead one into strong leadership. In the outer circle are qualities that characterize both spiritual and non-spiritual leaders.

The Inner Circle of a Pastor (Spiritual Leadership)

1. **That Others Will Glorify God.** The ultimate goal of all spiritual leadership is that other people might come to glorify God, that is, might so feel and think and act as to magnify the true character of God. According to Matthew 5:14-16, one of the crucial means by which a Christian leader brings other people to glorify God is being a person who loves both friends and foes. "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid, nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house Let your light so shine

before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your father who is in heaven."

This text shows that there is an attitude and lifestyle that is so distinctive that when it appears in the arena of fallen humanity it gives valid evidence that there is a God and he is a gloriously trustworthy heavenly father. When the reality of God's promises to take care of us and to work everything together for our good grips our hearts so that we do not fall prey to greed or fear or vainglory but rather manifest a contentment and a love and a freedom for other people, then the world will have to admit that the one who gives us hope and freedom must be real and glorious.⁸

2. Love Both Friend and Foe by Trusting in God and Hoping in His Promises: But how shall we attain to a love that is strong enough to bless and pray for its enemies? The answer given in Scripture (and this is the third level in the inner circle) is that trust in God and hope in his promises leads to love. Galatians 5:6 says, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor un-circumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love." That is, when we have strong faith in the goodness of God it inevitably works itself out in love. Colossians 1:4, 5 says, "We have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love which you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven." In other words, when our hope is strong we are freed from fears and cares that prevent the free exercises of love. Therefore, a spiritual leader must be a person who has strong confidence in the sovereign goodness of God to work everything together for his good. Otherwise, he will inevitably fall into the trap of manipulating circumstances and exploiting people in order to secure for him a happy future which he is not certain God will provide.

3. Meditate on and Pray Over His Word: But how shall we sinners come to have this kind of confidence in God? Romans 10:17 says, "Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ." And Psalm 119:18 says, "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." These two texts together show us that faith in God

⁸ Vincent, M. R. *Timothy, Titus, Philemon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), 71.

is rooted in God's Word. When we hear God's Word, especially the preaching of Christ in whom all the promises of God have their yes, we are moved to trust him, but this does not happen automatically. We must pray that our eyes be open to the true significance of the Word of God in Scripture. So the spiritual leader must be a person who meditates on the Word of God and who prays for spiritual illumination. Otherwise, his faith will grow weak and his love will languish and no one will be moved to glorify God because of him.⁹

4. Acknowledge Your Helplessness: But finally, we must ask how a person comes to be willing to spend time with and be open to the Word of God? The answer seems to be that we must acknowledge our helplessness. All true spiritual leadership has its roots in desperation. Jesus commended the man who said, "God be merciful to me, a sinner." Jesus said of his own ministry, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I came not to call the righteous but sinners."

This means that the beginning of spiritual leadership must be in the acknowledgement that we are the sick who need a physician. Once we are humbled to that point we will be opened to reading the doctor's prescription in the Word. And as we read the wonderful promises that are there for those of us who trust the doctor, our faith will grow strong and our hope will become solid. And when our faith is strong and our hope is solid all the barriers to love, like greed and fear, will be swept away. When we become the kind of people who can risk our lives, even for our enemies, and who don't hold grudges and who devote our energies to do others good rather than seeking our own aggrandizement, then people will see and give glory to our father in heaven.

The implication of this inner circle of leadership is that in order to lead you have to be out ahead of your people in Bible study and prayer. There will be no successful spiritual leadership without extended seasons of prayer and meditation on the Scriptures.¹⁰

⁹ Vance, Laurence, *Archaic Words and the Authorized Version*. (Illinois: Westminster Press, 1989), 121.

¹⁰ J.I. Packer, *Pastoral Obligations* (London: Heineman Publications, 1989), 39.

Marks of a Successful Pastor

There is no how one will talk about the success of a pastor being a spiritual leader that one will not begin with his **spiritual wave**. Adetoyese notes that if a pastor fails in this area of spirituality, all his qualifications will not be able to make him a successful pastor.¹¹ This is in congruence with the position of Alfred Gibbs. For Gibbs, a pastor must be regenerated, must have mutual; or cordial; relationship with Jesus (love), and must be a Christian.¹²

Adetoyese further stresses that the man expects to dispose spiritual truth must have experience that which he expects others to believe.¹³ Without a new birth, he has no adequate conception of spiritual things, no clear understanding of Christian experience, or ability to lead others to faith in Jesus Christ, not is he able to build up the church of Christ. Hitherto, the foundation to exhuming the marks of a successful pastor is embedded in his spiritual life. Someone said; the spiritual aspect of man controls the physical. Here are other marks:

1. **Restless:** Spiritual leaders have a holy discontentment with the status quo. Non-leaders have inertia that causes them to settle in and makes them very hard to move off of dead center. Leaders have a hankering to change, to move, to reach out, to grow, and to take a group or an institution to new dimensions of ministry. They have the spirit of Paul, who said in Phil. 3:13, "Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal of the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." Leaders are always very goal-oriented people. God's history of redemption is not finished. The church is shot through with imperfections, lost sheep are still not in the fold, needs of every sort in the world are unmet, sin infects the saints.

¹¹ Adetoyese, 29.

¹² Alfred Gibbs, *The Preacher and His Preaching* (Lagos: Bil-cha Books, 1991), 29, 32.

¹³ Adetoyese, 29.

It is unthinkable that we should be content with things the way they are in a fallen world and an imperfect church. Therefore, God has been pleased to put a holy restlessness into some of his people, and those people will very likely be the leaders.

2. **Optimistic:** Spiritual leaders are optimistic not because man is good but because God is in control. The leader must not let his discontentment become disconsolation. When he sees the imperfection of the church he must say with the writer of Hebrews (6:9), "Though we speak thus, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things that belong to salvation." The foundation of his life is Romans 8:28, "God works all things together for good for those who love him and are called according to his purpose." He reasons with Paul that, "He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, will then surely give us all things with him" (Rom. 8:32). Without this confidence based upon the goodness of God manifested in Jesus Christ the leader's perseverance would falter and the people would not be inspired. Without optimism restlessness becomes despair. Consequently, optimism sets the pace for their success.¹⁴

3. **Energetic:** Lazy people cannot be leaders. And they cannot be successful except by dubious character. Thus, successful pastors are very energetic. Spiritual leaders "redeem the time" (Eph. 5:16). They work while it is day, because they know that night comes when no man can work (John 9:4). They "do not grow weary in well doing" for they know that in due season they shall reap if they do not lose heart (Gal. 6:9). They are "steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord their labor is not in vain" (1 Cor. 15:58). But they do not take credit for this great energy or boast in their efforts because they say with the apostle Paul, "I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Cor. 15:10). And: "For this I toil, striving with all the energy which He mightily inspires within me" (Col. 1:29).

The world is run by tired men, someone has said. A leader must learn to live with pressure. None of us accomplishes very much without

¹⁴ Phillips, John. *Exploring the Pastoral Epistles*. Australia: SPCK Press, 1967), 98.

deadlines and deadlines always create a sense of pressure. A leader does not see the pressure of work as a curse but as a glory. He does not desire to fritter away his life in excess leisure. He loves to be productive. And he copes with the pressure and prevents it from becoming worrisome with promises like Matthew 11:27, 28 and Philippians 4:7, 8 and Isaiah 64:4.¹⁵

4. Able to Teach: It is not surprising to me that some of the great leaders at Bethlehem Baptist Church have been men who are also significant teachers. According to 1 Timothy 3:2, anyone who aspires to the office of overseer in the church should be able to teach. What is a good teacher? A good teacher has at least the following characteristics. A good teacher asks himself the hardest questions, works through to answers, and then frames provocative questions for his learners to stimulate their thinking.¹⁶ A good teacher analyzes his subject matter into parts and sees relationships and discovers the unity of the whole. A good teacher knows the problems learners will have with his subject matter and encourages them and gets them over the humps of discouragement. A good teacher foresees objections and thinks them through so that he can answer them intelligently. A good teacher can put himself in the place of a variety of learners and therefore explain hard things in terms that are clear from their standpoint.

Also, a good teacher is concrete, not abstract, specific, not general, precise, not vague, vulnerable, and not evasive. A good teacher always asks, "So what?" and tries to see how discoveries shape our whole system of thought. He tries to relate discoveries to life and tries to avoid compartmentalizing. The goal of a good teacher is the transformation of all of life and thought into a Christ-honoring unity.¹⁷

5. Tactful: Paul said in Colossians 4:5, 6, "Conduct yourself wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, to know how it is necessary to answer each

¹⁵ Treat, Casey *Church Management: Leading People in the church Growth*. Benin City, Nigeria: Anointed Ministries Publication, 1989.

¹⁶ Rushdoony, R. J. *Institutes of Biblical Law*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972), 67.

¹⁷ Towner, Philip H. *The Letters to Timothy and Titus, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series*, 77.

one." And the writer of Proverbs said, "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver" (25:11). We must remember that leaders are aiming to change hearts, not just to get jobs done. Therefore, alienating people unnecessarily is self-defeating. Tact is that quality of grace that wins the confidence of people who are sure you won't do or say something stupid.

6. Theologically Oriented: this is another crucial measure or mark of a successful pastor. Colossians 3:17 says, "Do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." 1 Corinthians 2:16 speaks of the spiritual man as having the mind of Christ. A spiritual leader knows that all of life, down to its smallest detail, has to do with God. If we are to lead people to see and reflect God's glory, we must think theologically about everything. We must work toward a synthesis of all things. We must probe to see how things fit together. A successful pastor is not isolated one from the Bible; he is keen with the Bible.

7. His Home: this is prominent in analyzing the success of a pastor. The first ministry of a pastor is his home and when he is not successful in this regard, he may not be 'successful' in other sphere. Adedokun notes that the personage must be a paradigm for the immediate context.¹⁸ Everyone knows the pastor lives and expects a type of life there that conforms to the message from his pulpit – where this conformity is not lucid or evident; the spiritual progress of the church is affected. Thus, the success of a pastor starts from the stability of his personal and immediate home.

8. In addition to the afore mentioned, another thing that marks the success of a pastor is that he is more careful in relation to women. Adetoyese puts it as thus, "He does not have to be a lady's man."¹⁹ He has control of his man nature and controls his relation with the opposite sex.

¹⁸ J.A. Adedokun, *How to be a Successful Pastor and a Happy Pastor's Wife* (Ibadan: Olaoyeyinka Commercial Press, 1992), 15.

¹⁹ Adetoyese, 49.

Conclusion

That one is not rich by human standard does not mean that he is not successful. Human yardstick for measuring wealth is not God's. The major mark of a successful pastor is characterized by faithfulness. No amount of work could be done for the master if devoid of faithfulness is void. A pastor should always know that materialistic ideology is not the prerequisite for measuring success. The pant after the kingdom of God is the criteria for measuring success. This should be the quest of every pastor not diabolism. As earlier said, success as far as the pastoral ministry is concerned is not really in materialism; it is in the lives (the flock) impacted positively. The researcher wishes to round off with the Yoruba adage that says; 'idi ise eni ni a ti n moni lole' meaning one is know at his chosen profession. Every pastor who craves success must be faithful and committed to the work because when there is responsibility, accountability is sure.

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