



Persistent Leadership: Constructive Reflections on Saul's Leadership Model

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Abstract

Saul's leadership can be a reflection of the leadership of today's church pastors. This article aims to describe the failure of Saul in leading the nation of Israel and the reflection that can be built from it. Through the analysis of Saul's leadership, a constructive reflection was formed so that a leadership model was formed for pastors or church leaders. The study method is a descriptive qualitative one with a literature study approach having been adopted. The results of this study conclude that to be pleasing to God, a leader or shepherd is required to be persistent or consistent from the beginning of receiving a call to the end of life (persistent leadership). The picture of this leadership model is firm, firm in faith and a life that is not tied to worldly materialistic matters. There are three things that become the focus of persistent leadership, namely: one, being persistent in managing the vision, that is, all things in life are aimed at the establishment of the kingdom of God. Two, persistent divine interaction, firmness in communicating with God through prayer and Bible study. This is indicated by a wise life. Three, persist in carrying out the mission. True mission is self-denial, not living according to worldly values and living only for God.

Keywords: persistent leadership; saul's leadership; saul's reflection; leadership models.

Introduction

Leadership is a necessity that cannot be separated from the lives of believers in the church fellowship. Organization or churches without leaders will not produce good values and results (Samarena, 2020). With regard to the issue of leadership, at one point in the history of the Israelites, they rejected God's leadership and chose a king like any other nation generally did, as their leader. For this, Saul became the first king that God appointed. God chose Saul because he was seen as having the capabilities needed to serve as a king. Physically, Saul had advantages compared to other men of his age, with a tall body and a handsome face (1 Samuel 9:2). Meanwhile, in terms of morality, Saul was a polite, caring, responsible and reliable person (1 Samuel 9:5-16). Saul had good and quality capital to be chosen and appointed as king for the Israelites (1 Samuel 9:17) and the Spirit of God directly accompanied and controlled him (1 Samuel 10: 6-7).



Saul brought spiritual moral capability and strength and his reign was successful. The strength of his army was so strong that many great enemies were defeated. Behind all these positive things, the fact was that God ultimately became disappointed and rejected Saul. This led to Saul's tragic death even though Saul was actually the leader chosen by God himself to be the king of Israel. Through Samuel, Saul was anointed and this was a sign that God believed in Saul with all his potential (Perugese, 2018). Success brought Saul to a high level of self-confidence but at the same time he had a fear of losing all of these achievements. The situation led Saul to ignore God's decree and act in violation of it. Saul started his leadership well but in the middle of the journey he experienced deviations, and also changes in motivation.(Wati & Yuono, 2021). On several occasions, Saul heard God's voice but deliberately ignored it (1 Samuel 15: 10-30; 1 Samuel 2:22-25).

Examples of leadership models and attitudes of Biblical figures both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament are studies that never become obsolete. Especially nowadays where there is a leadership crisis among God's people and generally across the globe. There is also a decline in the quality of today's church leaders (Budiman & Siswanto, 2021). Leadership is experiencing setbacks on various fronts, both in the leadership of the nation and the church today (Frederik, 2020). Increasingly frequent conflicts in the process of changing church leadership are caused by political games and the machinations of leaders (Wijaya, 2018:129–144). A leadership crisis occurs because of a lack of trust in leaders who are involved in many conflicts (Tubagus, 2020: 56). A study of the leadership models of Bible figures can serve as examples and warnings for today's spiritual leaders so that they can be successful in carrying out their mandate and all their duties and especially be able to give accountability to God for the trust He has given them.

Many researches working on the theme of King Saul's leadership have been compiled, one of which is that by Peruge which discusses the meaning of God's rejection of Saul based on 1 Samuel 15:1-35 and its implications for today's servants of God. The conclusions of this study are: God's rejection because of Saul's disobedience, sincere repentance by admitting mistakes instead of blaming others, God's choice is always right in choosing His messengers (Perugese, 2018). Another research by Wati and Yuono on comparative leadership studies on David Versus Saul and its implementation for contemporary church leadership is also useful (Wati & Yuono, 2021). This paper aims to describe the leadership of Saul and David in the Bible and its relevance to the church today. This article concludes that healthy leadership is related to vocation, character, spirituality and practices that are in accordance with the values of truth. Healthy leadership is also manifested in succession preparations. The stronger the character, spirituality and vocation of a leader, the healthier the church and its leadership will be (Wati & Yuono, 2021). Another study was conducted by Shella which discussed the character of David and Saul as benchmarks for a successful ministry. It was conveyed in that study that the character of David and Saul can be used as a benchmark for what character should be changed and what character should be applied. The results of this study show that the characters that determine success are faith, wisdom, discipline, humility, and dependence on the Holy Spirit (Shella et al., 2021: 16).

From several existing studies there has been no discussion about Saul's leadership model and make it a constructive reflection for church pastors. Therefore this research was structured in order to provide a description of Saul's leadership model and produce an analysis that is useful for developing a church pastor's leadership model. The focus of this article is on the analysis of Saul's leadership pattern as a basis for taking reflection, so that referring to this can possibly help form a new leadership model for church pastors to follow. Persistent leadership is a form of leadership that can be used as a pattern for church pastors so that they can become leaders who are acceptable to God.



Methodology

This study uses a literature study research method. Assessment of existing problems was done using various supporting literature, both journal articles, books, study results and general articles containing the same theme. The discussion of the main ideas is presented using a qualitative descriptive method. The first step was to interpret the events surrounding Saul's election as king of Israel according to their narrative meaning. The next step was to analyze Saul's leadership model and the characters displayed. This interpretation sought to be able to find the message contained in the text. From the results of the analysis, a constructive reflection was formulated to form a new pattern or model of leadership for church pastors to consider.

Discussion

King Saul's Background

The disappointment of the Israelites over the leadership of Samuel's children, Joel and Abijah, made the Israelites demand a king to rule them well. Apart from these reasons, there is the factor of the heart's desire to be the same as other nations who are under the king's rule. By having a king, all people can be protected and fight against their common enemies (1 Samuel 8:5-7). Saul was elected as the first king born of the tribe of Benjamin, the son of a rich and respected Kish family. Saul was handsome and tall (1 Samuel 9:1). Saul had the basic capital as an ideal king. In terms of Saul's morality he was considered to be a good moral and responsible individual (1 Samuel 9:3-5). His humility was manifested by him being willing to listen to other people's suggestions (1 Samuel 9:6) and he was also polite (1 Samuel 9:7-8). His morality was very clearly indicated in the story contained in 1 Samuel 9:5-16. Shortly after his anointing as king, his quality morals and meekness were demonstrated when some people abused him and did not believe him (1 Samuel 10: 27). In response to this, Saul responded well and was even able to forgive them (1 Samuel 11: 12-13).

His concern for others was expressed through the event of saving Jabesh from the arbitrary actions of the Ammonites. Saul acted as a protector for the Israelites (1 Samuel 11). For the victory of the Israelites against the Ammonites, Saul invited his people to worship God through burnt offerings and to give thanks for them. This testifies to his close relationship with God (1 Samuel 11). God called Saul (1 Samuel 10:1) to be king with the task of saving God's people from the enemies around him.

But the story that follows in the Book of Samuel reveals one by one his personal weaknesses. Starting from the story of resistance to the Philistines (1 Samuel 13:1-22), he should have waited for Samuel's arrival according to the promise of seven days to perform the sacrifice. But Saul felt he deserved to do this himself and this action was also motivated by his fear of being abandoned by the people (1 Samuel 13). This act sparked God's disappointment so God appointed another person as a substitute for Saul as king (1 Samuel 13:13-14). Saul's further disobedience was the refusal of God's command to destroy the Amalekites (1 Samuel 15). Saul let the Israelites who were with him seize the good livestock, even though God had commanded him not to spare anything. These two wrong actions had damaged Saul's relationship with God so that the Spirit of God was no longer with him. It was from this situation that David later became Saul's confidant. However at the end, David's fame made Saul jealous (1 Samuel 18). This was a sign that Saul's moral and spiritual qualities were on the decline. Finally, Saul suffered a tragic death, killed of his own accord while in battle against the Philistines (1 Samuel 31).



Saul's Leadership Model

With his potential and the guidance of God's Spirit, Saul was able to carry out his duties as king relatively well. But Saul did not have the determination to remain obedient to God so that he forgot his call of duty. From the beginning, God warned of this situation through Samuel's words that a stipulation applied to the Israelites and the king who ruled them. If they did not listen to God's word and go against His commandments, then God's own hand would be against the Israelites and their king (1 Samuel 12:14-15). Saul broke the decree and thus the Spirit of God withdrew from Saul's life because of this (1 Samuel 16:4). God also expressed regret over the decision to make Saul king because he had turned against God (1 Samuel 15:11).

At first, Saul's leadership was carried out on the basis of humility and the right motivation. Therefore his administration of leadership was based on and guided by the Spirit of God. In this case Samuel became the advisor and intermediary who conveyed all of God's commandments to Saul. Sincerity and clean motivation put Saul on God's side. Leadership that is based on God's inclusion directs to the fulfillment of the interests of the people not personal interests so that Saul managed to achieve extraordinary achievements with his government. But in the continuation of his reign, Saul began to change his focus to himself. Everything was done for him so that Saul felt insecure when David appeared to be superior to him. Saul had even become so ambitious as to try to kill David because he saw him as a threat to his power (1 Samuel 18:7-9; 20:31). Everything was done and measured by Saul for his own sake, this is what also resulted in him ignoring God's commands and not respecting the Ark of God, as David once mentioned, "And let us move the ark of our God to our place, because in Saul's time we did not heed it" (1 Chronicles 13:3).

The heart and focus that shifted to himself made Saul commit the sin of building a monument for himself (1 Samuel 15:12) and the leadership orientation that led to fulfilling his own desires made Saul crave praise and recognition for the magnitude of the achievements. Reputation became the focus of Saul's leadership. Therefore Saul experienced a change in life goals and forgot his origins and for what purpose he was appointed by God to be king (1 Samuel 12:13-15). Saul even dared to oppose God by making David—who had been approved by God, his enemy (Samuel 18:28-29).

Saul's leadership is colored by a story that highlights that Saul was selfish: Saul waging war without God's command and seeking proof that he is great (1 Samuel 13:1-4), because of ambition, willing to sacrifice others (1 Samuel 14:45), deep hatred (1 Samuel 20:32-33), seeking praise (1 Samuel 15:1-3), and violating God's provision (1 Samuel 15:7-8). Apart from being selfish, Saul also sought self-justification for every mistake he made as an example of self-righteousness – offering burnt offerings without Samuel (1 Samuel 13:8-13) and other self-righteousness (1 Samuel 15: 9,15 ; 15:20,21,24,30). Saul's leadership was ultimately built on the attitude of being self-centered thus forming negative attitudes such as pride (1 Samuel 15:12), disobedience (1 Samuel 13:1-13), greed (1 Samuel 15:17-19) and building up a self-image for popularity (1 Samuel 15:15: 24) that influenced all of Saul's decisions.

The impact of leadership that is controlled by self-centeredness is the withdrawal of the guidance of the Spirit of God and ultimately leads to eternal destruction. This is because the purpose of this model of leadership is self-glorification (a popularity contest) not the glory of God as the giver of the mandate.

Constructive Reflections on Saul's Leadership Model



Saul's example of leadership contains a negative side so it is necessary to draw a constructive reflection for church leaders. Saul is considered a failed leader (Sibuea, 2020). Leaders become key figures that determine the progress or decline of a nation and also a church (Wati & Yuono, 2021). The church is in a crisis of leadership and the era of virtualization encourages that condition to be well formed because this era is increasingly open and can be clearly seen through cyberspace (Anjaya, 2021b). Therefore, constructive leadership or constructive reflection is needed for the development of the church in terms of the quality of church leaders required to fulfil God's mandate.

The main failure of Saul's leadership was his change in motivation and focus from God to himself. This change was the key to failure. Leadership that pleases God is when the main focus and motivation is only on God and all is done for the sake of the glory of God and the kingdom of heaven. Referring to the nature of God that is consistent with all of His rules and promises, then leadership that is under God's control is also required to be consistent. One of the failures of Saul's leadership was the lack of consistency: starting with success but ending with failure. His beginning with motivation for God ended with motivation for himself.

Changes in the direction of goals and motivation for Saul's leadership actually did not take place suddenly but started from small issues. Saul was not aware that the desires of his heart which were getting more and more out of control from day to day, came from the little mistakes he made. For example Saul became impatient with Samuel's non-arrival and then took over Samuel's task of performing the sacrificial service. Another mistake was when Saul violated God's commandment by not killing Agag the king of Amalek, even though eventually, Saul killed him. God's punishment for this 'small' mistake was so severe because in front of God, Saul's fault was not in big or small matters but in violation of His decrees. God did not tolerate this because it set a bad precedent for the people of Saul who are His people, moreover it was a provision from the beginning that if there was a violation of His decrees then God's punishment was ready to be poured out (1 Samuel 12:13-15).

Talking about consistency in leadership, persistent leadership is a leadership model that is persistent or consistent. Referring to the story of Saul, there are several consistencies or persistences that must be maintained by church leaders, namely: first, the persistence of the vision, namely the direction that is only aimed at the kingdom of God. The focus of church leadership begins with a vision to realize God's kingdom on earth, this means that the focus of ministry is consistently carried out based on God's needs and desires. The church can develop if it is led by people who have a vision to grow the church. The reason and foundation for equipping church members in leadership roles is for the building of the body of Christ according to Ephesians 4:11-16 (Borrong, 2019). Leaders are chosen and sent by God to be leaders who have clear aims and objectives (vision). That means the leader must have and set a clear vision, namely the kingdom of God. Vision is not only enough to be proclaimed but really needs to be pursued to be achieved through concrete actions. The direction of the goal, the focus of life in total only on God.

Second, the persistence of divine interaction. This persistence or consistency requires church leaders to always be connected to God. Thus God's wisdom will encompass and the guidance of the Holy Spirit will direct all actions and decisions that are right according to the teachings of the Bible. (Anjaya et al., 2021:59–70). Always being connected to God can be done by diligently praying in the right way, always trying to understand God's will in every event of life and self-correcting continuously. Spiritual leadership must leave self-interest behind and motivation must be directed to the benefit of others - to the glory of God. Therefore one's motivation should be by and for God alone (Rumahlatu, 2017). In the persistence of this divine interaction, leaders are required to



continue to maintain humility, and be willing to listen and respect others as interactions exist between humans in general.

Third, mission persistence. Mission persistence or consistency is firmness in terms of carrying out the vision set through concrete actions that are in accordance with the truth of God's word. Reflecting on Saul's story, the mission persistence that needs to be carried out is an effort of continuous self-denial. This is very important considering that in carrying out church leadership, leaders or pastors will face many worldly temptations (Anjaya, 2021a). Powerlessness to deny oneself will be fatal to God's favor. In fact, self-denial can be started by eliminating all worldly desires. Ideally, pastors or church leaders live only to carry out missions in order to achieve the vision of presenting God's kingdom. Church leaders are required to live life only for the glory of God (Selan, 2018), not the glory of self and family. Saul's fatal mistake was carrying out a personal mission for his personal interests.

The three persistences cannot be run separately, they are interrelated and support each other. Mission persistence, one of the main things is an act of self-denial – and this needs to be concretely manifested in order to achieve God's vision (goal). Vision persistence can continue to be directed to the right corridor only if divine interaction is carried out consistently. The attainment of God's vision can only be achieved if there is mission persistence – in this case, consistent self-denial, even if it needs to be done throughout one's life. Therefore a church leader or pastor, in establishing his vision and mission must reflect God's vision and mission. In the context of Saul's leadership story, the vision and mission according to God's will is to liberate and save the Israelites from the pressures of the surrounding nations. Thus, referring to Saul's leadership, the vision of today's shepherds is to liberate and save. Freeing the congregation and oneself from the shackles of the seductive vision of the world and through it can save souls into eternity.

New Testament Leadership

The Lord Jesus taught us the most perfect leadership model. God confirmed that a prominent person or leader must be a servant or servant for all (Matthew 20:26-27; Mark 9:35). That is the condition for His followers. Leadership for the Lord Jesus was in providing service to others. This cannot be achieved without humility and an attitude of prioritizing the interests of others. Christian leaders or church pastors must have a basic understanding and awareness that being a leader is as a servant (Mark 10:42-45) not to be served as a narcissistic person. Servant leaders must be committed first and foremost to people and especially their congregation and should be authentic and dependable (Nicolaidis, 2020). A Christian leader is called by God to duties and responsibilities as a servant and a status as a servant of God and others/ A Christian servant leaders recognizes that leadership is not all about them, but rather that things are accomplished through others and virtue and morality are required as in a business enterprise (Nicolaidis, 2020; 2015).

In Luke 22:26 the word 'leader' is connected with the word *deaconon* from *diakonos* (servant). This means a leader is a servant, not a ruler, a servant for those he accompanies. Imitating Jesus' attitude as someone who has a humble and gentle attitude, always willing to sacrifice and ready to carry out a task. The analogy of this statement is that a servant only has one vision, namely the vision of his employer. To be able to know and keep the vision directed towards its goals, a servant must continue to interact with the employer. Through this, the concrete action of implementing the vision can only be carried out perfectly if the servant is willing to abandon all his own interests, deny all his desires and only focus on the interests of his master.



Persistent Leadership Application According to Biblical Perspective

Reflecting on the story of Saul's leadership who was unfaithful in small matters, and allowed himself to be lulled by worldly desires for self-image and power, the basis for true leadership is a firm and loyal attitude. In accordance with its definition, persistence contains a firm, firm and loyal attitude. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, persistent means "*continuing to exists past the usual time, or continuing to do something in a determined way even when facing difficulties or opposition*" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022). In this case the leadership model based on this attitude (persistent) will lead to God's favor. This has been the advice of the Apostle Peter that steadfastness and firmness are God's gifts to complete His calling. Thus, it can be stated that a persistent attitude is closely related to God's approval, or it can occur only if you focus on God's vision and have an intense interaction with Him. A leader in a church or any enterprise also needs a positive servant leadership motivation based on deep spirituality which allows for the desired principles, standards, and procedures for all actions and a set of divinely inspired virtues need to be in place with relevance to all activity (Nicolaides, 2020).

Persistent leadership contains three important points in its application. First, the persistence of the vision of God's kingdom is an attitude that puts God first above all else. A church leader or pastor must live fully only for God. This fulfills the teachings of the Lord Jesus to love the Lord God with all your heart and soul (Matthew 22:37) and the teachings of the Apostle Paul, namely that everything is done only for the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31). An example of a concrete attitude that leaders can take is to live out God's word in their daily life both through their words and deeds (Frederik, 2020:69–86). Keeping one's words means only saying words that lead to things that are sweet to hear, uplifting, noble, holy, and edifying (Philippians 4:8). Daily actions are also behaviors that are in line with God's word. *Second*, the persistence of divine interaction is critical. This persistence or consistency is the act of a leader who is always consistent in connecting with God through true and quality prayer (Huang, 2020:35–50) so that all his or her actions, lifestyle and pattern of thinking is in accordance with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In this case the church leader or pastor is required to have the ability to find God or hear God's voice in every life event that is lived out (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18; Ephesians 6:18; Matthew 26:41). Divine interaction is not an indication of the miracles that can be displayed or demonstrated by leaders, but rather the wisdom that appears in everyday life: in making decisions, how to respond to a problem, and patterns of dealing with life.

Third, mission persistence. Mission persistence or consistency is related to continuous self-denial efforts. This is very important considering the current fact that modern human life has been shackled by the pleasures and facilities of the world and materialism reigns supreme. Worldly notions and values have dominated. Pastors or church leaders are required to be able to break free from these shackles, and not follow the lifestyle of today's world. Hedonism, consumerism and materialism have dominated the majority of people today. Therefore the attitude that needs to be adopted in living this life is the example of the Lord Jesus. Pastors and church leaders should live in simplicity, not in luxury (Susanto & Triastanti, 2020:75–88). Self-denial also speaks of worldly ambition. Various ambitions and desires related to status, pride, honor should be abandoned. Building a church is not by world standards which always relates to the number of congregations, the size of the church building and assets but rather to the quality of the congregation's faith. Following the Lord Jesus is mandatory self-denial (Luke 9:23; Matthew 16:24-25).

With these three points, persistent leadership, can be applied so that the name of God is glorified. Through this leadership model, the life of a pastor or church leader will be able to radiate God's light in this increasingly wicked world. In this way the congregation will also get a living example so



that the purpose of God's call on church leaders to liberate and save is achieved. Leaders in churches must emulate Abraham, Joshua, Paul and Peter and others in scripture who appreciated a deep intimacy with God throughout their life. They continued to learn and growing spiritually as God's chosen leaders. They had spiritual authority and acquiesced to what God wanted from them. A good leader empowers followers to provide loving service, and does not lead for their own personal gain. A leaders must be accountable and not self-centered.

Conclusion

Saul's leadership can be a constructive reflection for the leadership of today's church pastors. Referring to the failure of Saul's leadership which was caused by the lack of consistency or persistence of obedience to God's decrees, this article focused on this as a constructive reflection. It was concluded that in order to be pleasing to God, a leader or pastor is required to be persistent from the moment he or she receives the call to the end of life (persistent leadership). The description of this leadership model is that it is solid, firm in faith and life that is not bound to worldly things. There are three things to focus on in *persistent leadership* namely: one, persistence in managing the vision that is all things in life are aimed at the establishment of God's kingdom. Everything is for His glory. Two, persistent divine interaction, firmness in establishing communication with God through prayer and Bible study is imperative. This is indicated by a wise life. Three, persistent mission. The true mission is self-denial and living only for God and the furtherance of His kingdom.

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