

Christian Leaders and their Role in Wider Society –

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The role of Christian leaders in their society is commonly assessed¹ by the leadership in our churches and in various Christian institutions and communities. I believe society as a whole – not only churches – needs first and foremost leaders who are God-fearing people who sought and seek counsel from the Almighty God. Christians should assume² leadership in society by bearing³ Christian values. Christian leaders must lead wherever they are by using biblical principles, not contradicting them. In Acts 1:8 Jesus instructed His disciples to bear testimony of Him in Jerusalem, then Judea and Samaria, and finally to the remotest parts of the earth. They were to preach and win souls to Christ. If we say the home is our Jerusalem, the church is our Judea or Samaria, then the community/society is the uttermost part of the world. Let us not presume leadership in our community until we have first assumed true leadership in our family and in the church.

To be in a leadership position or role does not necessitate that one holds a leadership title nor even has a leadership position. Several of the most effective

¹ “assess – to think about something carefully and make a judgement about it”, Macmillan School Dictionary (Oxford, England) 2004.

² “assume – start to control something; take an important position in”, Ibid.

³ “bearing – seeming to be (Christian, in our context); having and showing (Christian) qualities”, Ibid.

leaders in my congregation today do not hold any office or wear a title. The same is true in any local church and community. Leadership is *not* position or being in decision-making but rather an attitude and a lifestyle. The most powerful influence any of us can have on others is by virtue of *who we are* as individuals. Any person who has invested his life in helping others achieve their highest goals and dreams has had the greatest influence. When he has done this long enough, people will follow him because of his integrity and his character. The key to leadership or an influential position is investing yourself into the people of your community. Invest in yourself by being a person of integrity and character. Invest in your community by being involved in their various activities. One of the most basic things every one of us can do to be leader in the community is simply to be and keep informed.

Stay attached to the happening circumstances in the community. Keep your finger on the pulse of your society. Put a lot of effort into listening to people, reading and applying the Bible, interacting with people outside your church groups. Like our Lord Jesus, associate with sinners and eat with them, Matthew 9:10-11; 11:19. You cannot lead if you do not know what is going on. Being informed, involve yourself in public meetings where ideas are exchanged. Exercise your influence either in big

forums⁴ or small ones through showing and speaking Christian values. Speak up in town meetings when issues arise that need a word from the Lord. Do not be timid. Our Christian involvement in society needs to extend beyond knowledge and the dispensing of information into the more public arenas of service. When we understand that leadership is *influence*, not a position or a title, then we can accept the fact that “the measure of a leader is the not number of people who serve him, but the number of people he serves”.⁵ Jesus taught the principles of leading by serving when He washed the disciples’ feet, John 13:1-16. Great leaders throughout human history have been people who have practised the art of servanthood.

Under current Christian leadership do you think the future world would be more under the rule of God than at present?

I would answer ‘yes’, because the solution for the Christian leaders to bring the world into the future leadership of God is to encourage personal fear God in every area of life, including in national life. As a Christian leader, the responsibility and character of God must be seen in your own life as you bring yourself and your Lord Jesus into society. Having the foundation of integrity in your heart and being a good steward, Christian leaders must exercise Christian

⁴ the plural of forum can be either fora or forums, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english> accessed 4th October 2017.

⁵ John C. Maxwell 21 Laws of Leadership (Thomas Nelson: Nashville, TN) 1998, p.62.

values and put them into practice in all their work places, not just in the church. Many Christians who attended the Sunday meeting today are working in business places and in the political arena Mondays to Fridays. To me as a Christian servant, it is a great opportunity to be in such positions. Dallas Willard writes of such people, “They alone have at their disposal the means to bring their surroundings increasingly under the rule of God. On the one hand, they have, “all power (authority)” that is from the hands of the One who bid them go and teach all human groupings to do as He commanded when He promised to be with them always, Matthew 28:18-20. On the other hand, the teachers of the gospel have ‘Christ’s kingdom fellowship’ to live in and to offer to all. They have millions of people around the world who regularly come to them, submitting to their leadership in spiritual life even when unclear about what that means. Above all, they have knowledge of concrete practices of submission to righteousness which give an adequate teaching and example, and their hearers can make regular remarkable progress into the character and power of Christ himself”.⁶ Because of that, the current Christian leadership might fully anticipate the future leadership under the rule of God more than the present, by showing the very best examples to their society, being God fearing men and women at the community level as well as in the church. It is necessary to become involved in your community,

⁶ Dallas Willard [Living a Transformed Life Adequate to Our Calling](http://www.dwillard.org/articles/artview.asp?artID=119) <http://www.dwillard.org/articles/artview.asp?artID=119> , accessed 3rd October 2017. All the following quotations from Willard are from this article.

interacting with the local people in the community. By doing so you let them see you as a God-fearing servant with the heart of integrity.

What is the relationship between the Great Commission, discipleship, and the Kingdom of God/Heaven? In the Great Commission Jesus instructs His disciples to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you”, Matthew 28:19-20. This biblical mandate, known commonly as the Great Commission, instructs Christians to move outward in making disciples, teaching all people in the Christian faith, and initiating them into the worldwide fellowship of the Church. With respect to being a disciple of Jesus, Willard noted, “as a disciple ... I am with Him, by choice and by grace, learning from Him how to live in the Kingdom of God”.

Jesus specifically trained His followers to carry on His work of ministry, although Willard argues, “the main burden of this work of disciple-making no doubt falls to some of us who lead and teach, in whatever capacity, in our churches”. Jesus first called the fishermen and the tax collectors, not the educated or the great teachers of Law, to be His early disciples, Matthew 4:18-23; 9:9-13. We are aware of many great Christian leaders, but it is each and every one of us who is called to “go” in the Great Commission. Be Christian leaders responsible for the future of the world. Because the resources of God’s Kingdom are

available to Christians, responsibility for the condition of the world in a year, or in centuries to come, rests upon the Christian Church. We alone have at our disposal the means to bring our surroundings increasingly under the rule of God". (Quotation slightly amended).

Vision, intention, means

Willard gives a simple model for how people change. He calls it VIM, as in the phrase "vim and vigour".⁷ VIM stands for Vision, Intention, and Means. Briefly these are the three aspects of change, focusing especially on the using of spiritual disciplines as ways that we can trust to make us more the kind of leader God wants, with the vision, intention and means of Christian formation and transformation. I believe this is an excellent model of how Christians can seriously go about engaging with God and engaging with society in ways that are positively transformative:

- **Vision** – things we need to understand clearly
- **Intentions** – values we need to commit to
- **Means** – what we can do to foster⁸ transformation

I believe this model offers the proper balance for living with God and participating in society. To engage

⁷ "vim – exuberant vigour and energy"; "vigour – physical and mental energy, enthusiasm", <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english> accessed 3rd October 2017.

⁸ "foster – help something develop, encourage the progress of" Macmillan School Dictionary (Oxford, England) 2004.

effectively in this process, there are certain things that we need to envision and understand well. There are also some values that we need to commit ourselves to. There are certain means available to us by which we can deliberately open ourselves up to the kind of relationship with God that helps us in transforming society. You may notice I amend Willard's order:

- **Vision of Kingdom life:** The vision of our life in the Kingdom of God is the place we must start. This vision underlies the spiritual transformation of Christian likeness. Christians can see the life now and forever in the range of God's effective will, that is partaking of the divine nature while escaping the devastating corruption of the world, 2 Peter 1:4. What we are aiming for in this vision is to live fully in the Kingdom of God while in church *and* in society, and to live as fully as possible here and now, not just in the hereafter.
- **Means for spiritual transformation:** these include such practices as solitude, memorisation of and meditation on the scriptures, fellowship with all other Christians and positive accountability to others.

We must pray and work to replace the inner character of the 'lost' with the inner character of our Lord Jesus: His vision, His understanding, His feelings, His decisions and His character must be nurtured. In doing that the old and merely human nature will not function as controller anymore, because all people become new

creations in Christ. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here”, 2 Corinthians 5:17. We are not left to ourselves in finding such means. We have rich resources available in the teaching of Jesus, in the scripture, and through God’s people historically and currently. At the local church level, all members must put these things into practice on a daily basis.

- **Intention to live in the Kingdom as Jesus did:** Jesus makes it possible for us to intend to live in the Kingdom as He did while on earth. We can actually decide to do it, to live with Him 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Not ‘in the Kingdom, out of the world’, but ‘in the Kingdom while very much *in the world*’! Concurrent living – in Christ – in the church – in the community – all under and displaying Jesus’ Lordship. First of all, trust Him, count on Him being the Anointed One, the Christ. Concretely intend to live in the Kingdom of God by obeying the precise example and teachings of Jesus. We show we trust Jesus by doing as Jesus did. Similarly, it is the vision of life in God’s Kingdom that provides an adequate foundation for the steadfast intention to obey Christ. It is this general intention to please God in all things, that stirs attending church services and programmes, going to Bible studies, prayer meetings and responding through water baptism, bringing offerings and in many other ways. One key way many believers regrettably *ignore* pleasing God is by living considerably

less than as 100% Christian while they are in the non-Christian workaday world. I urge you not to be like them. Dare to be different, following our Lord Jesus!

What would the church in your context do differently if its leaders truly intended to be and to make Christian disciples?

The church would grow spiritually. The members would love one another and have the foundation of Christian integrity firmly in place. The church will be reaching out to those outside the church through evangelism and mission. Those who are inside the church will bring encouragement, fellowship, praising to God, and love-sharing in small group meetings. All of these relationships work together in balance and are necessary for each other to function properly. Most importantly, remember to seek God in prayer, spend time in His word, listening to the Holy Spirit to show what He wants to best structure the ministry of your church. The structure of the ministries in the local church should follow the function and purpose of the church.

The ministry of the local church is not just in the church building or activities by ministers. Most of it is (or should be) by individuals from the congregation serving in whatever roles God has opened to them in their wider society and community.

What would such a decision “cost” in terms of sacrifice or change?

John Calvin used the term “self-denial” to summarise the entire Christian life. Self-denial must never be confused with self-rejection. Self-denial is an overall, settled condition of life in the Kingdom of God, perhaps better described as “death to self”.⁹ Calvin wrote, “If we, then, are not our own, 1 Corinthians 6:19, but the Lord’s, it is clear what error we must flee, and whither we must direct all the acts of our life.

- We are not our own; let not our reason nor our will, therefore, sway our plans and deeds.
- We are not our own; let us therefore not set it as our goal to seek what is expedient for us according to the flesh.
- We are not our own; in so far as we can, let us therefore forget ourselves and all that is ours.

Conversely,

- We are God’s; let us therefore live for Him and die for Him.
- We are God’s; let His wisdom and will therefore rule all our actions.
- We are God’s; let all the parts of our life accordingly strive toward Him as our only lawful goal, Romans 14:7-8”.¹⁰

The cost in terms of sacrifice is through Jesus, who paid the price to redeem the whole world. Being a

⁹ Dallas Willard Living a Transformed Life Adequate to Our Calling <http://www.dwillard.org/articles/artview.asp?artID=119> page 56, accessed 3rd October 2017.

¹⁰ John Calvin lived from 1509 to 1564AD. Among his many writings is, The Christian philosophy of unworldliness and self-denial; we are not our own, we are God’s: <http://matthiasmedia.com/briefing/2005/10/the-sum-of-the-christian-life-the-denial-of-ourselves/> accessed 3rd October 2017.

follower of Christ, you must sacrifice your life and take the yoke of Jesus to follow Him. Jesus said, "Whoever finds their life will lose it and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it", Matthew 10:39. As a leader you must give your time to teach and train the members, attending many meetings, and you must be an example in how to give your tithes and offerings to the church, to relief and to mission.

According to Dallas Willard, "a discipline is what you do to modify your inner person. It is an activity in my power that enables me to accomplish what I cannot do by direct effort". This is the same with spiritual disciplines. The point is that the way to offer more and more simple acts of care and kindness is to become caring and kind in your own heart by using spiritual disciplines to grow in God's grace, 2 Corinthians 6:3-10; Galatians 5:22; Colossians 3:12. From the life of Jesus there are a number of spiritual disciplines to help us grow in God's grace, to receive His kindness so that we become more kind, readily and consistently doing kind things for other people. Getting alone with God to be quiet is one of the foundational Christian disciplines to help us to become more like Jesus, Luke 5:16; 9:10; 22:41.

The nature of the spiritual disciplines is with the physical body, whereas most evangelicals emphasise only beliefs and feelings. How can things that we do with our bodies result in spiritual growth?

Willard concentrated on the whole part of the human being for the spiritual disciplines, because it is all, not part, of our person that reflects our character. I believe spiritual transformation happens best when we work on the elements of our 'self' in a specific order. When successful, spiritual transformation unites the entire body and the person can then bring remarkable harmony into the groups in which he/she participates. The body is our personal presence in the physical and social world. In union with it, we come into existence and become the persons we shall forever be. Often this body shows our fallenness into sin. But at the same time, this amazing capacity of the body means that it can be reformed to become our ally in Christlikeness. Such a reformation of the body is one major part of the process of spiritual formation. The evangelicals emphasise beliefs and feelings. Feelings are central to our spiritual formation in Christ. We may feel good or bad in studies of the Bible, prayer, fasting and other activities within the church. Feelings of fear may also influence our going out, meeting the needs of other people and ministering to them in *their* various places. In the revolution of our character, many of our feelings, emotions, sensations and desires must be changed. Feelings can properly move us to positive action, so enjoy being moved!

Scholars and philosophers put such an emphasis on spiritual disciplines that it becomes dangerously close to trying to earn your salvation

by works. How would you respond to this criticism? I believe spiritual discipline does not begin when someone offers to follow Jesus, but when Jesus calls someone already in love with Him to follow Him. It is a response to Jesus' call of love. A person can only follow Christ when his heart is filled with love for Him. It is not how much you do or try to do by your own ability. Willard's definition of a discipline is, "any activity within our power that we engage in to enable us to do what we cannot do by direct effort". The application to the spiritual life is not too difficult to understand. If your life as usual has not been a fertile as usual, (perhaps not like it once used to be), or has not been the fertile ground in which God can confidently bring change, you may need to fall in love with Jesus all over again.

The distinction between "effort" and "earning"¹¹
"Effort" sounds very much like "earning". Both words move hand in hand. But God is much more interested in my effort. He wants me to press on to reach my goal, Philippians 3:13-15. Paul writes about how he "presses on", which he also describes as "straining forward". This is an effort. In effort you put weights and power, with sweat dripping out of you, in order to achieve your goal. Effort is not the same as earnings. Willard explains it, "while it true that we are saved by grace, that God alone is the author of our salvation, and it is impossible to change our wayward hearts on our

¹¹ "effort - an attempt to do something that is difficult or involves hard physical or mental work". "earnings - the amount of money that someone receives in exchange for working" Macmillan School Dictionary" (Oxford England) 2004.

own, we must understand the critical truth that *God is opposed to people making an effort to earn salvation*. God is not opposed to effort but to earnings”, emphasis mine. Salvation cannot be earned by anyone. It is a gift generously given by God, Ephesians 2:8-9.

The distinction between “trying” and “training”¹² for living a Christ-like life

In fact, training is required for any significant challenge in life, even including our spiritual growth. By trying by myself I cannot make myself more Christ-like. Practical training and more biblical application to life, with experience, will always be more successful than merely trying. Let all of us genuine Christians play our roles in society by faith, learning on the job at the feet of our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, His Holy Spirit and word.

African world views and values: in what way do they challenge the leaders?

According to the Bible, God is holy and deals with hearts, so that sins will no longer rule in human life. God is the only One who has authority and power to rule in us. God may seem far away, but He lives with us not only in times of bad circumstances but all the time. In the general African world view, god cannot dwell in human heart; people only bring god into their lives out of fear. They try to prevent things from going wrong with offerings and so on. In times of need when things

¹² “trying – attempting to do something for yourself”, “training – the process of teaching/learning a particular job or activity”, Ibid.

do go wrong, they may run to him for help. When those needs are met they need not have anything to do with god until the next time. People do not generally understand that the Creator God came to dwell in the lives of people and graciously rule over us in a divine human partnership. As He works in us so we who know Him must work with Him everywhere in His world.

I suggest that in contemporary Christian training schools and other teaching we should put more emphasis on discipleship and the role of discipline in our physical bodies. These two help me to grow in Christ-likeness. As a leader, your physical presence and participation in the church during times of need, such as during bereavement and funerals, will greatly assist church members. But why not offer these ministries to those outside in the wider community too? Visiting the sick, the housebound or hospitalised, the prisoners are all complementary activities to the prayers that a Christian leader must be involved in. Unfortunately, many of us are falling in this area today because of so many programmes that keep us away from meeting the physical needs of our own members. And if we do not have time for helping our own people, we are going to have to radically change and work really hard to minister Christianly in the wider society. But we must do it, ourselves and especially through our congregational people, if we are going to bring our nations, our states, our provinces, our cities and our towns more under our God's influence, for ourselves in the present and for our children in the future.

Discussion guide

Using this chapter and Scriptures quoted

1. “To be in a leadership position or role does not necessitate that one holds a leadership title nor even has a leadership position”. True or false? Why? Give practical examples.
2. What do Matthew 9:9-13 and 11:16-19 say about living ‘outside of’ the Christian community? Is this an example for us to follow? Why?
3. What do you think will bring “the future world ... more under the rule of God than at present”? List ways this may happen. Bring Scriptures as you share your ideas.
4. “What would the church in your context do differently if its leaders” (indeed all of its people) “truly intended to be and to make Christian disciples”?
5. From Philippians 3:7-16 discover and share things that will help all of us to live Christianly in a largely non-Christian environment. What does it mean to “press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of” us? Verse 12.