

SERVANT LEADERSHIP IN NEHEMIAH 5:14-19 AND ITS RELEVANCE FOR ALLEVIATING SUFFERING IN AFRICA

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Abstract: Africa's enormous human and natural resources and dynamic cultures are undeniable. Despite the resources, however, many African countries continue to face intense suffering in the 21st century, which raises doubt about the continent and its people's ability to manage its vast resources and change the tide positively. The untold suffering in Africa, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, stems from diverse causes, which include the legacy of oppression from the trans-Atlantic slave trade and colonialism, systemic poverty, bad leadership, political instability and corruption. This trajectory requires a radical shift to ethical and servant leadership that will transform the continent and its people, halt the prolonged suffering and provide adequate development and prosperity for all. Using the historical-grammatical method, this paper posits that Nehemiah's servant leadership model can help African leaders lift their countries from suffering to well-being. Although Nehemiah's model spreads across the entire book named after him, the particular text for this paper is in Nehemiah 5:14-19, which reflects the significant ethos that undergirds his role as governor during Jerusalem's post-exilic reconstruction of the city wall. Nehemiah's reverence for God, sacrifices, service, compassion for his people, justice and accountability form the nucleus of his servant leadership model, which brought relief and transformation to Jerusalem and its people. If African leaders at various levels and sectors imbibe this model, the continent and its people would witness an unprecedented reduction in suffering and move towards rapid development and shared prosperity. Although Africa has diverse contexts, the Nigerian experience somewhat represents several other countries in the sub-Saharan region. More research should focus on developing servant leadership theory from the sacred texts (Hebrew and Christian) for effective leadership in Africa.

Keywords: Alleviate, Nehemiah, Servant-Leadership, Suffering.

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Introduction

Leadership is such an essential component of human existence whose impact determines to a great extent the happenings in organisations, communities and nations of the world. Leadership is so widespread that every group, organisation or nation requires it. Interestingly, both development and underdevelopment, success and failure, prosperity and poverty are reckoned as results of different kinds of leadership. This realisation justifies the popular maxim that "Everything rises and falls on leadership."¹ There are many definitions of leadership due to its broad nature, and each definition describes its focus or kind of leadership. Despite the different definitions, there seems to be a common emphasis that leadership imbues influence on others. Thus, leadership can be defined as the capacity to influence and guide an individual or a group of people to achieve a defined goal.²

Nevertheless, the kind of leadership focused on in this study is servant leadership. Since Robert Greenleaf's seminal work in 1970, servant leadership has focused on how leaders improve the condition and qualities of people they lead through service. The

distinction of the servant leadership model from all other leadership philosophies lies in the leader's commitment to serving others, which matters most.³ One of the best examples of servant leaders the Bible presents is Nehemiah. Nehemiah's servant leadership was so impactful that it restored the desolate city of Jerusalem and prospered its inhabitants. Nehemiah's activities and demeanour, which translated into the significant impact and transformation achieved, are worthy of emulation.

The Book of Nehemiah captures the Israelites' experiences during their return from exile and Nehemiah's reign as the governor of Jerusalem. Nehemiah 5:14-19 is part of that narrative that presents a unique model for contemporary leadership that can be applied across a broad spectrum of human endeavours and organisations, be it religious, political, economic, social or cultural. It is a servant leadership that demonstrates service, sacrifice, selflessness, integrity, justice and accountability. Therefore, this paper submits that Nehemiah's servant leadership model is relevant for alleviating Africa's diverse sufferings. It could foster leadership quality that will directly impact African nations' development trajectory and mitigate the untold hardship on the continent.

¹ John C. Maxwell. *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 134-135

² Marija Dimitrovska, Lijana Pushova Stamenkova and Lazar Stosic. "Leadership in times of crisis." *Science International Journal* 2, 1, 2023:19

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³ James W. Sipe and Don M. Frick, *Seven Pillars of Servant Leadership: Practicing the Wisdom of Leading by Serving* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2015), n.p.

Background to the Book of Nehemiah

According to the Hebrew Masoretic texts, the books of Ezra and Nehemiah were identified as one volume.⁴ Even in the uncials of the LXX during the time the Greek recension was made, the books were still together.⁵ The Christian Canon recognises the two books as separate volumes; this division was unknown until about the 3rd Century among Christian Circles⁶, but was unknown in the Hebrew Canon until the fifth Century AD.⁷ The unity of Ezra-Nehemiah is proven by the endnotes that would have been at the end of the book of Ezra, coming at the end of the book of Nehemiah. The Masoretes practised including an endnote after each book of the Bible. That was supposed to be found after Ezra 10:44, but it is missing, and the end of Nehemiah contains the endnotes for the two books.⁸ Thus, the one-volume Ezra-Nehemiah contains the progressive history of the people of Judah post-Babylonian exile.⁹ Again, in the Hebrew Canon, the books were categorised as part of the writings, unlike the way they are in the Christian canon today, where the books are grouped as one of the historical books following the chronicles.¹⁰ These arrangements have been done based on the similarities in the closing two verses in the book of Chronicles with the opening of Ezra in chapter 1:1-4; hence, the proposal of taking the chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah as a literary unit by some scholars.¹¹ Expectedly, the books derive their names from the principal character of each of them.

There are several viewpoints on the authorship of the book of Nehemiah, knowing that it was originally a singular unit with Ezra. However, using personal pronouns in the book suggests that Nehemiah authored the book.¹² The writing suggests that the author wrote in the similitude of a diary; hence, some scholars submit that the book was probably written by Nehemiah, only that Ezra used Nehemiah's memoir as an appendix to his own writing.¹³ Some scholars view Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah as a work of the Chronicler, though their date may be within the same range; however, their historical standpoint and literary style diverge greatly. Hence, the authorship could not have been attributed to the Chronicler.¹⁴ Further arguments disprove the possibility of assigning the authorship to the Chronicler by consideration of the time¹⁵ of writing. Ezra-Nehemiah dates earlier than the chronicles, which date to the closing of the fifth century B.C. However, the mention of Jaddua in Neh. 12:11 in the list of Priests and Levites has led to contrary opinions. Jaddua was a priest around 351-331 B.C., suggesting that if it were Nehemiah, there was no way he would have captured that. However, an objective view of this

suggests that this may have just been a secondary addition and that this evidence would not be too tangible to disprove Nehemiah's authorship.¹⁶ Thus, this paper holds that solid scholarly evidence supports the book's authorship of Nehemiah.

Considering the book of Ezra-Nehemiah, the document is generally written as history and must be viewed from the perspective of Biblical historiography.¹⁷ Though the books are memoirs, various other sources are used, thus making the book a mixture of genres¹⁸. The assemblage contains three materials, namely, the Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel narrative, the Ezra narrative and the Nehemiah narrative (Neh.1:1-7:73a and 11:1-13:31). In the Nehemiah material, the first-person narration extends from Neh. 1:1-7:5 and 12:31-13:31.¹⁹ The narrative also contains lists of various kind such as the lists of exiles in Neh. 7:7-72a, the list of builders of the wall in Neh. 3:1-32, the closing section of the account of Nehemiah's first governorship in Neh. 11 accounting for the new inhabitants of Jerusalem, other villages occupied by the Jews, list of high priests, list of heads of Levitical and priestly houses. These lists must have come from the temple archives or the governor's office.²⁰ Nehemiah 5:14-19 falls within the memoirs of Nehemiah, which is like a personal diary record of one's activities in a given day or season. Such is the narrative in the pericope of study.

Context of Nehemiah's Leadership

The political context in the day of Nehemiah was under the dominance of the Persian government after Babylon fell into their hands in 539 B.C.²¹ under Cyrus' rule. Being an elite ruler, he permitted all the Babylonians captured to return to their homelands, leading to some Judah men returning to their homeland.²² However, others were unwilling to return to rebuild their city and the temple.²³ Though with firm administrative control, the Persian government permitted some religious flexibility for its subjects. This gesture was demonstrated in Cyrus's support for the repair of the temple, as accounted for in Ezra 1:1-4. John *et al.* opine that there was a rebellion within the empire that threatened the cohesion of the Persian reign during the reign of Artaxerxes I, bringing the possibility of the willingness of the Persian government to ally with some minority groups within the empire, such as the Jews.²⁴ Thus, the political government in Judah was not sovereign, as it was just an arm of the Persian empire. The governors who were in power before Nehemiah took advantage of the people and further impoverished them with their oppressive and selfish government style.

One of the practices of the Persian government was their heavy taxes on their provinces, which were used to furnish and maintain magnificent palaces and campaigns for pacification or

⁴ Jerry Falwell, 1982. *Liberty Bible Commentary (Old Testament)*. Lynchburg: The Old Time Gospel Hour), 884

⁵ R.K. Harrison. *Introduction to the Old Testament*. (Grand Rapids: Williams B. Erdsman Publishing Company, 1969), 1135

⁶ Ibid

⁷ William Sanford Lasor, David Allan Hubbard and Frederic WM. Bush. *Old Testament Survey*. (Grand Rapids: Willam B. Erdsman Publishing Company, 1982).

⁸ Harrison, 1136

⁹ Falwell

¹⁰ Lasor, *et al*, 638

¹¹ H. Kelth Beebe. *The Old Testament*. (Belmont: Dickenson Publishing Company, 1970), 372

¹² Falwell

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Harrison, 1149

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Tremper, 209

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Lasor, *et al*, 645

²⁰ Ibid., 646

²¹ Lasor, *et al* 644

²² Lasor, *et al*

²³ Longman Tremper III & Raymond B Dillard. *An Introduction to the Old Testament* 2nd ed. (Michigan: Zondervan, 2018), 207

²⁴ John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, & Mark W. Chavalas. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*. (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2000), 472

conquests.²⁵ In Nehemiah 5, the demands for taxes from the Persian government did not stop despite many of them having left their fields for the course of the building. Some sold their properties or gave their children to their creditors to meet the demands.²⁶ That shows the impoverished state of the people in the context of the fifth chapter, making them vulnerable people whose advantage was additionally taken by the previous governors before Nehemiah.

Analysis of Nehemiah 5:14-19

The passage is first presented in the Hebrew Text, followed by a verse-by-verse analysis of the pericope. The Hebrew texts were adapted from the WTT Leningrad Hebrew Old Testament, while the English version used the New American Standard Bible on the Bible Works 8.0 software. The analysis utilised Bible Works software, version 8.0's Lexicon, and a comparison with other translations like the New International Version and the Septuagint Bible.

Nehemiah 5:14-15 WTT **Nehemiah 5:14** פָּקַדְתִּי בְּאַרְצָא יְהוּדָה מִשְׁנַת עֲשָׂרִים וְעַד שְׁנַת שְׁלֹשִׁים וְשָׁמַלְתִּי לְאַרְתַּחְשֶׁסְתָּא הַמֶּלֶךְ שָׁנִים שְׁתַּיִם עֲשָׂרָה אֲנִי וְאֵלֵי לֶחֶם הַפֶּתַח לֹא אָכַלְתִּי: ¹⁵ וְהַפְחוֹת הָרָאשִׁים אֲשֶׁר־לִפְנֵי הַכְּבִידִי עַל־הָעָם וַיִּקְחוּ מֵהֶם בְּלֶחֶם וַיִּן אֶסְרֵי־שָׂקָלִים אַרְבָּעִים גֶּם נְעִירֵיהֶם שָׁלַטְנוּ עַל־הָעָם וְאֲנִי לֹא־עָשִׂיתִי כֵן מִפְּנֵי יְרֵאָת אֱלֹהִים: ²⁷

Nehemiah 5:14 Moreover, from the day that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year to the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes, *for* twelve years, neither I nor my kinsmen have eaten the governor's food *allowance*. ¹⁵ But the former governors who were before me laid burdens on the people and took from them bread and wine besides forty shekels of silver; even their servants domineered the people. But I did not do so because of the fear of God.²⁸

The translation is near to the rendition in the Hebrew text; however, the closing clause in verse 14 is better rendered in the New International Version as "...neither I nor my brothers ate the food allotted to the governor." Meanwhile, the LXX rendition did not acknowledge "allotment" in the form it was used in most English translations. The word "βίαν" connotes a use of force or violence, which in no way could be understood as an allotment. However, as stated in the BHS, the food is a special course only for the governor, thus, the sacrifice of Nehemiah and his brothers.

The English translation in verse fifteen got a very close rendition of the use of the words in the BHS. The word הַכְּבִידִי which describes the burden laid on the people by the administration that was before Nehemiah, means to "weigh heavily." Thus, the previous administration placed a heavy burden on the people, inflicting suffering on them. He further accounted that "even their servants domineered the people." The word combination translated into the clause is נְעִירֵיהֶם which can be translated as "boy or youth or manservant" and שָׁלַטְנוּ which means "gain power, to have power over, to lord it over" Hence, the Nehemiah essentially accounted the misuse of power, even by the young ones who should not be exercising such authority at that age. This expresses a high level of corruption and power misuse. The LXX uses the word ἐκτετιναγμένοι, which is a participle and not a verb, which means

being "shaken out". Thus, the expression would have been rendered, "the people were being shaken out," as the LXX does not include the word translated as "servants" in its manuscript. By this suggested translation, the performer of the action would have been directly hidden and indirectly pointed to the "former governors" that the writer was writing about. However, whatever atrocities committed under their government are written in their account.

The phrasal expression מִיּוֹם (in verse 14), which means "from the day," implies that the practice that the writer was to refer to was not just a one-time event or futuristic decision or words of hope. It was a reference to a practice that had begun from the inception of his governorship. A reference to the Hebrew word אֶשְׁרִיצָנָה (Verse 14), translated as "I was appointed", has a connotation of "to command, order, ordain, give order" that could have been rendered as "He commanded, ordered, ordained." This implies that the writer (Nehemiah) was commanded or ordained to be the ruler of the people of Judah. It means that Nehemiah did not rise to usurp authority over the people or assume power circumstantially, but the expression of his appointment suggests that the king did not just commission him to build the wall of Jerusalem but to govern the people of Judah. ²⁹His political office was recognised by the king reigning over the empire.

Nehemiah, in verse 15, further refers to the governors who were before him and reckoned the use of force implied by the use of the word וַיִּקְחוּ which means to "take, lay hold of or seize." Therefore, the expression agrees with the LXX expression of the forceful food collection from the people. Nehemiah accounts that the governors who reigned before him exploited the people forcefully. The word שָׁלַטְנוּ which means "to lord over", agrees with this in the sense of the forceful taking of the bread and wine and silver from the people. Thus, Nehemiah acknowledged that the governors who reigned before him actively inflicted suffering on the people instead of providing relief.

Nehemiah 5:16 WTT **Nehemiah 5:16** וְגַם בְּמִלְאֶכֶת הַחוּמָה הָיֵאתִי הַחֹזֶקֶתִי וְשָׂדֶה לֹא קָנִינוּ וְכָל־נְעָרֵי קְבוּצִים שָׁם עַל־הַמִּלְאֶכֶה: ¹⁷ וְהַיְּהוּדִים וְהַסִּגְנִים מֵאָה וְחֲמִשִּׁים אִישׁ וְהַבָּאִים אֵלֵינוּ מִן־הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר־סָבִיבִתֵּינוּ עַל־שְׁלֹחֵנָי:

Nehemiah 5:16-17: And I also applied myself to the work on this wall; we did not buy any land, and all my servants were gathered there for the work. ¹⁷ Moreover, *there were* at my table one hundred and fifty Jews and officials, besides those who came to us from the nations that were around us.

The English translation renders the translation as it is in the BHS; however, in the LXX, the sense of "buying a land" rendered in the English translation is not presented as such in the Greek text. The word "ἐκράτησα" and the word "ἐκτεσάμην" were both used, the former meaning to take into one's possession, while the latter is to acquire. Invariably, the text denied a forceful takeover of any land and land acquisition case.

וְלֹא קָנִינוּ in verse 16, meaning "not to grasp a field, not acquire", further clarifies the integrity of Nehemiah and his men as they were committed to the work. They did not take over anyone's field forcefully or take advantage of the vulnerable by buying their lands. Their attitude shows commitment to the work and integrity of heart in service.

²⁵ Raymond Brown. *The Messaage of Nehemiah*. (Leicester: Intervasrity Press, 1998), 88

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ All Greek texts are adapted from the Septuagint Greek Version of the Bible via Bible works 8.0 Software.

²⁸ All English translations of the Scriptures are adapted from the New American Standard Bible except otherwise stated.

²⁹ Brown, 86

Nehemiah's provision for the one hundred and fifty Jews and officials also included the non-Jewish nation that surrounded them. The "Surrounding nation" referred to in verse 17 is the non-Jewish nation as denoted by the word מְהֵימָנִים which means "out of people or out of pagan people". That shows Nehemiah's accommodation and readiness to welcome people outside his countrymen. The provisions he made daily were itemised in verse 18, and he stated emphatically that he did not seek the governor's allocation. The phrase translated as "not demand" is in Hebrew בִּקְשָׁתִי which means "not seek"; the sense of the "seeking" is to "look for, seek to obtain." This communicates Nehemiah's detachment from any form of seeking to obtain the 'governor's special treat.' He wanted to serve the people and not inflict more pain and suffering on them.

וְאֶשֶׁר הָיָה נֶעֱשֶׂה לְיוֹם אֶחָד שְׁוֹר אֶחָד וְצֹאן שִׁש־בָּרָדוֹת וְצִפְרִים וְעִשְׂוִילִי וּבִין עֶשְׂרֵת יָמִים בְּכָל־יָוִם לַהֲרָבָה וְעַם־זֶה לָחֵם הִפְתָּח לֹא בִקְשָׁתִי כִּי־כִבְדָּה הָעִבְרָה עַל־הָעָם הַזֶּה: 19 זָכְרָה־לִּי אֱלֹהֵי לְטוֹבָה כָּל אֲשֶׁר־עָשִׂיתִי עַל־הָעָם הַזֶּה: פ

Nehemiah 5:18-19: Now that which was prepared for each day was one ox and six choice sheep; also birds were prepared for me, and once in ten days all sorts of wine were furnished in abundance. Yet, for all this, I did not demand the governor's food allowance because the servitude was heavy on these people. ¹⁹ Remember me, O my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people.

The word "furnished" in the above text is absent in its Hebrew text. The translators probably deployed it to emphasise the abundant provision of the wine. Likewise, the use of "according to" in verse 19 gives the prayer for favour a reference point to all the good he had done for the people.

The prayer of Nehemiah in verse 19 was a plea for God's remembrance. Noted by the word זָכַר interpreted as "remember". Thus, Nehemiah used this imperative of entreaty to appeal to God and recall the good he had done for the people. Nehemiah demonstrated his trust in God's faithfulness to reward good deeds.

Inferences from the analysis of Nehemiah 5:14-19

Nehemiah 5:14-19 has invaluable Servant-leadership lessons for the contemporary context.

- 1) Servant Leaders do not usurp authority: Nehemiah did not usurp authority; he was appointed as governor (Vs 14). The clause, "I was appointed", speaks to the legitimacy of Nehemiah's leadership. The means or process of becoming a leader must be right, as well as the end goals. For Nehemiah, the means and goals were rightly derived. This legitimacy may enhance the quality and courage to serve.
- 2) Servant Leadership is transformational: Nehemiah's servant leadership entails the transformation of the whole, that is, a holistic transformation, not for selfish aggrandisement nor esoteric elites' whim and caprices. Nehemiah moved Jerusalem and its people from despondency to glory, desolation to recovery, and shame to greatness. At the point Nehemiah was appointed governor, there was a record of corruption and oppressive leadership, but Nehemiah was that servant leader who changed the narrative.
- 3) Servant Leaders are characterised by integrity, fear of God and love for the people: Genuine servant leadership hinges on the fear of God, integrity and genuine love for

the people.³⁰ God is at the centre of servant leadership; it takes God to be selfless, as it is unnatural to be selfless. However, Nehemiah's reliance on God was reflected in His leadership and the sacrifices he made for the well-being of the people. "Christian leader relies on God totally but accepts responsibility fully." This was modelled in Nehemiah's life as he demonstrated responsibility while he fully relied on God.³¹

- 4) Servant Leaders are empathetic: Leadership, as demonstrated by Nehemiah, was empathetic; he had a heart for the people and compassion for the people. He demonstrated that he could relate to the pain of the people. In his day, the governor's welfare was laid on the governor's tax, not the imperial taxes,³² but Nehemiah refused to lay an extra burden on the people. Instead, he accommodated and fed several of them from his own salary. This gesture demonstrates his compassion for the people, unlike the governors before him who laid extra burdens upon the people for the sake of their own extravagance.
- 5) Servant leadership aims at serving others: Nehemiah led with a positive heart to service, unlike the previous leaders who lorded it over the people. Service is a principle of leadership that seeks to put others ahead of the leader, just as Nehemiah did in Nehemiah 5:15-16.³³

Relevance of Nehemiah 5:14-19 for Suffering Alleviation in Africa

The leadership characteristics demonstrated in the book of Nehemiah, and specifically in the pericope of this study, portray a model that contemporary African leaders of various leanings can adapt to meet the needs of their people and restore hope amidst imminent suffering. This model is relevant for alleviating suffering in Africa.

- 1) Credibility to Leadership Position: It is no exaggeration to say that the road to political leadership/office in many African countries is not transparent enough. As Iwuchukwu rightly notes, most of the electoral processes that produce the political leaders in Nigeria are corrupt and selfish.³⁴ If leaders emerge through questionable processes, their illegitimacy would be used to manipulate them by higher powers, preventing the leaders from adequately attending to the welfare of the people. Therefore, if African leaders intend to mitigate their people's sufferings drastically, they should pay attention to the process that brings them into office and strive to ensure that the process is credible, fair, and legal, as stated in their nation's constitution. Nehemiah did not become the governor of Judah through unclear means. He was appointed by King Artaxerxes, thus making his authority and governorship recognised and authentic.

³⁰ Brown, 96-97

³¹ Richard J. Gehman. *Learning to Lead*. (n.p: Oasis International Ltd, 2008), 231

³² Brown

³³ Evans Forester. "Lead Like an Exile." *Leadersgolast*. April 2008. <http://leadersgolast.com> (accessed November 5, 2024)

³⁴ Rebecca Chinelo Iwuchukwu "A Comparative Analysis of Gideon's Leadership And Contemporary Nigerian Leaders in National Development" *Biblical Studies and Leadership in Africa Biblical studies Series number 7*, ed., S.O Abogunrin, (Ibadan; NABIS, 2009) 83-84

Political leaders who would be a beacon of hope to the people must strive to maintain standards in the process that brought them into office. Leaders must be aware that leadership attracts high expectations from their followers. As such, they should gravitate towards competency, accountability, compassion, welfare and justice, which prove that they care for the people and have a sense of ultimate accountability.³⁵ This is opposed to the trend of the “do or die” struggle for power, which sometimes includes using acquired wealth to purchase leadership positions or using diabolical force to gain access to political office. Since leadership is for the service of others, it must not be sought by all means without regard for due process or the rule of law.

- 2) Servant Leadership is transformational: Sometimes, people assume that the political system in sub-Saharan Africa is too bad for repair, but Nehemiah is a model to say otherwise. However, the past governments might have handled state funds poorly and mistreated the people, but a servant leader aiming towards transforming his people can make a change with intentional effort geared toward resilience. Nehemiah came into power, and rather than maintaining the status quo, he chose to change it. Leaders are needed in today's African society who would pioneer reforms and challenge the status quo instead of joining the list of oppressive governments.
- 3) Sacrificial Leadership: Nehemiah models exemplary and sacrificial leadership. This gesture can be attributed to his reverence for God, his love and compassion for the people, and the integrity of his heart. Every political leader leading a people out of a socio-economic challenge must accept the responsibility and be willing to make sacrifices. These sacrifices would be unachievable if the leaders do not have a genuine heart that reveres God, loves the people and values personal integrity. For Nehemiah, reverence for God is not what is done in the place of worship but the regard for God and love for His people, which is demonstrated in everyday life. If Christian political leaders would carry this same understanding to their various constituencies, knowing that reverence for God is not about the demonstration done in the place of worship but much more the regard given to God at the duty posts in matters that concern the people, then, their actions would be fair and not cruel towards the people they govern. The fear of God would increase the love and respect shown towards the people created in the image of God. As Ebhomienlen submits, if the Nigerian Politicians followed the example of Jesus' sacrificial and humble service to the people, Nigeria would be a paradise on earth.³⁶
- 4) Empathetic Leadership: When the people's cry came up to Nehemiah in Nehemiah 5:1, Nehemiah responded in three ways: he made a personal response, arranged for public discussion and resolution, and then set out a case for resolving it legally. These responses fall into three levels: emotional, intellectual, and volitional.³⁷ Political leaders and other leaders must feel the people's pain, hear their cries and respond adequately. The sad reality in Nigeria and some other

African countries is that the leadership of government hardly feel the pain of the people as they continue to make their selfish and dictatorial policies, which have negative impacts on the poor masses.³⁸ This apathy further increases the pain of suffering among the African populace. However, servant leadership is about the people, not the leader himself. Hence, empathy is important in meeting the needs of the people. Apathy closes its eyes to the followers' concerns, but empathy hears and moves to action.

- 5) Service-oriented Leadership: In Nehemiah 5:16, Nehemiah prioritised people led by example. He was not just a leader who gave orders but was ahead in the work himself. Exemplary leaders must, of necessity, learn to serve the people. A true leader serves, and they do their best, serving the people wholeheartedly; for doing this, they may not be popular, but they make a real impact that transforms people and society. African Christian leaders are expected to lead exemplarily by using their mandate to serve the people who elected them to office.³⁹ By so doing, they demonstrate their selflessness and Christlikeness, a beacon of hope to the world amid imminent suffering. Hence, servant leaders prioritise services that will help people become better than they were, which is a hallmark of transformational leaders.

Conclusion

This paper has analysed Nehemiah's servant leadership style as documented in the book of Nehemiah, specifically, the reforms and reconstructions he carried out in chapter 5:14-19, Nehemiah's trust in God, humility, love for his people, sacrifices, justice, and development for the well-being of Jerusalem and its inhabitants have great relevance for African leaders to emulate in order to alleviate suffering of their people. The leadership demonstrated in Nehemiah challenges much of African leadership and provides a viable alternative that guarantees transformation. It is correct here to assert that servant leadership that will produce the transformation Nehemiah achieved must be rooted in God. It implies that love for God and fellow humans, irrespective of background, status or affiliation, underlies this kind of servant leadership. This model appears to be the missing underpinning that African leaders must imbibe to activate this servant leadership, leading to shared prosperity. Therefore, this paper recommends that further study focus on exploring more characters in the Scriptures who exemplified a servant leadership theory to have robust resources from which African leaders can draw.

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³⁶ Thomas Oseyi Ebhomienlen “Christ Example of Servant Leadership: A Model for Political Leaders in Nigeria” *Biblical Studies and Leadership in Africa Biblical studies Series number 7*, ed., S.O Abogunrin, (Ibadan; NABIS, 2009), 301.

³⁷ Brown, 89

³⁸ Iwuchukwu

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