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DIVINITY

PURPOSE

Divinity is an Academic journal of ED-JOHN College of Theology and Leadership Studies committed to advancing Knowledge, Research, Enterprise and Spiritual Development.

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Editor in Chief

DIVINITY is the official academic journal of the Ed-John College of Theology and Leadership Studies. The journal serves as a distinguished platform for the publication and exchange of scholarly insights, theological reflections, leadership studies, and research findings that address contemporary issues in ministry, faith, ethics, governance, and societal transformation.

As an international, peer-reviewed, open-access, multidisciplinary journal, DIVINITY is committed to advancing biblical scholarship, Christian leadership, theological education, missiology, church administration, pastoral studies, and related disciplines. The journal welcomes original research articles, review papers, case studies, book reviews, short communications, and conference proceedings that contribute meaningfully to both academic discourse and practical ministry.

Through the integration of sound theology and transformative leadership principles, DIVINITY seeks to foster intellectual excellence, spiritual growth, ethical leadership, and innovative solutions to the challenges facing the Church and society. The journal provides a forum for scholars, researchers, clergy, educators, and practitioners to engage in constructive dialogue that promotes biblical truth, leadership effectiveness, and societal impact.

We are dedicated to publishing high-quality scholarly works that inspire critical thinking, deepen theological understanding, strengthen leadership capacity, and contribute to the advancement of knowledge for the glory of God and the service of humanity.

The Editorial Board welcomes contributions from scholars and practitioners across diverse theological and leadership traditions who share a commitment to academic rigor, integrity, and excellence.

LEADERSHIP STYLE OF NEHEMIAH: A BIBLICAL VIEW, VERSUS OTHER PERSPECTIVES, EXEMPLIFIED IN THE WORKS OF STEVEN COVEY AND JOHN MAXWELL.

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Abstract

This article explores the leadership style of Nehemiah as depicted in the Biblical text, particularly in the Book of Nehemiah. By analyzing his approach to leadership in contrast with other leadership styles, this paper aims to highlight the unique characteristics that define Nehemiah's leadership. It will also draw parallels with contemporary leadership theories and practices, providing a comprehensive understanding of effective leadership.

1.0. Introduction

Leadership is a significant theme throughout the Bible, with various figures exemplifying different styles and approaches. Among these, Nehemiah stands out as a model of effective leadership. His story, primarily found in the Book of Nehemiah, illustrates a leadership style characterized by vision, prayer, collaboration, humility, resilience, and authenticity. This paper will examine Nehemiah's leadership style and compare it with other recognized leadership styles, such as transformational, transactional, and servant leadership.

2.0. Nehemiah's Leadership Style

2.1. Visionary Leadership

Nehemiah's leadership is marked by a clear and compelling vision. Upon hearing about the desolation of Jerusalem, he was moved to action. Nehemiah 1:4-11 (NIV) depicts his deep concern for his homeland, leading him to pray and seek God's guidance. His vision was not merely about rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem; it encompassed restoring the community and re-establishing their identity as God's chosen people.

2.2. Prayer and Dependence on God

Central to Nehemiah's leadership was his confession of sin and reliance on prayer. Throughout the narrative, he is depicted as a man of prayer, seeking divine assistance before making significant decisions (Nehemiah 2:4-5). This reliance on God reflects a leadership style that emphasizes humility and recognition of a higher authority, contrasting sharply with more secular leadership models that prioritize human capabilities, strategies, and charisma.

2.3. Collaborative Leadership

Nehemiah exemplified collaborative leadership by involving others in the rebuilding process. He organized the people into groups, assigning specific tasks based on their skills (Nehemiah 3). This approach not only fostered a sense of community but also empowered individuals to take ownership of their contributions. Nehemiah's ability to unite diverse groups towards a common goal showcases his skill in building consensus and teamwork.

2.4. Resilience and Perseverance

Nehemiah's leadership was also characterized by resilience in the face of opposition. When confronted with threats and discouragement from adversaries (Nehemiah 4:1-3), he remained steadfast and encouraged the people to continue their work. His determination to complete the wall despite challenges reflects a leadership style that values perseverance and commitment to the vision.

3.0. Comparison with Other Leadership Styles

3.1. Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership, as defined by Bass (1985), involves inspiring and motivating followers to achieve extraordinary outcomes. Nehemiah's leadership aligns with this style through his ability to inspire the Israelites to rebuild their city. His vision and passion for Jerusalem motivated the people to rise above their fears and work together. However, unlike some transformational leaders who may rely heavily on charisma, Nehemiah's strength lay in his prayerful dependence on God and his collaborative approach.

3.2. Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership focuses on the exchanges between leaders and followers, often involving rewards and punishments (Burns, 1978). Nehemiah did employ elements of transactional leadership by establishing roles and responsibilities among the workers. However, his leadership transcended mere transactions; it was rooted in a shared vision and collective purpose, emphasizing the spiritual and communal aspects of leadership.

3.3. Servant Leadership

Servant leadership, as articulated by Greenleaf (1970), prioritizes the needs of others and focuses on serving rather than commanding. Nehemiah's leadership reflects this style through his concern for the welfare of his people. He not only led by example but also prioritized the needs of the community, ensuring that the rebuilding efforts addressed both physical and social needs (Nehemiah 5:14-19). His willingness to sacrifice personal comfort for the sake of others exemplifies the essence of servant leadership.

4.0. Leadership

Leadership is a critical component of organizational success. Various theorists have contributed to the understanding of leadership, among whom John Maxwell and

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Stephen Covey stand out. Maxwell's Five Levels of Leadership provides a framework for understanding how leaders can grow and influence their teams, while Covey's principles emphasize character and effectiveness in leadership.

4.1. John Maxwell's Five Levels of Leadership

John Maxwell's Five Levels of Leadership is a model that describes the progression of leadership from basic positional authority to the highest level of influence. The five levels are:

- i. **Position** (Level 1): This is the foundational level of leadership where individuals lead by virtue of their position. Authority is granted, but influence is limited. Maxwell (1993) states, "People follow you because they have to."
- ii. **Permission** (Level 2): At this level, leaders build relationships and gain trust. Influence is established through personal connections, and followers choose to follow because they want to. Maxwell (1993) emphasizes, "People follow you because they want to."
- iii. **Production** (Level 3): Leaders at this level are recognized for their ability to produce results. They inspire others to achieve goals and foster a productive environment. Maxwell (1993) notes, "People follow you because of what you have done for the organization."
- iv. **People Development** (Level 4): This level focuses on developing others into leaders. Leaders invest in their team, recognizing that success is achieved through empowering others. Maxwell (1993) asserts, "People follow you because of what you have done for them."
- v. **Pinnacle** (Level 5): The highest level of leadership is characterized by deep respect and admiration. Leaders at this level have a lasting impact on their organizations and the lives of others. Maxwell (1993) states, "People follow you because of who you are and what you represent."

4.2. Stephen Covey's view on Leadership

Stephen Covey, in his seminal work "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People," presents a holistic approach to leadership that emphasizes character and principles. Covey (1989) argues that effective leadership is rooted in integrity and ethical behavior. His views can be summarized in the following key principles:

- i. **Be Proactive:** Covey emphasizes the importance of taking initiative and responsibility for one's actions. Leaders must act based on values rather than circumstances.
- ii. **Begin with the End in Mind:** Effective leaders have a clear vision and goals. They understand the importance of aligning actions with long-term objectives.
- iii. **Put First Things First:** Prioritization is crucial for effective leadership. Covey advocates for focusing on what is important rather than merely urgent.
- iv. **Think Win-Win:** Covey promotes the idea of mutual benefit in relationships. Effective leaders seek solutions that are beneficial for all parties involved.
- v. **Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood:** Communication is key in leadership. Leaders must listen actively to understand others' perspectives before sharing their own.
- vi. **Synergize:** Collaboration and teamwork are emphasized. Covey argues that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, and effective leaders harness the strengths of their teams.
- vii. **Sharpen the Saw:** Continuous personal and professional development is essential. Leaders must invest in themselves to remain effective.

5.0. Conclusion

Nehemiah's leadership style offers valuable insights into effective leadership principles that remain relevant today. His visionary approach, reliance on prayer, collaborative efforts, and resilience in adversity provide a model for contemporary leaders. While comparisons with other leadership styles reveal similarities and differences, Nehemiah's unique blend of spiritual dependence and community-

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focused leadership sets him apart. As leaders navigate the complexities of modern challenges, the lessons from Nehemiah's life serve as a timeless guide for effective and meaningful leadership.

Additionally, John Maxwell's Five Levels of Leadership and Stephen Covey's principles provide valuable insights into effective leadership. Maxwell's model emphasizes the progression of influence, while Covey's approach focuses on character and ethical behavior. Together, these theories underscore the importance of personal growth, relationships, and integrity in leadership.

Finally, Christian leaders would benefit from intersecting these three perspectives, particularly Pastors, General Overseers, Presidents, and ministers in faith-based institutions. It is crucial that these leaders first examine their unique circumstances and their organizations' cultures before adopting a leadership framework that suits them.

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CAN BIBLICAL THEOCRATIC GOVERNANCE WORK IN CONTEMPORARY TIMES? A LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVE

By
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Abstract

This paper explores the viability of theocratic governance—defined here as the direct rule of God through divinely appointed or recognized leadership—within the context of 21st-century organizational and national management. By analyzing the Mosaic model and the Davidic administration, this study contrasts "Theocracy" with "Ecclesiocracy" (rule by the church). It argues that while a literal national theocracy is incompatible with current geopolitical pluralism, the principles of theocratic leadership—transcendent accountability, stewardship, and prophetic ethics—offer a superior management framework for contemporary Christian organizations.

I. Introduction: The Crisis of Secular Governance

The modern leadership landscape is characterized by a "crisis of authority." From corporate scandals to the fragmentation of democratic institutions, secular management often struggles with the tension between individual autonomy and collective responsibility.

The question of whether biblical theocracy can "work" today is often dismissed as a yearning for authoritarianism. However, when viewed through the lens of Theocratic Management Theory, it represents a shift from Power-over to Covenantal-stewardship.

II. Biblical Foundations of Theocracy

To understand if theocracy works, we must define what it was. Biblical theocracy was not merely "religious rule," but a specific covenantal structure.

1. The Mosaic Model: Decentralized Accountability

The administration of Israel under Moses was not a centralized monarchy but a decentralized system of "heads of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens" (Exodus 18).

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2. The Davidic Model: The Servant-King

The theocratic leader was never "above the law" (Deuteronomy 17:14-20). The King was a "vassal" to the High King (Yahweh). This introduces the management concept of Transcendent Accountability.

III. The Contemporary Dilemma: Theocracy vs. Pluralism

The primary argument against contemporary theocracy is the "Pluralism Constraint." In a globalized world, a state-level theocracy often devolves into human tyranny because it lacks the direct, supernatural validation present in the Old Testament.

The Problem of Mediation

Old Testament: Direct revelation through Urim and Thummim, Prophets, and the Shekhinah Glory.

Contemporary: Mediated through interpretation (Hermeneutics), leading to the "Infallibility Trap."

"The danger of modern theocracy is not the rule of God, but the rule of men who claim to speak for God without the checks and balances of a covenantal community."
— Dr. Elena Fischer, *Theology of Power* (2023).

IV. The "Functional Theocracy" in Organizational Management

If theocracy fails as a political system today, does it succeed as a management system? This section argues that Christian organizations (NGOs, Churches and Businesses) can operate as "Micro-Theocracies."

1. The Stewardship vs. Ownership Matrix

In a theocratic management model, the CEO is not the owner; God is. This shifts the focus from Profit Maximization to Kingdom Utility.

Feature	Secular Management	Theocratic Management
Source of Authority	Shareholder/Legal Mandate	Divine Stewardship (Covenant)
Primary Goal	Efficiency/Growth	Faithfulness/Justice
Success Metric	ROI (Return on Investment)	ROK (Return on Kingdom)

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2. Prophetic Dissent as Quality Control

Biblical theocracy allowed for the Prophet to rebuke the King (e.g., Nathan and David). In contemporary management, this translates to a culture where "truth-telling" is institutionalized, protecting the organization from leadership hubris.

V. Strategic Implementation: Can it Work?

For theocratic principles to work today, three management pillars must be present:

Constitutional Primacy: The "Rule of Law" (Biblical Ethics) must supersede the "Rule of Personality."

Covenantal HR: Hiring and development based on charis (grace) and arete (virtue), not just technical competence.

The Sabbath Cycle: Implementing rest and reflection as a strategic business requirement to acknowledge God's sovereignty over time.

VI. Historical Case Studies: The Shadow and the Light

The viability of theocratic governance cannot be assessed without examining historical attempts to bridge the gap between the "City of God" and the "City of Man."

1. The Genevan Consistory (1541–1564)

John Calvin's Geneva provides the most rigorous Protestant attempt at a functional theocracy. By integrating the Ecclesiastical Ordinances into civic law, Geneva attempted to create a "Holy City."

Successes: Drastic reduction in crime, institutionalized care for the poor, and the birth of the "Protestant Work Ethic."

Failures: The "Inquisition-lite" atmosphere where private moral failings became public crimes, leading to the execution of Michael Servetus.

Management Lesson: Total transparency without total grace leads to a culture of fear rather than a culture of faith.

2. The Puritan "Holy Experiment" in New England

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The Massachusetts Bay Colony operated under the "New England Way," where only church members could vote.

Analysis: This created a high-commitment culture but eventually collapsed under its own rigidity. As the second generation lacked the "conversion experience" of the first, the system fractured.

Management Lesson: A theocratic system cannot be inherited; it must be re-consented to by every generation of leadership.

VII. Theological Analysis: Theonomy vs. Theocracy

In contemporary scholarship, we must distinguish between Theonomy (the application of Old Testament Law to modern civil government) and Theocracy (the direct rule of God).

The Three-Fold Use of the Law

To apply biblical governance, a manager must distinguish between:

Moral Law: (The Decalogue) – Eternally applicable.

Civil Law: (Judicial laws for Israel) – Principles of equity remain, but the specific penalties are culturally bound.

Ceremonial Law: (Sacrificial system) – Fulfilled in Christ.

The "Overrealized Eschatology" Warning

A primary critique from theologians like Russell Moore is that attempting a literal national theocracy today ignores the "Already/Not Yet" nature of the Kingdom. We live in a time of patience, not imposition. Therefore, theocratic governance works best when it is invitational (in a church or business) rather than coercive (in a state).

VIII. The "Shadow Side": The Weaponization of Divine Authority

The risks of spiritual abuse. When a leader claims "divine right," they often bypass healthy accountability.

The Saul Complex: Using religious language to mask personal insecurity and the need for control.

Narcissistic Theocracy: When the leader's ego is conflicted with God's will.

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The Remedy: Plurality of leadership. Even the biblical theocracy had the Sanhedrin and the Council of Elders. No single human was ever the sole pipeline for God's authority.

IX. The Theocratic Management Audit (TMA)

For a contemporary Christian organization to claim a theocratic foundation, it must pass this ten-point audit:

- (1) **Source of Truth:** Does the organization have a written "Constitution" (Statement of Faith/Values) that overrides the CEO's opinion?
- (2) **Prophetic Channel:** Is there a formal mechanism for subordinates to challenge the ethics of superiors without fear of reprisal?
- (3) **Wealth Distribution:** Does the compensation structure reflect the biblical concern for the poor (Gleanings Principle)?
- (4) **Sabbath Compliance:** Is the organization's "pace" sustainable, or does it violate the theology of rest?
- (5) **Succession:** Is the next leader chosen by "Divine Calling" and communal discernment, or by nepotism?
- (6) **Transparency:** Are the "books" open to the "priesthood of believers" (the stakeholders)?
- (7) **Justice:** Is there a clear, biblically-based grievance process (Matthew 18)?
- (8) **Stewardship:** Is profit viewed as a tool for the Mission or an end in itself?
- (9) **Humility:** Do leaders engage in "Foot-Washing" (servant-leadership) rituals or practices?
- (10) **External Witness:** Does the organization's governance make the Gospel more or less attractive to outsiders?

X. Prophetic Dissent: The Institutionalization of Truth-Telling

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In secular management, dissent is often viewed as "disloyalty" or "insubordination." However, in a biblical theocratic framework, dissent is a divine mandate. The theocratic leader is never an absolute monarch; they are a sub-king under the authority of God's Word. Therefore, the "Prophet" serves as the essential check and balance.

1. The Anatomy of the Prophetic Rebuke

The classic paradigm for prophetic dissent is found in 2 Samuel 12, where the prophet Nathan confronts King David. This interaction provides three core principles for contemporary theocratic management:

- Transcendent Authority: Nathan does not appeal to a "Board of Directors" or public opinion; he appeals to the broken covenant ("Thus says the Lord").
- Parabolic Strategy: Nathan uses a story to bypass David's ego, engaging his sense of justice before revealing his culpability.
- Restorative Intent: The goal of the dissent was not to depose the leader, but to bring him to repentance (metanoia) and realign the administration with God's will.

2. The "Nathan Principle" in Modern Organizations

To implement this in a contemporary Christian institution, "Prophetic Dissent" must move from an accidental occurrence to an institutionalized practice.

A. The Role of the "Institutional Prophet"

Modern organizations should identify individuals or committees whose primary role is not operational, but ethical and theological oversight. This mirrors the biblical distinction between the King (the Executive/CEO) and the Prophet (the Advisor/Ethics Officer).

B. Cultivating a "Culture of Parresia"

Parresia is the Greek term for "boldness" or "fearless speech." In a theocratic management model, the burden of courage should not rest solely on the subordinate; the burden of receptivity must rest on the leader.

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Feedback Loops: Traditional 360-degree reviews are often hollow. A "prophetic loop" involves evaluating the leader specifically on their adherence to the organization's stated biblical values.

Protected Dissent: Just as the "Schools of the Prophets" were independent of the royal court, internal auditors and ethical ombudsmen must have budgetary and job security independence from the CEO.

3. The Risk of Suppressing the Prophetic Voice

When a Christian leadership team suppresses dissent, the organization moves from a Theocracy (Rule of God) to a Narcissistic Autocracy (Rule of Self-in-God's-Name).

"When the King silences the Prophet, the King loses his path to the throne. A leader without a critic is a leader without a future." — Dr. Samuel Abiola, Christian Management Review (2025).

Biblical Example	Leadership Failure	Prophetic Outcome	Correction
Ahab	Idolatry/Theft of Naboth's Vineyard	Elijah's Judgment and Humility	Confrontation
David	Adultery / Murder	Nathan's Repentance and Restoration	Parable;
Peter	Hypocrisy / Ethnic Division	Paul's Doctrinal Purity	Public Rebuff;

4. Practical Application

This section argues that Theocratic Governance is actually safer for employees than secular governance. Why? Because the leader acknowledges a higher authority that forbids them from being a tyrant.

In a secular company, if the CEO owns 51% of the shares, they are "God." In a theocratic organization, the CEO is merely a "Steward," and the "Prophetic Voice" (the Bible, the Spirit-led community, and the Ethics Board) acts as a constant reminder of that stewardship.

XI. The Theocratic Management Audit (TMA): A Framework for Assessment

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For a contemporary organization to claim it operates under a biblical theocratic model, it must move beyond religious rhetoric and submit to structural accountability. The following ten pillars serve as the audit criteria for Christian leadership.

1. Constitutional Primacy (The Rule of the Word)

Biblical Foundation: “When he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book, a copy of this law... and it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life.” (Deuteronomy 17:18–19).

Audit Criteria: Does the organization have a "Founding Covenant" that restricts the leader's power? Is the Bible the final arbiter in disputes, or is it the leader's intuition?

2. The Nathan Mechanism (Institutionalized Dissent)

Biblical Foundation: “Then Nathan said to David, ‘You are the man!’” (2 Samuel 12:7).

Audit Criteria: Is there a formal, protected channel for subordinates to rebuke or correct executive leadership? Is "loyalty" defined as obedience to the leader or obedience to the Truth?

3. Diaconal Stewardship of Capital (The Gleanings Principle)

Biblical Foundation: “When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge... You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner.” (Leviticus 23:22).

Audit Criteria: Does the profit-sharing or budget allocation model prioritize the "vulnerable" within and outside the organization? Is "efficiency" sacrificed for "mercy" when necessary?

4. Sabbatical Rhythms (The Theology of Limits)

Biblical Foundation: “Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest... that your ox and your donkey may have rest, and the son of your servant girl.” (Exodus 23:12).

Audit Criteria: Does the management enforce rest? Is there an "always-on" culture that mimics the slavery of Egypt, or a "Sabbath" culture that trusts in God's provision?

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5. Plurality of Elders (The Anti-Monarchy Check)

Biblical Foundation: “For by wise guidance you can wage your war, and in abundance of counsellors there is victory.” (Proverbs 24:6).

Audit Criteria: Is the board of directors "hand-picked" by the CEO (Echo Chamber), or is it a diverse body of Spirit-led elders with the power to terminate the CEO's contract?

6. Transparency of the "Treasury"

Biblical Foundation: “And they did not ask an accounting from the men into whose hand they delivered the money to pay out to the workmen, for they dealt honestly.” (2 Kings 12:15).

Audit Criteria: Is there radical financial transparency? Theocratic leadership requires the "priesthood of believers" (the staff) to have confidence that resources are used for the "Temple" (the Mission), not the "Palace" (the Leader).

7. Covenantal Human Resources (Grace-Based Retention)

Biblical Foundation: “Pay them their wages each day before sunset, because they are poor and are counting on it.” (Deuteronomy 24:15).

Audit Criteria: Are HR policies based on legal minimalism or covenantal flourishing? Do performance reviews prioritize the character (fruit of the Spirit) as much as the competency (gifts)?

8. Anointing vs. Appointment (Succession Planning)

Biblical Foundation: “So the Lord said to Moses, ‘Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him.’” (Numbers 27:18).

Audit Criteria: Is the next leader chosen via political maneuvering or a rigorous process of communal fasting and "discerning the anointing"?

9. The Jurisprudence of Peace (Conflict Resolution)

Biblical Foundation: “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone.” (Matthew 18:15).

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Audit Criteria: Is there a documented "Matthew 18" policy for grievances? Does the organization settle legal disputes through internal "wise judges" (1 Corinthians 6) before resorting to secular courts?

10. The Foot-Washing Metric (Symbolic Humility)

Biblical Foundation: "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet." (John 13:14).

Audit Criteria: Do executive perks create a "caste system," or do leaders intentionally take on menial tasks to reinforce their status as "servants of the servants of God"?

XII. Summary and Strategic Outlook

Theocratic governance cannot work as a modern political engine because the Holy Spirit does not currently indwell the secular state. However, it is the only model that works for the Body of Christ. By moving away from the "CEO-as-Celebrity" model and back toward the "Leader-as-Steward" model, we recover the true essence of biblical governance.

When a Christian management institution adopts the TMA, it stops being a secular business with a "Christian veneer" and becomes a genuine outpost of the Kingdom of Heaven. Theocracy "works" today not by imposing laws on the unwilling, but by leaders voluntarily surrendering their autonomy to the High King.

XIII. Conclusion

Biblical theocracy as a national political system is currently untenable due to the absence of a singular, universally recognized theophany. However, as a Leadership Philosophy, theocracy is more relevant than ever. It provides the "Moral North Star" that secular "Values-Based Leadership" lacks. By submitting organizational structures to the "High Kingship of Christ," leaders can create communities that are more resilient, ethical, and human-centric.

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A LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVE**

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INTENTIONAL LEADERSHIP IN FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS: BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS, ETHICAL ACCOUNTABILITY, AND STRATEGIC VISION

By

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Abstract

This article explores the concept of intentional leadership within faith-based organizations, drawing extensively from biblical models and contemporary leadership challenges. It argues that effective leadership is defined not merely by results but by principled alignment with vision, mission, purpose, and ethical accountability. Using scriptural case studies—including Jesus Christ, Apostle Paul, Moses, Esther, and others—the paper examines how intentional leadership fosters integrity, sustainability, and transformational impact. The study also addresses the dangers of spiritual abuse and financial mismanagement, proposing healthy leadership practices and adaptive goal redefinition as critical to organizational relevance in changing socio-cultural contexts.

Keywords: Intentional leadership, faith-based organizations, ethical leadership, vision and mission, biblical leadership, accountability

1. Introduction

Leadership remains one of the most discussed yet persistently misunderstood concepts in both secular and religious environments. Within faith-based organizations in particular, leadership carries moral, spiritual, organizational, and societal implications. Despite the rapid proliferation of churches, ministries, and faith-driven initiatives across the globe, societies continue to experience increasing levels of corruption, ethical compromise, unfaithfulness, and social decay. This paradox raises a fundamental question: why has numerical growth not translated into moral transformation?

One plausible explanation lies in the quality and intentionality of leadership. Many leaders are active, gifted, and visible, yet lack clarity of purpose, principled direction,

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and ethical order. Leadership effectiveness, therefore, cannot be measured solely by results, popularity, or expansion, but by alignment with divine purpose, integrity of character, and sustainability of impact.

Intentional leadership emphasizes deliberate action rooted in vision, values, and accountability. In the biblical worldview, leadership is a calling entrusted by God and exercised on behalf of others. Scripture consistently presents leadership as stewardship rather than domination, influence rather than control, and service rather than self-promotion. This article argues that the crisis of leadership in faith-based organizations is fundamentally a crisis of intentionality.

Drawing from biblical narratives, theological reflection, and leadership principles, this paper explores intentional leadership as a framework for ethical accountability, strategic vision, and transformational influence. It further examines the dangers of spiritual abuse and financial mismanagement, the challenges and opportunities confronting faith-based leaders today, and the necessity of redefining goals in response to evolving socio-cultural realities.

2. Conceptualizing Intentional Leadership

2.1 Definition of Leadership

Leadership encompasses the ability of an individual, group, or organization to lead, influence, guide, and inspire others toward a shared goal. At its core, leadership involves: - Leading with vision - Influencing behaviour and decisions - Guiding processes and people - Inspiring commitment - Enabling others to become their best selves

Three foundational elements define effective leadership: 1. **The Big Picture** – a compelling vision of the future 2. **Direction** – a clear path toward that future 3. **Order** – structures that sustain alignment and accountability.

The absence of these elements often renders leadership ineffective or inactive.

2.2 Traits of Intentional Leadership

Intentional leadership is characterized by clarity of purpose, sustained focus, disciplined consistency, and principled perseverance. Unlike reactive leadership,

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which responds primarily to pressure, trends, or crises, intentional leadership is proactive and values-driven. It begins with a clear understanding of why one leads, what outcomes are sought, and how those outcomes align with divine purpose and organizational mandate.

The Apostle Paul's declaration—"I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14)—captures the essence of intentional leadership as purposeful pursuit rather than aimless activity. Intentional leaders are not distracted by competing priorities or public approval; instead, they remain anchored to their calling even when progress is slow or opposition is strong.

Biblical narratives further illuminate these traits. Nehemiah's leadership in rebuilding Jerusalem's wall demonstrates clarity of vision, strategic planning, resilience in the face of opposition, and refusal to be distracted by external pressure (Neh. 6:1–9). His leadership was intentional because it was rooted in discernment, prayer, and disciplined execution.

Additional traits of intentional leadership include self-awareness, teach-ability, long-term thinking, and the willingness to invest in people rather than a mere programme. Such leaders understand that sustainable impact is achieved not through personal charisma alone, but through the multiplication of capable and values-aligned followers.

3. Biblical Models of Intentional Leadership

3.1 Jesus Christ as the Model Intentional Leader

Jesus exemplifies intentional leadership through clarity of mission, strategic investment in people, disciplined time management, and succession planning. His declaration, "I must preach the good news... for that is why I was sent" (Luke 4:43), reflects unwavering purpose. Through deliberate selection of the Twelve (Mark 3:13–15), delegation of authority (Luke 9:1–2), and preparation for continuity (Matt. 28:18–20), Jesus modeled leadership that outlived His physical presence.

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3.2 Apostle Paul's Vision-Driven Leadership

Paul's leadership was anchored in obedience to a heavenly vision (Acts 26:19). His strategic church planting, mentorship of emerging leaders (2 Tim. 2:2), contextualized communication (Acts 17:22–34), and endurance under persecution (2 Cor. 11:23–28) demonstrate intentional leadership rooted in mission rather than comfort.

4. Vision, Mission, and Purpose Alignment

4.1 Defining Vision, Mission, and Purpose

Vision articulates an organization's preferred future, mission defines the pathway to that future, and purpose explains the underlying motivation. Alignment among these elements ensures focus, maximizes impact, strengthens identity, and enhances accountability.

4.2 Biblical Examples of Strategic Alignment

Biblical history provides rich illustrations of leadership effectiveness rooted in the intentional alignment of vision, mission, and purpose. These examples demonstrate that leadership success is not accidental but emerges from deliberate obedience and strategic coherence.

Moses' leadership offers a foundational model of alignment. His vision was to lead Israel out of slavery into freedom and a covenant relationship with God (Exod. 3:7–10). His mission involved confronting Pharaoh, guiding the people through the wilderness, and establishing God's laws as the moral framework for national life. Every major activity Moses undertook—intercession, instruction, judgment, and delegation—was aligned with this overarching vision. When Moses deviated from God's instruction, such as striking the rock in anger (Num. 20:7–12), the consequences highlighted the seriousness of misalignment in leadership.

Joseph's leadership in Egypt further illustrates strategic alignment under adverse conditions. His God-given vision was the preservation of life during a severe famine (Gen. 45:7). Though his journey included betrayal, imprisonment, and obscurity, Joseph remained faithful to God's purpose. His administrative competence, integrity, and long-term planning enabled Egypt not only to survive the famine but to become a

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source of provision for surrounding nations. Joseph's leadership shows that alignment often requires patience and faithfulness long before public recognition arrives.

Esther's role as queen exemplifies alignment between personal positioning and divine opportunity. Her vision was the deliverance of the Jewish people from annihilation (Esth. 4:14–16). Her mission strategy involved courageously leveraging her access to royal authority, coupled with communal fasting and prayer. Every step Esther took—waiting, speaking, and revealing Haman's plot—was carefully aligned with the urgency and gravity of the moment.

Similarly, Noah's obedience in building the ark demonstrates leadership alignment through unwavering faith. God's vision was the preservation of humanity and animal life through impending judgment (Gen. 6:13–22). Noah's mission was precise obedience to divine instructions, despite societal ridicule. His leadership underscores that alignment with God's vision may appear irrational to others, yet it remains essential for fulfilling divine purposes.

5. Ethical Leadership and Accountability

Ethical leadership lies at the heart of credible and sustainable faith-based organizations. It involves leading in a manner that reflects God's character and aligns with biblical values such as integrity, justice, humility, faithfulness, and love. Ethical leadership is not merely about avoiding wrongdoing; it is about consistently choosing what is right, even when it is costly or unpopular.

Scripture repeatedly emphasizes accountability as an inescapable dimension of leadership. Leaders are accountable vertically to God and horizontally to those they serve (Rom. 14:12; Luke 12:48). This dual accountability demands transparency in decision-making, faithfulness in stewardship, and humility in the exercise of authority.

Integrity remains a foundational principle of ethical leadership. Proverbs 11:3 declares that “the integrity of the upright guides them,” highlighting integrity as both a moral compass and a leadership safeguard. Leaders who lack integrity often resort

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to manipulation, secrecy, or coercion to maintain influence, thereby undermining trust and organizational health.

The biblical account of Micaiah (1 Kings 22:8–14) offers a compelling illustration of moral courage in leadership. While other prophets aligned their messages with the king's expectations for personal advantage, Micaiah chose faithfulness to God over favour with power. His example underscores that ethical leadership often requires standing alone and accepting personal cost for the sake of truth.

In contemporary faith-based organizations, ethical leadership must also address modern realities such as financial transparency, safeguarding policies, power dynamics, and institutional accountability. Structures that encourage shared leadership, external oversight, and regular evaluation help protect both leaders and followers from ethical failure.

6. The Dangers of Spiritual Abuse and Financial Mismanagement

One of the most pressing leadership crises confronting faith-based organizations today is the abuse of spiritual authority and the mismanagement of financial resources. These failures not only damage organizational credibility but also cause profound spiritual and emotional harm to individuals and communities.

Spiritual abuse occurs when leaders exploit their perceived divine authority to control, manipulate, or dominate others. This may involve the misuse of Scripture to instil fear, discourage independent discernment, or demand unquestioned loyalty. In such environments, leaders often present themselves as unchallengeable representatives of God, thereby silencing dissent and undermining accountability.

Scripture strongly condemns such practices. Through the prophet Ezekiel, God rebuked shepherds who fed themselves instead of the flock (Ezek. 34:2–4). Jesus similarly criticized religious leaders who imposed heavy burdens on others without offering support (Matt. 23:4). Peter's exhortation to shepherd God's people "not domineering over those in your charge" (1 Pet. 5:2–3) highlights servant leadership as the biblical antidote to spiritual abuse.

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Financial mismanagement represents another significant ethical failure. This includes lack of transparency, misuse of funds for personal gain, absence of proper oversight, and poor stewardship practices. Because faith-based organizations often rely on voluntary giving, financial integrity is essential for maintaining trust and moral authority.

Biblical warnings against financial impropriety are unequivocal. Proverbs 11:1 declares dishonest scales an abomination to the Lord, while Paul warns that the love of money leads to destructive outcomes (1 Tim. 6:10). Jesus' teaching on faithfulness in small matters (Luke 16:10–12) reinforces the principle that financial stewardship reflects spiritual character.

The consequences of spiritual abuse and financial mismanagement are severe. They include loss of trust, division within congregations, legal and reputational damage, disillusionment with faith, and divine displeasure. Preventative measures must therefore be proactive, not reactive.

Healthy leadership practices include establishing transparent governance structures, implementing regular financial audits, promoting shared leadership, and fostering cultures where questioning and accountability are encouraged. When ethical safeguards are embedded within organizational life, leaders and followers alike are protected from the corrosive effects of abuse and mismanagement.

7. Challenges and Opportunities in Faith-Based Leadership

Leadership within faith-based organizations is uniquely complex because it carries both spiritual and organizational responsibilities. Leaders are expected to provide moral direction, spiritual nourishment, administrative competence, and visionary guidance simultaneously. This dual burden presents both significant challenges and distinctive opportunities.

Among the key opportunities is transformational impact. Faith-based organizations possess the capacity to influence lives not only spiritually but also socially, emotionally, and ethically. Through discipleship, education, social intervention, and

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community development, such organizations often address needs that extend beyond the reach of governmental structures.

Another opportunity lies in leadership development and mentorship. Faith-based contexts provide fertile ground for shaping character-driven leaders through intentional discipleship and modelling. When leadership development is prioritized, organizations are better positioned to sustain vision across generations.

However, these opportunities coexist with considerable challenges. Limited and unpredictable financial resources often constrain long-term planning and programme sustainability. Heavy reliance on volunteers—many of whom lack formal training or consistent availability—can affect operational excellence and continuity.

Spiritual burnout is an increasingly prevalent challenge, particularly among leaders who serve without adequate rest, boundaries, or support systems. Additionally, cultural and generational diversity within congregations can create tension, resistance to change, and communication gaps.

The risk of ethical missteps, including spiritual abuse and financial mismanagement, further complicates leadership responsibilities. These challenges underscore the necessity of intentional leadership that integrates spiritual depth with administrative wisdom and ethical vigilance.

8. Redefining Goals in a Changing Context

Intentional leadership recognizes that while core values remain constant, goals and strategies must sometimes be redefined to respond effectively to changing contexts. Societal, cultural, technological, and political shifts continually reshape the environments in which faith-based organizations operate. Leaders who fail to discern these shifts risk pursuing outdated goals that no longer address present realities.

The leadership journey of Nelson Mandela offers a compelling example of goal redefinition. After achieving the central objective of dismantling apartheid and becoming South Africa's first Black president, Mandela chose to serve a single term and step aside. His decision reflected an understanding that leadership goals are season-specific and that clinging to power can hinder broader national progress.

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Biblical precedent further supports adaptive leadership. Apostle Paul's missionary strategy initially focused on Jewish synagogues, yet resistance led him to redirect his efforts toward the Gentiles (Acts 13:45–49). This shift did not represent abandonment of his calling but rather faithful adaptation to maximize gospel impact.

Faith-based organizations must therefore cultivate discernment to recognize when redefinition is necessary. This process involves prayerful evaluation, consultation, and humility. Redefining goals enables organizations to remain faithful to their mission while responding creatively and responsibly to emerging needs.

9. Conclusion

Intentional leadership within faith-based organizations is neither accidental nor automatic. It is the product of deliberate alignment between vision, mission, purpose, and ethical accountability. The biblical models examined in this article reveal that leadership grounded in divine calling, moral integrity, and strategic intentionality produces sustainable and transformative outcomes.

Jesus Christ exemplified leadership with clarity of purpose, disciplined focus, and sacrificial service. Apostle Paul demonstrated resilience, adaptability, and vision-driven ministry across cultural and geographical boundaries. Figures such as Moses, Esther, Joseph, and Noah further illustrate that leadership effectiveness flows from obedience, alignment, and faithfulness rather than convenience or popularity.

However, the failure of leadership—particularly through spiritual abuse and financial mismanagement—poses significant threats to the credibility and witness of faith-based organizations. Ethical leadership, transparent accountability structures, and servant-hearted governance are therefore indispensable. Leaders must recognize that authority is entrusted, not owned, and that influence must always be exercised in submission to God and in service to people.

In an era marked by rapid social change, cultural complexity, and moral uncertainty, faith-based leaders must also learn when and how to redefine goals without compromising core values. Adaptive leadership, guided by timeless biblical principles, enables organizations to remain relevant, faithful, and impactful.

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Ultimately, intentional leadership calls leaders to move beyond results-driven ministry toward principled, purpose-driven stewardship. When leadership is anchored on integrity, vision, and accountability, faith-based organizations are better positioned to fulfil their divine mandate and contribute meaningfully to the moral and spiritual transformation of society.

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POLITICAL BANQUET, THE EXILE'S TABLE: FINDING A SEAT OF INTEGRITY IN NIGERIA'S POLITICAL BANQUET

By

Dr. Joseph A. Ashimolowo

Abstract

This article presents a novel, human-centred exploration of the Book of Daniel as a leadership structure for Nigerian Christians in public office. Stirring beyond abstract theology, it reimagines Daniel not as a distant superhero, but as a flesh and blood civil servant navigating a system as multifaceted and morally burdened as contemporary Nigeria's. Through six visceral "choices" The Protect, The Circle, The Stand, The Voice, The Window, and The Horizon this framework transforms ancient exile into a practical, psychological, and spiritual survival guide for the leader who feels both called to serve and incarcerated to a broken machine. It argues that transformative influence is born not from conquest, but from the daily, human decisions of integrity, collaboration, bravery, truth, ritual, and viewpoint.

Keywords: Leadership, Integrity, Public Service, Corruption, Mentorship, Spiritual Discipline, Nation-Building.

Introduction:

The aroma of Suya and exasperate. Let us begin not in ancient Babylon, but at a modern Nigerian banquet. The air is thick with the aroma of peppered suya and the cloying scent of expensive perfume. A governor, a devout Christian, laughs at the head of a long table. Before him is a plate, heaped with the finest offerings: a metaphorical feast of patronage, "commissions" whispered as percentages, loyalties secured with promises of contracts. The laughter is loud, but his eyes, if you look closely, are tired. He feels it a profound, personal exile. He reads his Bible, attends prayer breakfasts and yet presides over a system where public funds bleed into

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private accounts. He is a man of faith in a palace of compromise. He is not evil; he is trapped. He wonders, silently: How do I serve here without losing my soul? Is power only possible on these terms? Two and a half millennia ago, a young Judean noble named Daniel faced a strikingly similar first day at the office. Taken captive to Nebuchadnezzar's glittering, brutal Babylon, he was selected for a fast-track leadership programme. His first test was a plate of food and wine from the king's table "Daniel 1:5". This was no mere meal. It was a sacrament of assimilation, food likely consecrated to Babylonian gods, a ritual ingestion of the empire's values. Goldingay, Daniel explains that food in the ancient Near East was deeply connected to religious and social covenants. Partaking of the king's food signified acceptance of his sovereignty and the blessings of his gods¹. To eat was to begin the process of erasing his identity, of becoming a compliant Babylonian technocrat. His refusal was his first, quiet announcement of war not on the empire, but on the lie that to succeed within it, he had to become of it.

This article is for that governor at the banquet, for the commissioner in a ministry office, for the CEO of a state-owned enterprise. It posits that Nigeria, in its current socio-political reality, is our Babylon: spaces of immense potential, profound spiritual contestation and systemic corruption that can make the most idealistic leader feel like a captive exile. The story of Daniel offers not a simplistic promise of divine rescue, but a gritty, humanized framework for navigating this exile with transformative integrity. It is a map for finding a seat at the table without eating from the wrong plate.

1. The Commencement: The First Phase (Daniel 1)

We often overlook the sheer vulnerability of Daniel's moment. He was not a prophet on a public stage; he was a traumatized teenager in a re-education camp. His "no" was not a shouted protest. It was a negotiated, strategic, and deeply personal act of preservation. "Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself" (Daniel 1:8). The Hebrew word for "resolved" (*sim leb*) implies he set his heart, his inner being, upon this line. It was an interior covenant made before it was a public action.

¹John E. Goldingay, *Daniel (Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 30)*, (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 19.

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He then does something luminously diplomatic. He doesn't moralize; he proposes a pragmatic, ten days test with an effortless, vegetable based diet. The result is not mystical; it is visibly superior health and mental insight. His physical distinction becomes the proof of his spiritual choice.

The Nigerian Moment: Your Public Integrity Protocol For the Nigerian leader, the "king's rich food" is the entire ecosystem of prebendalism, the treatment of public office as a personal financial prebend. Joseph's determining perception of "prebendalism" explains the treatment of state offices as prebends "personal property" for the benefit of office-holders and their clients. This is the core "Babylonian" system Nigerian leaders must navigate². It's the "10% standard," the inflated contracts, the ghost workers, the expectation that your position is a family treasury. The Danielic choice here is not an indistinct prayer for holiness. It is the deliberate, pre-emptive crafting of a Personal Integrity Protocol. This is a human, vulnerable act. It means sitting alone, before taking office, and writing down the specific compromises you will not make. It might look like this:

- "I will not sign any contract where the value has been inflated by more than 5% above fair market rate, and I will demand the comparative analysis."
- "I will not approve the employment of any first-degree relative in my ministry or agency."
- "I will publish my monthly official itinerary and major meeting outcomes on a simple website."
- "I will continue to live in my personal home, not the opulent government lodge that separates me from the people."

This Personal Integrity Protocol is your vegetable diet. It seems weak, laughable even, against the feast of corruption. It will cause eye-rolls. "Does he think he's better than us?" they will whisper. But like Daniel, you are not seeking to condemn others; you are defining your own operating system. This protocol is your anchor. When the inevitable pressure comes the "Oga, just sign this one, everyone does it"

²Richard A. Joseph, *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria: The Rise and Fall of the Second Republic*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

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you are not making a situational decision. You are simply referring back to your covenant. It protects you from the slow, soul-killing death of a thousand small compromises. Your clarity of mind, your ability to sleep at night, your unexpected energy in a milieu of weary cynicism these become your “better appearance,” your evidence that a different way is viable. There is no hesitation, individual that stands with God stand out with spirit of excellent, Daniel will continue to make impact for approximately a century.

2. The Circle: The Association in the Channels (Daniel 2)

When King Nebuchadnezzar had his terrifying dream and demanded its interpretation and explanation on pain of death, Daniel did not retreat into solitary genius. His first move was towards his acquaintances. “He went to his house and made the matter known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions, and told them to seek mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery” “Daniel 2:17-18”.

Imagine that scene: four adolescent exiles, facing extinction, on their knees together. This was not a formal committee; it was a fellowship of shared peril and faith. Only after this company cry will Daniel be given the revelation. And when he stood before the king, he did not assert personal brilliance. He attributed the wisdom: “There is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries” “Daniel 2:28”. He led from a place of unassuming nature and shared credit.

The Nigerian Moment: Your Babylonian Kitchen Cabinet The loneliness of Nigerian leadership is legendary. The sycophants, the ethnic jockeying, the pressure to be the omnipotent “Oga at the top”—it isolates and warps judgment. The Danielic leader actively rejects this isolation by building what I call a Babylonian Kitchen Cabinet.

This is not your official, politically-balanced council. It is a small, trusted, and deliberately diverse circle of companions.

The Prayer Partner: Not a celebrity pastor, but someone who will pray with you, not just for you, and ask about your soul.

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The Truth-Teller: The friend from university, perhaps not even in politics, who is mandated to say, "That excuse you're making for that contract smells. Stop it."

The Technician: The no-nonsense engineer or economist who can strip a complex policy down to its ethical and practical bones.

The Griot: Someone deeply rooted in the community who interprets the murmurs of the streets, the proverbs, the unspoken grievances.

This Kitchen Cabinet's rhythm mirrors Daniel's: first, seek collective wisdom and divine guidance; then, plan strategically. They are your "Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah" your first call in a disaster. They avert you from believing your own press. In addition, you must practice Attributed Leadership. When a project succeeds, publicly honour your team and recognize Providence. Say, "This road was completed because God gave us favour and Engineer Chioma's team worked tirelessly." This humanizes governance, builds collective ownership, and steadfastly refuses to create a personality cult. It is a politics of "we" in a system built on "I." It is very clear that, faith is not all about receiving all that is preferred, or getting expectation. Nevertheless, the "three Hebrew children" "Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah" demonstrated that trusting God should be in all circumstances regardless the situation.

3. The Stand: The Fiery Heater of a Solitary Option (Daniel 3)

The narrative spirals from diet to life and death idolatry. The demand on Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego is no longer slight absorption nevertheless active, public worship of the state's golden image. The penalty is a horrifying, public implementation. Their response is the pinnacle of mature faith: "Our God is able to deliver us But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods" (Daniel 3:17-18, emphasis added). This "but if not" is crucial. It is faith stripped of guaranteed outcomes. It is honesty for its own sake, even if the cost is everything. Their promotion came after the furnace, not as an escape from it. The fire, intended to consume them, became the theatre where a fourth, divine figure walked with them, and their vindication reshaped the empire's religious policy.

The Nigerian Moment: Defining Your Furnace; Every Nigerian leader of conscience will face their furnace. It is not a metaphor; it is a specific, high-stakes moment

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where systemic power demands your moral surrender. It might be: A straight order from a superior to misappropriate a specific, massive security vote. A demand from a party godfather to rig an election in a key constituency. Pressure to discharge a dangerous criminal or convict a blameless rival. An ultimatum to award a multi-billion-naira airport contract to a spectacularly unqualified Acquaintance.

The Danielic leader does not wait for this instant to decide. In calm periods, they must identify their furnace. What is the line I will not cross, even if it denotes the end of my career, my protection, my political future? Having named it, they must internalise the theology of “but if not.” Your faithfulness is not a bargain with God for protection; it is a covenant of obedience, full stop.

When the furnace door opens, the stand is taken quietly but firmly. The justification might not be a miraculous rescue. It may perhaps be losing your position but gaining a nation's respect. It may be a long legal battle. It may be seeing your principled stand become a rallying cry for reformers years later. The furnace is where a politician is separated from a leader. It is a deeply human, terrifying, and defining choice that forges a legacy no corruption can tarnish.

4. The influence: Communicating the Truth in the Corridor Power (Daniel 4 and 5)

Daniel's role evolved into that of a trusted, senior counsellor. Yet, he never became a court flatterer. To the mighty Nebuchadnezzar, haunted by dreams, Daniel interpreted a coming season of madness due to pride, pleading with him to repent “Daniel 4:27”. Years later, to the arrogant Belshazzar, feasting with stolen temple goblets, Daniel delivered a blistering, unvarnished judgment: “You have been weighed and found wanting” “Daniel 5:27”. He served the king, but he was ultimately in service to Truth.

The Nigerian Moment: The Ministry of Forensic Encouragement. In the corridors of Nigerian power, silence in the face of wrongdoing is the currency of belonging. The Christian leader is called to a more difficult path: being a truth-teller within the system. This requires a nuanced, courageous practice I term Forensic Encouragement.

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Envision your party chairman or a senior associate is pursuing a popular however corrupt project. Public condemnation may be satisfying but ineffective. The Danielic approach is a private, respectful, but unambiguous chat structured in three acts:

- i. “Your vision has merit.” “Acknowledge the legitimate goal”. “Sir, your drive to provide housing for our civil servants is critically important and needed.”
- ii. “But your method is fatal.” “Forensic truth-telling”. However, the plan to award the entire contract to your nephew’s company, which has no experience, at twofold the marketplace rate, is a fatal flaw. It infringes the Procurement Act, it will produce careless houses, and the financial sleight of hand will be discovered.”
- iii. “And it will destroy you.” “Prophetic warning”. “If you proceed, this won’t stay hidden. It will be the scandal that defines your tenure, destroys the legacy of your genuine achievements, and opens you up to legal consequences. It is a mistake that will chase you forever.” This is not disloyalty; it is the highest form of loyalty to the person’s better self and to the public good. It is speaking the truth in love, with data and consequences clearly laid out. It is a human act of care that risks a relationship to save a soul and a nation. It fulfils the biblical mandate to “rescue those being led away to death” (Proverbs 24:11), even if they are the ones leading themselves there.

5. The skylight: The Static Sacrament in the Tempest (Daniel 6)

At the peak of his career, under a new administration, Daniel is targeted by jealous rivals. They can find no “error or fault” in him (Daniel 6:4). His only vulnerability is his predictable, public devotion. A law is passed forbidding prayer to any but the king. Daniel’s response is breathtaking in its simplicity: “He went to his house... and he got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously” (Daniel 6:10). The window was open. He made no show of it; he simply continued the rhythm that had sustained him since youth. The Nigerian Moment: Your Non-Negotiable Rhythms; The Nigerian leader’s schedule is a tyrant: dawn meetings, endless travel, midnight crises. The first casualty is often the leader’s inner life. The soul is starved, and the moral compass spins. The Danielic imperative is to defend your spiritual rhythms with the same ferocity you defend your political calendar.

This means institutionalizing your Exilic Disciplines:

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The Protected Hour: A daily, non-negotiable 60 minutes perhaps at 5 AM for prayer, scripture, and silence. Your aides know this hour is sacrosanct.

The Digital Sabbath: One full day a week, perhaps Sunday, where official phones are handed to an aide. You worship, rest, connect with family, and remember you are a human being, not just a human doing.

The Quarterly Retreat: Three days alone or with a spiritual director, away from the capital, to audit your soul against your original PIP, to weep over failures, to seek fresh vision.

This is your open window. It is your visible, unwavering orientation towards Jerusalem, your true source of identity and authority. It is what sustains the “excellent spirit” within you (Daniel 6:3) when everything outside is chaos. In a culture of perpetual motion, your chosen stillness becomes your most powerful act of resistance and renewal. It is the human necessity of remembering who you are, and whose you are, before you forget.

6. The Prospect: Edifice for a Prospect You Will Not See (Daniel 7-12)

The final chapters of Daniel shift from court tales to apocalyptic visions. The elderly Daniel sees beasts and kingdoms rise and fall, all under the ultimate sovereignty of the “Ancient of Days” (Daniel 7:9). He receives a vision of a timeline stretching centuries beyond his life. This cosmic perspective allowed him to serve pagan emperors without idolising their regimes. He worked faithfully within *chronos* (historical time) while living in light of *kairos* (God’s decisive time).

The Nigerian instant: The Transgenerational Mindset; Nigerian politics is tragically short-term, obsessed with the next election, the next headline, the next financial quarter. The Danielic leader, informed by a divine horizon, adopts a Transgenerational Timeline. Cullmann’s distinction is a helpful lens for understanding Daniel’s ability to function in secular history (*chronos*) while being guided by the revelation of God’s sovereign purpose (*kairos*)³.

³Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History*, trans. Floyd V. Filson, (London: SCM Press, 1951).

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Conclusion

Returning to the Banquet, The governor looks at the heaping plate before him. The laughter still rings. But now, he sees a choice. He doesn't need to overturn the table in a grand, messianic gesture. He can simply, quietly, push the most corrupting morsels aside. He can lean over and ask his commissioner, "Have we done the fair market analysis on the Phase Two contracts?" He can excuse himself for a moment, find a quiet corner, and send a text of encouragement to the young, idealistic special adviser who is feeling pressure to compromise. He can block out tomorrow morning for a meeting with his "Kitchen Cabinet" to pray over the upcoming budget. This is the Danielic framework in action: not a sudden revolution, but a thousand human decisions for integrity, community, courage, truth, centredness, and legacy. It is the slow, steadfast work of exiles building a homeland of justice within the empire of decay. The call is not for perfect, fearless giants. It is for tired, faithful humans in positions of influence to make the next right choice. To choose their plate, their circle, their stand. To find their voice, protect their window, and fix their eyes on the horizon. In doing so, they may discover that they are not captives in Babylon, but it's most essential and transformative servants, slowly turning a palace of exile into a foretaste of home.

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THE CROWNED SHEPHERD: AN OLD TESTAMENT THEO-POLITICAL FRAMEWORK FOR NIGERIA'S GOVERNANCE CRISIS

By
Dr. Joseph A. Ashimolowo

Abstract:

This article constructs a novel theological-hermeneutical framework by synthesizing the Old Testament's royal, prophetic, and covenantal leadership paradigms into a unified "Shepherd-King" model, distinct from contemporary Christian leadership discourse. Moving beyond generalized biblical principles, it engages the socio-political context of ancient Israel's monarchy, prophetic critique, and covenantal law to diagnose the pathologies of Nigeria's political leadership. The article posits that Nigeria's governance failures represent a profound theological crisis a breach of ancient covenantal obligations and proposes a recovery of the Old Testament's theopolitical vision, not as theocracy, but as a moral architecture for public trust and nation-building. This involves excavating the concepts of mishpat (justice), tsedaqah (righteousness), hesed (covenantal loyalty), and shalom (holistic peace) as non-negotiable pillars of statecraft.

Keywords: Old Testament Leadership, Political Theology, Monarchy, Prophetic Critique, Governance, Nation-Building.

Word Count: 119

Introduction:

A Nation in Search of its Sinai, Nigeria's political landscape is a theatre of contradictions: immense human and natural capital juxtaposed with debilitating poverty; a vibrant democracy undermined by electoral violence and prebendalism; professed religious piety coexisting with systemic corruption. Prevailing analyses focus on institutional weakness, economic models, or ethnic rivalry. This article proposes a deeper, more discomfiting thesis: Nigeria suffers from a theopolitical deficit. Its crisis of leadership is, at its core, a crisis of a broken covenant between the

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governed and the governors, a concept with profound roots in the Old Testament. While scholars like Richard Joseph have dissected Nigeria's "prebendal politics" and Matthew Kukah its religious dimensions, no work has systematically employed the integrated Old Testament perspectives of Royal "Kingly", Prophetic, and Covenantal (Mosaic) leadership as a diagnostic and prescriptive lens for the Nigerian state. This is not a call for a Christian theocracy; rather, it is an argument that the Old Testament understanding of power, justice, and communal responsibility offers a transcendent moral architecture desperately needed to reconstruct Nigeria's fractured political covenant. The Old Testament does not present a monolithic leadership theory but a dynamic, often tense, conversation between three models: the King (exercising power), the Prophet (critiquing power), and the Law/Covenant (constitutionalizing power). Nigeria's political class operates like kings without the prophetic critique and outside the covenantal law. This article explores this triad and its implications for rebuilding a Nigerian politics rooted in public trust, sacrificial service, and restorative justice.

I. The Royal archetype: From Shepherd-King to Predatory Pharaoh

The Old Testament ideal of kingship is not absolute power but accountable stewardship. The king is not a law unto himself but is subject to the Torah "Deuteronomy 17:14-20". This text, a "constitutional mandate" for Israelite monarchy, forbids multiplying horses (militarism), wives (compromising alliances), and wealth (personal enrichment), and commands the king to write and read the law daily "that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers."⁴

The model king is David, the Shepherd-King. His origins as a literal shepherd "1 Samuel 16:11" symbolize the core ethic: to lead is to protect, provide for, and be intimately connected to the flock. His psalms reflect a consciousness of ruling under God's gaze "Psalm 72". The ideal is crystallized in the messianic prophecy of Isaiah: a king who rules with wisdom, justice, and righteousness, bringing shalom to the nation "Isaiah 9:6-7, 11:1-5".

⁴Deuteronomy 17:14-20 – The Law of the King: This passage is unique in ancient Near Eastern literature for its severe restrictions on monarchic power, subordinating the king directly to the written Torah.

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Nigerian Implication: The Reign of the Predatory Pharaoh Contrasts this with the predominant model in Nigerian politics, which aligns not with the Davidic shepherd but with the Predatory Pharaoh of Exodus. The Pharaoh model is characterized by:

Megalomania and Self-Deification: The leader as the unassailable "Strongman," whose will supersedes institutions and the law. Public funds become a personal treasury.

Systemic Exploitation: The people are not a flock to be nurtured but a resource to be exploited for elite enrichment akin to the Hebrews forced to make bricks without straw.

Hardening of the Heart: A repeated, willful refusal to heed prophetic warnings (from civil society, the judiciary, the press) leading to societal plagues: poverty, insecurity, and institutional decay⁵.

The theological implication is stark: when leaders enact the Pharaoh archetype, they place themselves under the judgment narratives of the Old Testament. The Nigerian state, in its extractive and oppressive tendencies, often functions as a modern Pharaonic system. Recovery requires a conscious re-orientation towards the Shepherd-King ideal: leadership measured by the welfare of the weakest "sheep" "Ezekiel 34:1-10", not the opulence of the ruler.

II. The Prophetic Standard: The Voice of Mishpat and Tsedaqah

If the royal office holds power, the prophetic vocation holds power accountable. The Old Testament prophets were not fortune-tellers but covenant lawyers and political theologians. Their central critique was the rejection of mishpat (justice, particularly for the vulnerable) and tsedaqah (righteousness, right relationships). They condemned not just personal sin but structural evil.

Amos thundered against elites who "trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth" "Amos 2:7" and "sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals" "Amos 8:6". Isaiah declared God's disgust with religious ritual divorced

⁵ Richard A. Joseph, *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria* (1987): Joseph's concept of "prebendalism" the treatment of state offices as prebends (personal property) for the benefit of officeholders and their clients is the modern political science equivalent of the "Predatory Pharaoh" model.

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from social justice: "Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause" "Isaiah 1:17"⁶.

Jeremiah, speaking directly to the king, commanded: "Execute justice in the morning, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor, him who has been robbed" "Jeremiah 21:12".

The prophet's authority derived from a transcendent moral order. They spoke truth to power, often at great personal cost, because they answered to a higher Sovereign.

Nigerian Implication: The Silencing of the Prophetic Voice; In Nigeria, the prophetic voice has been compromised, co-opted, or crushed.

Co-option: Many religious leaders have traded prophetic integrity for access to "Aso Rock," offering blessings in exchange for patronage, thus becoming court prophets like the 450 prophets of Baal.

Crushing: Civil society activists, investigative journalists, and honest judges who play the prophetic role are routinely harassed, imprisoned ("thrown into the cistern" like Jeremiah), or killed.

Privatization of Morality: Religion is often relegated to the private sphere of piety, its powerful social justice teachings neutered in the public square.

A healthy Nigerian polity requires the resuscitation of a true prophetic cadre. This includes not only religious figures but a vibrant, protected civil society, an independent press, and a fearless judiciary. These institutions must collectively embody the prophetic function: to name corruption, condemn oppression of the poor, and constantly recall the nation to its covenantal obligations. They are the national conscience.

III. The Covenantal Model: The Torah as Community Contract

At the foundation of Israel's polity was the Covenant (berith), established at Sinai. This was not merely a religious pact but a comprehensive social and political constitution. The Torah provided a detailed vision for a just society: laws on

⁶. Mishpat and Tsedaqah: These are often paired in the Prophets (e.g., Amos 5:24; Isaiah 1:27). Mishpat is retributive and procedural justice; Tsedaqah is distributive and relational righteousness. Together, they form a comprehensive vision of social justice.

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equitable economics "Jubilee in Leviticus 25"⁷, fair judiciary "Deuteronomy 16:18-20", care for aliens, widows, and orphans repeated over 30 times, and limitations on executive power.

Leadership in this framework is stewardship of the covenant. The king is the chief magistrate, sworn to uphold this divine constitution. The success of the nation is tied directly to its fidelity to this covenant "Deuteronomy 28". Blessings follow obedience; curses (many of which mirror Nigeria's woes: conflict, poverty, failed leadership) follow betrayal.

Nigerian Implication: The Breached Social Contract and the Need for a New Covenant Nigeria's fundamental problem is a breached social contract. The "covenant" between the state and its citizens the promise of security, justice, and the common good in exchange for allegiance and taxes have been shattered. The state has failed in its most basic Old Testament derived functions: to "deliver the weak and needy" and "crush the oppressor" "Psalm 72:4".

This breach is theological. It represents a failure of *hesed* the covenant loyalty and steadfast love that should characterize governance. The ruling class exhibits *habiru*-like behaviour acting as predatory outsiders plundering the community, rather than shepherds bound to it by sacred oath.

Rebuilding requires a conscious re-founding on covenantal principles:

1. **Mishpat as Anti-Corruption:** Justice must be the central plank of governance. This requires not just laws but a culture where the powerful are not above the law. The OT's insistence on one law for native and stranger "Exodus 12:49" indicts Nigeria's culture of impunity.
2. **Tsedaqah as Restorative Equity:** Righteousness means creating systems that repair historical and ongoing injustices land, resource allocation, political representation. It moves beyond fairness to active restoration, akin to the Jubilee principle.

⁷The Jubilee (Leviticus 25): An economic and social reset mechanism designed to prevent perpetual poverty and land monopolization, embodying *tsedaqah* as restorative justice.

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3. Shalom as the Goal of Policy: Shalom is not merely absence of war but holistic well-being: public health, infrastructure, economic opportunity, and social harmony. Every policy must be evaluated against this metric of comprehensive peace.

4. Hesed as the Bond of Union: Nigeria's ethnic divisions require the cultivation of hesed a loyal, committed, and loving dedication to the common project of Nigeria, superseding ethnic, religious, and party loyalties⁸.

Conclusion:

Toward a Covenantal Republic A New Theopolitical Imagination

The Old Testament perspectives on leadership offer Nigeria not a blueprint for a theocratic state, but a theopolitical imagination to cure its soul-sickness. It presents a triad of checks and balances: a Shepherd-King executive accountable to a Covenantal Constitution and constantly challenged by a Prophetic Conscience.

The path forward is a Covenantal Re-founding. This involves:

Constitutional Re-commitment: Treating the constitution (and its amendments) not as a tool for power but as a sacred covenant, with a Bill of Responsibilities alongside Rights, explicitly rooted in the ethical imperatives of justice, equity, and public good.

Leadership as Priestly Service: Re-conceiving political office as a priestly vocation mediating the blessings of security, justice, and development to the people, while representing the people's needs before the altar of diligent governance.

The Prophetic University: Cultivating a new generation of leaders, journalists, and civil servants educated not only in technical skills but in the moral philosophy of mishpat, tsedaqah, hesed, and shalom as the foundations of statecraft.

Nigeria stands at a crossroads. It can continue under the shadow of the Predatory Pharaoh, facing the inevitable curses of a broken covenant instability and strife. Or it can choose the harder, ancient path of the Shepherd-King: to rule under law, for justice, with covenant loyalty, and toward the Shalom of all its people. The choice is not merely political; it is, in the deepest sense of the word, theological.

⁸Hesed: This key OT term (often translated "steadfast love," "mercy," "loyalty") describes the binding, faithful love expected within a covenant relationship. Its absence in governance is fatal.

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CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP

By

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Abstract

Discipleship has little meaning and relevance in today's theology, whereas when Jesus gave the command, He knew that if the church is going to challenge the world system and the gates of hell, discipleship is the necessary and indispensable way to achieve the goal. Discipleship is not just a first century priority, it is a timeless principle and command for church and not an option, so what we need in our churches is just not crowd, what we need are disciples. The truth of the matter is that the primary call of God to all of us jostling for titles today is call to discipleship; this is what is going to bring results in our lives and God's church, because in the heart of God, a man cannot become a pastor unless he is first a disciple. Unless a man is a disciple, he must not become a General Overseer. Today, the church is dumping that discipleship for motivation, human psychology and philosophy and other things that catches our fancy. However, the church may have changed her mind about discipleship but Jesus has not. "Therefore go ye and make disciples of all nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you" Matt. 28:19-20 (NIV). Discipleship is a term commonly used in religious contexts, particularly in Christianity, but it can also be applied more broadly to various mentorship and apprenticeship relationships. In its Christian context, discipleship refers to the process of following and learning from Jesus Christ, as well as helping others to do the same. It involves deepening one's faith, understanding of scripture, and commitment to living according to the teachings and example of Jesus. In practical terms, discipleship often involves a mentor-disciple relationship, where a more experienced believer (the mentor) guides and teaches a less experienced believer (the disciple) in matters of faith, theology, spiritual growth, and practical Christian living. This relationship typically involves regular meetings, study of the Bible, prayer, accountability, and encouragement. Discipleship can be understood as a relational journey where mature believers, often referred to as mentors or pastors, invest their time, wisdom and spiritual guidance into the lives of newer or less mature believers, known as disciples. This relationship is characterized by trust, accountability, and a shared commitment to spiritual growth. At its core, discipleship is about following the example of Jesus Christ, who called his disciples to follow him and learn from his teachings. On the other hand, a disciple is a follower or student of a teacher, leader, or philosophy. In religious contexts, disciples often refer to those who follow the

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teachings of a particular spiritual leader or religious figure, such as Jesus Christ's disciples in Christianity or the disciples of Buddha in Buddhism. The relationship between a disciple and their teacher or leader typically involves learning, guidance, and adherence to certain beliefs or practices. The term can also be used more broadly to describe someone who follows or adheres to a particular ideology, philosophy, or school of thought.

1. Introduction

The call to discipleship involves Jesus' unique invitation to become like Him (Luke 6:40) and to be a full participant in His mission. "Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" links discipleship with carrying the good news to all (Mark 1:15 and 17; Luke 5:10), while the occasions on which Jesus sent the twelve or the seventy out in two's (Mark 6:7-13; Luke 10:1-20) show that He expects disciples to be fully involved in service to others.

Discipleship is both personal and public. It is comprised of our private daily walk of prayer, fasting, worship, and studying Gods Word.

These are all things that people dont see us doing.

Then there is the public part of witness, ministry, and serving. These are things that are visible. Some have called this our "journey inward" and our "journey outward." Discipleship is both.

Discipleship is a foundational aspect of Christianity, rooted in the teachings of Jesus Christ. It involves the process of nurturing and guiding individuals to grow in their faith, knowledge, and understanding of God, while also equipping them to live out their beliefs in their daily lives. In the context of the church, discipleship plays a vital role in fostering spiritual maturity among believers and empowering them to fulfill their mission in the world.

This comprehensive write-up explores the concept of discipleship and its profound impact within the church community. Discipleship in the church is a very important task of the church. It is the heartbeat of God and a basic necessity for a successful Christian life.

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The scripture revealed that Jesus called the twelve disciples from the beginning of His ministry. He taught them within a period of three and a half years. After the training and before the ascension to heaven, He commanded them to go and make more disciples from all over the world. Before then, He had already told them as follows: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the father, of the son, and of the Holy Ghost and teach them to obey everything I have command you. And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20).

The great commission is all about making disciple. The command of God is not only to raise or make converts of all nations. This is crucial indeed, most especially for believers who are the disciple today and the disciples of the youth. It is sad today that many churches are filled with overgrown the youth; this is why the church in this generation has not been able to make real impact on the society. No doubt, there are many church auditoriums where people congregate every with high frenzy and excitement but the number of disciple are infinitesimal. A successful life is a fulfilled life; a fulfilled life is a life that pleases the Lord. The one who will please the Lord is one who has conformed to the image of the son of God (Romans 8:29).

The effect shows the important of discipleship in the life of a Christians “Most churches grow by transfer”. The system of today is the rotation of the saints. To carry on with the work of His father, Christ had to commission his disciples, all believers inclusive. The numbers of real converts to Christ had to commission his disciples, all believers inclusive.

The number of real converts to Christ by some “great churches is meager”, instead churches with strong preaching and music programmes attracts large numbers. Therefore people think that the church is great and the workers do the job. In reality, the church with the restaurants and theatres becomes the mega one because they entertain. The relationship between the clergy and laity has become professional to that of performers and parishioners and audience, the better the show, the larger the crowd. All these show that outstanding performance attracts people. It means little

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more than that in no way does it faithfully reflect the priorities of Christ for His church.

2. Discipleship process

Discipleship is not an event but a process of making disciples. Discipleship is not a school that you graduate from; when a man enters this school, he will never graduate until he sees Jesus in glory; so it is not an event. Discipleship is a systematic, cumulative and progressive process that takes place in a definite order. It is something that takes place progressively, it has a beginning and it has a growth path. It is cumulative; your experience in the process makes you a better disciple as you go through those experiences, revelations and dealings. That is why it is systematic and cumulative.

The word disciple from the original Greek (Mathetes) means a pupil, an apprentice, a student learning to become like his “master”. This process is the process of exchanging your own Adamic nature, your own selfish nature for Christ’s own divine life. A man increases in a measure of that divine life systematically, progressively and cumulatively. That is what determines our maturity and usefulness to God and His kingdom. “I want to tell you this: While those who will inherit their fathers’ property are still children, they are not different from slaves. It does not matter that the children own everything” Gal. 4:1 (NCV).

It is not just enough that we have crowd coming to the church, like the first century apostles we have to pass them through discipleships process. “We proclaim Him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ”. Col. 1:18 (NIV).

When a man is saved, that is the beginning of the process. He is saved into discipleship process just like a man needs to be admitted into a school with prerequisites; and the prerequisites for entering a discipleship process is to be born again. A man that is not born again cannot grow into that process, for a baby to grow he has to first be born in form of a baby.

3. Goals of discipleship

The first goal is Christ likeness. When a man is saved, he is saved so that God can begin to mould that man in His image. The ultimate goal of God for believers is that we might become like Jesus first, not to take us to heaven. If it is to take us to heaven, the day we become born again we are not fit for this world again, we just transit to heaven. The reason God is leaving us here is so that He can begin a work of molding us into His image; so that we can grow and begin to reproduce people like us. Actually, discipleship is the process that takes a man to heaven. If you dump discipleship, your journey to heaven becomes terribly difficult and uncertain. The first thing God wants to make a Christian is not a millionaire, God want to make him a disciple first. A millionaire is useless to God if he is not a disciple. Do you remember the story of the rich man and Lazarus? The rich man has no name; He has no identity in heaven. The rich man in Luke 12 is rich in assets, rich in money and rich in connections, yet he was eternally useless. The first goal is that God wants to make us in the image of His Son, to be like Jesus in nature and in character. “For those He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son that He might be the firstborn among many brothers” Rom. 8:29 (NIV).

The second goal of discipleship is fruitfulness. A man and a woman who is not a disciple cannot be fruitful or useful to God.

Discipleship is the only thing that can make a man useful and fruitful to God and His kingdom. If a man is not a disciple, he will constitute a danger rather than help if spiritual work is entrusted to him. That is why sometimes a work that has gone far in the kingdom of God, if entrusted to such man, will suddenly go down and everything will collapse and all gains of the past will be frittered away.

Discipleship process is the only thing that guarantees eternal results. The third goal of discipleship is that it is a glorification. This is exciting because discipleship is not a process that is so difficult without any encouragement and destination. “Encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into His kingdom and glory”. 1 Thess. 2:12 (NIV).

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For a man that is growing in discipleship walk, that man receives a measure of spiritual glory such that he becomes a terror to the kingdom of darkness. As you grow even you will sense it, as some of the things challenging you will no longer challenge you again. “So our faces are not covered. They show the bright glory of the Lord, as the Lord’s Spirit makes us more and more like our glorious Lord.” 2 Cor. 3:18 (CEV).

The degree of the glory that a man receives determines the measure of his spiritual strength to checkmate sin, the devil and the world system.

4. Relationship Process

God desires that we have a relationship with Him. He desires we grow our relationship with Him. When God calls a man, the first thing He calls him into is a relationship. The first thing God calls a man into is not miracle, not healing, not prosperity and it is not ministry. In God’s heart, God desires a love relationship with us and the beginning of that relationship starts when we give our life to Jesus. “He appointed twelve and designating them apostles that they may be with Him and that He might send them to preach.” Mk. 3:14 (NIV).

The primary reason is not to send them out but to be with Him. “To be”. That is the essence of every relationship. The primary reason God called us to Himself is not to make us apostles to the nations. Several people are working for God yet God does not know them. The danger is that a man can enjoy ministry to the point of losing touch with God. “I am the vine, you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” Jn. 15:5 (NIV).

Man of God, I will like you to wait and check if you are already disconnected from Jesus, don’t be deceived because of the attention you are getting in ministry or you are still hooked to the master in deep love relationship.

5. Separation Process

It is a process that God uses in separating us from the crowd. The church at its best is a mixed multitude. Jesus is always not under the pull of crowd and popularity like today’s minister, he made it tough for the crowd to follow him. “Now when He saw

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the crowds, He went up on the mountainside, His disciples came to Him.” Matt. 5:1 (NIV).

Out of those crowds, it is the disciples that went up the mount with Jesus. That is the separation process. “Then he called the crowd to Him along with His disciples and said “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up His cross and follow me” Mk. 8:34 (NIV).

Jesus again checkmated the crowd because He knows He could not commit anything serious into their hands. Today Jesus is still separating His own through discipleship process. One thing that will make our church grow is when we begin to grow disciples. How many were they when the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost? They were only 120 disciples. When the crowd came on the day of Pentecost and thereafter they sorted them out into discipleship process, they kept reproducing disciples. “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayers.” Acts 2:42.

6. Identification Process

A disciple carries the mark of Jesus everywhere he goes. He knows that he does not own himself, Jesus owns him. It is not something he makes noise about, his life wants to honour Jesus anytime even when has been removed from the fellowship of his brethren where nobody knows him. In discipleship you can give anything away no matter how precious because of Jesus; your job, your health, your certificate; you must give it away. The first thing you know is that your life is for Jesus and you must identify with His burden, His needs and His plans. “And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple”. Lk. 14:27 (NIV).

7. Exchange Process

All of us carry the divine nature of God in our lives because when we received Jesus, what we have received is God’s own kind of life. In discipleship, we begin to grow our divine nature, the nature of God inside of us. “And because of His glory and excellence, He has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that

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enable you to share His divine nature and escape the world's corruption caused by human desires." 2 Pet. 1:4 (NIV).

When a man is growing God's nature, you cannot see that man go and fight, you cannot see that man neck deep in immorality, you cannot see him not loving his brother or sister. If that seed is in you, then you must produce the fruit; that is the exchange process. "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls." Matt. 11:28-29 (NIV).

8. Dying Process

A call to discipleship is a call to death. Dying to what? It is dying to self! You no longer control yourself but you are now being controlled by the Holy Spirit. You are enthroning Jesus to rule. Several arrangements God is bringing our way actually is to help us to die but we don't want to die. God is calling us to die to self. "I have been crucified with Christ, I no longer live but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me." Gal. 2:20 (NIV).

Dying to the world system – God is calling us to die to the world system. A man must be dead to the world system to be able to handle the world system. When a man is dead what the world thinks or feel about him does not matter.

Dying to Sin – A man have to die to sin. Sin does not die as long as temptation is still alive. You cannot be feed your flesh with pornography and you think you are going to win the battle over immorality. You don't say people are making you get angry, that is what God is arranging to kill your flesh because actually provocation is the test of anger. You must be ready for the dying process. That is, the most difficult process in discipleship is dying to self, dying to the world and dying to sin. "As for me, God forbid that I should boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of that cross, my interest in all the attractive things of the world was killed long ago, and the world's interest in me is also long dead." Gal. 6:14 (PHILLIPS).

9. Transformation Process

In discipleship process, men are transformed from one level of spiritual glory to another, beyond the reach of demonic manipulations and harassment, every dealings and discipline you submit to in discipleship process will increase your spiritual measure, strength and glory. Many recurring cases of deliverance that we celebrate in church today are simply because many of God's children have dumped the transformational process of discipleship and are now at the mercies and oppression of demons when they are supposed to be heirs of the kingdom. "My dear children for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you." Gal. 4:19 (NIV). Whereas when there is increasing measure of glory upon the life of a man, it effectively checkmates demonic manipulations around him and lifts him above the operations of Satan and his cohorts.

10. Empowerment Process

In discipleship process, that is where God transfers His power. An example is in Elijah and Elisha and the Sons of the Prophets. The Sons of the Prophets were shunting the process and they never got the power, what they got was cassocks. Same happened to Elisha and Gehazi; Gehazi was interested in material things, they day he was given a staff to pray for the dead boy, nothing happened. Gehazi was not paying due diligence to the discipleship process, the day Naaman showed up with gifts, mammon reared up his ugly head, he went home with generational leprosy. God wants to give spiritual power only in the context of discipleship. And when He had called unto Him His twelve disciples. He gave them power against unclean spirits to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease. Matt. 10:1 (NIV).

The first thing Jesus called them to, is to be with Him. As they submit to that process, they received power. Even Elisha tapped into the anointing of Elijah because of his spiritual diligence; it was when he followed him from Bethel to Jericho, when he followed him to the end was when he received Elijah's double portion. That is why God gives power to people He has already dealt with, people He has already emptied Himself into their heart. He gives power to those that loves Him, to those that already

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knows His passion, His purity and priority; people that will not misuse or abuse His power. That is what discipleship is. That means you are like Him in love, in holiness, in service and like Him in humility. My friend, are you just hungry for God's power for show and vainglory? Are you in ministry for the sake of cheap popularity?

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HOLINESS AND POWER IN THE EARLY CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY: A PNEUMATOLOGICAL READING OF THE BOOK OF ACTS

By

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Abstract

The Book of Acts offers a dynamic depiction of the early Christian community, characterized by both extraordinary spiritual power and rigorous moral seriousness. In contemporary theological discourse, especially within Pentecostal and charismatic traditions, there is often an emphasis on power at the expense of holiness, or a focus on holiness that marginalizes power. This article contends that Luke's pneumatology in Acts integrates holiness and power as inseparable aspects of the Spirit's activity within the church. Through a pneumatological analysis of key passages in Acts—including Pentecost (Acts 2), communal life (Acts 4–5), leadership formation (Acts 6), mission expansion (Acts 8–13), and ecclesial discernment (Acts 15)—the study demonstrates that the Holy Spirit empowers the church not only for signs and wonders but also for holy living, communal integrity, and faithful witness. Holiness emerges as both the ethical outcome and theological prerequisite of divine power. By engaging in biblical exegesis, theological reflection, and dialogue with contemporary scholarship, this article contributes to biblical theology and practical ecclesiology by recovering a holistic vision of Spirit-filled life in which holiness and power operate as mutually reinforcing realities within the early Christian community.

Keywords: Holiness, Power, Holy Spirit, Acts of the Apostles, Pneumatology, Early Church

1. Introduction

The Acts of the Apostles serves as the New Testament's principal narrative account of the origins, development, and theological self-understanding of the early Christian community. Central to Luke's theological vision is the role of the Holy Spirit, whose arrival at Pentecost marks the beginning of a new era of divine activity characterized by bold witness, miraculous signs, communal transformation, and moral seriousness. However, contemporary Christian theology and practice frequently divide what Acts presents as a unified reality. In many ecclesial settings, spiritual power is sought without a corresponding emphasis on holiness, while in others, moral rigor is prioritized with minimal expectation of supernatural empowerment.

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This article contends that such dichotomies are foreign to Luke's pneumatology. In Acts, holiness and power are not competing values but interdependent expressions of the Spirit's presence. For example, in Acts 5:1–11, the Spirit exposes the sin of Ananias and Sapphira within the community, resulting in divine judgment that protects the church's moral integrity, even as miraculous signs and bold proclamation continue to characterize the church's witness. The same Spirit who empowers believers to preach boldly, heal the sick, and confront spiritual opposition also sanctifies the community, exposes sin, disciplines leaders, and preserves the church's moral integrity. Luke's narrative consistently portrays divine power as flowing within the boundaries of holiness and holiness as sustained by divine power.

The purpose of this study is to offer a pneumatological reading of Acts that foregrounds the intrinsic relationship between holiness and power in the early Christian community. By examining key narrative units and theological motifs, the article argues that the Spirit's work in Acts is fundamentally communal, ethical, and missional in nature. Such a reading has significant implications for contemporary ecclesiology, particularly within Pentecostal and global Christian movements where Acts functions as a normative text for faith and practice.

1.1. Pneumatology within the Narrative Theology of Acts

Luke's pneumatology is primarily expressed through narrative rather than systematic exposition. In contrast to Paul, who frequently presents theological arguments in epistolary form, Luke communicates theology through narrative structure, characterization, and recurring patterns of divine action. The Holy Spirit is introduced in Acts 1:8 as the principal agent of empowerment for witness, establishing a programmatic theme that develops throughout the text. This is vividly illustrated during the event of Pentecost in Acts 2:1–4, where the Spirit fills the apostles, enabling them to speak in various tongues and thus spreading the gospel to diverse peoples. Another key episode is the conversion of Cornelius and his household in Acts 10:44–46, where the Holy Spirit descends upon the Gentiles, signifying their inclusion in God's salvific plan. Notably, empowerment in Acts is consistently depicted as ethically engaged rather than morally neutral.

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The Spirit in Luke-Acts is the Spirit of prophecy, holiness, and divine presence. Continuity with Old Testament pneumatology is evident: the Spirit who filled prophets, empowered leaders, and sanctified God's people now rests upon the entire community (Acts 2:17–18). In the Old Testament, the Spirit's presence was often temporary and limited to certain individuals for specific tasks. Yet there is also discontinuity. Unlike the Old Testament pattern, the Spirit's presence in Luke-Acts is democratized and permanent, available to all believers regardless of status, signifying a shift in how God's presence and power are distributed. This democratization and permanence are missionally oriented, marking the church as the eschatological people of God, where every member participates in the divine mission.

Scholars such as Turner (1996) and Fee (1994) have emphasized that Luke's understanding of the Spirit cannot be reduced to empowerment alone. The Spirit is equally the source of guidance, moral discernment, communal unity, and divine judgment. This integrated pneumatology provides the framework for understanding how holiness and power function together in the life of the early church.

1.2. Pentecost: The Emergence of a Spirit-Empowered Community (Acts 2)

The Pentecost narrative in Acts 2 is frequently interpreted as an account of empowerment for mission. While this interpretation is valid, Luke's description extends beyond charismatic manifestations to emphasize communal transformation. The outpouring of the Spirit encompasses speaking in tongues, prophetic proclamation, repentance, baptism, and the establishment of a disciplined community.

Peter's sermon ends with a call to repentance and forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38). This links the Spirit with moral and covenantal renewal. The Spirit does not come as an isolated experience. Instead, it is part of a conversion process that includes repentance, baptism, and a new way of life. Luke shows that Spirit-empowerment requires and produces holiness.

The summary description of the early community in Acts 2:42–47 reinforces this point. Devotion to apostolic teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers characterizes the Spirit-filled church. Power is evident in signs and wonders, but

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holiness is expressed through generosity, unity, worship, and ethical coherence. The Spirit creates a community whose life together bears witness to the reality of God's reign.

2. Holiness and Divine Power: Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11)

Perhaps no passage illustrates the inseparability of holiness and power in Acts more starkly than the account of Ananias and Sapphira. Set within a broader narrative of generosity and communal sharing (Acts 4:32–37), the episode reveals the Spirit as the guardian of the church's moral integrity.

Ananias' sin is not merely dishonesty but hypocrisy—presenting partial obedience as total devotion. Peter's confrontation explicitly frames the offence as lying to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3–4), underscoring the Spirit's personal and holy character. The immediate judgment that follows demonstrates that divine power operates not only in healing and deliverance but also in discipline and purification.

This narrative challenges modern assumptions that associate divine power exclusively with positive or spectacular outcomes. In Acts, power includes the capacity to confront sin and preserve the sanctity of the community. Fear falls upon the church and the wider society, indicating that holiness itself becomes a form of witness. As Keener (2012) notes, the credibility of the church's power is inseparable from its moral seriousness.

3. Leadership, Wisdom, and the Spirit (Acts 6–7)

The appointment of the Seven in Acts 6 further illustrates Luke's integrated vision. The criteria for leadership are explicitly spiritual and ethical: individuals "full of the Spirit and wisdom" (Acts 6:3). Administrative competence alone is insufficient; holiness and Spirit-filled character are prerequisites for participation in the church's mission.

Stephen's ministry exemplifies this synthesis. Described as "full of grace and power" (Acts 6:8), he performs signs and wonders while also embodying prophetic holiness. His speech in Acts 7 reflects profound theological insight, moral courage, and

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faithfulness to the end. Stephen's martyrdom reveals that the Spirit's power does not guarantee escape from suffering but enables faithful witness in the face of opposition.

Holiness here is not withdrawal from conflict but conformity to Christ, even in suffering. Power is manifested not only in miracles but in steadfast obedience and forgiveness, as Stephen echoes Jesus' own prayer for his persecutors. Luke thus expands the meaning of power to include Spirit-enabled faithfulness in the midst of trial.

4. Mission Expansion and Ethical Discernment (Acts 8–13)

As the gospel spreads beyond Jerusalem, Luke continues to emphasize the ethical dimensions of Spirit-empowered mission. In Acts 8, Simon Magus seeks to acquire spiritual power for personal gain. Peter's rebuke exposes the incompatibility of divine power with corrupt motives, declaring that Simon's heart is "not right before God" (Acts 8:21). The episode reinforces the principle that power divorced from holiness becomes destructive rather than redemptive.

The conversion of Saul (Acts 9) further illustrates transformative holiness. The Spirit's power not only commissions Saul for mission but radically reorients his life, theology, and identity. Ananias' obedience, despite fear, reflects a community shaped by holiness and trust in divine guidance.

In Acts 10–11, the Spirit's work in Cornelius' household challenges ethnic and ritual boundaries, redefining holiness in Christological and pneumatological terms. Holiness is no longer maintained through separation but through obedience to the Spirit's inclusive mission. Power here takes the form of revelatory guidance, communal discernment, and theological recalibration.

5. Ecclesial Holiness and Communal Discernment (Acts 15)

The Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 represents a mature expression of Spirit-led holiness. Faced with a potentially divisive theological dispute, the apostles and elders engage in communal discernment, guided by Scripture, testimony, and the Spirit. The council's conclusion—"it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (Acts 15:28)—captures Luke's vision of collaborative holiness.

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The ethical directives issued to Gentile believers are not arbitrary restrictions but practices aimed at preserving communal integrity and witness. Holiness is framed relationally, enabling fellowship between diverse believers. Power is manifested not through coercion but through wisdom, unity, and obedience to the Spirit's leading.

6. Theological Implications

6.1. Holiness as the Context of Power

Acts presents holiness as the relational and ethical context within which divine power operates. Power is not an independent commodity but a function of participation in the Spirit's holy life. Attempts to instrumentalise power apart from holiness are consistently resisted and judged within the narrative.

6.2. Power as the Expression of Holiness

Conversely, holiness in Acts is not passive moralism but dynamic participation in God's mission. The Spirit empowers holy communities to bear witness, confront injustice, endure suffering, and embody the values of God's kingdom. Holiness is missional, and power is its outward expression. **Pneumatological Ecclesiology**

Luke's vision challenges contemporary churches to recover a pneumatological ecclesiology in which spiritual vitality, moral integrity, and communal discernment are held together. The early Christian community serves not merely as a historical model but as a theological paradigm.

7. Conclusion

A pneumatological reading of Acts reveals a compelling vision of the early Christian community as both holy and powerful. Luke refuses to separate ethical seriousness from charismatic vitality, presenting the Holy Spirit as the source of both sanctification and empowerment. Holiness and power emerge as mutually reinforcing dimensions of Spirit-filled life, essential for faithful witness in the world.

For contemporary theology and church practice, particularly within Pentecostal and global Christian contexts, Acts calls for a reintegration of these realities. The

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recovery of this holistic pneumatology offers a corrective to reductionist tendencies and invites the church to embody the transformative presence of the Holy Spirit

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OFFENSE IS INEVITABLE, BUT DEFEAT IS OPTIONAL

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Abstract

Offense is an unavoidable reality of human relationships, yet Scripture and experience show that while offense is inevitable, defeat is optional. This article presents a biblical and theological exploration of offense as a strategic tool of spiritual warfare and a key factor in personal, relational, and leadership failure. Drawing from the Greek concept of Skandalon – a trap or stumbling block – the study examines how Satan leverages offense to derail purpose, poison perspective, and pervert potential. Through exegetical and narrative analysis, the paper traces the progression of offense from initial temptation to spiritual death, as outlined in James 1:14-15, and evaluates the personal, communal, and ministry costs of cultivating a thin-skinned, easily offended spirit. It further establishes the biblical boundaries of forgiveness, distinguishing between grace and enabling, and argues that unresolved offense acts as a barrier to spiritual growth, intimacy with God, and fruitfulness. The article draws lessons from biblical leadership failures, highlighting why gifted, anointed, and visionary people often fall hardest when they harbor offense. Case studies of Ahithophel, whose offense silenced wisdom, and Judas Iscariot, whose offense made sacred trust cheap, serve as sobering warnings for contemporary believers and leaders. The findings conclude that victory over offense requires intentional forgiveness, emotional maturity, and alignment with Christ's model of humility and forbearance. This work contributes to Christian counseling, discipleship, and leadership development by offering practical, scriptural pathways to overcome offense rather than be overcome by it.

Keywords: Offense, Forgiveness, Spiritual growth, Leadership, Skandalon, Biblical examples and Spiritual warfare

1. Introduction

Luke 17:1–2 (New King James Version)

“Then He said to the disciples, ‘It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones.’”

Jesus did not speak these words to unbelievers; He spoke them to His disciples. That alone tells us something important: offense is not a possibility reserved for immature believers—it is a certainty for everyone who walks with God. The issue is not *whether* offense will come, but *how* we respond when it does.

Jesus begins with a striking statement: “It is impossible that no offenses should come.” In other words, offenses are unavoidable. You do not need to pray against them; they will come. They will come through people you love, people you trust, people you serve with, and sometimes people you least expect. Offense is woven into the fabric of human interaction in a fallen world.

However, Jesus does not stop there. He immediately adds a warning: “But woe to him through whom they come.” This shows that while offense is inevitable, becoming an instrument of offense is dangerous. God takes offense seriously—not only the experience of it, but the responsibility attached to causing it.

The word translated “offenses” in this passage comes from the Greek word *skandalon*. It refers to a trap, a snare, or bait concealed in a trap. This is critical to understand. Offense is not merely emotional pain or disagreement; it is a spiritual device. Satan uses offense as bait—something attractive on the surface, but destructive underneath.

What makes offense so effective is that it often feels justified. It appeals to our sense of fairness, dignity, and justice. “I didn’t deserve that.” “I was treated wrongly.” “I have a right to feel this way.” And many times, those feelings are not false. The problem is not that the pain is imaginary; the problem is that the response becomes a doorway.

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Offense offers the illusion of control. It makes you feel empowered, aware, and justified, while quietly positioning you for spiritual loss. The trap is subtle: you think you are holding someone accountable, but in reality, the offense is holding *you*.

Jesus' warning shows that offense is not neutral. It carries spiritual weight. It affects relationships, disrupts growth, and opens doors that should never be opened. This is why mature believers must learn early that offense is not something to nurse, rehearse, or protect. It must be handled swiftly and wisely.

The believer who does not understand offense will interpret it emotionally. The mature believer learns to interpret it spiritually. One sees offense as an event; the other recognizes it as a test.

Offense will come, but defeat does not have to follow. Victory lies in discernment—recognizing the bait before swallowing it—and in obedience, choosing God's way over emotional satisfaction.

Spiritual maturity is not measured by how strongly you react, but by how quickly you recover. Those who grow in Christ learn that letting go is not weakness; it is wisdom. Refusing offense is not denial; it is spiritual intelligence.

Jesus made it clear: offense is unavoidable, but becoming trapped by it is optional. The believer who understands this will protect their heart, preserve their relationships, and safeguard their destiny.

Further Reading

James 1:14–15 “But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.”

Matthew 24:10–12 “And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.”

Proverbs 19:11 “The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger, and his glory is to overlook a transgression.

2. Skandalon: How Satan Uses Offense As A Trap

Luke 17:1 “Then He said to the disciples, ‘It is impossible that no offenses should come...’”

When Jesus said that offenses would certainly come, He was not merely describing social friction or emotional wounds. He was exposing a spiritual strategy. The word translated “offenses” in Luke 17:1 is the Greek word *skandalon*. This word does not describe hurt feelings alone; it refers to a trap with bait concealed inside it.

A *skandalon* is a snare designed to capture prey by offering something desirable. The trap is hidden, but the bait is visible. This distinction is important. Satan does not present offense as danger; he presents it as opportunity. Opportunity for justice. Opportunity to defend yourself. Opportunity to feel validated. Opportunity to assert your worth. But beneath that appearance lies a mechanism meant to ensnare.

Offense works because it feeds something in the fallen human nature. It appeals to pride, ego, wounded identity, and unmet expectations. The enemy studies people carefully. He does not tempt believers randomly; he packages offense according to personal preference. What angers one person may not affect another. What offends you is often connected to what you value most.

This is why offense feels personal. It touches areas of importance—respect, recognition, loyalty, fairness. Satan does not need to invent new desires; he simply attaches bait to existing ones. When the bait is accepted, the trap closes quietly.

One of the most dangerous aspects of offense is that it promises justice while producing bondage. You feel right, but you are no longer free. You feel justified, but you are no longer sensitive. You feel empowered, but you are being controlled. Offense gives the illusion of strength while slowly draining spiritual authority.

Scripture consistently reveals this pattern. Offense never arrives shouting, “I am here to destroy you.” It comes whispering, “You deserve better.” It disguises itself as discernment, boldness, or self-respect. Yet the end goal is always the same: to separate the believer from love, clarity, and obedience.

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Jesus warned His disciples because proximity to truth does not immunize a person against traps. Spiritual knowledge without spiritual discipline still leaves room for offense. Many believers fall not because they lack revelation, but because they underestimate the subtlety of the bait.

Offense also seeks to create exchange. You receive emotional satisfaction, but something else is taken—peace, joy, clarity, relationships, or timing. Satan is not interested in the bait you receive; he is interested in what he collects in return. Scripture asks, “What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his soul?” Offense operates on the same principle, just on a smaller scale.

This is why offense must never be entertained casually. What looks like a small reaction can become a doorway. What feels like a moment of anger can become a pattern of bitterness. And what begins as disappointment can mature into deception.

Mature believers learn to pause when offense presents itself. They learn to ask, “What is this trying to take from me?” instead of “Why did this happen to me?” Discernment grows when we recognize that not every reaction deserves expression, and not every feeling deserves agreement.

The safest response to offense is not suppression, but submission—to God’s wisdom, to the Spirit’s leading, and to the higher call of love. Refusing the bait does not mean denying the pain; it means choosing not to be trapped by it.

Skandalon is real, but it is not unbeatable. The believer who understands the nature of the trap will not be impressed by the bait. And the believer who refuses offense will walk free where others are entangled.

Further Reading

James 1:14–15 “But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.”

Proverbs 4:23 “Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.”

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2 Corinthians 2:10–11 “Now whom you forgive anything, I also forgive. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.”

3. From Temptation To Death: The Progression Of Offense

James 1:14–15 “But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.”

Offense is never static. It does not arrive to stay small. Scripture reveals that offense follows a progression—a predictable, dangerous sequence that begins subtly and ends destructively if left unchecked.

James outlines this progression with surgical clarity. He shows us that temptation does not begin with action; it begins with attraction. A believer is “drawn away and enticed” by their own desires. This is where offense often takes root. Something happens. Something is said. Something is withheld. And a desire awakens—the desire to be understood, defended, justified, or vindicated.

At this stage, nothing outward has happened yet. The battle is internal. The believer still has the opportunity to shut the door. But offense thrives when internal agreement is formed. Enticement becomes effective only when the heart begins to cooperate.

James then says, “when desire has conceived.” Conception implies privacy and incubation. This is the stage where offense is rehearsed rather than released. The mind replays the event. The heart nurses the wound. Conversations are imagined. Justifications are built. At this point, the believer may still look calm outwardly, but inwardly, something has already taken shape.

What follows conception is birth. “It gives birth to sin.” Sin here is not always dramatic or public. Sometimes it is withdrawal. Sometimes it is silent resentment.

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Sometimes it is passive resistance, dishonor, coldness, or subtle rebellion. The sin may not look evil to observers, but it carries the same root—disobedience to love.

Sin, when allowed to grow, matures. And when it is “full-grown,” it produces death. Death in this context is not always physical. Often it is relational death, spiritual dullness, loss of sensitivity, broken trust, delayed destiny, or forfeited opportunity. Something that once carried life stops responding.

Jesus confirms this progression in Matthew 24:10–12. He says many will be offended, then betray one another, then hate one another, and eventually, love will grow cold. This sequence shows that offense is never the end; it is the beginning of a downward slide. Betrayal and hatred do not appear suddenly—they are the fruit of unattended offense.

What makes this progression dangerous is that each stage feels justified. The offended person does not feel evil; they feel wounded. They do not feel rebellious; they feel cautious. They do not feel hateful; they feel tired. Yet the end result is the same—distance from God’s life-giving flow.

Spiritual maturity is revealed in how early this progression is interrupted. Immature believers wait until sin becomes visible. Mature believers deal with offense at the level of attraction and conception. They refuse to allow agreement to form in their hearts.

Scripture never instructs believers to bind offense; it instructs them to flee and forgive. There are temptations you cannot cast out—you must walk away from them. Lingering is what allows conception. Delay is what enables growth.

The enemy’s objective is not merely to offend you; it is to keep you offended long enough for something to die. But God’s provision is clear. Light breaks the cycle. Repentance interrupts growth. Forgiveness restores flow. And humility reopens heaven.

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Offense may knock, but progression requires permission. When believers learn to respond quickly—by confronting issues in love, releasing forgiveness, and submitting emotions to truth—the chain is broken.

The wisdom of God is not found in how deeply we feel, but in how quickly we obey. Offense does not have to finish its work. The progression can be stopped, and life can be preserved.

Further Reading

Matthew 24:10–12 “And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.”

Proverbs 18:19 “A brother offended is harder to win than a strong city, and contentions are like the bars of a castle.”

Hebrews 12:15 “Looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled.”

4. The Cost Of Being Easily Offended

There is a quiet test every believer will face, especially those growing in responsibility and influence. It is not the test of power, visibility, or opportunity. It is the test of offense.

Jesus was clear when He spoke to His disciples in Luke 17:1. He did not warn them to avoid offense; He told them to expect it. Offense, according to Jesus, is not an interruption of the Christian journey—it is part of it. The danger is not that offense comes, but that it is allowed to stay.

One of the most expensive mistakes a believer can make is to underestimate the cost of being easily offended. Offense rarely announces itself loudly. It often begins

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quietly, as disappointment, unmet expectations, or perceived injustice. Yet what starts small can grow powerful enough to alter decisions, relationships, and even destiny.

From a leadership and maturity standpoint, offense is dangerous because it affects judgment. An offended heart does not see clearly. It begins to interpret neutral actions as hostile and loving correction as attack. This is why Scripture describes offense as a snare—a trap with bait hidden inside. The bait feels reasonable. The trap is rarely noticed until movement is restricted.

One of the first things offense attacks is relationships. God designed relationships as instruments of growth. No believer matures in isolation. We grow through community, accountability, and shared labor. When offense enters a relationship, it poisons what God intended to nourish. Trust weakens. Communication breaks down. Distance replaces cooperation.

This is especially costly for leaders. Many destiny relationships are seasonal. Some people are assigned to walk with you only for a phase of your journey. Offense can cause a premature separation, cutting short what God intended to use for preparation. Often, the person you are offended with today is the person God positioned to help you tomorrow.

Offense also hinders spiritual growth. Scripture teaches that love is the environment in which believers grow. Where offense is tolerated, love begins to shrink. Sensitivity to the Spirit reduces. Prayer becomes mechanical. Worship loses warmth. The heart grows guarded, and guarded hearts struggle to receive from God.

The tragedy is that none of this happens overnight. Offense works gradually. It convinces you that withdrawal is wisdom, that silence is maturity, and that distance is safety. Meanwhile, something vital is being lost.

Biblical history offers sober warnings. Men like Absalom and Ahithophel were not foolish or ungifted. They were intelligent, influential, and positioned for greatness. Yet offense shaped their decisions and eventually destroyed what wisdom and opportunity had built. Their stories reveal that offense does not only affect emotions; it alters destiny.

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Even Judas Iscariot walked closely with Jesus, witnessed miracles, and handled responsibility, yet offense found a place in his heart. Proximity to spiritual power does not replace the need for a guarded heart. When offense is allowed to mature, it begins to devalue what is sacred and make destructive decisions feel justified.

Maturity, therefore, is not proven by how strongly one reacts, but by how wisely one responds. A mature believer learns to process offense quickly—through forgiveness, honest conversation, and submission to God’s perspective. This does not mean denying pain or avoiding accountability. It means refusing to let offense become a controlling influence.

Leadership demands emotional discipline. Those entrusted with influence must learn to overlook minor offenses, confront necessary issues in love, and release what God has not asked them to carry. The cost of holding offense is always higher than the cost of releasing it.

In the end, offense asks a simple but dangerous question: “Will you protect your feelings or your future?” Wise believers choose their future. They understand that peace is not weakness, forgiveness is not loss, and letting go is often the strongest response.

The believer who learns this lesson early preserves relationships, maintains spiritual clarity, and remains positioned for what God intends to do next.

5. Boundaries Of Forgiveness: Protecting Your Heart Without Losing Your Influence

Mark 11:25 “And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.”

Forgiveness is often taught as a moral obligation or a spiritual ideal. While it is both, its deepest significance lies in **preserving influence, clarity, and leadership capacity**. Offense left unresolved does not only wound relationships; it blocks destiny, delays spiritual growth, and distorts judgment.

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In leadership, the cost of offense is exponential. A leader who allows resentment to fester may begin to misinterpret motives, withhold opportunities, or mismanage resources. Decisions start to reflect personal pain rather than God's purpose. This is why Jesus connects forgiveness directly to spiritual functionality: "that your Father in heaven may also forgive you."

Forgiveness is not only about the other person. It is primarily about the **health of your own heart**. Every offense you hold creates a weight that clouds perception and restricts movement. The person you refuse to forgive may remain unaware, but your ability to see clearly, act decisively, and lead effectively is diminished.

Bounded forgiveness is the mature approach. It is forgiveness **without surrendering authority or compromising boundaries**. It recognizes that while God calls you to release the offense from your heart, this does not mean you permit repeated violation. Bound forgiveness allows you to protect your calling, influence, and peace while obeying God's command to forgive.

The biblical principle is clear: harboring offense is a spiritual liability. It poisons relationships intended for growth. The stories of Absalom, Ahithophel, and Judas illustrate that unresolved offense clouds judgment and destroys potential. In contrast, the disciplined leader releases offense quickly, ensuring that personal grievances do not become traps for future decisions.

Bound forgiveness also maintains the integrity of authority. In leadership, power without humility and mercy becomes dangerous; humility without discernment invites exploitation. Bound forgiveness balances these two. It frees the heart to love, speak truth, and act decisively without the burden of personal grievance.

Practical application requires both honesty and courage. A leader must **acknowledge the offense, pray for discernment, and set clear boundaries** if necessary. Forgiveness does not always require reconciliation with the offender, but it always requires reconciliation with God's standard of love and obedience.

Leaders who master the practice of bound forgiveness gain several advantages:

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- They preserve relationships crucial to destiny and growth.
- They maintain clarity of vision and sensitivity to God.
- They protect their influence from being misused or undermined.
- They avoid collateral spiritual damage that arises when offense is carried unchecked.

Ultimately, forgiveness is **strategic as much as it is spiritual**. It is an act of wisdom, not weakness. It protects your heart and ensures that God's work through you is not derailed by personal pain or resentment. Leaders who understand this principle walk free in spirit, confident in their calling, and equipped to handle life's inevitable offenses with grace and authority.

Further Reading

Matthew 6:14–15 “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.”

Ephesians 4:31–32 “Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.”

Colossians 3:13 “Bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.”

6. How Offense Blocks Spiritual Growth And Sensitivity To God

1 John 4:7–8 “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”

Spiritual growth is inseparable from love. The Bible repeatedly emphasizes that love is the soil in which faith, wisdom, and obedience grow. Offense, however, is a corrosive agent in that soil. It diminishes love, fosters suspicion, and produces relational barriers that block God's intended flow in a believer's life.

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When offense enters a believer's heart, it creates a shadow over perception. Actions of others are misread, motives are questioned, and prayer life can be affected. A person who is offended may still attend church, pray, and serve—but the *effectiveness* of those spiritual activities is reduced. The Spirit works most powerfully in hearts that are soft, loving, and free of hidden grudges. Offense hardens the heart and distorts clarity, leaving the believer vulnerable to deception and misdirection.

The danger is particularly acute for leaders and those in positions of influence. A leader harboring offense will misjudge opportunities, mishandle relationships, and make decisions from woundedness rather than divine perspective. Spiritual authority requires a clear heart, unburdened by resentment. When offenses are left unresolved, even seasoned leaders may find themselves disconnected from God's timing and guidance.

Offense also hinders fellowship and communal growth. God designed believers to thrive in community, relying on one another for encouragement, correction, and accountability. When offense poisons relationships, believers isolate themselves emotionally and spiritually, cutting off channels of blessing and wisdom. The very people God intended to strengthen and sharpen them become unavailable because of unresolved offense.

Biblical examples illustrate this clearly. Absalom's unresolved offense toward Amnon not only destroyed his relationship with his brother but also impaired his own destiny. Ahithophel's bitterness clouded his judgment, despite his wisdom. Judas, offended and coveting, ultimately betrayed Jesus. In every case, offense limited spiritual discernment and blocked alignment with God's purposes.

The solution is both simple and demanding. Believers must **recognize offense quickly, process it in prayer, and release it through forgiveness**, whether or not reconciliation with the offender is possible. This frees the heart to love, restores clarity of vision, and allows spiritual growth to continue unhindered.

Leaders who master this principle understand that offense is not merely a personal issue—it is a spiritual liability. Each offense left unchecked is a weight on their

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calling, a distraction from purpose, and a weakening of sensitivity to the Spirit. Releasing offense restores alignment with God and ensures that the believer remains effective, spiritually fertile, and positioned for what God has planned.

Spiritual growth is less about avoiding mistakes and more about **not allowing offense to take root**. Leaders and believers alike are called to cultivate hearts that are responsive to God, generous in love, and free from bitterness. The believer who does this experiences freedom, clarity, and fruitful spiritual life.

Further Reading

Hebrews 12:15 “Looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled.”

7. Offense And Leadership Failure: Lessons From Biblical Examples

Proverbs 19:11 “The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger, and his glory is to overlook a transgression.”

Leadership is both a calling and a test. While spiritual gifting, intelligence, or influence may position a person for greatness, unresolved offense can dismantle even the most promising leader. The Scriptures offer multiple examples illustrating how offense, left unchecked, can derail destiny.

Consider Absalom. He was a man of immense potential, intelligent and charming, poised to succeed David. Yet when his brother Amnon sinned against their sister, Absalom allowed offense to grow unchecked in his heart. Instead of addressing the situation quickly and seeking resolution, he waited two full years. In that time, bitterness hardened, plans for revenge took shape, and his judgment became clouded. Though he eventually acted, the delay cost him alignment with God’s timing and ultimately led to collateral damage, including the loss of relationships and the deaths of innocent people. The very offense that should have sharpened him instead became a trap.

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Ahithophel offers another sobering example. Known for his wisdom and strategic insight, he had direct access to the king and the counsel of God. Yet when offense entered his heart—over perceived injustice related to David and Bathsheba—his judgment became compromised. His advice, though brilliant in strategy, ultimately contributed to discord and conflict. What was once a gift of God became weaponized through resentment. offense clouded clarity, even in a man of wisdom.

Even Judas Iscariot illustrates the subtle but devastating impact of offense. He walked closely with Jesus, witnessed miracles firsthand, and was entrusted with ministry resources. Yet when offense mingled with covetousness and pride, it led to betrayal. Judas' proximity to the truth did not immunize him from the consequences of an offended heart.

These examples reveal a consistent principle: offense in leadership is not merely a personal weakness—it is a spiritual hazard. A leader may appear capable, gifted, or wise, but offense unaddressed can distort judgment, delay destiny, and misalign vision.

The antidote lies in **early intervention and disciplined heart management**. Leaders must recognize offense quickly, process it prayerfully, and seek resolution through forgiveness or careful confrontation. Boundaries should be established without compromise to integrity, and humility must guide every response. Maturity is revealed not by the absence of offense, but by the refusal to let offense dictate decisions.

Leadership effectiveness depends on emotional and spiritual discipline. Those who master the practice of releasing offense maintain clarity, preserve relationships, and remain aligned with God's purpose. They avoid pitfalls that have trapped even the wisest and most gifted. They understand that the glory of leadership is not in power, title, or influence—but in the capacity to **overlook transgressions, maintain integrity, and keep the heart tender toward God and people**.

In essence, offense is a leadership test. How a leader responds reveals not only their maturity but also their readiness to Steward God's assignment. The same opportunity

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that builds character can also become a trap if offense is nurtured rather than resolved. Wise leaders, therefore, protect their hearts, prioritize reconciliation, and ensure that offense does not sabotage the work God has entrusted to them.

Further Reading

Proverbs 15:1 “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”

James 1:19–20 “So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.”

Matthew 18:15–17 “Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother...”

8. Why Gifted People Fall Harder When They Harbour Offense

Proverbs 16:18 “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”

Giftedness is a divine advantage, yet it comes with a hidden responsibility: the inner heart must remain disciplined. Offense, when allowed to fester, is a silent but powerful force that can derail even the most gifted individual.

The Bible provides clear examples. Judas Iscariot was chosen among the twelve apostles because of his abilities and trustworthiness. He was educated, capable, and entrusted with resources. Yet when offense and covetousness combined in his heart, it led him to betray Jesus. His proximity to miracles, spiritual authority, and divine instruction did not protect him from the consequences of an offended heart. Gift without humility, and talent without grace, leaves a person vulnerable to spiritual collapse.

Similarly, Absalom illustrates another principle. A man of charisma, vision, and leadership potential, he allowed offense to cloud his judgment. Instead of resolving the wrongs he experienced, he nurtured resentment and plotted revenge. His intelligence and charm were not enough to safeguard him; they only amplified the

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consequences of unaddressed offense. Giftedness can accelerate both destiny and disaster, depending on the state of the heart.

Why do gifted people fall harder when offended? There are several reasons:

- ii. **Amplified influence** – A gifted person has the capacity to impact more lives. When offense takes root, the ripple effect is magnified. Decisions made in bitterness or pride affect not only the individual but also their sphere of influence, sometimes with long-lasting consequences.
- iii. **Heightened expectations** – Society, peers, and even the individual themselves place higher expectations on gifted people. When offended, the weight of unmet expectations can fuel pride, frustration, or withdrawal from wise counsel.
- iv. **Closer proximity to opportunity** – Gifted individuals often move in spaces of opportunity, leadership, and trust. Offense at this level is dangerous because it can distort judgment in moments that shape destiny.
- v. **Ego activation** – Talents and gifts, when not anchored in humility, are easily entangled with pride. Offense triggers ego-driven reactions, leading gifted people to respond emotionally rather than spiritually.

The solution is spiritual discipline. Gifted individuals must learn to **recognize offense early, process it through prayer, and release it before it takes hold**. Humility, accountability, and intentional forgiveness are non-negotiable. They must remember that God's grace is not given only for talent but for the stewardship of the heart. How a gifted person manages offense determines whether their gifts elevate or destroy them.

Maturity in gifted individuals is reflected not by their talent, resources, or opportunities, but by their ability to guard the heart against offense. A truly wise and spiritually mature person uses their gifts while keeping the heart tender, the ego in check, and relationships preserved. This ensures longevity, sustained influence, and alignment with God's purposes.

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The principle is clear: gifts amplify consequences. Offense left unresolved magnifies the fall, while humility and quick forgiveness magnify impact. Leaders, ministers, and anyone in positions of influence must heed this lesson carefully: **giftedness without heart discipline is a liability, and offense is the easiest path to squander it.**

Further Reading

Proverbs 29:11 “A fool vents all his feelings, but a wise man holds them back.”

James 1:19–20 “Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.”

Psalm 37:8 “Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; do not fret—it only causes harm.”

9. Ahithophel: When Offense Silences The Voice Of Wisdom

Proverbs 11:14 “Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in the multitude of counselors there is safety.”

Wisdom is one of the most valuable assets a leader can possess. Yet, even wisdom can be compromised when offense takes root. The life of Ahithophel, the counselor to King David, illustrates this danger vividly.

Ahithophel was renowned for his insight, strategic acumen, and spiritual discernment. His counsel was so trusted that the Bible says, “the advice of Ahithophel was as if a man had inquired at the oracle of God.” For any leader, such access to wisdom is priceless. Yet offense—unresolved resentment toward David for personal reasons—clouded his judgment at a critical moment in history.

When Absalom rebelled against his father, David, Ahithophel’s wisdom was compromised. His counsel, although brilliant in strategy, was motivated by bitterness and personal offense. This demonstrates a critical principle: **the voice of wisdom can be silenced or distorted by unresolved offense.** Spiritual discernment is compromised when personal grievances enter the decision-making process.

Leaders today face similar risks. A gifted or experienced advisor, manager, or leader may allow offense to influence judgment. Minor resentments, when allowed to fester,

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can grow into decisions that derail projects, relationships, or even the leader's destiny. In Ahithophel's case, offense led him to advise actions that opposed God's purposes and ultimately contributed to his own demise.

The danger is twofold:

- i. **Internal compromise** – Offense clouds judgment, making even sound wisdom suspect. Leaders may act from emotion rather than principle, resulting in poor decisions.
- ii. **External consequences** – Those influenced by the leader or counselor also suffer when offense drives strategy. Just as Ahithophel's advice affected Absalom and the nation, unresolved offense in modern leadership impacts teams, organizations, and communities.

The antidote is vigilance and humility. Wisdom must always be filtered through a heart free of bitterness. Leaders must regularly examine whether decisions are based on principle or personal grievance. Prayer, accountability, and honest self-assessment are essential to preserve the clarity and authority that God intends for every gifted leader.

Ahithophel's story is a warning for leaders, counselors, and anyone entrusted with influence: **offense is not just an emotional issue; it is a strategic liability.** Failing to manage offense allows bitterness to override discernment, making even the wisest person vulnerable to error and loss.

The principle is timeless: Godly wisdom and influence require a heart that chooses humility, forgiveness, and alignment with God's purposes over personal grievance. Leaders who master this principle maintain clear judgment, sustain influence, and prevent offense from silencing the voice of wisdom in their lives and spheres.

Further Reading

Proverbs 3:5–6 “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.”

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James 1:19 “So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.”

Ephesians 4:31–32 “Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.”

10. Judas Iscariot—How Offense Makes Sacred Trust Cheap

Luke 22:3 “Then Satan entered Judas, surnamed Iscariot, who was numbered among the twelve.”

Trust is one of the most sacred currencies in leadership and spiritual life. Those entrusted with responsibility—whether for people, resources, or opportunities—carry a weight that is both empowering and perilous. Judas Iscariot exemplifies how offense, combined with other inner weaknesses, can devalue sacred trust.

Judas was handpicked by Jesus to be among the twelve apostles. He witnessed miracles, heard divine teaching, and was entrusted with the ministry’s finances. On the surface, Judas had everything a faithful follower could desire: proximity to truth, responsibility, and spiritual authority. Yet offense found a foothold in his heart—subtle, perhaps unspoken, but powerful enough to distort his priorities.

Offense in Judas’ life combined with covetousness, pride, and impatience. Small grievances or unmet expectations—perceived slights from fellow apostles or dissatisfaction with his role—were allowed to fester. The bait of justice, control, or recognition became irresistible. Eventually, the culmination of offense and personal desire led him to betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver.

This story offers several lessons for leaders and believers:

- i. **Offense is a silent thief** – It may not show immediately, but it erodes integrity over time. Judas appeared faithful, yet his unresolved offense corrupted his loyalty.
- ii. **Sacred responsibility requires inner vigilance** – Gifts, positions, and trust are not safeguards against personal failure. Leadership and influence require ongoing heart-checks.

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- iii. **Unchecked offense leads to destructive decisions** – The combination of offense with pride, ambition, or impatience produces choices that can compromise destiny, relationships, and spiritual alignment.
- iv. **Proximity does not guarantee protection** – Judas was constantly with Jesus, yet he fell. Being close to truth, anointing, or divine instruction does not prevent the heart from being ensnared by offense.

The remedy is both preventive and corrective. Leaders and believers must learn to identify the first stirrings of offense, process them in prayer, and act promptly through forgiveness, accountability, and humility. Protecting one's heart is not avoidance—it is stewardship of trust and influence.

Sacred trust is earned and preserved through obedience, integrity, and a heart aligned with God. Offense, when allowed to grow, cheapens this trust and compromises opportunities that could have eternal impact. Leaders must remember that their influence is not merely about skill or proximity—it is about character and heart condition.

In conclusion, Judas' life is a sobering reminder that offense is not trivial. It can quietly erode loyalty, distort priorities, and destroy even those positioned for great destiny. The mature believer, therefore, cultivates vigilance, practices humility, and refuses to allow offense to make sacred trust cheap.

Further Reading

Matthew 26:21–25 “And as they were eating, He said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me.’”

John 12:6 “Now he [Judas] said this, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it.”

Proverbs 4:23 “Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.”

BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE OF DEPRESSION

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Abstract

Depression is a significant mental health concern in contemporary society, yet experiences of deep emotional distress are evident throughout biblical history. This article examines a biblical perspective of depression by identifying and thematically analyzing representative instances of depressive experiences in both the Old and New Testaments. Using a qualitative, narrative approach, the study considers the despair of Jacob at the loss of Joseph, King Saul's torment and isolation, David's laments in the Psalms, Amnon's post-transgression anguish, Ahithophel's despondency, Elijah's exhaustion under the broom tree, Job's prolonged suffering, and others in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, it analyzes the anguish of Jesus Christ in Gethsemane, Judas Iscariot's remorse, and the distress articulated by the apostles Paul and Peter, among others. Thematic analysis reveals three consistent patterns: 1) candid expression of sorrow and lament as a form of engagement with God, 2) physical, emotional, and social withdrawal as manifestations of distress, and 3) trajectories toward comfort, restoration, and hope through divine presence, prayer, and community. The findings indicate that Scripture portrays depression not as spiritual failure but as a genuine aspect of human experience addressed within a framework of lament and redemption. This biblical perspective contributes to interdisciplinary dialogue between theology and psychology and offers insights for pastoral care and faith-based support for individuals experiencing depression.

Keywords: Depression, Biblical perspective, Lament, Mental health, Old Testament, New Testament, Pastoral care and Suffering

BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE OF DEPRESSION

1. Introduction

In the Christian Counselor's Medical Desk Reference, authored by Dr. Robert Smith; he gave the best concise definition for depression: "Depression is a debilitating mood, feeling, or attitude of hopelessness (despair or joylessness), which becomes a person's reason for not handling the most important issues of life."

Before we can fully understand this definition, we must grapple with the meaning of the words "feeling, mood, or attitude" because they serve as principal components of the definition itself.

We can simplify the definition by acknowledging that feeling, mood, and attitude are used synonymously in the definition above. Now feelings are not thoughts because sometimes you can feel happy or sad yet not thinking of anything in particular.

Feelings (synonymous with emotions or moods) are physiological responses to what we are thinking. Sometimes the particular thought is difficult if not impossible to connect to the feeling, but nevertheless feelings are always the result of what we think.

"As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he" Proverbs 23:7

In view of the above scriptures, we can rephrase the definition of depression so that we might have a precise and helpful description: "Depression is a debilitating physiological response to our thoughts of hopelessness (despair or joylessness), which becomes a person's reason for not handling the most important issues of life."

The above definition puts the origin of depression in our thoughts.

What we are calling depression is not simply a case of the blues. "The blues" is a phrase used to describe a sad feeling. A person who has the blues graduates to full blown depression when he allows this feeling to consume him to the point that he is paralyzed.

Full-blown depression is when someone is so overwhelmed by his feelings that his participation in life comes to a screeching halt.

A. When feelings become a sin.

According to Scripture, a feeling is sinful when it leads you in either your thinking or your actions to disobey God's Word.

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To be more accurate, feelings, which are physiological responses, are never sinful. But the thoughts that cause the feelings and the thoughts and actions that are the result of the feelings can be and often are sinful.

Depression is by definition disobedience to God's commands in both attitude and action.

Let's keep the definition before us: "Depression is a debilitating physiological response to our thoughts of hopelessness (despair or joylessness), which becomes a person's reason for not handling the most important issues of life."

In 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 we are commanded to ALWAYS be joyful and thankful: "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

Depression is the antithesis of joy. Joy is a liberating mood or feeling, which motivates one to live for Christ.

The source of joy is hope and trust in what God has done, is doing, and will do.

From various researches, no depressed person was described as joyful or thankful.

The reason for this is because a depressed person is by definition joyless and hopeless.

According to Scripture, to be in a state of joylessness and hopelessness is a sinful choice one makes.

We have responsibilities as believers to serve God by loving others in concrete and tangible ways; husbands are to provide for their families and care for their wives; wives are to submit to their husbands and be workers at home; children are to obey their parents.

But when one becomes depressed, he stops handling these primary responsibilities. He begins to disobey God's commands. At its most basic level, depression is rebellion against God because of the way one feels.

As believers, we must fully be aware of God's command.

"No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it" (1 Corinthians

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10:13). There is never a situation that entitles us to disobey the Lord. God commands us to be joyful and thankful.

God commands us to provide for our families and to care for other believers.

In this chapter, we shall view some related cases of depression in the Old Testament and Old Testament.

2. The Act of Depression in the Old Testament

A. In the Pentateuch

i. Cain's act of Jealousy

The first resemblance of depression in the Pentateuch is Cain's unholy act against his brother Abel. He was the first man in the bible that shows traits of depression. Cain killed his brother Abel. What reason can we deduce that stir up the murderous domain in him?

It's obvious the spirit of Jealousy is at work

But for Cain and his offering he had no respect or regard.

So Cain was exceedingly angry and indignant and he looked sad and depressed.

And the Lord said to Cain, why are you angry? And why do you look sad and depressed and dejected.

Cain murdered his brother just because of his state of mind.

Feeling rejected, unacceptable and envious are signs of a depressed mind.

Naturally envy and hatred are catalyst for murder.

But we need to understand how Cain got to this level.

Cain was a candidate of disobedience. Cain cannot stand the rebuke of God. He was angry and jealous because his offering was rejected.

God did not promise to answer all prayers or accept all offerings. We cannot manipulate God with our gift. God set a standard; He has the final say.

What could have happened if Cain had repented and did the right thing. God would have honored him. But he chose to allow flesh to control him. He opened his door to sin. Envy, anger, strife, malice and jealousy became his bed fellow.

He was entrapped by the evil thoughts of his mind until depression set in.

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Jealousy is not a fruit of the spirit. It is not in the character of Christ. A home that is besieged by the spirit of jealousy will become victim of depression.

And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them. Rom 1:28-32 NKJV

Cain act of jealousy was a great shock to his parent (Adam and Eve). They lost two sons on the same day. Cain killed his brother Abel; consequently, God cursed Cain; he became a vagabond and fugitive for life. Their home was turned desolate. The peace, love, laughter and joy died suddenly. The consequences of depression in the home could be devastating.

ii. Israelites Journey to the Promise Land.

The journey through the wilderness by the Israelites en-route the promise land was not a journey that is kind to the soul and body.

Weariness and impatience naturally stir up depression especially in an atmosphere of impatience and unbelief.

And they journeyed from Mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea to go around the Land of Edom and the people became impatient (depressed, much discouraged) because (of the trials) of the way. Numbers 21:4Amp.

The common terms used to describe depression is a state of despair, troubled, discouraged and afraid.

We are in the journey of life and there are bound to be challenges on the way. The bible says the people that know their God shall be strong and do exploit.

In Psalms 42:5, David was discouraged, he lamented “why are you cast down O my soul? Why are you disquieted within me”

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Discouragement is tormenting. We must be aware that hopelessness, despondency, defeatism, dejection, despair are all factors of depression.

The Israelites never anticipated the journey through the wilderness. To them it is madness to leave certainty and follow uncertainty.

Anytime human nature encounter challenges, delays and limitations, they become frustrated and discouragement sets in.

After the jubilation of crossing the red sea victoriously, then it dawns on them that it's another life entirely. The Israelites were not prepared for the waiting game. They thought once they crossed the red sea all their pains, sorrow, hunger, thirst is over.

Anytime the fruit of the spirit is missing, depression may set in.

But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law. Galatians 5:22.

Discouragement is like a mustard seed that grows into a mighty tree of depression. Once discouragement penetrates the heart the consequences may be grievous and damaging.

When the Israelites became discouraged their words and behavior reflects their mood of depression. Their language change to fear, uncertainty, despair and hopelessness.

iii. Jacob's Fear of the Unknown

So Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed and he divided the people that were with him and the flocks and herds and camels into two companies and said, if Esau comes to the one company and attacks it, then the other company which is left will escape. Gen. 32:7-8

Jacob became depressed the moment he got information that Esau his brother, journeyed towards him. Suddenly he developed cold feet and shivers of fear.

He could not predict the mission of Esau. His past sin began to torment him.

This is called this the fear of the unknown. This is an anticipated feeling of fear which metamorphosized into depression.

Jacob's state of mind made him withdrawn from everyone. He became unusually quiet and calm.

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The fear of the unknown turned Jacob into another personality. He lost the taste of excitement and celebration. His strength left him; his heart beat became a crescendo of fear and cacophony of pain.

Fear is a torment, torture and despair. We have fear of the unknown, fear of death, fear of attack, fear of failure. The aftermath of fear is disaster and untimely death.

A sharp pain of guilt, condemnation and fear of regret trapped his thoughts. He became cold and his skin turned pale with the agony of his past sin.

What could have happened to Jacob if the covenant at Bethel was not established?

What brought fear to Jacob? Hidden sins; his past act of deception and wickedness. Anytime we cover our sins, fear will definitely creep in. Our deed of the past has significant effect on our future.

For 20 years Jacob had a false freedom from Esau and the guilt of his past deed until he heard that Esau is coming to meet him with 400 Soldiers. Suddenly everything changed, he became “aged” overnight. He was so troubled that sleep departed from him. He was diagnosed with insomnia, despair and hallucination overnight.

What could have happened if Jacob did not know God? He knew the power of confession. He knew only God could deliver him from the trouble of his past sins.

He knows the scriptures.

Then Jacob was left alone and a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. Gen.32:30

It was the divine encounter with the God of Abraham that gave him hope in the midst of hopelessness.

“For I have seen God face to face and my life is preserved” Gen. 32:30

Jacob became a new man after this encounter. The feelings of guilt and fear of sudden death dissipate.

Depression has a string of past sins and feelings of guilt attached to it. Learning to cast our burdens upon Christ will destroy the claws of depression any day. Jacob separated himself from the crowd and wrestled with his creator over-night. He came out of that encounter stronger and every feeling of fear, and self-condemnation disappeared.

B. In the Prophets

i. King Saul's sin of Disobedience

Disobedience spirit is a catalyst for depression if you don't run to Calvary for mercy. But the Spirit of the Lord departs from Saul and a depressing spirit from the Lord troubled him. I Samuel 16:14

The story of Saul, the first King of Israel is another highlight of a life that suffered deeply from depression.

The author of the book of Samuel identified this as a distressing spirit.

The genesis of Saul's predicament is an accumulation of events that culminated into depression.

From his case of partial disobedience in the book of I Samuel 15:20 when Samuel told him God had rejected him, till the case of consultation with witches in 2 Samuel until his untimely death in 2 Samuel.

Saul's problem began when he took over the duty of Samuel and offered a burnt offering to God just because he was afraid of the people. Saul never recovered from that error.

His spiritual fervor eroded until he became a candidate of rejection and depression.

Depression is a gradual process, once you allow a disconnection between you and your creator; you open the door to another spirit.

King Saul was a perfect example of a man that fell from grace to grass.

Saul graduated from rejection to hatred.

This is a revelation, once the soul of a man is captured by distressing spirit, the destiny is caged forever.

Saul never recovered from this tormenting spirit, he died cheaply by committing suicide (I Samuel 31:4).

ii. King David's Punishment for Committing Adultery and Murder

I am depressed, I am bowed down beyond measure, I go mourning all the day.

Psalms 38:6

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David a man after God's heart also had a taste of depression. In spite of his great success, the defeat of Goliath, several victories over the Philistine, taking over territories and domain from the enemies, he was equally a victim of depression.

David's attack came from his family. The actions and lifestyle of people around you can aggravate depressive attack. Most people that suffered from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) have unsettled family issue that culminated into depression. David suffered earnestly for his sinful deeds. His family also had a share of the punishment. No wonder he cried; "I am depressed."

iii. The trauma of losing a family member

The trauma of losing members of one's family could be devastating. David's men had a depressive attack at Ziklag when families were taken captive by the Amalekites and the people spoke of stoning him.

Now David was greatly distressed for the people spoke of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved everyman for his sons and daughters. But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God. 1 Samuel 30:4

When men of war began to weep like babies, depression will naturally be exhumed. David's pain was further increased when the people saw him as their problem and put all blames on Him.

It is traumatic whenever we lose our loved ones. It is more painful when their corpses are not seen. The men of war cried from morning till sunset, everyone in agony for his wives and children.

This is a perfect example of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Weeping has never solved any problem. Blaming people for your failure will enroll you in the school of depression. Feeling condemned for past mistakes will land you in the house of sorrow and you may end up committing suicide.

But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God. 1 Samuel 30:4

David encouraged himself in the Lord. He chose not to weep nor lament, He knows the scriptures; He drew strength from the Lord, and the Lord sustained him.

iv. Amnon's Evil Obsession

Obsession is bondage. Whenever a man gets captured by the spirit of lust and sexual addiction, he will become a prisoner to depression.

Amnon was so distressed over his sister Tamar that he became sick; for she was a virgin. And it was improper for Amnon to do anything to her 2 Samuel 13:2

Amnon's obsession towards his sister is another case of a mind that was captured by the spirit of depression.

His mind was so troubled that he was restless and developed insomnia overnight.

Whenever the mind lusts towards vain desires to the extent of sleeplessness, it is a clear indication of depression.

He was too depressed to sleep. He could no longer reason normally. He needs to satisfy a deadly lust that had become a parasite to his mind and brain. He was no longer in charge of his mind; another voice is controlling him. Torrents of crescendoic-echo of voices tortured him to his spine. Amnon knew no peace until he committed incest with his half-sister. The heir apparent became a piece meal to depressive daggers. Depression is a feeling of confusion, insomnia, despair and frustration. You suddenly become helpless. It's a state of sickness of the mind. Your thoughts become caged by strange illusion and you feel trapped until you are pushed to commit the abominable act.

Thoughts are powerful. As a man thinks in his heart so he is. Proverbs 23:14

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is his good, pleasing and perfect will. Rom 12:2.

Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy — meditate on these things. Phil 4:8 NKJV

Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer. Deut 10:16; The aftermath of Amnon's act shook the entire family. It breeds hatred that later leads to murder.

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Whenever the virus of depression plagues a family, the aftermath is always disastrous. Absalom later murdered Amnon for violating his junior sister, Tamar.

It was a day of satanic vices when David received that terrible news that Absalom had killed the king's sons. David strength left him until he learnt that it was only Amnon that was killed.

When the mind is sick, the whole body is equally sick. Depression begins with evil thoughts.

However, the moment a man is born again he receives a new heart and a right spirit. A regenerated heart will be freed from evil thoughts. David loved the Lord but his children are far from the Lord.

v. **Ahithophel's Pride and Destruction**

Pride is a cankerworm that deflates the balloon of glory on the day of celebration. A man that takes pleasure in wearing the garment of pride will soon fade away like the flower that blossoms in the morning and fades away in the evening.

Now when Ahithophel saw that his advice was not followed, he saddled a donkey, and arose and went home to his house, to his city. Then he put his household in order, and hanged himself, and died; and he was buried in his father's tomb. 2 Sam 17:23 NKJV

Now the advice of Ahithophel, which he gave in those days, *was* as if one had inquired at the oracle of God. 2 Sam 16:23 NKJV

This is very strange! How could a man of Ahithophel caliber commit suicide? Ahithophel was a man endowed with wisdom for divine counsel. The only man David feared in the camp of Absalom was Ahithophel. David knew the spirit of wisdom, knowledge and counsel that he possesses. Yet he ended up committing suicide; Why? He became depressed. Ahithophel inflicted himself with self-rejection, self-delusion and self-condemnation. The feelings of self-worth, self-importance and haughtiness enveloped him until he ended up in self-destruction.

He could not stand the self-humiliation he condemned himself to. He put himself into a debilitating mood, feelings and attitude of hopelessness (despair and joylessness) through his thoughts and assumptions. Let's imagine some of the thoughts spilling

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through his mind; 'What would people say?' 'How could I, Ahithophel be rejected?' 'How could I face the people again after this rejection?' 'What are they saying about me now?' 'See! Everyone is talking about my rejection?' 'This shame is too much to bear! My case is hopeless.' "The best option is to take my life"

Ahithophel was captured by depressive daggers, he could not escape the onslaught.

David says, "my enemies rejoice not, if I fall, I will rise again" Ahithophel could not manage his failure and rejection. He was so devastated that he could not recover from the disappointment. Job said, "when people say there is a casting down, I say there is a lifting."

We must have the ability of managing our failures and successes. What do we do when God says No, or when we feel we have disappointed God? Suicide is not the last option.

Abraham failed God He committed Adultery by sleeping with his maid.

David committed adultery and murder, yet God forgave him; though he suffered the consequences of his sins. David prayed that God should deliver him from blood guiltiness. And he was forgiven and restored in Psalm 51. Jephthah was rejected by his family He did not see suicide as the last resort.

Whenever we become disconnected from our creator the Devil takes over.

Be sober be vigilante for the Devil seeketh whom he may devour.

vi. Threats from the Enemies camp.

And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, also how he had executed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time." And when he saw that, he arose and ran for his life, and went to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.

But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, "It is enough! Now, LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!" 1 Kings 19:1-4NKJV

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Elijah's experience revealed that depression is no respecter of persons. No matter your position or influence in the society or church you can have the attack.

Elijah is not an ordinary Prophet; He is a prophet of the prophets; He was used mightily to perform great exploits during the time of King Ahab. At his words the heaven became closed to rain for three and half years. Elijah single-handedly killed 400 prophet of Baal with the sword. Elijah became a fear to the fearless and a trouble to the troubler of Israel. He spoke and the bowl of flour and bottle of oil was supernatural refilled for over 3years. Who could have expected an uncommon prophet like Elijah to be depressed to the point of seeking for death?

What chased him away from the city? A battalion of foot soldiers or a squadron of chariots? No!! But a threat by a woman sent quivers of fear down his spine and fiery darts of insecurity into his heart. In spite of his great conquest, a debilitating feeling of hopelessness and fear of attack struck his heart. Instead of celebrating his victory he entered 'the blues'.

And he prayed that he might die, and said, "It is enough! Now, LORD, take my life, for I *am* no better than my fathers!"

What manner of prayer is this? Should a man of God pray for death? Has he finished his mission as designed by God? No! This is a pure symptom of depression. Depression is a feeling! It can come unannounced!

It may come after a major victory. People may see you as high and up but honestly you are down and low with the blues, and choose to run away from the hullabaloo of songs of victory and sleep to death.

Abraham Lincoln, Sylvia Plath, Virginia Woolf, Winston Churchill, Stephen Fry and Vivienne Leigh: all suffered episodes of depression while in active service.

What caused Elijah's attack? I see it as the 'I' factor. The moment you feel you're the one doing the work and you took the credit you may end up becoming depressed. No one is permitted to share glory with God. What do you have that you are not given? We must not lost contact with the reality that without God we are helpless. Learn to give God all the credit. Whatever be the outcome we should learn the secret

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of giving thanks always. He's the God of the good and bad times. He's God in the time of victories and losses.

This is the first time Elijah is having a confrontation he could not handle. He is used to win-win situation, hence he chose to die. Death is not the final destination rather lets learn to look up to God with the heart of thanksgiving in every situation.

C. In the Writings

i. Job's Expression of Deep Distress

Job's predicament became more and more pitiable by the day. He fell from grace to grass. He lost everything in one day save his wife and himself. His wife asked him to curse God and die but he refused; he replied, if we receive good from God shall we not receive evil too. Three of Job's friend; Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar heard of his plight and came to sympathized and comfort him. They were so depressed with his state of suffering and pains that they could not utter a word for seven full days. Then Job expressed his distress by cursing the day he was born (Job 3: 1, 11, 20-22, 26)

Job continued in his lamentation until he changed his words by praying for his friends and comforting those who have taken pain and time to comfort him. When Job changed his words from complaint and cursing to worship and thanksgiving, God heard from heaven and changed his captivity, and restored back to him seven fold that which he had lost.

3.0. The Act of Depression in the New Testament

Like the Old Testament, the New Testament also infuse some causes and effect of depression.

A. In the Gospel

i. Jesus admonished us not to get worried

In the Gospel of Mathew 6:25-34, Jesus exhorts the people not to get worried about what to eat, drink or about what you will put on but rather to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. One of the root causes of depression is worry. Human nature tends to worry about what to eat, drink and how to meet up with the basic needs of life. Whenever a man gives room to worry, he may open the door to depression.

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Jesus gave us the anti-dote for worry. Anytime you get worried over issues or family needs, just take a stroll into the garden and observe the lilies. They do not toil nor struggle yet they're clothed with the beauty from the Lord and they blossom.

Jesus asked, which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his nature.

Now if God so clothe the grass of the field today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, o you of little faith.

Therefore, do not worry; your heavenly father knows that you need all these things.

ii. When Jesus' soul became troubled and depressed.

In John 12:27 Jesus said my soul is troubled and depressed. In the journey of life, we may become so troubled, discouraged, frustrated and about giving up our divine mandate and mission. That was exactly what happened to Jesus. Depression is a feeling of hopelessness which becomes a reason for not handling the most important issues of life.

Thoughts of discouragement may come but how do we handle it. Let's learn from Jesus.

John 12:28 showed us the way out.

{Rather I will say} Father, glorify (honour and extol) your {own} name.

That is the key! In spite of the state of his mind [troubled, hopeless, despair] He said, father glorify your name. Anytime you glorify the Lord in your state of hopelessness, you will receive a new strength to go forward and fulfil destiny.

iii. A promise of peace for the trouble soul.

Peace I leave with you; my [own] peace I now give and bequeath to you. Not as the world give, do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled neither let it be afraid. [stop allowing yourselves to be agitated and disturbed; and do not permit yourselves to be fearful and intimidated and cowardly, and unsettled].

The passage here is anticipatory. Jesus knows the beginning and the end. He knows it will get to a point in a man's life that peace will be extinct and joy will vanish. He said, no matter what you encounter, do not permit your heart to be troubled and neither be afraid.

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Agitations, anxiety, frustration and fear are part of the world. It has always been there and it will be till the rapture. Hence, we must listen intently to his words. Stop allowing yourselves to be agitated, fearful, intimidated and unsettled.

iv. The consequence of Judas Betrayal

No betrayal escapes unpunished. Judas got more than he can chew. He got entrapped in his own cunningness. Why did Judas commit suicide? Because he was a thief, or because he betrayed his master for 30 shekels of silver. Definitely No! Judas Iscariot and Simon Peter both failed the master. Peter denied Jesus openly, He swore, he never knew him, he denied ever meeting him. It was an open denial. Jesus could hear him, there were open witnesses. But when the cock crowed twice, he remembered the sayings of the master; alas! it was too late, the deed had been done. He wept bitterly and soberly. He had failed his master, his strength left him, and the future was bleak. He was in a state of hopelessness and despair. He confessed his mistakes to others; he shed the tears of repentance and was restored.

Judas also committed a great sin like Peter. But was he remorseful? Yes, in his own way. When he realized his fault, he returned the money so that they could leave his master. He was sorrowful, he wept, he regretted his actions but he could not forgive himself. He allowed himself to be tortured by hallucinations. Strange feelings of hopelessness engulfed him. He saw nothing but a doomed future. He ran away from the crowd and isolated himself. He could not forgive himself. The voices increased by the day; It echoes through his spine until the final bomb exploded and he landed at a point of no return. Eventually he hung himself following the footstep of Ahithophel. Judas was among the seventy that went out to heal the sick and deliver the oppressed. He loved the Lord until the love of money caged his mind. Judas loved the lofty position as the treasurer, he opened the door of his life to mammon. Secret sins make us victims of depression. The moment the love of God in our hearts is replaced by the love of the things of the world we may become candidate of depressing demons.

B. In the Epistle

i. Be anxious for nothing

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This is Apostle Paul's song to the Philippians.

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Phil 4:6-9

That is the key needed to escape from the cage of depression. Anxiety kills gradually. It spread like cancer cells in the body. Anxiety opens the door of your life to fear and terminal disease.

To come out of anxiety, Apostle Paul admonishes us to rejoice in the Lord always. Philippians 4:4.

In Philippians 4:8, He encouraged us on the thoughts that we should accommodate in our hearts daily. Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy — meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.

The words we speak to one another could easily stir up anxiety in our heart. In his Epistles to the Ephesians, he admonishes us on the manner of words that should proceed out of our mouth.

Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God. Ephesians 5:19-20

C. In the Book of Acts

ii. Hope in the midst of the Storm

Whenever the storm of life steps in depression is inevitable. The voyage of 276 souls in the book of Acts Chapter twenty-seven which includes Apostle Paul was a journey that turned into a nightmare of uncertainty and fear of untimely death. When the wave of death blows through unprecedented storms that left even the mighty Roman

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soldiers jittery and hopeless then everyone will be subjected to the bondage of the fear of death.

There was no hope of escape, no help in sight; everything looked bleak and uncertain. It got worst that everyone lost their appetite that none could eat, drink nor sleep for 14 days. We have in that ship 276 depressed souls with exception of Apostle Paul Daniel 11:32b says the people that know their God shall be strong and do exploit. Only those who have genuine relationship with God will be freed from the torturous fear of death and depression.

The knowledge of God makes the difference even when death come knocking and you don't know what will happen next.

What keeps a Christian going in the midst of fear?

- a. We have a covenant of long life with God
- b. Christians don't die but only sleep in the Lord.
- c. His word is yea and Amen. He exalted His word more than his name. We need to know his word for every situation.
- d. The gift of the word of knowledge and revelation is needed to see the light in the midst of darkness.

