

**STEADFAST SHEPHERD: SPIRITUAL LEADERS IN HARD TIMES. A TALK  
PRESENTED BY REV. FR. DANIEL EVBOTOKHAI ON THE OCCASION OF THE  
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## **Introduction**

The progress and development of any group or organization depend heavily on its leaders. Underdevelopment or stunted growth often leads to questioning and criticism of leadership. The frustrations and challenges faced in Nigeria today reflect the quality of its leaders. The call for good leadership is constant and pervasive. Media analyses frequently highlight leadership as a key factor in national progress. Proverbs 29:2 underscores this point: "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when the wicked rule, the people mourn." The path out of national hardship lies in good leadership, just as the solution to spiritual stagnation in churches and religious organizations rests on strong spiritual leaders.

Leadership is the ability of an individual or group to influence and guide followers or members of an organization. It involves making sound decisions, articulating a clear vision, establishing goals, and equipping followers with the knowledge and skills to achieve those goals. Chester I. Barnard defines leadership as "the quality of behaviour of individuals whereby they guide people or their activities in organizing efforts." This discussion will focus on spiritual leaders, as the topic suggests, rather than political or secular leaders.

## **A Spiritual Leader**

A spiritual leader applies spiritual values and principles to the organization or group they lead. They understand the importance of followers finding meaning in their work, addressing fundamental questions like: Is our work worthy? What is our greater purpose? What are our values and ethical principles? What will be our legacy? Are we making an impact? Are we still needed?

While many associate leadership with power, authority, honor, prestige, or personal advantage, Christian leadership is fundamentally about service. Matthew 20:27 states, "Whoever wishes to be first among you, shall be your servant, even as the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Jesus exemplified servant leadership. A spiritual leader serves rather than dominates, seeking to encourage and

inspire followers, respecting them rather than exploiting them. Embracing Christ's model of leadership will bring profound positive changes within our groups.

### **Brief Biblical Import**

Jesus declared, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11). This verse perfectly describes a spiritual leader who acts as a shepherd to their flock. Jesus' use of "sheep" isn't derogatory. Sheep are among the most vulnerable creatures, easily disoriented and helpless without a shepherd. By calling us sheep, Jesus highlights our need for guidance and protection. Without leaders, we are lost and confused.

A shepherd has multiple roles: leading, feeding, nurturing, comforting, correcting, and protecting. A spiritual leader leads by modeling godliness and righteousness, inspiring others to follow Christ. Paul exemplified this, saying, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1). A spiritual leader follows Christ and inspires others to do the same.

Like the Great Shepherd of Israel, who promised to "bind up the injured and strengthen the weak" (Ezekiel 34:16), spiritual leaders should care for the vulnerable within their flock. They must manage the diverse gifts and abilities of their followers. Finally, a spiritual leader ensures the safety and protection of their followers, guarding them against predators, like false prophets and teachers, who can lead them astray. Neglecting this duty can result in losing members to these dangers.

### **Qualities of a Spiritual Leader**

1. **Effective Time Management:** Time is a precious and irreplaceable resource. Leaders must manage their time effectively to avoid procrastination, unproductive meetings, poor prioritization, unrealistic time estimates, inadequate planning, interruptions, and failure to delegate.
2. **Seeks God's Direction:** Proverbs 16:1, 3, and 9 emphasize the importance of seeking God's guidance in all plans and actions. A spiritual leader commits their work to the Lord, trusting that He will establish their steps.
3. **Modesty, Not Arrogance:** Arrogance is an abomination to the Lord (Proverbs 16:5). A spiritual leader should be humble and approachable, not domineering.

4. **Peacemaker:** A spiritual leader builds bridges, absorbs misunderstandings, accommodates opposing viewpoints, and objectively resolves conflicts.

5. **Fair and Just:** "Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues with injustice" (Proverbs 16:8). A spiritual leader acts with fairness and justice in all their dealings.

6. **Lifelong Learner:** "How much better to get wisdom than gold! To get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver" (Proverbs 16:16). Spiritual leaders are constantly learning, growing, and improving, recognizing that pride and arrogance take root when learning ceases. They are often avid readers.

7. **Slow to Anger:** "Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city" (Proverbs 16:32). A spiritual leader controls their temper, recognizing that anger is dangerous and destructive. Like God, who is slow to anger and rich in mercy (Psalm 145:8), they cultivate patience and understanding.

### **Roles of a Spiritual Leader**

1. **Motivator:** Inspires and encourages others through recognition, rewards, and creating a positive environment.

2. **Mentor:** Provides guidance, support, and wisdom to help others develop and succeed.

3. **Learner:** Continuously seeks knowledge, skills, and abilities to improve themselves and the organization.

4. **Communicator:** Effectively listens and articulates messages clearly and concisely.

5. **Navigator:** Creates and communicates a compelling vision for the future.

### **Spiritual Leaders in Hard Times**

The current economic hardships in Nigeria, marked by rising prices, insecurity, and other challenges, make leadership particularly difficult. Survival has become the primary focus for many. These hard times strain church leadership, limiting resources and hindering outreach efforts. Generosity is compromised as people prioritize saving and hoarding. Visions and goals are sacrificed for basic functionality.

The allure of quick wealth and pleasure, especially among youth, presents another challenge. Many young people are less interested in spiritual matters, making it difficult to engage them in faith-based activities. How can leaders succeed in such an environment?

### **Ways a Leader Can Survive Hard Times**

1. **Prayer:** Prayer is essential for spiritual leaders, providing guidance, inspiration, and strength. Both personal and collective prayer are vital for navigating challenging times.

2. **Diversify Income Streams:** Multiple income sources provide financial stability during economic downturns. Leaders should explore opportunities beyond traditional giving and tithes, such as online businesses or service provision.

3. **Control Expenditure:** Careful budgeting and cost-cutting measures are crucial. Leaders should prioritize essential activities and find creative ways to manage resources effectively.

4. **Evangelization and Outreach:** Reaching out to new people and growing the community is essential for long-term sustainability. Leaders must model Christian virtues to attract and retain members.

5. **Stay Positive:** Maintaining a positive outlook is crucial, even in difficult circumstances. Leaders instill hope and empower others to overcome challenges. "A leader is a dealer in hope," as Napoleon Bonaparte said.

6. **Be Visionary:** Spiritual leaders must anticipate future challenges and prepare for them. "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18).

### **Important Lessons for Leaders From John Maxwell's Book "360 Degree Leader":**

1. Position is not Power: Leadership is not about your title or position, but about your influence and ability to lead others.

2. Leadership is About Influence, Not Intimidation: True leaders lead by influencing others, not by intimidating or manipulating them.

3. The 360-Degree Leader Leads Up, Across, and Down: Effective leaders lead not just their team members, but also their superiors and peers.

4. Lead Yourself Exceptionally Well: Before you can lead others, you must be able to lead yourself. This means developing self-awareness, self-discipline, and self-motivation.

5. Value the Position, but Not More Than the Person: Leaders must value the people they lead, not just their position or title.
6. Don't Be Afraid to Lead from the Middle: Leaders don't have to be at the top of the organization to make a difference. They can lead from anywhere.
7. Lead by Example, Not Just by Giving Orders: Leaders must model the behavior they expect from their team members.
8. Be Willing to Take the Heat: Leaders must be willing to take responsibility for their actions and decisions, even when it's difficult.
9. Be a Leader, Not Just a Boss: Leaders focus on developing their people, not just giving orders.
10. Develop Your People, and They Will Develop the Organization: When leaders develop their people, they create a culture of growth and development that benefits the entire organization.
11. Leadership is Not About Achieving a Title, But About Achieving Results: Effective leaders focus on achieving results, not just on achieving a title or position.
12. The Best Leaders Are Those Who Lead by Serving: Leaders who serve their people and their organization are more effective than those who focus on their own interests.
13. Leaders Must Be Willing to Make Tough Decisions: Leaders must be willing to make difficult decisions, even when they are unpopular.
14. Leaders Must Be Able to Communicate Effectively: Leaders must be able to communicate their vision, goals, and expectations clearly and effectively.
15. Leaders Must Be Able to Build Strong Relationships: Leaders must be able to build strong relationships with their team members, superiors, and peers.
16. Leaders Must Be Able to Adapt to Change: Leaders must be able to adapt to changing circumstances and lead their organization through times of change.
17. Leaders Must Be Able to Empower Others: Leaders must be able to empower their team members to take ownership and make decisions.

18. Leaders Must Be Able to Create a Positive Culture: Leaders must be able to create a positive culture that promotes growth, development, and productivity.

19. Leaders Must Be Able to Lead with Integrity: Leaders must be able to lead with integrity, honesty, and ethics.

20. Leaders Must Be Lifelong Learners: Leaders must be committed to lifelong learning, seeking feedback, and continually developing their skills and knowledge.

### **Conclusion**

Thank you for this opportunity. Continue your efforts; earthly rewards are temporary, but God's rewards are eternal. Your work for God is an investment in eternity. May the reward of good service be yours. Put these principles into practice and strive to be a leader who makes a difference, creating a society marked by excellence.