



Serving like Joseph can save Zimbabwe: Optimizing spiritual with strategic leadership

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ABSTRACT

Paradoxically, Zimbabwe is so rich in natural, material and human resources, yet it is plagued by crises due to poor leadership. Providentially, spirituality retains a strong influence in national affairs. Sadly, strategic engagement is missing. Many Christian and traditional leaders neglect active politics while a few engage, and others become national leaders without offering transformational strategies. Despite their failure, spiritual leaders are still trusted and expected to leverage their positions and influence the transformation of Zimbabwe. While the positive contributions of religion to development are appreciated, the continuity of multi-layered political, socio-economic and environmental crises and the mass exodus of Zimbabweans to neighbouring countries, which cause disturbing migration problems, are a wake-up call for transformational leadership. Using literature review and Butzke's theory of theonomic reciprocity, this article explores lessons from Joseph's strategic leadership. It finds that, while Joseph was very spiritual, he was also strategic and effective in national governance. In conclusion, spiritual leadership can enhance national transformation if it is strategized. Therefore, it is recommended that Christian leaders emulate Joseph and strategize their spiritual capacities to save Zimbabwe from its present predicament.

Keywords: Spiritual Leadership, Integrity, Strategy, Sustainability, Transformation

INTRODUCTION

Religion holds an indispensable place in African society.¹ In Zimbabwe, Christian and African traditional religions (ATR) exert tremendous influence on national politics and can enhance transformation.² Although Christian and ATR leaders are fallible and sometimes become entangled in a heterogeneity of controversies, such as commodification, commercialisation of the gospel and corruption,³ Church and ATR leaders are still trusted and expected to foster transformation in

¹ Obaji M Agbiji and Ignatius Swart, "Religion and Social Transformation in Africa: A Critical and Appreciative Perspective," *Scriptura: Journal for Contextual Hermeneutics in Southern Africa* 114, no. 1 (2015): 1–20.

² Kimion Tagwirei, "(Mis)Leading by the Spirit: Transforming African Spiritualities and Political Leadership," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 44, no. 1 (November 28, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v44i1.2934>.

³ Luyando Mutale Katenda, "For Religious Leaders in Africa, Popular Trust May Present Opportunity, Challenge in Times of Crisis," August 2020.

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Zimbabwe.⁴ It is challenging that multi-layered political, socio-economic and environmental crises continue to confront Zimbabwe.⁵ In light of these challenges, this article presents strategic leadership lessons from Joseph to transform Zimbabwe. It argues that Zimbabwe's crises could be mitigated, or even ended, if spirituality were complemented by contextual and transformational strategies. Although numbers vary, research on African migration uncovers that Zimbabweans are leaving their home country to migrate to neighbouring and further-away countries in search of greener pastures – regardless of xenophobia, racism and other problems related to migration they encounter there.⁶ Structurally, this discussion starts by overviewing theonomic reciprocity, a contextualisation of spiritual leadership, a conceptualization of strategic leadership, and discerning lessons from Joseph's leadership in Egypt.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theonomic Reciprocity

The theory of theonomic reciprocity is credited to German theologian Bohren's work on preaching, titled *Predigtlehre*.⁷ Theonomic reciprocity encourages strategizing spirituality and strategic management by using and sustaining God-given resources to achieve inclusive transformation. Bohren developed the theory of theonomic reciprocity from observing the relationship between the Spirit and method. He argues that being strategic while being spiritual is crucial, and that preachers should fully submit to the Spirit for inspiration and revelation, and still assume the responsibility of hermeneutics and homiletics for effective sermon preparation and delivery. Butzke interpreted Bohren's submissions and explained that theonomic reciprocity means using God's provisions for individual and collective sustainability; pneumatology must be married to anthropology with relevant techniques and methods.⁸ For Butzke, the Holy Spirit works with human correspondence. Accordingly, human beings must submit to God while retaining their responsibility to pray, believe and work to achieve sustainability. The theory of theonomic reciprocity fits this study because it merges spirituality with strategy and facilitates the exploration of the need for Zimbabwean Christian leaders to strategize their spiritual leadership to save Zimbabwe from economic recession. The parable of talents (Matt. 25:14–30) indicates that God is pleased by those who invest what He provides. Thus, the strategic management of divine provisions determines sustainability. By studying the leadership of Joseph in Egypt, lessons that could be useful can be extracted to sustain crises-stricken Zimbabwe.

METHODOLOGY

This paper used a qualitative literature review methodology. Literature review was considered because it uncovers what has been attended to and the gaps that are in serious need of scholarly attention. The researcher surveyed and analysed relevant published academic and non-academic publications which are directly and indirectly related to the topic under study. Through a literature review, the researcher assessed the most recent and current publications in view of Christian and strategic leadership. This submission engaged with what has been covered by other researchers and writers. Resultantly, the researcher identified an acute gap in strategic spiritual leadership. Literature review unearthed that the multifaceted political and socio-economic crises in Zimbabwe prevail mainly due to a lack of bold, responsible, prophetic and strategic leadership. Much of the published literature, which is captured from the introduction of this paper, reflects that ecclesiastic and African traditional leaders are still trusted and expected by citizens to speak for the voiceless and facilitate national transformation. Thus, it is crucial to strategize spiritual leadership towards saving the nation. As such, reviewing related literature enriched this submission.

⁴ Tagwirei, "(Mis)Leading by the Spirit: Transforming African Spiritualities and Political Leadership."

⁵ Chipso Dendere, "Zimbabwe at 45 - What Is Happening?," Australian Institute of International Affairs, May 26, 2025, <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/zimbabwe-at-45-what-is-happening/>.

⁶ Willard Tendai. Masara, "The Exodus: Politics and Extra," *Afritondo Media and Publishing*, n.d.

⁷ Rudolf Bohren, "Predigtlehre" *Chr. Kaiser*, 1996.

⁸ P.L. Butzke, "Theological Aspects of Church Sustainability" (viewed, 2021). <https://sustentabilidad.files.wordpress.com/2012/12/theological-aspects-of-church-sustainability-en.pd>.

DISCUSSION

Contextualising Spiritual Leadership

Spirituality is complex because of its fluidity and broadness, mostly caused by diverse experiences, beliefs, traditions, practices and narratives across different ethnic and religious societies. However, for a working definition, this study agrees with Reisinger that ‘spirituality is a system of meaning that is resilient and allows a person to thrive and to give meaning to even the most shattering of life experiences’.⁹ Since religion is a way of living that demonstrates one’s spirituality, spiritual leadership, in this paper, refers to leaders of spiritual groupings in the Zimbabwean context. It should be remembered that Zimbabwe is home to followers of a multiplicity of spiritualities.¹⁰ The nation houses about 15 million people with different beliefs and practices. Regardless of the diversity, what is undeniable, as one of the esteemed African theologians, John Mbiti, claims, is that Africans are notoriously religious.¹¹ African spiritual leadership is located in the context of interconnectedness through which religion is inseparably interwoven in everything.¹² Africans believe that all things affect each other.¹³ While a multitude of religions, such as ATR, Christianity, Islam and Judaism, are common in Zimbabwe, Zimbabweans predominantly subscribe to ATR and Christianity.

Zimbabwean traditional leaders are commonly mandated to serve communities in local affairs by fostering cultural values such as *Ubuntu*, responsible citizenship and mediation between their communities and the state, to ensure service delivery and inclusive development. In Zimbabwe, traditional leaders are intermediaries of development, and are expected to influence good governance, management and distribution of public resources to achieve inclusive sustainability.¹⁴ Sadly, the interrelation of spirituality with governance has exposed spiritual leadership to political abuse for personal interest.¹⁵ Although situations differ from one area to another, a few leaders of Christianity and ATRs have unwaveringly strategized their spirituality to improve governance and sustainable development in Zimbabwe.¹⁶ Instead of embodying and promoting transformational leadership as the salt and light of the world, studies suggest that most Church leaders in Zimbabwe have given in to compromising moral, political and financial scandals.¹⁷ Consequently, due to poor leadership, Zimbabwe is poverty-stricken.¹⁸ While other factors are also instrumental in the cause of Zimbabwe’s crisis, this study agrees that transformational leadership can and must provide ‘the path and bridge to finding solutions that fit the 21st century Africa’,¹⁹ through voicing for and contributing to good governance, the rule of law, pro-development policies and responsible citizenship. Yet, if Christian and traditional leaders teach about, adopt and advocate for strategic governance, the story of national development can change.²⁰

Although this study appreciates the plurality and role of spiritual leadership in governance and sustainable development, it is limited to Christian leadership. Christian leadership is diverse, comprising heads of different evangelical, Pentecostal and mainline Christian groupings. Most submit to one God and the Bible as their common denominator. Therefore, this submission engages the Christian leadership in sustainable development in Zimbabwe. It should be noted that Christian leadership is impartially

⁹ Doris Reisinger, “What Is Spirituality? The Challenges of a Philosophical Definition,” *Sophia* 64, no. 1 (March 24, 2025): 117–31, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11841-024-01034-w>.

¹⁰ Thabiso Thoka, “The Relationship between Spirituality and Culture in Africa: A Christian Ethical Perspective” (University of Pretoria, 2022).

¹¹ J. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*. (New York: Anchor Books, 1969).

¹² Tagwirei, “(Mis)Leading by the Spirit: Transforming African Spiritualities and Political Leadership.”³

¹³ Phemelo Olifile Marumo and Mompoti Vincent Chakale, “Understanding African Philosophy and African Spirituality: Challenges and Prospects,” *Gender and Behaviour* 16, no. 2 (2018): 11695–704, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.10520/EJC-131f2d7f55>.

¹⁴ Jeffrey Kurebwa, “The Institution of Traditional Leadership and Local Governance in Zimbabwe,” *International Journal of Civic Engagement and Social Change* 5, no. 1 (January 1, 2018): 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.4018/IJCESC.2018010101>.

¹⁵ Tagwirei, “(Mis)Leading by the Spirit: Transforming African Spiritualities and Political Leadership.”

¹⁶ Kimion Tagwirei, “Uniting Divided Religious Leaders to Democratize Zimbabwe,” *Religions* 14, no. 10 (September 24, 2023): 1224, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14101224>.

¹⁷ Bekithemba Dube, “Regime Enablers and Captured Religious Mandate in Zimbabwe,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 41, no.1(2020): 1–7.

¹⁸ Kimion Tagwirei, “Rebuilding the Broken Walls of Zimbabwe with the Church, Leadership and Followership,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 45, no. 1 (February 27, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v45i1.3054>.

¹⁹ J. K. Sholle, A. P. Papa, and K. Bett, “Transformative Leadership for the 21st Century: Africa at Glance,” *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications* 9, no. 11 (2019): 494–500.

²⁰ Yakubu Joseph, “Faith and Sustainable Development: An African Christian Perspective,” n.d., 49–56.

transformational.²¹ Therefore, Christian leadership is expected to embody Jesus Christ's leadership model of selflessness, servanthood and stewardship to serve and save humanity. Though some Christian leaders in Zimbabwe are good, others are ineffective. By applying the theonomic reciprocity theory and drawing strategic lessons from Joseph, the following subsection discusses how Zimbabwean Christian leadership can strategize their spiritualities to save Zimbabwe. Joseph's strategic leadership model is relevant to Christian leaders, and is suitable for a Zimbabwe bedevilled by political, environmental and socio-economic crises. In the same or a similar way as Joseph prophetically and strategically served and sustained Egypt, Zimbabwean Christian leaders can strategize their spiritual influence to transform the governance and sustainability of their nation.

Conceptualizing Strategic Leadership

The concept of strategic leadership is complex, and there is no universal definition.²² That is why Chishamba reports that, 'despite its recognized importance, SL [strategic leadership] remains a fragmented concept'.²³ Singh et al. assert that strategic leadership can be understood as leadership that is focused on strategic socio-economic and environmental transformation through considered vision, high-level administration, engagement, innovation, operation and servanthood.²⁴ For Jaleha and Machuki, strategic leadership integrates critical thinking with anticipating, envisioning, maintaining flexibility, planning and working strategically, as well as empowering followers or employees to create new inventions that lead to inclusive transformation or change, ultimately yielding desired outcomes.²⁵ Langat views strategic leadership as aligning momentary actions with a long-term vision to drive an institution through uncertainty and change. 'Strategic leadership is not as straightforward as other leadership styles; it combines various aspects from different styles depending on the underlying conditions'.²⁶ Conversely, Samimi et al. argue that strategic leadership should not be limited to the creation of meaning and vision and setting objectives and outcomes for an organisation. They define strategic leadership as top leadership decisiveness, engagement with internal and external stakeholders, and inspiring, managing and leading others to needed ends.²⁷

Strategic leadership is integrally characterised by transformational leadership, servant leadership, participative leadership, adaptive leadership and operational leadership.²⁸ Attributes of strategic leadership include innovativeness, charisma, motivation, power, skilfulness and versatility.²⁹ Overall, it is discernible that strategic leadership engages visionary leadership, stakeholder management, critical thinking, adaptability, long-term planning and firm implementation of action plans. Strategic leaders consider internal and external environments and make decisions and work plans that determine their organisations' desired future.³⁰ In light of this explanation, the following subsection illuminates strategic leadership lessons we can learn from Joseph.

Discerning Strategic Leadership Lessons from Joseph in Egypt

The Bible describes Joseph as the long-anticipated son of Jacob and his wife Rachel (Gen. 37:1–3). Joseph was born when Jacob was old, and Jacob loved Joseph dearly. As a result, Joseph's brothers jealously begrudged him. Eventually, when Joseph turned 17, he had a dream that suggested that his brothers would submit to him in the future. That dream worsened the brothers' hatred of Joseph (Gen. 37:8). When Jacob sent Joseph to check on his brothers, they saw him coming and plotted to kill him,

²¹ Tagwirei, "Uniting Divided Religious Leaders to Democratize Zimbabwe."

²² Alex A. Jaleha and Vincent N. Machuki, "Strategic Leadership and Organizational Performance: A Critical Review of Literature," *European Scientific Journal* 14, no. 35 (2018): 124–49, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2018.v14n35p124>.

²³ Jay Chishamba, "Conceptualizing Strategic Leadership: Theories, Themes, and Varying Perspectives," *Acta Universitatis Danubius. Economica* 20, no. 5 (2024): 49–77.

²⁴ Anjali Singh et al., "The State of the Art of Strategic Leadership," *Journal of Business Research* 158 (March 2023): 113676, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2023.113676>.

²⁵ Jaleha and Machuki, "Strategic Leadership and Organizational Performance: A Critical Review of Literature."

²⁶ Andrew. Langat, "Strategic Leadership: Definition, Application, and Characteristics," *Highrise*, November 8, 2024.

²⁷ Mehdi Samimi et al., "What Is Strategic Leadership? Developing a Framework for Future Research," *The Leadership Quarterly* 33, no. 3 (June 2022): 101353, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2019.101353>.

²⁸ Langat, "Strategic Leadership: Definition, Application, and Characteristics."

²⁹ Samimi et al., "What Is Strategic Leadership? Developing a Framework for Future Research."

³⁰ Langat, "Strategic Leadership: Definition, Application, and Characteristics."

but then decided to sell him off to Ishmaelite traders as a slave (Gen. 37:18–30). The Ishmaelites also sold Joseph to Potiphar, who was the leader of the guards for the Egyptian Pharaoh. The Bible reports that Joseph demonstrated godliness, integrity, resilience, servanthood and diligence in the house of Potiphar. Potiphar made him an overseer in his house, and God blessed Potiphar's household because of Joseph (Gen. 39:4–5). The devil tempted Joseph with seduction through Potiphar's wife. Although young, he resisted, fled and demonstrated integrity (Gen. 39:7–15). Potiphar's wife framed Joseph, and he was imprisoned. Nevertheless, Joseph remained resilient and faithful and served his sentence diligently. Genesis 40:1–4 recounts that God blessed Joseph and the prison warders made him an overseer of other prisoners because of his virtue. Two of his fellow prisoners had dreams that troubled them, and Joseph interpreted their dreams. Later, Pharaoh himself struggled to find interpretations of his dreams. The two former prisoners remembered that Joseph could interpret dreams and suggested that Pharaoh ask Joseph to interpret his dreams. Genesis 41:9–14 reports that Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dreams as meaning that there would be seven years of bumper harvests followed by seven years of famine. Spiritually and strategically, Joseph advised Pharaoh to find a wise administrator to manage the harvests and to prepare for the future by storing food to sustain the people during the coming famine. The Pharaoh noticed that, while he was very spiritual, Joseph was also a strategist. Pharaoh declared that Joseph was the best person to appoint as the administrator of his kingdom (Gen. 41:39–40, 41–57). Joseph used his God-given spirit of excellence and discernment, which demonstrated theonomic reciprocity by serving and saving the Egyptian kingdom through strategically utilising available resources. In line with Joseph's leadership traits, the following subsections discern strategic lessons that Christian leadership can apply to serve and save Zimbabwe similarly.

Visionary and virtuous leadership

Although Joseph was originally an ordinary young man looking after his father's flock (Genesis 37), the trajectory of his life changed when he received a vision of leadership. Pollard and Pollard suggest that vision is the main factor that influences and leads leaders and followers to their desired future.³¹ The dream of Joseph in Genesis 37:5–9 signifies God's plan for his life. Joseph knew that he had been called to be a leader. His dream laid out the direction that he was meant to follow. Vision is essential in leadership. Vision directs leadership and followership behaviour and inspires strategic efforts to achieve destiny.

Joseph shared his vision with his brothers and parents; he probably expected interpretation, encouragement and guidance. Instead, his father rebuked him, while his brothers hated and sold him into slavery. Potiphar's wife falsely accused Joseph of attempting to rape her, and Potiphar sentenced him to imprisonment without further investigation. Pharaoh's chief butler, whose dream Joseph had interpreted in prison, forgot about Joseph for about two years after his release. Joseph remained in prison, but he demonstrated visionary resilience in the face of misapprehension, jealousy, betrayal, false accusations, wrongful imprisonment and being forgotten by those he had served and inspired. Joseph remained focused and faithful. Visions are not realised instantly. The faithfulness, resilience, patience and focus of Joseph were strategic and effective. Jamali et al. explain that Joseph's capacity to remain stable despite disturbing disappointments should inspire everyone facing similar setbacks.³²

If Zimbabwean Christian leaders can be as visionary and virtuous as Joseph, they would be able to endure setbacks gracefully while trying to make the best of every situation and use their God-given vision and abilities to serve their communities and nation without allowing external factors to pull them down. The example of Joseph shows that being visionary demands faith, patience and resilience, to wait, remain upright and focused until the vision is realised. In the midst of multiple political and socio-economic problems, Christians in Zimbabwe should emulate Joseph's resilience and stand strategically as intermediaries of development. As Yoder says, 'having a vision for our future will strengthen and

³¹ Leslie N. Pollard and Prudence L. Pollard, "'The Joseph Factor.' Ministry International Journal for Pastors," November 2008. <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2008/11/the-joseph-factor.html>.

³² Dima Rachid Jamali et al., "Virtuous Leadership: Insights from the Example of Joseph," *Journal of Business Administration Research* 12, no. 1 (2023): 57–70.

stabilize a person to stay the course until the vision comes to pass'.³³ Reflecting on facing and withstanding one's challenges with faith, wisdom, courage and hope, as Joseph did, could motivate, strengthen and improve effective leadership during trying times. The virtues of the visionary Joseph must motivate Zimbabwean Christian leaders to adjust their stance on spiritual, political and socio-economic hurdles. As Joseph remained visionary and virtuous, Zimbabwean Christian leaders must pursue their God-given mandate with faith and without fear.

Administrative Leadership

Joseph's elucidation of Pharaoh's dreams and consequent planning and management of the Egyptian harvest to save Egypt from famine were strategic. Having predicted the seven years of famine and devising a plan to store surplus grain during the seven years of plenty was methodical and, thus, strategic. As Uroko argues, the fact that Joseph's strategy was feasible and sustainable led to its adoption by Pharaoh's administration.³⁴ Genesis 41:47–49 records that, during the seven years of abundance, Joseph collected all the food produced in those seven years of abundance in Egypt and stored it in cities. 'Joseph stored enormous amounts of grain, like the sand of the sea; it was so much that he stopped keeping records because it was beyond measure' (Gen. 41:49).

This action demonstrates critical thinking, which is strategic. Using God's provisions embodies the theory of theonomic reciprocity. Joseph managed to meet people's present needs and reserved part of the harvest for their future. Joseph's transformative leadership was characterised by sustainable governance and resource management. That kind of strategic management and foresight sustained Egypt during its seven years of famine. Joseph's strategic leadership ensured that Egypt not only weathered the famine but also became a hub of support for the surrounding regions that were affected by the drought. The accumulation of resources during the years of abundance provided to Egyptian citizens and foreigners during the lean years, which showcases the power of proactive planning and execution (Gen. 41:56-57).

Joseph was strategic in suggesting that Pharaoh appoint a wise and competent person to manage the harvest and build Egyptian sustainability. Similarly, if Zimbabwean Christian leaders could prophetically advocate for the appointment of competent technocrats to administer their nation, instead of making nepotistic political appeals, Zimbabwean resources could be well managed and inclusive sustainability achieved. Instead of political and partisan camaraderie, competency, anti-corruption, integrity and servanthood must be upheld. With this strategic and critical thinking, Zimbabwean Christian leaders could envision a future beyond the present, anticipate future challenges and opportunities and lead strategically.

Joseph also demonstrated that spiritual vision is not enough on its own. That is why he coupled it with strategic action. Joseph's grain collection and storage exemplify how leaders can integrate critical visionary thinking with strategic actions. By collecting a fifth of the Egyptian harvest during the years of abundance, Joseph underscored the importance of prudent resource management. Zimbabwean Christian leaders can learn from him and be always mindful of resource use, thereby guaranteeing sustainability and preparedness for difficult times. Strategically, Joseph intended to serve others and save the nations beyond Egypt. During the years of famine, Joseph managed to feed people from other nations, including his own family, when his brothers came to beg for food. In that way, Christian leadership must not serve only leaders and their immediate families and friends, communities or nations. It must serve people beyond ethnic, national and continental borders. Like Joseph, whose visionary leadership served and saved many, leaders must foresee future challenges and prepare accordingly. They should think critically, plan for the long term, and always be one step ahead.

³³ Marvin Yoder, "Joseph: A Visionary Leader," Tony Cooke Ministries, 2025, <https://tonycooke.org/articles-by-others/joseph-visionary-leader/>.<https://tonycooke.org/articles-by-others/joseph-visionary-leader/>.

³⁴ Favour C. Uroko, "Joseph's Strategic Planning Skills: A Substitution of Family Firm and Opportunism in the Evolution of Governance Mechanism," *Brolly* 1, no. 1 (2018).<https://journals.lapub.co.uk/index.php/brolly/article/view/15>.

Servant Leadership

Joseph's rise to prominence as a leader in Egypt was the result of exceptional leadership qualities and dedication to service. Through his interpretation of the dreams of the head baker, winemaker and the Pharaoh and his management of Egypt's harvest and sustaining people from Egypt and beyond during a time of abundance and famine, Joseph showcased servant leadership. Just as servant leadership exhibits selflessness, collectiveness and other-centeredness, Joseph exhibited genuine concern and care for others, including those who had wronged him, such as his jealous brothers.³⁵ While God was preparing Joseph for his future leadership, Joseph served his master well in slavery, administering his master's business affairs and refusing to take advantage of his master's wife or assets. In all of his actions towards his master, Joseph did what was right, and his master was blessed by Joseph's service (Genesis 39:5–6).

Moreover, when Joseph was in prison, he served his fellow inmates by helping them interpret their dreams and enlightening them about their futures. Joseph only requested that the winemaker appeal to the Pharaoh for him once he, the winemaker, was freed; however, the winemaker forgot about him (Genesis 40:23). Through this service to others, even while being mistreated, he served others. Such experiences prepared Joseph for his future leadership. Joseph was not affected by being treated as a servant, which is similar to Christ's servanthood. God continued to provide for Joseph throughout his harsh encounters – and that, too, prepared him to trust God while strategizing to achieve sustainability in Egypt. Genesis 45:8 confirms that Joseph acknowledged God's providence. Out of servant leadership, Joseph showcased love, selflessness and grace without begrudging those who had wronged him. Joseph saved the lives of the Egyptians and ultimately prospered in the years after the famine. Joseph exhibited servant leadership by serving Egypt with unwavering selflessness.³⁶

Diligent and Excellent Leadership

Diligence and excellence are important in Christian leadership. According to Wylie, diligence is biblically characterised by persistence, careful attention to detail and excellence.³⁷ Diligence is not driven by selfish ambition but by a desire to honour God and serve others wholeheartedly. Excellence is the quality of being very good. According to the Cambridge Online Dictionary, what is excellent is very good. It is discernible that excellence in leadership begins with serving others in the same way Christ served humanity, with consistent and unconditional love, grace and mercy, which yields total salvation for mankind. Such leadership inspires followers to support and advance the vision of their leader.³⁸

Despite his traumatising experiences – from being sold into slavery by his jealous brothers to false accusation and imprisonment – and in all circumstances, Joseph demonstrated diligence and excellence in all the roles he fulfilled. If diligence refers to one's conscientious commitment to duty, responsibility or assignment, Joseph demonstrated it excellently. According to Pollard and Pollard, Joseph could have proudly mistaken his dream as guaranteeing future leadership and avoided serving anyone, but he maximised the opportunities and challenges that came his way to serve God and people. As a result, Joseph was assigned leadership and was successful.³⁹

While serving Potiphar's house, Joseph earned the trust and favour of his master through an exceptional work ethic and managerial skills (Gen. 39:1–6). Joseph's commitment to diligence and excellence in the face of setbacks is an example for Christian leaders who seek to contribute something meaningful and transformative to African national development.

³⁵ Cara S. Jonker and Sinethemba C. Dube, "Servant Leadership and Well-Being: A Scoping Review of Positive Organisational Outcomes," *SA Journal of Human Resource Management* 23 (2025): 2783, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v23i0.2783>.

³⁶ Sandra L.J. Johnson, "AI and Machine Learning in Medicine: Ethical Considerations," *Current Allergy & Clinical Immunology* 33, no. 2 (2020): 114–17, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.10520/EJC-20600bd12e>.

³⁷ Scott Wylie, "The Path to Excellence: Embracing Diligence in the Christian Walk" (Wisdom International, December 4, 2023), http://www.wisdomonline.org/blog/diligence/?srsltid=AfmBOoqspdTVQS8Ptia_KYGFUblaTaNC0QgxZgaOYD6dc0CIJTN6NU68.

³⁸ Mark McGee, "Excellence in Ministry," *Gradelifethoughts*, 2018. <https://gracelifethoughts.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/excellence-in-ministry.pdf>.

³⁹ Pollard and Pollard, "The Joseph Factor." Ministry International Journal for Pastors."

Resilient and Adaptable Leadership

Joseph's resilience is evident throughout his tumultuous journey, a journey marked by betrayal, slavery, false accusations and imprisonment. Despite facing numerous setbacks, Joseph remained steadfast and firm in his faith in God's providence, protection, strength and direction. He remained resilient in adversity. While incarcerated, he continued to show leadership and administrative skills until he earned the trust of and was appointed by the prison warden to be an overseer of other prisoners (Gen. 39:20–23, 40:4–8).

Joseph's ability to adapt to changing and harsh conditions and thrive in adversity is a powerful example of resilience that African leaders need today. This is why Pollard and Pollard (2008) argue that 'the unexpected twists and turns in Joseph's life – from the pit, to the prison, to the palace – are undergirded with one constant: endurance'. Although the first thirty years of Joseph's life were marked with pain, he lived faithfully to God and people. That should inspire today's leaders to endure drawbacks to their end.⁴⁰

When Zimbabwean Christian leaders face challenges that conflict with their commitment to sustainable development, they can learn from Joseph's experiences that leadership endurance conquers adversity and achieves victory against all odds. Although the Church is engaged with politics, Zimbabwean political leaders generally tend to disregard the voices of spiritual leadership, relegate them to prayers and deny them opportunities to contribute to national development, especially in the context of dictatorship. For example, ruling political powers in Zimbabwe victimise the people who oppose political wrongs and (ab)use partisan gospel ministers to advance politicians' selfish political interests. The prophetic voice of the Church was suppressed by oppressive ruling elites who abused churches and clerics like riding horses for selfish conquest and retention of political power. Aptly, the story of Joseph is a lifetime lesson for Christian leaders, that applying the God-given spirit and gifts to serving others can open up closed spaces for national transformation. Joseph shows that no rejection, betrayal, false accusations, restrictions or delays could ruin his God-given purpose. African Church leaders must advance transformative integral *missio ecclesiae* and contribute to the sustainable development of Africa.

Compassionate Leadership

One of the greatest lessons we can draw from Joseph is compassionate leadership. Compassionate leadership refers to the will and capacity to notice signs of followers' problems and to address them.⁴¹ The distinctive characteristic of compassionate leadership is to address suffering. So, when Christian leaders respond to issues with compassion, they can foster people's well-being and resilience. Despite experiencing trials through slavery and prison, to eventually reach the palace, Joseph remained compassionate by graciously helping others, including those who had initially wronged him. Such grace can be transformative as leaders practice forgiveness and help those who have wronged them.⁴²

Genesis 41:51 refers to the healing of memories. Joseph's first child was born while in Egypt, and he named him Manasseh, which means that God caused him to forget all his suffering. The second indicator that Joseph had resolved his traumatic experiences features in verse 52; he named his second son Ephraim, which means that God made him fruitful. We agree with Chao that, by human standards, Joseph had every right to be an angry, victimized, incapacitated man. Yet somehow Joseph nurtured a tender, forgiving heart', forgave and served his renegade brothers (Gen 45:5, 8). Although Joseph was human, as did Zimbabwean Christian leaders, he decided not to pursue vindication for being so grievously wronged.⁴³

In the Zimbabwean context of a multitude of crises, being hurt is unavoidable. It could be that Church leaders have been hurt by the conduct of some political leaders, citizens, fellow ecclesial leaders or followers. Eventually, those who were hurt became discouraged and ceased playing their diaconal

⁴⁰ Pollard and Pollard, "The Joseph Factor." Ministry International Journal for Pastors."

⁴¹ Ace V. Simpson et al., "Theorizing Compassionate Leadership from the Case of Jacinda Ardern: Legitimacy, Paradox and Resource Conservation," *Leadership* 18, no. 3 (June 18, 2022): 337–58, <https://doi.org/10.1177/17427150211055291>.

⁴² Pollard and Pollard, "The Joseph Factor." Ministry International Journal for Pastors."

⁴³ Colleen Chao, "When Your Dreams Die: An Invitation to Compassion," *Revive Our Hearts*, November 17, 2016. <https://www.reviveourhearts.com/blog/when-your-dreams-die-invitation-compassion/>.

and prophetic roles. Compassion can sometimes be costly, but as embodied by Joseph, bearing the cost of compassion by serving others while enduring pain is at the heart of Christian leadership.

CONCLUSION

The visionary, virtuous, administrative, servant, diligent, excellent, resilient, adaptable and compassionate spiritual leadership of Joseph was strategic and effective in saving Egypt from economic volatility and tragic famine. Joseph strategized spiritual leadership in a transformational way. If Zimbabwean Christian leaders emulate Joseph and apply their God-given capacities, as theonomic reciprocity teaches, and as exemplified by Joseph, they can save Zimbabwe from its present paradoxical predicament of being rich in natural and human resources while remaining economically poor. If Christian leaders could serve strategically, as Joseph did, they could save their nation. In this way, Zimbabwe can be transformed to survive its crises and even help other countries.

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