



SERVANTS IN LEADERSHIP: THE FIVE-FOLD MINISTRY IN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

God has made all men to be stewards or servants to take care of his creation. By grace, He has given some people divine assignments and responsibilities to serve while working as leaders. It is rather unfortunate that, while God expects us to serve one another as He commands us that whoever wants to be the first should make himself the least, men and women are rather wrestling over who is superior. There is an apparent power wrestle in the body of Christ and as such men and women of God who should focus on serving God and fulfilling their calling, are running after titles and accolades. Some have even ignored the ministry into which they have been called and long after that which they deem as a higher office. For instance, the Evangelists, Teachers, Pastors and Prophets want to named Apostles, Bishops, and Archbishops because people see them as “higher ministerial offices”. This, indeed, should not be the case. This article, therefore, seeks to explore pertinent issues related to ministers and their ministries, particularly how those in the five-fold ministries respond to God's call, with focus on the biblical fivefold ministry. The researcher highlights some roles of the fivefold ministers, the problems in running ministry, and the need to be a servant in leadership. The researcher uses qualitative research methodology with observations, and semi-structured interviews as data collection techniques. This article concludes by making some recommendations.

Keywords: *servants, leadership, five-fold ministry,*

Introduction

The fivefold ministry as servants in leadership is a simple, central piece of Christian theology that highlights how people are used by Jesus to work through others. The fivefold ministry, in response to the New Testament book of Ephesians means that there are Apostles, Prophets Evangelists, Pastors (the presbyters) and teachers (Ephesians 4:11)¹. Such persons are called to encourage and edify other believers in their walk with the Lord, helping them grow deeper into more mature Christ-followers. Another characteristic of the fivefold ministry is that each and every one operates in servant-leadership position, meaning that they do not lord over you. Christine Ruggeri (2023) intimated that servant leadership is an infinite loop of positive influence that develops strong leaders by serving the needs of others first.

It is the idea that Jesus Himself lived as a servant leader, served others by illustration and word. Servant leaders serve the needs of those they lead, support them and empower them to do their best work—rather than behaving this way because it is what we are taught serving behaviours supposed to look like. Canavesi A Minelli E. (2022), indicates that:

Servant leadership is a versatile and multidisciplinary topic, as it can be applied to a variety of contexts that also fall outside that of the typical corporation. Specifically, the apostle Paul in his letters to Ephesians underscores it concerning every part of the body functioning where they fit within five-fold ministry.

Stressing the importance of unity and calling for believers to work together recognizing that each one has his own function in promoting growth, encouraging and helping others. When the body of Christ works together in unity, we are able to operate at our full capacity and reach our fullest potential. The fivefold ministry and servant leadership each of the fivefold ministry should strive to embrace and promote servant leadership that walks in humility, compassion, and willing to share detail of sacrifice for greater good. It includes taking time with others, advising or mentoring when appropriate and leading by example in the actions and behaviour. Servant leadership is embraced as Jesus Himself lived out as an example when he got down and washed his disciples' feet. The reminder of the concept serves as a powerful reinforcement that it is individual play which leads to building each other or one another up in Christ.

Amanda L. du Plessis; Carol M. Nkambule (2020) indicated that an awareness of the personal characteristics of a servant leader will have a positive effect on their resilience when dealing with difficult challenges. As believers, by adopting the ways of servant leadership and playing together as a team in harmony or oneness, they can walk out this calling to leave an imprint for God. For interns/graduate students majoring in leadership and studying it through a Christian lens, we need to both know, model the five-fold ministry principles that define true service-led servant leaders, better than anyone else. In the life of the Apostle Paul, we see a powerful example of leadership through servant-hood. Paul routinely described himself as a slave of Christ, even though he was one of the most important figures in Christianity. He would tell his friends, the churches he wrote letters to them over and again. He wanted simply to serve them in a way that helped strengthened their faith.

This servant-leadership paradigm forms the backbone of how practitioners understand their call to fivefold ministry, which puts other people's needs/maintenance ahead of your own pleasure or name. Peter operates out of a servant-leadership function for those serving in the five-fold ministry as well. I Peter 5:2 says be shepherds to God's flock that is under your care, watching over them...'(NIV). This directive underscores the pastoral role within the fivefold ministry, which involves caring for and nurturing believers in their spiritual growth. Peter emphasizes the importance of humility and selflessness in leadership, echoing the servant leadership model

¹ All scriptural quotes are from King James Version except otherwise indicated.

exemplified by Jesus himself. The concept of servant leadership within the fivefold ministry emphasizes the importance of accountability and mutual submission. Leaders are called to serve with integrity and transparency, seeking the counsel and input of their fellow believers. This relational and dynamic act fosters a sense of community and shared responsibility within the church, ensuring that leadership is exercised with humility and a spirit of cooperation. The fivefold ministry gifts are not bestowed for personal glory or power, but rather for the building up of the body of Christ. As servants in leadership, individuals called to these ministries are tasked with equipping and empowering others for service in the kingdom of God. This requires a willingness to lay aside personal interests and ambitions in order to prioritize the needs of others and to promote the unity and growth of the church.

Literature Review

Definition of Terms

Servant

The term *servant* can be defined as an individual who performs duties and tasks in service to another person or entity. Servants often work in domestic or familial settings, providing various forms of assistance such as cleaning, cooking, childcare, and other household tasks. The concept of servitude has evolved over time, with many modern interpretations focusing on the role of a servant as a loyal and dedicated employee who is committed to fulfilling the needs and desires of their employer. In a broader sense, the term can also encompass those who serve in roles of leadership or public service, such as government officials or religious figures, who dedicate themselves to the betterment and support of their countries, societies, constituents, or followers. Ultimately, the term servant implies a relationship of deference and service, with an emphasis on humility, duty, and selflessness in meeting the needs of others.

Leadership

Leadership is a multifaceted concept that encompasses the ability to motivate and inspire others towards a common goal. It involves not only possessing a clear vision and direction for a team or organization, but also the capacity to communicate effectively, make difficult decisions, and navigate complex challenges. Effective leaders are able to build relationships, empower others, and create a positive work environment that fosters collaboration and innovation. Also, (Ahamakah Venunye, 2023 cited Bernard, K. et. al, 2013), defined leadership as:

A continuous process of influencing behavior. It may be considered in context of mutual relations between a leader and his followers. Leadership is a dynamic process, which deserves study. It is a relational process involving interactions among leaders, members and sometimes outside constituencies)

Fivefold Ministry

The five-fold ministry is a biblical concept that refers to five specific roles or positions within the leadership structure of the Christian church. Mookgo Solomon Kgatle (2024) indicated that the five-fold ministry is the belief in the functioning of the five offices in ecclesial leadership such as apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, and evangelists. These roles, as outlined in Ephesians 4:11, include apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Each role serves a distinct purpose in the building up and edification of the church, with apostles providing foundational leadership and vision, prophets speaking forth God's word and direction, evangelists reaching out to bring non-believers into the faith, pastors shepherding and caring for the spiritual needs of the

congregation, and teachers instructing and equipping the body of believers. David Kavalevich (2022) indicated that ‘the five-fold ministry is an important part of what makes the body of Christ function properly.’ Through the balanced functioning of these five roles, the church is able to grow and mature in the knowledge and understanding of the Gospel, ultimately fulfilling its mission of spreading the message of salvation to the world.

Common Misconceptions about the Five-Fold Ministry

One common misconception about the five-fold ministry, as outlined in Ephesians 4:11-13, is that it is only reserved for pastors and church leaders. However, the five-fold ministry – consisting of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers – is actually meant to equip all believers for their individual roles in the body of Christ. Michael Fleming (2024) stated that ‘some view it as a historical model that’s not relevant today. Some embrace the underlying principles and modernize it. Still others are critical of it.’ Each member of the church has a unique gifting that complements and builds up others in the faith (1 Corinthians 12:12-31). Another misconception is that these roles are hierarchical or exclusive; in reality, they are meant to work together harmoniously for the purpose of edifying and growing the church. Understanding and embracing the diversity within the five-fold ministry allows for a more holistic approach to fulfilling the Great Commission and advancing God's kingdom on earth. The five-fold ministry is a term commonly used in Christian circles to refer to the different roles or offices that Christ has given to his church for the equipping of the saints and the work of ministry. These roles are outlined in Ephesians 4:11-12 which states, ‘So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up. One common misconception about the five-fold ministry is that these roles are hierarchical in nature, with one being superior to the others. Nick Francis Stephens (2018), indicated that apostolic leaders take stewardship and responsibility for their missional task. They strategically lead others into the process of unity and completeness achieved by the application of the fivefold functions. However, this is not the case as each role serves a unique purpose in the body of Christ. Michael F. (2024) mentioned that some people think if you have people in place performing the model’s job functions, then you’re executing the leadership model the right way and it will lead to healthy church life.’

In 1 Corinthians 12:28, Paul writes, ‘And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues.’ This shows that each role is important and necessary for the functioning of the church. Another misconception is that the five-fold ministry is only for a select group of individuals who hold specific titles or positions within the church. However, Ephesians 4:11-12 makes it clear that these roles are given by Christ himself for the equipping of all believers for ministry. In fact, 1 Peter 2:9 states, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." This shows that all believers are called to ministry and have a role to play in the body of Christ. One misconception that is often associated with the five-fold ministry is that it is limited to only certain charismatic or Pentecostal churches. However, the five-fold ministry is a biblical concept that applies to all churches and denominations. It is not limited to a particular group or sect but is for the edification and growth of the entire body of Christ. In fact, the Apostle Paul writes in Ephesians 4:4, ‘There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called.’ Another common misconception is that the five-fold ministry is focused solely on preaching and teaching, neglecting the other important aspects of ministry such as pastoral care, evangelism, and prophetic insight. However, the five-fold ministry functions in a holistic way, with each role complementing and supporting the others. In 1 Corinthians 14:3, Paul writes, ‘But the one who prophesies speaks to people for their

strengthening, encouraging and comfort. “This shows that the prophetic role is not just about foretelling the future but also about edifying and building up the body of Christ. One misconception that is often held about the five-fold ministry is that it is a human invention or man-made construct, rather than a divine appointment by Christ himself. However, Ephesians 4:11-12 makes it clear that these roles are given by Christ for the equipping of his people and for the building up of the body of Christ. It is not a human invention but a divine institution that is essential for the health and growth of the church. Indeed, Ephesians 2:20 states, ‘built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.’ Another misconception is that the five-fold ministry is no longer relevant or necessary for the church today, as some believe that these roles were only for the early church and are no longer needed. However, Ephesians 4:13-16 states, ‘until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching.’ This shows that the five-fold ministry is essential for the maturity and unity of the church. One misconception that is often associated with the five-fold ministry is that it is limited to certain individuals with specific giftings or talents, rather than being open to all believers. However, 1 Corinthians 12:7 states, ‘Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.’ This shows that every believer has been given spiritual gifts. Another misconception is that one must hold a specific title or position to be considered a part of the fivefold ministry. In reality, the fivefold ministry is not about titles or labels, but about the specific functions and giftings that individuals have been given by God. Anyone can operate in one or more of these roles, regardless of their official title within the church.

In addition, some people also mistakenly believe that the fivefold ministry is only relevant to certain denominations or streams of Christianity. In truth, the concept of the fivefold ministry is found throughout the New Testament and is meant to be a universal model for how the church should function. While different traditions may have different interpretations of these roles, the core principles remain the same. There is also a misconception that the fivefold ministry is a relic of the past, no longer relevant to the modern church. However, the need for apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers is just as important today as it was in the early church. Each role brings a unique perspective and skill set to the body of Christ, contributing to its overall health and growth. Another common misunderstanding is that the fivefold ministry is only for “professional” Christians or those in full-time ministry. While it is true that some individuals may be called to dedicate their lives to these roles, every believer is called to minister in some capacity.

Roles of Each of the Five-Fold Ministers

The concept of the five-fold ministry comes from Ephesians 4:11-13 in the Bible and describes five distinct roles within the Christian church. Frank Viola (2010) asserted that:

Authentic apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherd/teachers are gifted people who grow up in organic churches—not as leaders, but as brethren—equal in status to everyone else in the church. Because they have grown up out of the soil of authentic church life, they have been tested and proven to be safe to the Kingdom of God and to the Lord’s children.

Here are some roles for each of these ministries:

Apostles:

Claudia R. Wintoch (2003) cited Jim Goll (2001) indicated that Apostles are sent by 'Christ to have the spiritual authority, character, gifts and abilities to reach and establish people in Kingdom truth and order, especially through founding and overseeing local churches.' It is worth stating that Apostles are expected to perform the following among others:

Church Planting: Establishing new churches and communities of believers.

Oversight: Providing spiritual guidance and oversight to churches and ministries.

Vision Casting: Communicating God's vision and direction to the church.

Training Leaders: Equipping and mentoring new leaders within the church.

Doctrine Establishment: Defining and defending core doctrines and teachings.

Kara Haris (2022) mentioned that the apostles today do not write Scripture and are not considered a continuation of the original twelve or the Apostle Paul. They carry the purpose of being "sent out" to a place or people to make disciples and carry out the Great Commission.

Prophets:

Revelation: Receiving and conveying God's messages and revelations to the church. David Kovalevich (2022) consolidated this by indicating that Prophets often receive messages from God that they then share with others to prepare God's people.

Intercession: Praying and interceding on behalf of the church and its members.

Correction: Providing corrective guidance based on God's direction. Frank Viola (2010) explicates that Prophets were people who had a clear vision of Jesus Christ and who were able to articulate it lucidly.

Encouragement: Encouraging and edifying the church through prophetic words.

Evangelists:

Preaching the Gospel: Sharing the message of salvation with non-believers.

Outreach: Organizing and leading outreach programmes and missions. David Kovalevich (2022) also mentioned that Evangelists also have a heart for discipleship, which means they help new believers grow in their faith.

Training: Teaching others how to effectively share their faith.

Building Relationships: Establishing connections with non-believers to lead them to Christ.

Follow-up: Ensuring new converts are integrated into the church community.

Pastors:

Pastors have enormous roles to play as they are married to the church and hence are shepherds. Wintoch, R. (2003) states that the pastor's greatest concern is always the well-being of his sheep and his body, not only bringing training, but correction and protection where necessary. We can therefore mention that the pastor does the following inter alia:

Shepherding: Providing spiritual care and guidance to the congregation.

Counselling: Offering pastoral counselling to individuals and families.

Teaching: Teaching and expounding on biblical principles and doctrines.

Conflict Resolution: Pastors mediate between member when there is conflict within the church community.

Nurturing: Pastors foster the spiritual growth and maturity among church members.

Teachers:

Biblical Instruction: Providing in-depth teaching of the Scriptures. Wintoach R. (2003) consolidates this by indicating that teachers are sent to be ‘imparting divine life and anointing to their listeners who become hungrier for the Word of God, as the teacher illumines Scripture and brings forth truth never seen by their listeners before.’

Developing Curriculum: Creating educational materials for various age groups.

Equipping Believers: Equipping church members with knowledge and understanding of the Bible.

Mentoring: Mentoring other teachers and leaders within the church.

Theological Clarity: Ensuring doctrinal accuracy and clarity in teaching. These roles are meant to work together to build up the church, equip the saints, and promote unity and maturity in the faith. Hilder A (2024) indicates that the fivefold ministry are rooted in the character of God. The author further indicated that He (God) catalyses and sends... when He speaks and aligns... when He reveals and persuades... when He nurtures and cares... and when He teaches and guides.

Solutions to fivefold ministry challenges

- Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers all have unique responsibilities and pressures that can take a toll on their mental, emotional, and physical well-being. To address this challenge, it is important for leaders within the fivefold ministry to prioritize self-care and seek support from one another. Creating a culture of mutual care and accountability can help to prevent burnout and promote sustainability in ministry. The fivefold ministry may face challenges related to the interpretation and application of spiritual gifts. Apostles may prioritize boldness and risk-taking, while teachers may value careful study and theological precision. Nyaga Patrick, (2020) indicates that there is sometimes the ministers in the various fivefold offices tend to play blame game. He indicated the following:
 - Teachers can sometimes think evangelists are too flamboyant and sensational.
 - Evangelists can think teachers are dry and dogmatic.
 - Evangelists and teachers often agree saying that prophets can sometimes be intense and extreme.

To address this challenge, it is important for leaders within the fivefold ministry to embrace diversity and celebrate the different expressions of the Holy Spirit's work in their midst. Recognizing that each ministry role has a unique contribution to make can help to foster a spirit of collaboration and mutual enrichment.

Relevance of the fivefold ministry to the body of Christ

The fivefold ministry is a concept rooted in Ephesians 4:11-13, which speaks of the different roles within the church – apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. These roles are seen as essential for the growth and maturity of the body of Christ. The relevance of the fivefold ministry to the body of Christ lies in its ability to foster unity, provide leadership, and equip believers for ministry.

First and foremost, the fivefold ministry is crucial for fostering unity within the body of Christ. Each role brings a unique perspective and skill set to the table, allowing for a more holistic approach to ministry. Apostles provide vision and direction; prophets bring revelation and correction; evangelists reach out to the lost; pastors care for the flock; and teachers provide guidance and instruction. Together, they create a well-rounded leadership team that can effectively lead and nurture the church. Secondly, the fivefold ministry provides essential leadership for the body of Christ. Each role carries its own set of responsibilities and functions, from establishing new churches to nurturing spiritual growth to equipping believers for ministry. Functionally, according to Chris Oyakhilome (2024), the fivefold ministry are: (a.) for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, and for the edifying of the body of Christ; (b.) for the work of the ministry itself; (c.) for the edification of the Body of Christ.

Furthermore, this leadership is vital for guiding the church in the right direction, protecting it from false teachings and division, and helping it fulfil its purpose of spreading the gospel and making disciples. Without this leadership, the body of Christ would be lacking direction and guidance. What is more, the fivefold ministry plays a key role in equipping believers for ministry. Each role is responsible for training and mentoring others in their particular area of expertise, whether it be evangelism, pastoral care, or teaching. This equipping is essential for empowering believers to fulfil their calling and contribute to the overall mission of the church. By providing guidance, support, and training, the fivefold ministry helps believers grow in their faith and develop their gifts and talents for the service of God. In addition, the fivefold ministry helps to maintain the health and vitality of the body of Christ. Each role brings a different focus and perspective to the table, promoting balance and diversity within the church. Apostles focus on pioneering new ministries and churches, prophets bring insight and correction, evangelists reach out to the lost, pastors provide care and shepherding, and teachers offer instruction and guidance. Together, they create a well-rounded team that can address the various needs of the church and help it grow in maturity and effectiveness. In conclusion, the fivefold ministry is highly relevant to the body of Christ for its ability to foster unity, provide leadership, equip believers for ministry, and maintain the health and vitality of the church. By working together in harmony and complementing each other's strengths and weaknesses, the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers can lead the church in fulfilling its mission and purpose. The fivefold ministry is a gift from God to the body of Christ, and it is essential for the growth and maturity of believers and the advancement of the kingdom of God.

Methodology

The researcher has used semi-structured interview and observation to gather information. The participants were randomly sampled. The researcher has used observation over a period of time to have ample information on the strengths, weaknesses, successes and challenges of the fivefold ministry. The respondents have been carefully chosen from orthodox, Charismatic and Pentecostal churches. The researcher interviewed thirty (30) respondents consisting of 20 males and 10 females within the age range of 18-70. The males are more because they normally head ministries or occupy

the fivefold offices. Some of these participants have formal education whereas some do not but all of them have understanding of the fivefold ministry. Out of the thirty participants, fifteen (15) of them are ministers from the fivefold ministry, ten (10) are presbyters and deacons and five (5) of them are congregants from different denominations within the Christian faith.

Discussion and Data Analysis

The researcher has observed that, some ministers of the gospel do not understand the concept of the fivefold ministry. Many of them, some of whom have no mentorship or theological education feel that once you are progressing in ministry, you need to be changing your office as well. For that reason, a Minister called into the office of Evangelist, Pastor, Prophet or Teacher, all of a sudden bear the title of Apostle, Bishops or Archbishop because he has now started his ministry and has some pastors around or under him. It is obvious that ministers who are so much conscious of their positions seem to forget that they are servants who are just placed in a leadership position. Most of such ministers turn to idolized themselves. The respondents equally emphasized this assertion. Some of them indicated that, this posture to be served instead of to serve is prevalent in young Charismatic and Pentecostal ministers but not limited to them alone. Some of them mentioned that it is something found across the Christian faith and humans have the tendency to become bossy when people are working under them. Some along the line are as a result of pressure from subordinates to serve in many regards. Whereas some respondents feel it is normal to be served as a minister of the gospel, it should be mentioned that ministers of the gospel are sent to be servants. Some respondents mentioned that some ministers in the five-fold ministry are swayed by titles other than focusing on their assignments. The researcher has also observed that some ministers are not so much concerned with positions. They should rather focus on their assignments other than struggling for offices.

Recommendations

- a. All ministers in the five-fold ministry should see themselves as one. There seem to be too much division in the body of Christ even among the servants of God and this has subjected the body of Christ to ridicule. This is not healthy for the spiritual growth of our followers and the wider population.
- b. Young ministers who occupy the offices of Prophets and Apostles should emulate the character of revered ministers of the gospel who by their characters captured the hearts of believers and unbelievers in their journey with the Lord and stop self-glorification and exaltation.
- c. Ministers in the five-fold ministry should focus on preaching Christ other than making it look like their offices are ends in themselves.

Conclusion

The study has been able to discuss the misconceptions about the five-fold ministry, the roles of the ministers in the various offices, relevance of the five-fold ministry, the challenges and the solutions to the challenges identified. It is apparent from the submissions of the respondents that some ministers of the gospel do not carry themselves as servants but as gods. This is not a good image painted about the service we are called into. Ministers must therefore reposition themselves and open up to serve instead of looking up to others to serve them since Christ and the early missionaries served tirelessly. Ministry should always be about service to others and as such ministers should desist from running after titles as well as using those titles to intimidate those who

have sacrificed themselves for the growth of the work of God. The study has established that that all those in the five- fold ministry are actually servants who are placed in leadership as such must serve with humility.

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