**An Examination of Christian Practice within a Personal or Professional Context**

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1. **Event Selected for Reflection***1.1. Describe the setting, occasion, or repeated experience, which for you involves a stretch (new learning) or a struggle (problem-solving).*

The repeated experience that involves new learning and problem solving is financial challenges at my place of employment. Monthly, there are delays in paying salaries, issuing of benefits and paying suppliers. A great portion of this challenge has been brought on by overdue government subventions that have gone into bad debt. There are plans to conduct a right-sizing exercise, which has been delayed for over a year. The circumstance has led to emotional and financial strain on the staff, some staff have shown disengagement from the job.

On a personal note, it has led me to seek out opportunities to learn new skills, invest in myself and doctoral studies to be able to diversify my income.

*1.2. Why did you select this experience? What makes the selected event a stretch (new
learning) or a struggle (problem-solving) for you?*

I selected this experience because it is a constant situation/struggle in my life and that of the staff I lead, which has led to an unsettling situation. This situation is a struggle because of its potential impact on my livelihood, ability to provide for myself and family given that it was my main source of income. The struggle rests with the delays in salaries given this was my main source of income but also in the fact that staff was at risk of losing their main and only source of income. The situation stretches me to learn how to keep staff engaged and committed in the very difficult environment and has pushed me to learn new ways of coping. As a form of problem solving in order to combat this situation, I have made efforts to learn real estate, become a civil registrar and take on doctoral studies. I have also encouraged staff to learn new skills and develop themselves.

* 1. *How did you react/respond initially?*

Initially, I was confused, frustrated and overwhelmed with the situation. I therefore responded negatively to the situation through feelings of hopelessness and despair based on years of service given to my employer.

* 1. *Why does it provoke reflection about God, about yourself, about ministry?*This situation provokes a reflection on God because it allowed me to learn to trust him more and depend on him as reflected in Psalm 37:25 “I was young and now I am old, yet I have *never seen the righteous* one *forsaken*, nor his children begging for bread” Bible gateway. My belief in God as my provider and sustainer and my hope for the future is a ministry to others. It also made me become resourceful and reinvent myself as an individual and as a leader and think critically about my own life, financial situation and what is important.

1. **Situational Dimensions***2.1. Setting:*

The setting is at work usually around the 25th of the month when salaries are anticipated and not delivered. The mood among staff is usually pensive and when the realisation hits the setting is tense and hopeless. A sense of frustration and bitterness often sets in and then ‘oh well the work must continue’ sets in and staff remain hopeful for an early rather than later payment.

*2.2. Role/s: (functions or skills used or needed)*

The roles that are often needed are that of comforter, guide, agent of change, coach and others. I usually empathise with the staff, feel with them, allow them to express the frustration in a non-threatening way and offer advice where needed and necessary, offer support and hope. Because all of my small team are Christians, it is often easier to offer hope to the team through a spiritual connection with God as provider in texts like Psalms 37:25 (as highlighted earlier), Psalms 146: 7-9, Philippians 4:19 and one of my favourites Matthew 6:31,33 “*“Therefore take no thought, saying, ‘What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? … But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and* ***all these things shall be added unto you.****”* At other times, my role is that of teacher/guide/coach to help with making decisions or referring to the right source. At all times, my role is that of listener and empathizer given that this is what is often needed. Outside of these roles, there is often another staff member outside of my department who offers well needed humour in these times; putting a humorous twist on a negative situation.

*2.3. Design: (Capabilities used/limitations surfaced; or those of others)*

*2.3.1. Capabilities (God-given abilities)*God has given me the talent for problem-solving and empathy for others. As a trained clinical social worker, these talents/skills have been sharpened and honed for the greater good of the people I serve i.e. my staff. Through this empathic listening, I have been able to provide a sounding board, opportunity to express without fear of retribution or judgement and it has been mutually beneficial.

*2.3.2. Limitations (temperament)*I am limited in my ability to implement solutions but only to offer suggestions. Because my temperament is towards offering help, care, and being solutions- oriented, it is difficult to seemingly sit back and down “nothing” given that it is somewhat outside my scope of duties and leadership.

 Sometimes in listening to the staff, given my nature of problem solving I may want to offer suggestion but that is not necessarily what is needed by the staff member at that point. From a problem solving perspective, there are many responses that could improve the situation. Some of which have been shared with leadership. However, I am limited by my access, ability and power to make decisions at the highest level.

*2.3.3. Strengths (virtues)*

I am solution oriented and have tried to diversify my own skills, learning and income and offer aid and help to my staff. Additionally, I have sought to increase activities, sponsors and projects to my department so as to help staff with additional duties and payment and also increase income to the University no matter how small.
My strength is around building rapport with people and this is an important virtue when working in an organization. People want to know that you are listening and though we might not be able to change the situation they feel unconditional positive regard.

*2.3.4. Weaknesses (vices)*

 Patience has been a weakness of mine. It is hard to be patient when you see opportunities for change and things and people are falling apart. I have had many opportunities to be patient and God is still working on this vice in my life.

*2.4. God/spirituality: (God’s presence or grace in the situation or your response to it)*

I have seen God’s grace daily and every month when salaries are late, there has been money to pay my bills, and there have been vegetables in my garden no matter how small. He has shown his grace continually, the bills have not piled up beyond my ability and for this I am eternally grateful, thankful and I will sing the praises of God as my Provider. He has also shown his grace in that the salaries are usually paid before the next month's salary is due.

 *2.5. View of God, Biblical Truths, Principles: (Questioned)*Does God provide for me and not others?

 Does His provision depend on believing and trusting him fully?

 How does His role as Comforter help me to cope with this challenge on a daily basis?

3. **Operational Beliefs***What implicit Operational Belief is guiding your [or others’] decision-making? Be willing to
discover less than ideal tendencies. If you were to say in a sentence the belief/s demonstrated
by your actions or others’ actions in the situation, how would you state it/them?*My belief and faith in God as provider and comforter and my hope for the future is what is demonstrated in my actions.

*3.1. How would you distill your operational belief in the event?*

My operational belief is my faith in God showing that I trust him to provide but also my actions towards retooling and upskilling myself and “by not rolling over and playing dead.” After all, faith without works is dead.

3.2. T*o the best of your understanding, what are the possible roots of this operational belief?
What do you think may have contributed to its development?*

The root of this belief is from my family of origin. Growing up we always put our faith in God to provide. My dad was a contractor and he didn’t always have work and my mom was a housewife. We put our faith in God to provide for us and he always did, there was always more than enough food and other basic needs to share and to live a good life.

3.3. *What are the consequences of this belief: On your relationship with God? On your
relationship with others? On your ministry?*Because I trust and believe God to provide for me, and he has not swayed in his promise, my relationship with God has gotten stronger and I am eternally grateful. My relationship with others such as staff members have also improved as a result my hope for better times even with/without redundancies. My mother is often worried and honestly I sometimes am prone to worry but God has always proved so I believe and this becomes my ministry of faith and hope.

4. **Christian Critical Thinking**
4.1. *Scripture (What biblical images speak to your chosen situation/issue? What biblical
doctrines, commands, or promises speak to scripture/biblical images? What passages
address the situation/issue?)*

Scriptures to Ease Financial Worries and show God as Provider

Psalms 23:1 “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want”

Philippians 4:19 “And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

Matthew 6:26 “Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?”

Matthew 6:31-32 “Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’32 For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.”

Scriptures for mental and emotional peace

Philippians 4:6-7 “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

4.2. *Christian Tradition (Which level of Scripture, tradition, historical church trends still in
effect, denomination, or local practice contribute to this event?)*

There are two Christian traditional beliefs that come to mine, that money is the root of all evil and that it is easier for a rich man to go through the eye of a needle than to go to heaven. This promotes the poor Christian ideology and a struggle mentality. From this perspective, not receiving your salary should make you feel closer to God and closer to heaven. There are even some Christian traditions that have the belief that if you struggle in any way, it is because you do not have a good relationship with God or you are not a good Christian. Which is counter and conflictual to the preceding ideology given that it equates Christianity with struggle and poverty being closer to righteousness.

4.3. *Cultural/Reason (What cultural trends affect the situation? What do resources from
[other academic/scientific disciplines or spheres of life/culture] provide here?)*

Culturally and in particular since covid-19, households have experienced a lot of shift and shaking to lay-offs due to financial instability in companies, quitting and quiet quitting and other scenarios. This has led to a greater number of persons retooling and upskilling themselves, changing careers, finding new jobs in their field and notably diversifying and multiplying their income by taking on side gigs and starting new businesses etc. Culturally, Jamaican people are known to be resilient and resourceful.

4.4. *Personal Experience (How do your past experiences, temperament, gifts, ideas, feelings,
or values contribute to the experience? On reflection, how do you sense God at work?)*I sense God is at work in this experience because it allows me to trust him more and depend on him for my survival. Beyond a practical approach of diversifying my skills and career, I sense God is pushing me outside of my comfort zone to do service in other areas.

Additionally, my value in lifelong learning has pushed me to launch out into new areas such as real estate and civil registrar and push me to complete my doctoral studies in a supportive environment. I believe upskilling and diversification is important for the future.

5**. Theological Significance**5.1. *Understanding the interaction between the sources of theology, what principles or values
emerge that can contribute to your growing philosophy of ministry?*

The principle that rings true is that God takes care of his people, he is our provider. He will never leave us nor forsake us, even in financial, emotional and psychologically difficult times. This is my ministry to my staff, my neighbours, fiancé, friends and family that God provides and that we can depend on him and put our trust in him, even when it seems impossible. Donnie McClurkin’s song comes forcibly to mind “What seems impossible will you believe every promise that I made will you receive? Yes I will trust you Lord.” The sources of theology; scripture, nature, Christian experience, tradition and reason all interact to show and prove that faith and trust in God contributes to my ministry of his goodness.

5.2. *What were the key sources? Why?*

All the sources of theology coincide to speak of his faithfulness but the key sources are scriptures and my Christian experience. The scriptures speak to his providing nature; “I have never seen the righteous forsaken or his seed begging bread.” My experience with God as my provider is even greater proof of his goodness. I have not gone wanting even when there are weeks of delayed salary, I have always had food, my mortgage is paid and all my needs and wants met.

5.3. *Has the authority of Scripture shown itself in any practical ways?*
The authority of scripture has shown itself practically through provision, protection and generally sustenance. I recall one month in the earlier days of the salary delays, I had used up my funds for an emergency and when I did not receive my salary and my mortgage became due I became worried as two months prior, the interest rate for the mortgage increased and I needed an additional US$150 per month. I stopped worrying for a moment and prayed (it was more like a heart to heart with God) and immediately I felt better. I then proceeded to call my banker and explained the situation. He said that I would incur additional interest for late payment but then told me to send an email to the manager about the situation and copy him. I did that and left it there. I went to bed that night praying and giving thanks at the same time because I know my God has promised to be my Provider. The next couple of days my heartfelt email went far and wide to the highest levels of the management and based on my payment history not only was I allowed to make my payment later but there were no penalties/interest. I never knew this was possible. I told the story of God’s goodness to my friends and family. He is an on time God.

6. **Contextual Application**6.*1. What are you going to do/what did you do?*

In order to combat the financial instability brought on by the situation, firstly, I have sought to reskill myself by doing the real estate course and licensing exams, also i have been successful in the civil registrar exams and am waiting gazetting by the Office of the Prime Minister along with starting my doctoral studies with Omega. Secondly, I have offered support to staff experiencing emotional distress from the potential redundancy. Thirdly, I have continued to trust God to be my guide throughout the process and to depend on him for everything.

 *6.2. How do/did you need to trust God to work in the situation and/or in your life?*

I needed to trust God as my provider, the one who would never make me go wanting, I continue to trust him for this.

 *6.3. What values drive/drove your mission in the situation?*

My value of comfort to be able to provide for myself and my parents drove my mission. As a result my value of family and understanding how this situation impacts them is also a factor. Overall, my value of people (my staff) is a driving factor, understanding human behaviour and emotions aided me greatly in this situation.

 *6.4. What are/were your goals?*

My goal is to be ready for anything that this financial situation will bring. Though I am tenured and it has been expressed that I am someone they would like to keep, nothing in this world is certain. I have found however, that I am not scared or uncertain about the future because I know who holds tomorrow and he is preparing me and giving me insight and foresight and knowledge to trust the process and be anxious or fearful for nothing.

 To provide a safety net/supplemental income/career in order to prepare for any financial crisis/difficulty.

*6.5. What personal courage issues require/d faith steps?)*

I need the courage to trust that whatever God allows to happen in my life is for my good. So redundancy or not, God will remain my comfort and Provider. I have been through difficulties in my life and he has always worked it out for my good.

 *6.6. Comments on what happened*

Every new day brings new hope. But honestly, some days I worry and think about what the future holds. I don't worry for too long but I do worry. I am human, so the thoughts will come but I quickly push them away. At first it was a stressful situation and it continues to be off-putting but I continue to trust God.

My favourite text of all is Jeremiah 29:11, “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” Whenever I say this text, I know that I need not worry about tomorrow. He holds my future.

WORKS CITED

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