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Louis Brown

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LOUIS BROWN

# EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE: AN ESSENTIAL AND VALUABLE TOOL FOR EFFECTIVE CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP

## Introduction

Emotional intelligence (EI) is being acclaimed as having the potential to be the most precious personal and professional tool that a leader can have and utilize (Goleman, 1995). Over the years, researchers have examined the relationship of EI capabilities within numerous personal and professional fields and outcomes. The results indicate that EI competencies may produce positive improvements within a broad range of social, emotional, and professional experiences (Hendron, Irving, & Taylor, 2014).

However, despite the exciting and growing variety of EI writings, many researchers have seemingly neglected the Christian community, resulting in the unique and exciting profession of Christian leadership and church ministry remaining acutely underexplored. This lack of research interest is quite surprising due to the various social and emotional interactions Christian leaders encounter in church ministry and in their personal and professional lives (Hendron et al., 2014).

Momeny & Gourgues (2019) suggest that effective communication by emotionally intelligent leaders is essential to church ministry health. It is noted that church leader communication is utilized to motivate and develop effective growth in the Christian community. The standard of church leadership relationships is tremendously influenced by leadership communication. Perhaps church leadership can avoid the typical “clash of worldviews inherent in cross-cultural and multicultural relationships and the impact of that clash on the practice of leadership” (Lingenfelter, 2008, p. 16). When leadership communication is enhanced with emotional intelligence, it

Louis Brown, MBA, is a doctoral student at Liberty University.

produces essential aspects of leadership-members relationships, building trust, building member identity, and attaining collective effectiveness (Momeny & Gourgues, 2020; Momeny & Gourgues, 2019; HBR, 2015). Therefore, this article argues that emotional intelligence is an essential and valuable tool for enhancing church leadership effectiveness and its application to the growth and maturity of Christian leaders.

## **What Is Emotional Intelligence?**

Emotional intelligence was first used as a phrase by Salovey and Mayer in the 1990s. They explained that emotional intelligence is “the ability to monitor one’s own and others’ emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions” (Mayer & Salovey, 1993, p. 433). This expertise has five capabilities: “knowing one’s emotions, managing emotions, motivating oneself, recognizing emotions in others, and handling relationships” (Oswald & Jacobson, 2015, p. 2; Malphurs, 2018). Oswald and Jacobson suggest that Salovey and Mayer’s definition of emotional intelligence is quite restricted. Therefore, they prefer the broader definition of emotional intelligence by psychologist Daniel Goleman. Goleman and his colleague Richard Boyatzis identified four broader capabilities of emotional intelligence: “self-awareness (emotional self-awareness); self-management (achievement orientation, adaptability, emotional self-control, positive outlook); social awareness (empathy, organizational awareness); [and] relationship management (conflict management, coach and mentor, influence, inspirational leadership, teamwork)” (Oswald & Jacobson, 2015, p. 2; Malphurs, 2018).

Goleman was a trailblazer in implementing the emotional intelligence model in the workplace, particularly in leadership responsibilities in organizations. He focused on the practical usages of emotional intelligence, which would benefit business leaders and church leadership. Goleman was also a trailblazer in the direct use of neuroscientific findings. He pioneered the new “brain science” (Goleman, 2001, p. 2), which is understanding emotional intelligence and the part that emotions play in individual thinking and actions. Goleman recognized that because the idea of emotional intelligence was relatively new, long studies had not been conducted contrasting the predictive power of emotional intelligence against intellectual intelligence in effective organizational performance over an entire career. His survey of several hundred business organizations found that “for jobs of all kinds, emotional competencies were twice as prevalent among distinguishing

competencies [those that characterize successful leaders] as were technical skills and purely cognitive abilities combined” (Goleman, 2001, p. 23). Oswald and Jacobson argue that the translation of Goleman’s previous quote is that “the emotional competencies of pastors and church leaders are probably the most important factors in pastoral effectiveness” (Oswald & Jacobson, 2015, p. 3).

## The Definitions of Emotion

Sociobiologists emphasize the superiority of emotions over intellect at such critical moments when they speculate about why creation has given emotion such a principal role in human identity. They suggest that our emotions guide us in facing difficult situations and the tasks too important to be left to the intellect alone. Such challenging conditions include danger, family building, frustrations, marriage, and painful loss. Each external situation causes emotion that provides a distinctive inclination to act. Our emotions point us in the direction of handling the constant challenges of life (Goleman, 1995).

All emotions are, in essence, impulses to act, the instant plans for handling life. The very root of the word *emotion* is *motere*, the Latin verb “to move,” plus the prefix “e-” to connote “move away,” suggesting that a tendency to act is implicit in every emotion. With new methods to peer into the body and brain, researchers are discovering more psychological details of how each emotion prepares the body for a very different kind of response. (Goleman, 1995, p. 6)

Most people may or may not have any difficulty recognizing when they are experiencing an emotion. However, emotion is one of the most awkward concepts to define and comprehend completely. According to Malphurs (2018), one person has suggested that there are approximately 90 different definitions of emotions in scientific literature, attesting to the difficulty of the concept. However, a working definition of emotion must be understood to comprehend the emotions in ourselves and others. Malphurs’s definition of an emotion is “a unique, unplanned urge to love, hate, or express some other feeling that happens subjectively, subconsciously, and physiologically and is directed externally toward a person or thing” (Malphurs, 2018, p. 41). Understanding emotions and their effect will assist in the comprehension of the importance and need of emotional intelligence for Christian leadership and church ministry.

## **Eight Primary Emotions**

Goleman suggests that emotions have to do with a feeling and its corresponding thoughts, psychological and biological conditions, and various inclinations to act. There are enormous numbers of emotions, along with their combinations, differences, mutations, and expressions. Goleman believes there are eight primary emotions:

- Anger: fury, outrage, resentment, hostility to the extreme, hatred, and violence.
- Sadness: grief, sorrow, loneliness, gloom, despair, and severe depression.
- Fear: anxiety, nervousness, apprehension, fright; phobia, and panic.
- Enjoyment: happiness, joy, delight, satisfaction, pleasure, and mania.
- Love: acceptance, friendliness, trust, kindness, devotion, *agape*.
- Surprise: shock, astonishment, amazement, wonder.
- Disgust: contempt, scorn, distaste, disdain.
- Shame: guilt, embarrassment, regret, humiliation. (Malphurs, 2018, pp. 57–58)

This brief discussion concerning emotion is paramount in understanding emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is about understanding our own emotions, the emotions of others, and how they influence our thinking and actions. The hope is that Christian leaders and the church in general will be “challenged to become more aware of, understand, and manage their emotions and those of others around them to relate well with them and truly inspire others” (Malphurs, 2018, p. 11). Therefore, this article argues that emotional intelligence is an essential and valuable tool for enhancing church leadership’s effectiveness and its application to the growth and maturity of Christian leaders. Roy Oswald has concluded that emotional intelligence is the “most powerful tool that exists to help church leaders enhance their relational skills, which really is what emotional intelligence is all about” (Oswald & Jacobson, 2015, p. 1).

## **Emotional Intelligence in Church Leaders and Pastors**

The pastor’s ministry and church leadership are all about relationships. A person can be an excellent preacher or teacher, a talented theologian gifted in biblical exegesis, or an excellent servant to the people of God. However, if they are not emotionally intelligent, their ministry as a pastor or church

leader will be difficult. When church leaders have trouble relating to congregants, it puts doubt on the other competencies they bring to church ministry. Emotional intelligence skills are primary to building trust within a church congregation. Successful ministry depends on trust, and trust is an essential foundation for other talents and abilities (Oswald & Jacobson, 2015).

Emotional intelligence consists of abilities not taught in seminary or Christian universities but is essential to church leadership's effectiveness (Malphurs, 2018). It is all about character and how leaders express themselves and embody the message they preach. Who leaders are is as critical as what they know and what they do. Those who lead and train leaders need to create atmospheres in which relationships are the focus, where conduct is critiqued, and where people are offered feedback on the effect their words have on others (Oswald & Jacobson, 2015).

## **Core Attributes of Effective Church Leaders and Pastors**

The main focus of whatever spiritual guidance a pastor or church leader provides for a congregation must be from a self-aware leader who can connect in relevant ways with people—all types of people. Experts view self-awareness as the foundation of emotional intelligence. When leaders are unaware of their emotions, they will not be able to manage them (Malphurs, 2018). Emotions sometimes hit like a blow to the body; it is like physically running into another individual. A leader's emotional intelligence is defined by how well they manage these uninvited emotions. Self-awareness puts leaders in touch with these emotions, along with their potency. These emotions are what are referred to as "feelings." Maturity in emotional intelligence has to do with the leader's ability to probe the depths of these emotions and notice their subtleties. Church leaders and pastors can grow in their capacity to build a vocabulary for these feelings and obtain the ability to acquire some objectivity about them. Self-awareness allows leaders to observe their thoughts concerning these emotions and engage with their thinking brain and emotional brain. It involves going to that place in the brain that provides the ability to be objective both in thoughts and feelings. Oswald & Jacobson suggest that human beings should marvel at how their brains accomplish this (Oswald & Jacobson, 2015). The Scriptures declare, "for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works" (Ps. 139:14, KJV).

The emotionally intelligent church leader and pastor operate as though they have a "third eye watching their interactions" (Oswald & Jacobson,

2015, p. 123). They are fully aware of their feelings and recognize the other person's feelings. Pastors and church leaders may be aware that what a person is saying is causing them to feel anger, but these leaders possess the attribute of self-control. These leaders can ascertain whether the other person can manage anger and if they believe the person cannot, the leader quiets down and makes sure not to communicate their own anger in any manner. Leaders' self-awareness extends to the environments of meetings and has an awareness of group encounters. While leaders attend to both their own and other people's "thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, they are able to simultaneously participate in the meeting itself and to make wise, emotionally intelligent decisions" (Oswald & Jacobson, 2015, p. 123), thus establishing the value and necessity of emotional intelligence in the life and ministry of Christian leaders.

## **Emotional Intelligence and Church Ministry**

Effective church leaders and pastors can grow resonance with congregational members. In other words, "they can get on the same wavelength with every member of the congregation" (Oswald & Jacobson, 2015, p. 124) regardless of the uniqueness of each member. Church leaders who have difficulty in their relationship with some parishioners can usually obtain resonance with some but may have awkward relationships with others, leaving them with a sense of being disenfranchised and taken for granted. Such leaders may not know why they are out of sync with some congregational members. They appear to have failed to recognize the importance of first building a firm working relationship with parishioners before working with them. In addition, some church leaders are simply turned off by certain members and try to keep away from them as much as possible. These leaders do not do the difficult work of getting beyond their negative feelings to work on building meaningful connections with all members. If church leaders can only gain resonance with church members they personally like, their effectiveness within church ministry will be limited.

The apostle Paul admonished his spiritual son Timothy, a church leader, "I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality" (1 Tim. 5:21, KJV). Christian leaders must possess the wisdom that is from above in their lives and ministries. It is written in the book of James, "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits,

without partiality, and without hypocrisy” (James 3:17, KJV). When church members have trouble resonating with their pastor or church leaders, they abandon the congregation. They leave either physically or emotionally—and sometimes both. Some church leaders may stay as members but contribute very little, whether in terms of finances or participation (Oswald & Jacobson, 2015).

The emotionally intelligent pastor or church leader may have a great deal of “political, social, theological, or personal differences” (Oswald & Jacobson, 2015, p. 124) with particular members, but they seek ways in which to connect with all their members at an emotionally mature level. Whenever these emotionally intelligent church leaders and pastors meet their members in passing, they can smile at one another, because they have connected on common emotional grounds with each other. They have identified with each other deeply, which establishes grounds for a solid ministry relationship and allows the pastor and church leaders to move their members through personal crises or congregational conflicts when needed (Oswald & Jacobson, 2015).

Emotional self-management is crucial because it is the pastor who sets the emotional atmosphere for the entire congregation. The emotional condition and behaviors of the pastor affect how the members feel about and experience their fellowship. The manner in which church leaders manage their own moods and emotions will affect the moods and emotions of the church. Moods and emotions are alike, with the exception that a mood usually lasts for longer periods of time; in contrast, an emotion is short-lived, and the emphasis is on a specific event or experience. Just as the CEO of a company sets the emotional mood of the whole organization, the pastor sets the emotional tone of the congregation, especially for those who work closely with him or her on a regular basis. In this manner, the emotional intelligence of the pastor significantly impacts the kind of emotional intelligence practiced by those within the membership—which, in turn, impacts how attractive the church is to outsiders (Oswald & Jacobson, 2015).

At the core, the emotionally intelligent pastor is a team player. He or she may bring new and exciting ideas to the congregation. Still, these ideas are expected to be modified by a team within the membership so that the ideas can be owned by the entire congregation as “our idea” (Oswald & Jacobson, 2015, p. 125). Timing is critical, as this emotionally intelligent pastor continues in sync with the emotional tone of the membership regarding a specific issue and therefore knows when to ask for a decision to be made.



Introducing excellent ideas without meaningful input from the congregation is self-defeating. Even though the congregational decision-making process may consume more time, the execution of ideas in which the congregation has a significant part will be far less resistant in the long run (Oswald & Jacobson, 2015).

Even when everything seems to be going well, when pastors fail to set a positive and cheerful emotional tone in all areas of church ministry, some areas of church ministry will be diminished. For example, if negative energy is being released from the altar team, the emotionally intelligent pastor will find a way to turn the negative energy off and replace it with positive energy. Even a small amount of negative attention within a small ministry group can negatively influence other healthy areas of church ministry (Oswald & Jacobson, 2015).

## **The Emotional Intelligence of the Church Congregation**

According to Oswald & Jacobson, emotional intelligence is not a fixed attribute within leaders only; it is also a characteristic of congregations. The emotional intelligence of the congregation is built upon meaningful relationships between pastors and the congregation, along with deep interpersonal communications that congregants have with each other. The congregation's identity as a place of healing and individual support is not by accident. It would have been steered by strong church leaders, both clergy and laypersons, who recognize the importance of being emotionally intelligent, even though they may not use that term (Oswald & Jacobson, 2015).

Congregations offer many gifts to the community, and communal welcoming is one of those gifts. If someone would walk into many congregations today, they would likely find people ready to embrace, welcome, and speak with them (Oswald & Leas, 1987). People's interconnection with the congregation can supply the community they need to live the week ahead successfully. Shaking hands with church leaders can provide the required human touch, especially for older adults who may not have received that human touch all week long. This human touch that people experience from congregations can make an enormous difference in their lives. An emotionally intelligent congregation recognizes this and safeguards its emotional climate to maintain positivity. However, maintaining a welcoming membership will take continuous work. Emotionally intelligent congregations understand the importance of their continuing reach to the community (Oswald & Jacobson, 2015).

Oswald & Jacobson have indicated six ways a congregation can encourage emotionally intelligent conduct. Each of these methods assists members of a congregation to remain connected in positive ways. The emotional intelligent congregation will:

- Keep the three components of congregational life alive and healthy—climate, theology, and vision.
- Develop an immune system that enables church leaders and members to intervene when toxic interchanges threaten to disrupt a positive community experience.
- Ensure that congregational norms—the unconscious, unwritten rules about the way people are to behave—are made conscious and possibly altered to remain positive and relationship-enhancing.
- Expect decision-making or strong groups to engage in some teambuilding before they begin their work, and conclude with some evaluation of the group process before people leave.
- Sponsor small-group ministries in which people can connect in meaningful ways.
- Ensure that members and constituents receive prompt and effective pastoral care. (Oswald & Jacobson, 2015, p. 105)

An emotionally intelligent congregation maintains the three elements of congregational life, active and healthy in “climate, theology, and vision” (Oswald & Jacobson, 2015, p. 106). While all three elements are essential to congregational well-being, the climate is the most significant. Few results will be produced without an enthusiastic relational climate within the congregation, a high-level theology, and an active vision. Once the congregation members generate a warm, encouraging, and caring climate, they can successfully develop a prevalent “understanding of who they are as Christians in the embrace and exciting vision of where they should go next” (Oswald & Jacobson, 2015, p. 105). Congregational life and structure are outlined in Scripture, teaching that the church is the body of Christ, which is made up of many members but functions as a single organism (Oswald & Jacobson, 2015).

For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one

Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And those members of the body, which we think to be less honorable, upon these we bestow more abundant honor; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. . . . That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. (1 Cor. 12:12–14, 18, 23–25)

## Conclusion

It is an interesting and exciting time for the Christian community because of the relatively new knowledge of emotional intelligence in Christian leadership as an effective tool for life and church ministry. This new knowledge will enhance the effectiveness of Christian leadership and the leader's life and ministry. Emotional intelligence will help leaders become aware of their emotions and the emotions of those around them to better communicate with each other, thereby creating a dynamic emotional relationship between leaders and their followers. Church and congregational effectiveness will be enhanced and sharpened through the valuable tool of emotional intelligence. The community at large and humanity in general will be better serviced by the church and its ministries.

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