

LEADERSHIP, MISSION AND CHURCH GROWTH IN AFRICA

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Chapter Thirty-Nine

Christian View on Servant Leadership: A Recipe for a Successful Marriage

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A^{bstract} The aim of this study is to provide a Christian view on servant leadership as a practical guide to a successful marriage. The study is basically qualitative and it utilised relevant academic materials on servant leadership and Marriage institutions. Marriage is a universal phenomenon in every society. In this context, leadership is not about making our names known. It is about making God's name known and having the ability to love and respect the people in our care using the authority we have been given with grace. Marriage is something of sacred obligation and any adult that refuses to marry is seen by the society as either cursed or abnormal as a lot of importance is attached to marriage. Such obligations involve conflict of interests and values among stakeholders which could be enhanced or distorted by virtues and vices. Hence, the need to engage qualities that are inherent in servant leadership. The study's findings reveal that Christian perspective on servant leadership strongly accommodates tenets of love, forgiveness, understanding, empathy, patience, selflessness and tolerance which if consciously embraced by major stakeholders (husband, wife and children) in matrimony, would serve as a guide to a successful marriage. The study thus concludes by recommending to stakeholders in wedlock to imbibe virtues of commendation and not condemnation, effective communication, provision for the family, resilience and prayer which are further ways for the maintenance and sustenance of a happy and successful wedlock in the society.

Keywords: Christian Ethics, Servant Leadership, Marriage

Introduction

There are thousands of books about leadership out there. Many of such books carry titles such as how to be a great leader, how to get people to follow and listen to one's dictates, how to achieve influence and make a difference, how to make one's name known and how to build one's company or acquire positions of Power.² But all these line of actions mentioned above contradict the concept of servant leadership. Servant leadership flip the narrative of leadership on its head. In this context, leadership is not about making our names known. It is about making God's name known and having the ability to love and respect the people in our care, using the authority we have been given with grace.³

The theoretical foundation is Robert Greenleaf Theory of Servant Leadership which asserts that the great leader is seen as a servant first.⁴ It holds that anyone who must be a leader must be driven with the burden to serve others. This theory has its root in the worldview of the most influential and effective leader of all times (i.e. Jesus Christ). When Jesus Christ was asked how to become a great leader, he responded, "whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant ... just as the son of man did not come to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).⁵ In Christ, the goal of leadership is not to grab power, but to serve. Therefore, this study aims at making an overview of a Christian perspective on servant leadership as a practical guide to a successful marriage.

Conceptual Clarification

Who is a Christian?

A Christian is a person who has a personal living relationship with God through Jesus Christ (Jon 17:3), or somebody who has repented from sin and personally accepted Jesus Christ as his or her Lord and Saviour (John 1:12-13, 3:3)⁶.

The word "Christian" appears three times in the New Testament: the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch (Act 11:26); Agrippa said to Paul, "You almost persuaded me to be a Christian" (Acts 26:28). Peter exhorted, "If anyone suffers as a Christian let him not be ashamed" (1 Peter 4:16). In each instance, the word Christian assumes that the person called by the name is an adherent or follower of Christ;⁷ Prior to the adoption of the name "Christian", all the adherents of Christ were known as believers (Acts. 5:14 KJV), brothers (6:3), or saints (9:3), names which also continued to be used in Christendom till today.

Christian View of Servant Leadership

A leader is a person who influences others, someone who makes others do what he wants them to do in agreement with divine directive.⁸ A leader is a person who guides or directs a group or a movement.⁹ Therefore, leadership is an act of leading. It is the opportunity that one has to be a guiding force for others and it entails the ability and quality of leading. Leadership according to Olumide, is the influential increment over and above mechanical compliance with routine directives of the organisation.¹⁰ The person and personality of the leader goes a long way in determining the success achieved by any organisation, including the home. In the words of Daskal, "leadership is the capacity and will to rally people to a common purpose together with the character that inspires confidence and trust".¹¹

Servant leadership is distinct from the secular view of leadership. Sanders expatiate this in line with the teaching of Jesus Christ. Those in the world often see leadership from the perspective of lordship. They try to lord it

over the led but the main target is to exercise authority on the contrary. In essence, those who wish to lead, particularly in the home, are required to be servants of all.¹² Selfless service is the hallmark of servant leadership; it takes a servant leader serving selflessly to promote peace and manage inevitable conflicts efficiently and productively.¹³ The uniqueness of servant leadership is corroborated by Ishola,¹⁴ when he opined that servant leadership must be in compliance with the principles of the kingdom of God. The devil is always in opposition to marriage, causing conflict in homes, thereby building his stronghold to destroy God's work. Therefore, it takes servant leaders the power of God to pull down demonic stronghold built as a result of dispute. The antics of the devil through diverse strategic instruments like deceit, lies, intrigues, confusion, manipulation, divide and rule, among others are used to disengage the home. Only sensitive leaders can be sensitive enough to confront the devil instead of co-operating with him.¹⁵

There are certain qualities that are germane in Christian servant leadership. These are discussed as follows:

Integrity: as a servant leader, perhaps the most important quality is integrity. It is the foundation on which all other leadership qualities are built. Proverbs 21:3 is a reminder that Jesus calls us to walk in the ways of righteousness and justice – our action should reflect our faith. If we are true servant leaders, we cannot cheat, lie and manipulate our way to the top. Integrity is an intentional lifestyle, reflecting an overall track record of honesty and good character.¹⁶ As humans, we will stumble] and we will fall short, but true servant leaders are able to confess their sins before God and those they lead.

Humility: in Christian servant leadership, we have to be willing to learn from and listen to those we lead, because they might actually have better ideas and perspective than we do. A servant leader is someone who is ready to learn and grow from the experiences and opinions of others. The Bible admonishes by saying, "since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tender heartedness, mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience – Colossians 3:12 (NLT)" One of the most difficult things to admit to ourselves and others is that we do not know it all. It is easy to become addicted to the power and authority attached with being a leader.¹⁷

Flexibility: servant leaders practice flexibility and they are willing to adapt to their situations or challenges. But instead of allowing those unexpected events to cause anger, confusion or panic, servant leaders recognise that God is present in every circumstance. They have the willingness to practice being flexible and actually invite change. The bible backs it up when it says "I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything." I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with

plenty or little. For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength - Philippians 4:12-13 (NLT).

Love: Every leader who will serve with the heart of love will draw the best out of people in friendship that goes for better than prolonged argument and mere logic. Jesus saw sin as wrong but also was able to see sin as springing from deep and unmet needs on the part of the sinner.¹⁸ This enabled him to condemn sin without condemning the individual sinner.

Patience: According to St. Chrysostom as cited by Jolayemi,¹⁹ patience is seen as the queen of virtues. "What is regarded as patience in this regard is the victorious endurance and constancy under trials. Patience is the Christian's steadfastness and the brave or courageous acceptance of everything that life can do to us, and the transmitting of even the worst experience into another step on the upward way. It is the courageous and triumphant ability to bear things which enables a man to pass breaking point and not to break. Patience enables one to always welcome the unseen or unexpected challenges with cheers.

Tolerance: to be tolerant is to endure hardship and recognise the inevitability of conflicts. Provocation will surely come, but retaliation is definitely not the answer. A servant leader has the capacity of knowing when to assert a right and when not to. This means that he or she possesses a fine and rare quality of a moral person.²⁰

Forgiveness: Jesus practice of forgiveness in His relationships, especially in his relationship with Peter and one of his disciples was ground breaking. He made it clear through his life and teaching that forgiveness in interpersonal relationships was vital and without limits.²¹ His own ministry and sacrifice on the cross made possible the forgiveness of sins of the world and he prefigured this in the conduct of his earthly relationships, thereby setting a model for all mankind to follow. Matthew's gospel showed the question of Peter on this issue when he asked "how long must you keep forgiving someone who has wronged you?" (Matt 18:21-22).

Although Peter was actually attempting to be generous because the Talmud, the code of Jewish traditions stated that forgiveness was limited to thrice, Jesus' response was that even seven times was not enough, but that seventy times seven would be better. The implication of this was that there was no limit on how often a person should forgive his fellowman who has wronged him or her and (had repented).²² Jesus Christ being a perfect servant leader demonstrated. With all the acts of denial and betrayal showed to Jesus by his disciples, he showed his whole-hearted forgiveness to them by looking for them after resurrection and he even commissioned them to preach

repentance and remission of sins as they went on with the spread of the gospel. (Luke 24:47).

The Marriage Institution

Marriage (also called matrimony or wedlock) is a socially or ritually recognised union or legal contract between spouses that establishes rights and obligations between them and their in-laws.²³ The definition of marriage varies according to different cultures, but it is principally an institution in which interpersonal relationships, usually intimate and sexual, are acknowledged.²⁴ In some cultures, marriage is recommended or considered to be compulsory before pursuing any sexual lust and the regulation of sexual competition and makes the society interesting by ordering and channeling the satisfaction of sexual urge and by channeling procreation energies. Marriage helps society to reduce the potential volume of conflict and other social problems associated with sexual deviances.²⁵

Olatunde in his book entitled *The Minister and his Home* explains that it is marriage that produces a home. In every home, there is the father, mother, children and even relatives. The home is a place of every beginning and instrument of governance. Marriage was the first institution established by God and this shows that marriage is the foundation of human society. Therefore, it is through marriage that people are produced to form and occupy the human society.²⁶ Gbile Akanni sheds more light on the above view in his book titled *Building a Fulfilling Marital Relationship*. Gbile Akanni explains that marriage was God's own idea. He ordained it as a permanent and intimate relationship between a man and a woman and his wife till death do them part, thus as a lifelong covenant. Marriage was ordained by God to fulfill His own purpose which includes: a woman as a help for the man, for companionship, for procreation, for sexual satisfaction between a man and his wife and a remedial way of preventing immorality.²⁷

On the other hand, Edward Westermarck in his book *The History of Human Marriage* opines that marriage is "a more or less durable connection between males and females lasting beyond the mere act of propagation till after the birth of the offspring."²⁸ In the future of Marriage in Western civilization, he rejected his earlier definition, instead defining marriage as "a relation of one or more men to one or more women that is recognised by custom or law."²⁹ In this sense, he tries to now look at marriage from the aspect of the people. Therefore, marriage can be said to vary according to the culture of the people in question but it is principally an institution in which interpersonal relationships, usually intimate and sexual relationships are acknowledged.

Havilland and William see marriage as a social union or legal contract between people called spouses that establish rights and obligations between the spouses and their in-laws. In many culture, marriage is formalised by wedding ceremony. In terms of legal recognition, most sovereign states and other jurisdictions limit marriage to opposite gender in the gender binary; and a diminishing number of these permit polygamy, child marriages and forced marriage.³⁰

According to Bell, the act of marriage usually creates normative or legal obligations between the individuals involved. Some cultures allow the dissolution of marriage through divorce or annulment. Polygamous marriages may also occur in spite of natural laws. Marriage can be recognised by a state, an organisation, a religious authority, a tribal group, a local community or peers. It is often viewed as a contract. Civil marriage is the legal concept of marriage as a governmental institution irrespective of religious affiliation. It is a marriage that is done in accordance with marriage laws of the jurisdiction.³¹

Christian Servant Leadership Qualities as a Recipe for Successful Marriage

In marriage, husband is the head of the wife (Genesis 3:16, 1corinthians 11:3, 7-9, 1 timothy 2:13, Ephesians 5:23). The task of every husband is to provide leadership in the home. However, headship does not mean that in every detail the husband leads or decides. Who decides and lead in the day-to-day affairs of the marriage depends on the person and situation involved.

The husband is to take the lead in setting the goals, purposes, fulfillment as well as the religious or spiritual direction of the marriage. The success of every marriage, therefore, depends more on the husband than the wife.³²

According to Ruth Graham as cited by Olatunde "Happy marriages are never accidental. They are the result of good hard work". We must try hard to achieve an interesting and fulfilled family life. A happy and lasting marriage requires continual effort and attention. There must be the will on the part of both to make the union a success.³³ God intends that the marriage relationship should be exciting, captivating or fascinating. It is something to be enjoyed and not be endured (Proverbs 5:17-19, Ecclesiastes 9:9).

Marriage is one of the great schools of life. The husband and wife must learn in that school. They must learn from each other, from their children, and their mutual experiences. Marriage is not a joke. It must be worked on, and prayed over. To get a wife or husband may be easy, but to achieve a successful relationship is difficult.

Success in any disguise is not achieved by luck, it is achieved by work. Therefore, to achieve a successful marriage, one must be ever ready to pursue, struggle and labour for it. No success is achieved without sacrifice.

Below are some qualities of Christian servant leadership that will serve as a practical guide to a successful marriage:

Understanding: Understanding is a determining factor for an outstanding family life. A family that cannot understand will never stand³⁴ because homes are established upon understanding (Proverbs 24:3). You must be consciously aware of the fact that your own husband/wife is unique and incomparable. He has different background and temperament. These peculiarities must be studied, understood, appreciated and tolerated. His or her strengths and weaknesses must be understood for the sake of harmonious and lasting relationship.

One of the early biographers of John Wesley rated her wife, Molly as one of the worst wives in all history. In spite of this, Wesley was able to cope with her very successfully throughout his forty-one (41) years of marriage life (He married at age 47 and died at age 88). Wesley had once confessed that if he had not married to such a woman, he wouldn't have known how much to pray.³⁵

Another example was Martin Luther who was known for his unbounded liberality and hospitality. Martin would invite students to come and live in his house. Besides his own six children, six of Martin's nieces and nephews were also brought under his roof. When a friend died, Martin brought home the four children. Martin's wife Katie, however, was not comfortable with this kind of unlimited liberality and hospitality. Sometimes, she would hide money to prevent her husband from giving it away and there was always tension in the home because of this. Martin soon came to understand Katie's deficiencies and strength in household management and this understanding removed incessant tensions from the family.³⁶

Love: Love begins when we wish to serve others, and do to them what we wish they should do to us (Matthew 7:12). The husband needs to love his wife even as he loves himself and as Christ loves the church and gave himself for it. This love must not be hidden; it must be made visible. The children must know that their father loves their mother, and that their mothers love their father. The church must know that you love your wife and that your wife loves you. Above all, the woman herself must know that you love her, and the man himself must know that you love him.³⁷ Love is an essential ingredient for a happy home. It is the foundation upon which a successful marriage is built. When God loved the world, He did not keep it to himself, rather He expressed and demonstrated it (John 3:16). Love is not genuine until it is expressed and

demonstrated in words and action. Love is practical, visible, sacrificial and unconditional.

Love is the salt of every marriage and without it, no marriage works. Nothing is sweeter than love in marriage, and nothing is more distressing than dissension and hatred.

Forgiveness: In general, "to forgive" involves releasing a person from the consequences of some wrong action and restoring a breached relationship. Thus one person may forgive another for some slight or a damaging action. Mrs. Ruth Graham as indicated by Olatunde says, "A happy marriage is a union of two forgivers". We must disagree, we must quarrel when we live together, but these quarrels must be settled, and both sides must readily forgive and forget. This is what the Bible teaches.³⁸ The Bible teachings are against revenge, violence and hatred. Rather we must freely forgive.

For if you forgive men their trespasses,
Your heavenly father will also forgive you;
But if you do not forgive men their trespasses,
Neither will your father forgive your trespasses,
(Matthew 6:14-15).

Patience: Patience is a necessity for a happy and successful marriage life. The word "patience" means, the ability to accept difficulties or peoples' annoying behaviours without becoming angry. According to Everest Harrison, patience is a virtue which enables a person to wait for something promised or hoped for without anger or recrimination.³⁹ Patience is one of the fruits of the spirit enumerated in Galatians 5:22-23. Martin Luther said: "All my life is patience ... I have to be patient with the pope; I have to be patient with the heretics; I have to be patient with Katie" - his wife.

Tolerance: Your spouse is not an angel. He or she is a human being with blood and flesh. None of you is perfect. Perfection of course is non-existent in marriage. There is no perfection in marriage, all that we have is toleration.⁴⁰ Only God is perfect. As long as we are in human bodies, we will be prone to mistakes. No matter how much we try, we would still remain human beings. So, you do not need to be disappointed in your spouse. Everyone endures and tolerates his or her own. Do not let your expectations be too high. Do not expect him or her to give you the joy, peace, love and security that only God himself can give.

Empathy: How many times have you had a friend or family member sit with you when you were hurting? Have you ever received an encouraging note from someone when you needed it most? Think about what it meant for you to have a person truly empathise with you during your struggles. Empathy for a servant leader is simply being able to visualise yourself in someone else's

position.⁴¹ It helps you to understand what someone is feeling. The Bible says, "Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep"- Romans 12:15 (NLT).

It is easy to get hyper-focused on tasks and the work that we do. Working and accomplishing the set goals is important.⁴² But if we are not careful, we can begin to see people as problems to be solved instead of human beings to be loved. It is good that you see your spouse through the eyes of Jesus. When we are able to empathise with those around us and put ourselves in their shoes, we become more like Jesus. Whenever Jesus encountered someone who was hurting or in need of encouragement, he looked at them and had compassion for them, then he acted. We should make it an obligation to emulate this quality in Jesus when our spouse is in distress, trauma and bereavement. This will go a long way to enhancing a happy and successful marriage.

Recommendations

Based on the discussion, the following recommendations were made:

Give your home the first priority. The success of our homes depends on how we place it in our priority chart or order of life. The slightest misplacement can cause irreparable damage on our families. Many people place their homes as second priority. They are so busy with their businesses and official or professional responsibilities that all their days and nights are run together. Our home is our primary responsibilities, but the spiritual welfare of our family should come first. Put first things first, then at the end of your life, there will be no regret.

Learn to commend and not condemn. It is a serious matter for the husband or wife to give public embarrassment to his or her spouse. Everyone wants a reasonable degree of respect for himself or herself. Embarrassing your spouse publicly can hurt him to the bones and make him or her become difficult and ungovernable. People have committed suicide only because of hard talk and embarrassment. Do not correct, criticise or rebuke your spouse in the public and in the presence of the children and even anybody at all. Always appreciate, commend and comment on the good sides of your spouse particularly in public.

Endeavour to provide for your family. The husband must make adequate provision for his family in terms of food, clothing and shelter, as well as their social emotional and spiritual needs. The Apostle Paul emphasised strongly on what should be Christians' attitude to their families: "If anyone does not provide for his relatives and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Timothy 5:8). This

admonition certainly covers more than just material possessions. It includes help, companionship, love, mutual encouragement, practical help and then the scriptural teachings that will help them develop and mature as Christians. The provision here also includes sexual intercourse. The Bible says;

Do not deprive each other (sexually) except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourself to prayer. Then come together again so Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control
(1 Corinthians 7:5-6)

Establish an effective communication. It is the basis of any fruitful, happy and lasting relationship. Effective communication is a major therapy to many problems confronting families today. It fuels a marriage, keeps love moving to deeper and deeper levels, and reinforces the vital ingredients of trust, respect and understanding. No marriage works successfully without effective communication. A wise man once said, "If you talk together, you stay together". Through deep mutual sharing, the couple continues to grow together because they are continually learning something new about each other. No matter how long you have been together, you never really know what your partner is thinking.

Learn to pray together. Your family's personal devotional life and your times of prayer with your wife and children are keys to marital success. As you pray daily, God will guide you. A family that prays together stays together. Seven days without prayer make one weak. The husband is priest of the family and is responsible to establish a family altar for daily worship. They should gently lead their children to Christ as the good shepherd gently leads his people. (Psalm 23; Ephesians 5:23; Matthew 19:13,14).

Conclusion

This study has examined qualities in Christian servant leadership as a practical guide to a successful marriage. Qualities such as love, patience, tolerance, forgiveness, empathy and understanding which are inherent in Christian servant leadership should be incorporated into matrimony by stakeholders (husband, wife and children) and this would serve as a practical guide to a happy and successful marriage. No marriage is perfect. Those celebrating 30, 40, 50 years of togetherness are celebrating forgiveness and tolerance. Money does not determine a better marriage but character and loyalty do.

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