

THE EFFECT OF AMBITION TO SUCCEED, ACHIEVE AND COMPETE IN PASTORAL MINISTRY: HEALTHY OR HAZARDOUS TO DISCIPLESHIP IN SDA CHURCH NORTH RIFT VALLEY FIELD IN KENYA

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Abstract

The article sought to examine the impact of ambition in ministry when pastors embrace it in order to succeed, achieve and compete. Most of the gospel ministers' aspirations to go higher and the desire to possess more can affect ministerial lines positively or negatively. This study uses fifteen pastors from three stations as participants. These stations include Kitale, Mt. Elgon and Kapenguria. The research documents three Field departmental directors (Ministerial, Youth, and Evangelism) selected as informants. The instruments used to collect data was questionnaires and interviews. The study used random sampling in selecting the participants. The study revealed that there are positive aspects of ambition that, properly placed, can help pastoral ministry and the advancement of God's cause. The engagement resulted in having an educated ministry, not novices. The qualitative analysis was done through interviews with the three departmental personnel and a few pastors. The information from the informants showed that pastors need to embrace change as the world changes. Those interviewed indicated that ambitious pastors engaged themselves in activities that resulted in character assassination, misappropriation of church funds, and involvement in dubious means of acquiring wealth against the norms of pastoral ministry. The interviews were geared towards the pastors' views, understanding and perceptions on why they need to succeed, achieve and compete in pastoral ministry.

Key terms: Pastoral ministry, discipleship, positions and possessions and expectations.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

How do you measure success in your Pastoral ministry? The question was asked by the president West Kenya Union Conference (WKUC) of the Seventh-day Adventists while in Discipleship seminars for pastors in Kisumu, Kenya. Attending the same seminar, the question ignited and renewed our perception as gospel ministers towards discipleship and evangelism in our ministry. Is our ministry successful in baptizing many converts? Is it successful by having modern structures and innovative worship programs? Is it successful in having more trained pastors? While the baptism of the new convert is valuable to the church, having modern church structures and inspiring worship program is good, and training the pastorate at all levels is key to ministry. Nevertheless, it is not the ultimate measure of successful pastoral ministry. Nevertheless, some of the mentioned aspects propel ambition in some pastors.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

To be ambitious has different connotations. It can be either positive or negative. As you read from the Oxford dictionary, ambition means, "the ardent desire to high position or to attain rank, influence, distinction; on a negative look of the word, it brings a focus towards self-seeking." "ambition is the passion for excellence and the striving for improvement that moves the civilization forward." Epstein (1989, p.1) amends the dictionary definition by stating, "ambition is the fuel of achievement." Ambitious pastors in ministry ought to undertake ministerial work as a service to help individuals meet their different needs. However, the biblical teaching about humility and the warning that Christ's followers should not do things to show themselves to others makes ministers fear being misunderstood. This makes them conceal their ambitious aspirations. Instead, the pastors ought to embrace healthful, comparative, and competitive aspirations. Ambitious pastors invoke a competitive, focused, and comparing spirit. They compare what others are doing, their previous achievements, and what will drive them to achieve more in the future.

The Seventh-day Adventist church is in a changing society. Change is acceptable, and most ministers are challenged when ministering to diverse congregations. "A golden thread runs through the stories recorded in scripture about the heroes of faith. Through all the ups and downs of their lives, they pursued an intimate relationship with God through faith, and they were fully satisfied." Satisfaction while working in the life of a minister in whatever condition is paramount. The ministry in the contemporary world requires educated personnel. To be current and to minister to educated, wealthy, young, and enlightened congregations, a pastor has to come up to their level or even above. (White, 1948, 5T, p. 528) encourages the clergy that "The times demand an intelligent, educated ministry, not novices." She further indicates in the same book, "The cause of God calls for all-round men, who can devise, plan, build up, and organise. And those who appreciate the probabilities of the work for this time will seek by the earnest study to obtain all the knowledge they can from the Word, to use in ministering to the needy, sin-sick souls."

Expectations from members of the clergy to merit certain standards in ministry motivate them to strive higher while ministering. Most pastors think and perceive those members either positively or negatively as they minister. Financial aspects become the object measure or motivating factor to success. One has to strive to reach a certain level in ministry to acquire higher salaries to meet a sense of self-worth—dimension than the satisfactory dimension. Prestige and power are the two elements that entice most pastors to struggle to have a certain degree of power. Finley (2002, p.125) encourages pastors to be Christ-centred and satisfied in all their endeavours. He urges that "Looking to Jesus, I discover that all my restless longings and deepest inner needs are met – and I am fully satisfied."

The power over others shows significance why some ministers strive to achieve and satisfy their urge to control their counterparts to a certain destiny. When many covet a certain group, job, or even position, it becomes something valued, and pastors are not exempted. In the contemporary world, value is placed on recognition, being known, accepted, or remembered. Pastors spend most of their time preparing powerful sermons, not for effectiveness, but to gain fame and be given a chance to preach in prominent magnificent churches. Pressure to satisfy seniors is apathy to most ministers. Most church organisations set goals to be achieved by pastors at certain periods and levels. The matter makes the ministers use all methods to achieve what the leadership requires.

Jesus our Model

To achieve success in pastoral ministry requires one to understand what entails the discipleship venture. Jesus used his method to reach many. The focus was on a wider field that needed harvesting. He used most of his time mingling with them, but he concentrated on training and empowering a few. The limited number enabled him to reach them in a transparent, open, and accountable way. The methods used helped the disciples minimize ambition and struggle for power. Although they had aspirations to be great, the presence of Jesus brought their desire down. An example is when the disciples came to him and asked him, "who then is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" (Mathew 18:1-4). In the scripture in verse 4, Jesus cautions, "Therefore whoever humbles himself as a little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

Jesus modelled all he taught, He referred his followers to the scriptures as the basis and standards of all teachings. He mentored all the disciples for future service in his absence. He taught them how to pray and the value of prayer ministry. His method of teaching brought down the ambition to be great. Jesus took time to make disciples. He patiently trained them for service. Pastors need to use their strength, talents, and gifts to invest themselves in the life of another individual. The gospel minister should empower others to do better in matters of discipleship. It is the best option. Christ used small group ministry to achieve better results. He spent time with the disciples and made him or they grow to avoid the ambitious drives in the inner person that would lead to temptations. He was good at discerning able men who could easily understand his teachings. Therefore, he called them and said, "Yet it shall not be so among you, but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desire to be first shall be slave of all" (Mark 10:43-44).

Jesus trained, mentored, and equipped the disciples for the ministry. Our pastors need the same to enable them to grow and make others grow. The disciples watched and imitated their master. He was an example in devotional life (Mk 1:35, Lk 22:40, John 17:5-26). He engaged them in the ministry. First, they watched. He did it with them, and then later, they did it themselves, which worked effectively. He mingled with the needy, valued converts and visited them (Mk 2:15-17, John 11:17-37, John 3:1-16). He fellowshiped and showed love. He said, "All men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another (John 13:35, John 21:1-3, Acts 1:12-14, 12:1-19, 15:1-35).

White Comments on Ambition

Ministers need to set their aim high. However, there has been little ambition to put their powers to the test to reach an elevated standard in knowledge and religious intelligence. Our ministers will have to render God an account for the rusting of the talents He has given to improve by exercise. They might have done tenfold more work intelligently had they cared to become intellectual giants. Their whole experience in their high calling is cheapened because they are content to remain where they are. Their efforts to acquire knowledge will not hinder their spiritual growth if they study with the right motives and proper aims.

She cautions the ministers of the gospel to be vigilant. We cannot tell the ambitious man that he must cease to be ambitious if he would become a Christian. On the contrary, God places the highest objects of ambition before him – a spotless white robe, a crown studded with jewels, a sceptre, and a throne of glory and honour that is enduring as the throne of Jehovah... God is well pleased if those striving for eternal life aim high. However, there will be strong temptations to indulge the natural traits of character by becoming worldly-wise, scheming, and selfishly ambitious, gathering wealth to neglect the salvation, which is of so much higher value (White, 2006). White continues to make things straight. You should decide to change and cultivate meekness, faith, humility, and love. Press against the current of ambition and worldliness. Ministers who venture into positions need to avoid politics and shun contention. White (1881) warns those who love praise and money, "You love the praise of men, and you love worldly possessions above Jesus...But I speak to you as one who knows: Unless you overcome this intense love of money, it will cost you your soul's salvation, and then it would have been better for you had you never been born."

3.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on the data collected, the findings indicate that the effect of ambition on God's work as practised by the ministerial workers is attributed to both pastors and church members. Through the data collected, the researcher and the participants came to a realization that ambition has both positive and negative connotations to ministry. One pastor from Kitale and three from Mt. Elgon who were interviewed indicated that "the leadership of the Field should balance and regulate the dues of the ministers in the field or in the frontline work to be similar with that of their seniors." Two from Kapenguria observed that "regular seminars and training were key to reducing ambitious ministers." Expectations of pastors from members to merit certain standards in ministry motivate them to strive higher while ministering. Most pastors think and perceive those members either positively or negatively. Salaries become the object measure or motivating factor to success, and one has to strive to reach a certain level in ministry to acquire higher salaries to meet a sense of self-worth. Therefore, the pastor focuses on the comparative dimension than the satisfactory one. The power element is another cause. This entices most pastors to struggle to have a certain degree of power. The power over others shows significance why some ministers strive to achieve and satisfy their urge to control their counterparts to a certain destiny. When many covet a certain group, job, or even position, it becomes something valued, and pastors are not exempted. Contemporary society places value on recognition, being known, accepted, or remembered. As a result, pastors spend most of their time preparing powerful sermons, not for effectiveness but to gain fame and be given a chance to preach in prominent settings.

The study revealed that 43 per cent of ambitious pastors scored high in district report performance. In addition, most of them were rated knowledgeable and educated by the leadership. On the other hand, it was found that about 28 per cent of pastors engaged themselves in self-motivated activities, which resulted in character assassination, 8 per cent were involved in misappropriation of church funds, and involvement in dubious means of getting possessions as opposed to pastoral ministry norms. Ambition brings satisfaction once achieved. Ambition necessitates a modern pastor to focus on achievements, not discouragements. For example, the pastor has the burden to push for success in a numerical increase of members, better pay for workers, and rewards and awards to better-performing juniors or those subjected to them. It brings satisfaction to the pastoral ministry if Christ is at the centre. Visionary leadership helps ambitious pastors have the task of focusing on the future. They are possibility thinkers. They should address matters pertaining to visionary leadership, better programs, good sermons, discipleship engagement, and ways of accomplishing their dreams and goals. Ambition tends to divide the ministers and results in character assassination when not achieved. Contemporary society places value on recognition, being known, accepted, or remembered. Pastors spend most of their time preparing powerful sermons,

not for effectiveness but to gain fame and be given a chance to preach in prominent settings. If not achieved blame game begins.

4.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: In conclusion, pastors ought not to worship work but can make work be part of the worship of the creator. The result of the pastors' love, loving others, and being loved promotes a fulfilled, complete and abundant love in Christ. Therefore, the pastoral ministry's urge to ambition should be aimed at the giver of life and the owner of life. All our hopes, fears, aspirations, passions, failings, and achievements should be put into one fact: Even pastors die, and all is vanity (Eccl 1:2, 5:16).

Recommendations: The study recommends that the North Rift Valley Field leadership should balance and regulate the remunerations fairly of the ministers both at the office and the frontline pastors to minimize competing tendencies. The pastors should take the initiative to work and avoid overworking. The ministerial line requires pastors who can do things work. They take initiative to begin and also influence outcomes in an active and positive manner. They ought to use their gifts, talents, and capacities to make work and sometimes risk the failure element. Pastors should be contented. Contentment is a virtue. From a positive viewpoint, ambition propels a pastor to use himself or herself to the fullest. It brings in the element of the pastor's will to be, to do, and to become. The NRVF trains and conducts yearly seminars. These may curb a competitive spirit that encourages division among the clergy. They see other pastors as obstacles to their success. Sometimes churches are entangled in trouble due to individuals' personal pursuits. The NRVF leadership and the frontline pastors embrace recommended remedies in research question one.

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