

Healthy Spiritual Leaders

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“Knowing that self-leadership is the prerequisite to lead others. Understanding your role in ministry is a key to serve together in a team.”

- Leadership Bible

In serving the Lord, I'm always reminded of the importance of good health. If I lie in bed constantly in poor health, how can I serve Him effectively? For plants, animals, and people or the church alike, health is an integral aspect of growth. Without health, growth will be stunted. Therefore, a healthy church is a growing church that prospers in ministry and serving more people effectively.

The church is made up of individual disciples, and the growth of these disciples would directly or indirectly affect the spiritual growth of the church. Having healthy disciples is the prerequisite of a healthy church.

Moreover, healthy spiritual leaders can foster healthy disciples. A healthy spiritual leader should exhibit the following 5 attributes:

1. Spiritual Health - A Healthy Spiritual Leader Should Pursue Spiritual Living

According to 1 Timothy 4:7, spiritual leaders “have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly.” The dying apostle Paul encouraged young Timothy to train himself to be godly and continued to teach the truth of godliness. Being “godly” means a true submission to God and living a life pleasing to God. Being godly should be our basic attitude

before God. As we experience God's immensity, majesty and redeeming love, we would inevitably respond in awe and submission. This awe-struck kind of attitude can then transform into a worshipping, exalting, trusting, and holy life. So godliness is a way of living that includes our fear of God, love for people, our thoughts, our attitudes, our actions and behaviour.

A healthy spiritual leader not only maintains a close relationship with God, but also lives up to the image of a born-again Christian in “training” oneself to be godly. He or she needs to strive for continuous spiritual growth and a closer walk with the Lord, so that “godliness” is not just an external act, but a true intrinsic attribute of the leader.

Paul mentions that a truly godly person needs to undergo major changes in one's communications. He would abandon any “godless myths and old wives' tales” like cursing words, foul language, lies and replace them with comforting, uplifting and encouraging words. This is how godly behavior should look like.

2. Physical Health - A Healthy Spiritual Leader Should Be Consistent in Physical Training

I Timothy 4:8 says, “For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.” Paul's concept of physical training includes both physical and mental training. A

person's health definitely involves body, mind and spirit, and these aspects are interrelated: physical health will impact mental health, and vice versa. A sense of peace, joy, love, self-esteem and hope would in turn affect the immune system. Therefore, a sound spiritual health is directly related to a sound physical body.

Optimal and persistent exercise enhances health, because it regulates blood circulation, increases oxygen intake, builds up muscles, nourishes the brain, relaxes tension and strengthens the heart.

Jesus enjoyed good physical health as a carpenter by trade. When Jesus started His ministry, we could imagine he would need a good health to face the different needs from the crowds incessantly. Brothers and sisters, as our "body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price," "therefore honor God with your body." (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

3. Emotional Health - A Healthy Spiritual Leader Should Possess Emotional Stability

"Glad", "Mad", "Sad" are examples of basic human emotions. These may be short-term reactions resulted from disappointments, broken relationships or distraught circumstances, which are acceptable. However, long-term ailments resulting in depression, anxiety, panic or explosive temper are detrimental to our general well-being.

Proverbs 19:11 says, "A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense." Paul also reminds us, "Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry," Ephesians 4:25-27. The Bible keeps on reminding us to restrain

our anger and regulate our temper. We need to learn to forgive and let go of anger, for anger and bitterness is the root of many illnesses.

Jesus Himself is a good role model of emotional stability: He possesses all human emotions of glad, sad, mad, but He is totally skillful in dealing with His emotions so that they would not become his impediments.

4. Interpersonal Health - A Healthy Spiritual Leader Should Maintain Healthy Interpersonal Relationships

Maintaining healthy interpersonal relationships is the key to physical, mental and spiritual health. Inversely, an adverse emotional quotient would bring along ailments, headaches, insomnia and restlessness.

Luke 2:52 records, "and Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men." Jesus' health covers the physical, spiritual, emotional and relational aspects. Jesus never despises a person for his low socio-economic status; He only looks at a person's true worth. Even for a social outcast of the times, Jesus would care for his needs as a most worthy person.

The starting point of any beautiful relationship is God Himself, for He reconciles all. For "He himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility," (Ephesians 2:14). A triangle has been used to depict our relationship with God. The apex of a triangle represents God. The other two points of the triangle represent man. When people continuously move towards God, they are closer in relationship with other people; when a person is distant from God, the distance between the two people is longer too. When God is the center of man,

there is harmony; when the self is the center of man, there will be conflicts and distance. Conflicts only destroy what God has built up, but good relationships strengthen the church.

5. Personal Health - A Healthy Spiritual Leader Should Possess A Healthy Self-Image

"A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones." (Proverbs 17:22) A negative self-image affects our health adversely; whereas a cheerful heart brings a sense of security, fewer grudges, and more peace and harmony to the surroundings. A person capable of accepting oneself is more likely to be accepting of others. Love means acceptance, not rejection. When we accept, and are accepted, our self-worth would be recognized. Love and acceptance can dissolve flaws and weaknesses and highlight strengths and capabilities.

A healthy spiritual leader should embody a persistently clear conscience, and be able to look at oneself with "sober judgment". How can we look upon ourselves with sober judgment? It should originate from a clean heart that exuberates pure faith in God. Faith is the basis of a secure self-image; a secure self-image is built upon our faith in God.

A congregation of faithful disciples forms a healthy church. Only healthy spiritual leaders could foster healthy disciples, and these healthy disciples could in turn impact on the church for healthy growth. May God continue to bless us to become a healthy multi-site church.

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