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Equipping ministry for ecclesiastical leadership: A reflective study of Jethro's administrative insights in exodus 18:13-27

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Abstract

This paper sought to accentuate key administrative insights in Exodus 18:13-27 and how such insights could be applied in ensuring administrative leadership effectiveness in local churches. Insights gleaned from the passage could serve as a cutting-edge for biblical model of equipping ministry in the field of church administrative leadership. This paper adopts a descriptive approach, based on ideas developed from reading editorials, articles on church administration and leadership in several journals/academic sources. Also, personal experience in church work and the teaching of the course, church administration and leadership for over a decade is core in the methodology. As a contribution to this end, this paper gives a reflective study of the passage of Exodus 18:13-27 descriptively and presents the administrative insights gleaned from Jethro's counsel to Moses such as: delegation of responsibilities, necessity of having a shared leadership, dutifulness and commitment to given tasks, accessibility and approachability as a leader; having a sense of good decision making; winning of followers' trust, dependability and confidence; clear visibility of the work to be done; leader's method, strategy, approach or manner of doing any work can be questioned, critiqued and evaluated; being well informed, current and connected to God, the source of authority. Other insights include, there should be no preferential treatment for

some followers but equity and justice; having value for the Law/Word of God and be well versed in it. Church Pastors as administrators should be well acquainted in church policies, procedures and their church constitution. Avoidance of burn-out in ministry, the need for synergy, teamwork and having a listening ear are essential. Recruitment/enlistment of workers. And in the enlisting or recruitment of competent people/workers, there should be clear cut and well spelt out qualities or criteria for the selection or enlisting of people/workers. Separation of power, knowing one's jurisdiction, terms of reference should be given to those assigned responsibility. Job description and delegation of duties ranging from the lowest to the highest. Giving of feedback/report; having organizational structure and management hierarchy; assumption of duty for the leaders appointed should go with implementation of job description and operating a multi-staff ministry are some other dimensions of the insights. The paper concludes that in biblical times, the idea of leadership is the idea of guiding something or someone. This means that the essence of a leader in biblical times is to motivate others into action in order to achieve a God given purpose and goal through the grace of God.

Keywords: Administrative insights, Exodus 18:13-27, biblical model of equipping ministry, church administrative leadership

1. Introduction

Exodus 18:13-27 presents key administrative insights that could be gleaned for effective administrative leadership in churches. Clearly, Moses was an established leader but one who was experiencing the stress and pressure of his position. Nevertheless, he was able to accept the advice of an older person who was more experienced, Jethro his Father-in-Law. On the face of it, Jethro was able to speak to Moses with strong criticism, saying for example, '*what is this you are doing?*' (Exodus 18:14). He also offered his solution to Moses with a straight yet correct assessment of the situation; '*what you are doing is not good*' (Exodus 18:17). Moses was humble enough to act immediately on the advice he was given (18:24-26). This presupposes that a leader in biblical sense must be someone who does not rely alone on what he knows but must also welcome the ideas of others and achieve a God given purpose, objectives and goals of the people he is leading at the end of the day (www.prayerandbiblestudy.org). This also means that the essence of a leader in biblical times is to motivate others into action in order to achieve a God given purpose and goal through the grace of God.

Administrative leadership of local churches is hinged on administration. Church administration equips the church to be the church and to do the work of the church in a coherent and comprehensive manner (Lindgren, 1965, p.60). It is the guidance

provided by church leaders as they lead the church to use its spiritual, human, physical, and financial resources to move the church toward reaching its objectives and fulfilling its purpose. Church Administration enables the people of God who make up the church to become and do what they can become and do, by God's grace (Tidwell, 1985, p.27). Tidwell's definition emphasizes the involvement of all members of the church in administrative responsibilities: the leaders and lay people. Administration is not the concern only of the pastor and a few "key" lay people. The entire flock need to recognize the nature and mission of the church and should be involved individually and corporately in glorifying God (I Cor. 10:31). So that the church can fulfill its mission, and at the same time promoting an equipping ministry, and a shared leadership.

2. Biblical Concept of Administrative Leadership

The adjective or the term "Biblical" can be used with any word and captures what the word consistently looks like throughout the Scriptures. The word "leadership" when used with the adjective "biblical", helps one to actually understand what leadership means or looks like in the scripture. In Biblical times, the idea of leadership had everything to do with the leader's own character, ability to know God's and the people's will and the determination to carry it out. These types of traits were considered to be of great importance to one's ability to lead and can actually even predict his or her future success as a true leader of a people. Hence, Biblical leadership is meeting someone where they are, and taking them where Jesus wants them to go or be. This definition clearly distinguishes between secular leadership and leadership in the Christendom (<https://t.co/wtbmsu8kv>). In the opinion of Ayer (2016, p.5)

Biblical leadership is distinctly different from that described and defined by the world. The distinctive above help Christian leaders understand the unique way the Bible describes one person's influence upon another, the motivation behind that influence, the eventual outcome of that influence, and the source of power to guide and sustain that influence. A biblical leader is a person of character and competence who influences a community of people to achieve a God-honoring calling by means of the power of Christ.

Clinton (1998, p.17) defines a Biblical leader as one who influences a specific group of People to move in a God-given direction. Clinton is right because every leader should move according to the expectation of God. If the said leader fails to move the group or the organization in accordance with God's directions and will, that leader will not succeed irrespective of his status, skills, knowledge and experience. Men may help him with ideas but it takes God to sustain him in the leadership for effectiveness. Nothing is permanent except it is from the Lord. The scripture declares in (Ecclesiastes 3: 14, NIV) that everything God does will endure forever. A leader is envisioned as being at the center of group changes and activities and as embodying the desires of the group.

Leadership has also been defined from the personality perspective, particularly, the presentation of leadership as a combination of particular attributes and traits of the individual which enable him to incite others to implement a task. One of the briefest of definitions is Maxwell's "Leadership is influence". True leaders have a huge impact on the people around them and the ability to attract like-minded followers. Maxwell also emphasizes that leadership

embodies influence upon people and that, as influence grows, leadership levels grow also. According to Maxwell, the essence of leadership is people following a person because they wish to do so, not because they must. Relationships are the most crucial element in leadership, claims Maxwell. Leadership, many agree, is not a matter of power which overrides others, but rather the ability to empower others. Leadership is a relationship, not a position. Despite the large number of different conceptions of leadership, the key elements thereof may be gleaned as follows: leadership is a process, and it is influence. It unfolds in a group context and involves attainment of a goal which is always the result of a change of some sort. With these factors in mind, we shall be using the following definition of leadership, namely, that leadership is a process whereby one individual influences a group for the purpose of achieving a change which is the common goal of the group (Maxwell, 1998, pp. 11-13).

3. Brief Background of Exodus 18:13-27

In Exodus 18, Jethro visited his son-in-law Moses at a moment when things seem to be going well with Moses and the Israelites. The text of Exodus 18 appears as an account of a family reunion as Jethro brings Moses' wife and children. The encounter between Moses and Jethro is friendly, and Moses pays a special honor to Jethro. He goes out to meet Jethro, kisses him, and bows down. Moses' behavior is usually interpreted as an indication of Jethro's importance as a figure in the story, as a reflection of historical convention (Sarna, 1991, p. 99) and also as an expression of the encounter's warm and peaceful atmosphere. Jethro's affirmative answer to Moses' narration of God's deeds emphasizes this friendly spirit. The episode's harmony culminates when Jethro brings the sacrifice into the presence of Aaron and the elders. Whilst some commentators have identified a tension here in regards to Jethro's non-Israelite background, Childs (1974, p. 263) provides us with a typical explanation:

Nevertheless, Jethro acts throughout the story as a faithful witness to Yahweh. He is not treated as an outsider, nor does he act as one. He rejoices with Moses because of what Yahweh has done for Israel, and offers him praise in the language of Israel's faith. The sacrifice which Jethro offers is the final stage in a series of acts of worship.

The Israelites receive Jethro with approval in Exodus 18:10–12. This approval creates a transition to Exodus 18:13–26, where Jethro can consequently act as Moses' respected counselor. The second scene therefore presents the problem of administration and management in Israel. Because of the friendly relationship he has established with Moses, Jethro is ready and able to provide his son-in-law with good advice (Houtman, 1996, p.395). Jethro has no special revelation; his counsel stems from the realm of common experience. Greenstein even asserts that Jethro, using various wordplays, embodies a wise man, a sage, an individual who uses his wisdom to acknowledge the God of Israel and to contribute to the proper organization in Israel. Whilst Rashbam tries to associate the verb that is employed with the verbal root "to be confused," one can easily criticize this connection as unlikely. We can, however, offer a more plausible association with the homonymous verbal root "to be foolish" (Greenstein, 1999, p.166).

So in Jethro's speech, Moses' way of management is presented as a tiresome job, exhausting, foolish, and crazy activity.

Great tension exists in Jethro's counsel and the presentation of his rhetoric. On one hand, he radically criticizes Moses' leadership, and on the other hand, the speech is in itself a positive step. His criticism of Moses is thereby balanced by his stress on the final success of Moses, Israel and God's plan. Jethro thereby, suggests a model of organization to Moses his son-in-law. In this text the father-in-law proposes a model of organization which sets the principle of delegating authority to assistants. Apparently the system described above including Moses, Aaron and the counsel of elders, had worked well during the fight for liberation. But the narrative shows that there was a need of restructuring the system in order to meet all the needs of the people now that they were no longer under Egyptian laws. Jethro uses the time-consuming factor of Moses' task to address the issue of power delegation. He suggests a pattern of organization based on an administrative division of work that is found even in modern societies.

'Jack of all trade' model of leadership is in practice by some Christian leaders in our 21st century. Like in the words of Ntsiful (2014, p. 3) this model of leadership means the leader who hugs leadership responsibilities to himself, thinking that none else could do them. The result is that he wears both himself and those he leads. The 'Jack of all Trade' model of leadership kills visions, dreams and it leads to stunted growth of the church or the organization.

Leadership is not about the leader or the subordinates taking up all the responsibilities but it is about delegating responsibilities to the right subordinate. According to Maxwell (1979) a leader may possess all of the important characteristics needed by a leader but if he does not learn the art of delegation, and then he will never find himself coaching a dream team (p.169). The writer of this paper supports this scholar because a leader who fails to delegate will not succeed irrespective of his capabilities and skills. He may try to achieve his dreams but all his efforts will be in vain. Though it is the view of the masses that if you put in much effort you will achieve higher reward but you cannot achieve higher results without successful delegation. Maxwell was right when he said that the determination of a positive or negative outcome in leadership depends upon my ability as a leader to develop those closest to me (Maxwell, 1974, p.3). According to Sanders (1979, p.129) leadership is the ability to recognize the special abilities and limitations of others, combined with the capacity to fit each one into the job where he will do his best. He concludes by emphasizing that; He who is successful in getting things done through others is exercising the highest type of leadership. The writer supports Sanders view in that leadership is about delegating authorities and responsibilities to Subordinates for the attainment of goals and objectives leverage on the benefits on shared leadership and to avoid burn out in ministry.

4. Reflective Study of Administrative Insights from Exodus 18:13-27

A very careful study of the passage reveals many helpful administrative insights. Moses was not able to get all the needs of the people met. People were waiting from morning till evening to see him. Some doubtless went away at the end of the day not having reached Moses. They might have gone away angry. Jethro showed good judgment in his approach to Moses he asked question first, and later offered answers. He asked Moses what he was doing (to the people) and why he was trying to do it alone.

Moses gave a simple obvious answer about what he was doing. He seemed confused about why he was trying to do it alone "The people came unto me" (v.15). In some instances, administrators in contemporary times still try to explain their predicament like this. Jethro bluntly told Moses that what he was doing was not good. He also told Moses why it was not good. Moses and the people would surely wear away. The implication is that the people's need would continue to go unmet. The job was too heavy on him. He could not do it alone. Jethro recommended an equipping ministry for Moses. Jethro reprimanded Moses to listen to his advice. He involved God's presence with Moses (v.19) and the authoritative command of God (v. 23) that Moses follow the counsel. On a personal study of the passage, in teaching Church administration as a Course in the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomosho, Nigeria over a decade, some key administrative insights are observed as follows (The NIV Bible version is the one cited and used):

1. Delegation of duties and shared leadership

In Exodus 18:13-14 which states "The next day Moses took his seat to serve as judge for the people, and they stood around him from morning till evening. When his father-in-law saw all that Moses was doing for the people, he said, "What is this you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge, while all these people stand around you from morning till evening?" reveals that Moses obviously did the work alone, there was no delegation of responsibility to other of persons; hence, there is the absence of a shared leadership. He had no vision for multi-staff ministry. He served as a judge, counselor and intercessor. It is worthy of note here again the leadership of Moses was not a shared leadership. It lacked the art of delegation. Having a shared leadership is vital, wherein delegation of responsibility to other persons is possible. Leaders need to have vision for Multi –staff ministry to make room for others to be part of the work.

2. Dutifulness and commitment, accessibility and approachability

Moses was dutiful and committed to the task given him by God. Moses was accessible and approachable as a leader (See Exodus 18:13). Church Pastors and leaders in whatever capacity must be accessible by followers/subordinates and should also be approachable so as to meeting the needs of those placed under their watch- care.

3. Clear visibility of the work to be done

There is the visibility of the work that was done by Moses the leader; it yielded a result which was quite visible to Jethro (and even others) hence, Jethro observed it which paved way for a counsel to be given (See Exodus 18:14).

4. The administrative leadership style of a leader is subject to evaluation and criticism.

It is also glaring from Exodus 18:14 and Exodus 18:17 that the administrative leadership style or approach of a pastor or leader is subject to evaluation and criticism. As such, criticism should be accepted whether constructive or otherwise. They are helpful for improvement purposes and for effectiveness. As leaders we need people who are more experienced in administrative leadership to guide where necessary.

5. Winning of followers ‘trust, dependability and confidence

In Exodus 18: 15 which states “Moses answered him, “Because the people come to me to seek God’s will.” From this verse, in which Moses responded to Jethro’s question in the previous verse, 14, a Leader should be able to explain or give reasons for his leadership style or approach. Good leadership will lead to winning of followers’ trust, dependability and confidence in the leader. Moses as a leader was knowledgeable enough to solve the people’s problems.

6. Good decision-making, avoidance of preferential treatment and practice of equity and justice

Exodus 18:16, “Whenever they have a dispute, it is brought to me, and I decide between the parties and inform them of God’s decrees and instructions” gives a picture of the necessity of leaders to have a sense of good decision-making. Leaders need to be well informed, current and well connected to God; the source of authority to be able to engage in the art of making good decisions. Moses has no preferential treatment for some followers; and practiced equity and justice. He valued the Law and well versed in it. Church Pastors as administrators should be well acquainted with God’s Word and in church policies, procedures and the church’s constitution.

7. Burn-out in ministry

Burn-out in ministry is portrayed in Exodus 18:18, “You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone.” There is the tendency to be over worked in our administrative functions as leaders. It may lead to burn-out in ministry and can affect one’s health and even the entire organization (church or any other). There is the need for synergy, teamwork and delegation of duties.

8. Having a listening ear and being good representative of God

The ability to listen to advice is reflected in Exodus 18: 19, “Listen now to me and I will give you some advice, and May God be with you. You must be the people’s representative before God and bring their disputes to him.” Having a listening ear is essential. Also, a pastor or leader must be a good representative of God .Pastors and leaders should serve as a mediator or intermediary.

9. Performing the teaching function

Exodus 18: 20 which states “Teach them his decrees and instructions, and show them the way they are to live and how they are to behave” depicts that a leader ought to perform his teaching function by teaching the church God’s Word. He is to show those being led the way to live and assign the duties to perform. Reflection of Moses’ job description is vividly seen.

10. Recruitment, criteria for recruitment and manageable or small groups

Exodus 18:21, “But select capable men from all the people—men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain—and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens.”In this verse 21, three core outstanding administrative insights are seen. First, is the enlisting or recruitment of competent people for the work to be done. Choice of leaders is to be according to their capacity

and the selection is from among the people; persons who are already familiar with the terrain and the people to be led. Not strangers so to speak. However, A leader must not be biased or sectional in choosing workers/leaders. The second administrative insight has to do with the qualities or criteria for the selection or enlisting of people/workers. The third administrative insight boards on organization of those recruited or enlisted workers into manageable groups (small groups). Good organization is beneficial in many respects. First, it distributes the workload. Second, it helps to avoid unnecessary duplication of effort. Like in the words of Tidwell (1985, p.57), “Duplication of effort is at best a waste, and at worst counterproductive.”Third, it places responsibility where it belongs. In other words, it gives room for an organizational structure which will help situate and place the various gifts of the church (i.e Church members’ spiritual gifts) in their proper places of ministry. Fourth, good organization reduces or minimizes confusion in the sense that responsibility is placed where it is supposed to be placed.

11. Separation of power, terms of reference, job description, delegation of duties and feedback

Exodus 18: 22, “Have them serve as judges for the people at all times, but have them bring every difficult case to you; the simple cases they can decide themselves. That will make your load lighter, because they will share it with you.”In this verse 22, separation of power, knowing one’s jurisdiction, terms of reference should be given to those assigned responsibility are seen. Also, job description and delegation of duties, ranging from the lowest to the highest are some other dimensions. The leaders serving as judges at all times and referral of difficult cases to Moses Mirrors the ‘Law Court System’. Another administrative insight is that feedback/report is expected to be given back to Moses, the Leader. It is important that as Leaders having delegated responsibilities, feedback should be requested from those assigned responsibilities/duties.

12. Satisfaction

The administrative insight of Satisfaction is reflected in Jethro’s advise to Moses the Leader as recorded in Exodus 11:23, “If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied. ” Satisfaction and avoidance of burn-out/strain is on both sides, Moses, the leader and the people. It is important that a leader needs to lead followers/subordinates to take the right decision and do not coerce people into taking decision. There is the need to spell out the consequences of each decision taken and should be subject to God’s authentication. Yielding to good counsel has its benefit of satisfaction on both parties; the leader and the followers.

13. Complete obedience to godly advice and organizational structure and management hierarchy

In Exodus 18:24, “Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said.” Moses demonstrated complete obedience to godly advice. A leader should take to good counsel that will promote effective leadership. Moses followed the selection Criteria for recruitment prescribed to him and Moses put in place of organizational structure and management hierarchy (see exodus 18: 21, 25).

14. Implementation of job description

Exodus 18:26, states, “They served as judges for the people

at all times. The difficult cases they brought to Moses, but the simple ones they decided themselves."Here, the administrative insight

has to do with assumption of duty for the leaders appointed and implementation of job description. Moses, who at the beginning never had vision for a multi-staff ministry, now had a large heart to accommodate and embrace multi-staff ministry.

5. Conclusion

In biblical times, the idea of leadership is the idea of guiding something or someone. This means that the essence of a leader in biblical times is to motivate others into action in order to achieve a God given purpose and goal through the grace of God. This can be seen in Exodus 18:13-27 where Jethro visited his son-in-law; Moses to see what he was doing and ended up given him the right guide on how to run a proper and effective administrative leadership.

Several lessons have been gleaned from the passage (Exodus 18: 13-27) as analyzed in this paper with regards to administrative insights for effective biblical equipping ministry model. It is worthy of note that whatever responsibilities leaders have in their own lives, they should ensure that they are done in good judgment and in order; for it is not obligatory that a leader should run faster than he has strength.

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