

# Transformative Character Formation: Equipping Young Gospel Ministers For Sustainable Ministry In Nigeria

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## Abstract

Transformative character formation is an essential instrument of preparing young Gospel ministers for sustainable ministry in Nigeria. The pressures of contemporary Nigerian society, including materialism, leadership crises, moral compromise, competition, and the pursuit of personal success, can adversely affect young ministers if character formation is neglected. Transformative character formation is a systematic process of reshaping, adjusting, and forming values, behaviours, and perspectives through genuine encounters with Jesus Christ, daily life experiences, and mentoring. Indices of transformative character formation include genuine encounter with Jesus Christ, depending on the Holy Spirit as the Enabler, the transformation process, the manifestation state, and moral discernment and responsible decision-making. The paper argues that good character is indispensable in effective pastoral ministry because, without character, there is no ministry. The call of God can take a minister of God to greater heights in ministry, but character will sustain him or her in that place. Thus, character manifests itself in relationships and determines how the minister performs in ministry. The paper concludes that equipping young gospel ministers for sustainable ministry in Nigeria must be intentional and relational.

**Keywords:** Transformative Character Formation; Young Gospel Ministers; Sustainable Ministry; Nigeria

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## INTRODUCTION

Transformative character formation is an essential instrument of preparing young Gospel ministers for sustainable ministry in Nigeria. While theological knowledge, preaching skills, and ministerial competence are important, effective Christian ministry also requires the development of godly character, integrity, humility, discipline, compassion, and spiritual maturity. The pressures of contemporary Nigerian society, including materialism, leadership crises, moral compromise, competition, and the pursuit of personal success, can adversely affect young ministers if character formation is neglected. Therefore, ministerial preparation should go beyond academic and vocational training to include intentional formation of the whole person in accordance with the teachings and character of Jesus Christ.

For young Gospel ministers, transformative character formation involves a continuous process through which biblical values become deeply rooted in their attitudes, decisions, relationships, and patterns of ministry. Such formation is nurtured through prayer, Scripture, discipleship, mentoring, accountability, practical service, and participation in a healthy Christian community. A minister whose character is continually shaped by Christ is better equipped to handle authority responsibly, relate respectfully with congregants, manage resources faithfully, and respond to challenges without compromising Christian principles. In the Nigerian context, where ministers often serve amid complex social, economic, cultural, and religious realities, strong character provides an important foundation for credible and responsible ministry. The paper examines a brief description of gospel ministers in Nigeria, understanding transformative character formation, indices of transformative character formation, role of transformative character formation in ministry, necessity for transformative character formation in ministry, and equipping young gospel ministers for sustainable ministry in Nigeria.

## BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF GOSPEL MINISTERS IN NIGERIA

Gospel ministers in Nigeria can be described as Christian leaders who are called, trained, and entrusted with the responsibility of proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ, nurturing believers, administering Christian communities, and demonstrating Christian values within the wider society. Their ministry commonly includes preaching, teaching, evangelism, discipleship, pastoral care, prayer, counselling, and leadership. The biblical foundation for this ministry is reflected in Ephesians 4:11–13, where apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers are presented as ministers who equip believers for service and spiritual maturity. According to Obadare (2022:1-2), in the Nigerian context, gospel ministers operate within a highly diverse Christian environment that includes historic mission churches, African Instituted Churches, evangelical churches, Pentecostal and charismatic movements.

A significant characteristic of gospel ministers in Nigeria is their strong emphasis on evangelism and spiritual transformation. The growth of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity has particularly increased the visibility of pastors, evangelists, prophets, and other ministers who emphasise conversion, prayer, healing, deliverance, biblical teaching, and the work of the Holy Spirit. Burgess (2008:10-12) observes that Nigerian Pentecostal development has been shaped by revival movements and changing social and religious circumstances, producing new forms of Christian leadership and ministry. Similarly, Olofinjana (2011:5-6) documents the contributions of numerous Pentecostal pioneers whose ministries helped shape the development of Christianity in Nigeria. Thus, gospel ministers have played an important role in transmitting Christian faith and establishing churches and ministries across different Nigerian communities.

Gospel ministers in Nigeria also function as pastoral caregivers and teachers. Beyond preaching from the pulpit, they provide counselling, visitation, prayer support, marriage guidance, discipleship, leadership development, and assistance to people experiencing social and spiritual difficulties. Their position often gives them considerable influence over the beliefs, practices, and moral decisions of church members. Obadare (2022:4-5) notes that pastors exercise considerable authority within their churches and in wider society. This influence places an ethical responsibility on ministers to demonstrate integrity, humility, accountability, sound biblical interpretation, and servant leadership.

Another important feature is the increasing social engagement of gospel ministers and churches. While evangelism and spiritual formation remain central, some Nigerian Christian ministries have expanded their activities into education, healthcare, humanitarian assistance, community development, entrepreneurship, and other forms of social service (McCain, 2013:20-21 and Obadare, 2022:4-5). This development suggests that the ministry of the gospel in Nigeria encompasses both proclamation and practical service to communities.

At the same time, the prominent social positions of some gospel ministers have sparked discussions from different perspectives on pastoral authority, wealth, political relationships, and accountability. For instance, Obadare (2022:9-10) states that Nigerian Pentecostal pastors have extensive authority and influence over politics, public policy, popular culture, and moral life. Thus, this does not apply equally to every Nigerian gospel minister, but it demonstrates why character, accountability, and the responsible exercise of spiritual authority are indispensable in the contemporary Christian ministry.

## **UNDERSTANDING TRANSFORMATIVE CHARACTER FORMATION**

Transformative character formation is derived by the author from the perspective of the Scripture as found in Roman 12:2, which says, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect. Christian Character Formation involves cultivating the fruits of the Spirit (Collicutt, 2015:91). Thus, Transformative Character Formation is a systematic process of reshaping, adjusting, and forming values, behaviours, and perspectives through genuine encounter with Jesus Christ, daily life experiences, and mentoring.

It involves shifting from carnal behaviours to resembling Jesus Christ in both actions and words, thereby manifesting the constant integrity of Christian life. Transformative Character formation is a continuous relationship with God and humanity that must be intentional. The choice of the words transformative character formation describes the relationship with Jesus Christ for resemblance in words and actions, in private and in public. This will make Christians and ministers of the gospel reflect the identity of Jesus Christ, who saves and calls into the ministry for the transformation of life and society. Thus, knowledge, skills and influence cannot make a transformative impact in life and ministry, but characters that are rooted in the moral standard of God. Hence, the author describes transformative character formation as an ethical framework for developing moral standards and character traits essential for life and ministry.

Willard (2012:13) states that spiritual formation is a process in which the various dimensions of human life are brought into harmony with God’s will. He identifies areas such as the mind, emotions, will, body, social relationships, and soul as dimensions requiring transformation. Thus, character formation involves the renewal of the whole person rather than merely

correcting isolated behaviours. The process is therefore both spiritual and moral, producing virtues such as love, humility, patience, integrity, self-control, compassion, faithfulness, and truthfulness.

Transformative character formation is also understood as a process of spiritual growth that occurs through a person's relationship with God, the influence of Scripture, Christian community, disciplined practices, and practical obedience. The biblical idea of transformation emphasises the renewal of the mind and the development of a new pattern of life (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:22–24). Willard (2021) argues that character is not simply a collection of occasional actions but is connected to the deeper formation of the will or heart (145–146). Thus, Christian character cannot be adequately developed through external instruction alone. Knowledge of Christian doctrines must be accompanied by practices that enable believers to embody their beliefs.

Furthermore, transformative character formation has significant implications for Christian ministry because ministers are expected not only to communicate the Christian message but also to embody it. A minister whose character is being transformed should increasingly demonstrate integrity, humility, emotional maturity, servant leadership, faithfulness, and love toward others. Character formation, therefore, provides an important foundation for credible ministry, since the effectiveness of Christian leadership is closely related to the character of the person exercising leadership. The New Testament's emphasis on qualities such as being above reproach, self-controlled, hospitable, gentle, faithful, and able to teach demonstrates that Christian ministry requires both competence and character (1 Tim. 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9).

### Indices of Transformative Character Formation

***Genuine Encounter with Jesus Christ:*** The starting point of transformative character formation is the genuine encounter with Jesus Christ. A genuine encounter with Jesus Christ refers to a personal and transformative experience in which an individual accepts Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. It involves recognising Jesus as Lord and Saviour, leading to personal conviction to discover the need for salvation. This encounter results in a significant change in a person's life, values, and behaviours. It is more than the acquisition of theological knowledge; it involves the transformation of the whole person so that Christian convictions become visible in everyday behaviour. Willard (2021:26) emphasises that spiritual formation concerns the transformation of the human heart, mind, will, body, and social relationships into conformity with the character of Christ. It leads individuals to abandon old ways of life and move towards a life that reflects Christ's identity. It involves a deliberate decision to follow Jesus and submit to his authority, which manifests as a desire to serve others, share the gospel, and live according to Christian principles.

***Depending on the Holy Spirit as the Enabler:*** A genuine encounter fosters a relationship between the individual and Jesus. This relationship is characterised by prayer, worship, and meditation in the Scripture, leading to spiritual growth and maturity. At this stage, the Holy Spirit rests on believers as an enabler to live a Christian life. Believers must surrender to the Holy Spirit to transform their minds and actions, abandoning old habits to embrace a new life in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit, as an enabler, brings a dramatic shift in how a person sees himself and others. Prayer, Scripture meditation, worship, fasting, service, confession, and other spiritual disciplines can function as practices through which Christian character is cultivated. Boa (2001:82) connects spiritual formation with spiritual disciplines, an integrated life, relationships, stewardship, discipleship, and perseverance.

**Transformation Process:** The transformation process of human character by the Holy Spirit is a mysterious journey that shapes an individual's life with the teachings of Christ (cf. Rom. 12:2). Formation happens in the process of transformation, which involves the totality of humans (cf. Rom. 8:19-21). The renewal by the power of the Holy Spirit states the reasons for not conforming to worldly patterns. This renewal helps individuals align their thoughts, perspectives, and behaviours with God's truth. Character formation is an ongoing process. The Holy Spirit continues to work within believers, helping them to grow and mature in their faith. This includes facing challenges and trials, which refine their character and deepen their reliance on God. The role of the Church and a community of believers is vital in the transformation process. Fellowship, mentorship, and accountability among Christians provide support and encouragement, fostering an environment conducive to growth and character formation.

**Manifestation State:** As individuals yield to the Holy Spirit, they begin to exhibit the fruits of the Spirit, such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, among others. These traits reflect the character of Christ and are essential for effective pastoral ministry and personal relationships. Integrity and consistency between belief and behaviour constitute another important index. Transformative character formation produces a life in which professed Christian convictions increasingly correspond to actual conduct. A person who has been transformed does not merely speak about honesty, purity, justice, or love but seeks to practice these virtues in private and public life. Arthur (2021:2) affirms that Christian character education similarly connects ethical formation with the development of virtue and the integration of Christian beliefs into lived experience.

Transformative character formation reduces the tendency toward pride, self-centeredness, defensiveness, and the pursuit of recognition. Instead, the individual becomes increasingly willing to receive correction, acknowledge weaknesses, learn from others, and submit personal desires to God's purposes. This is particularly important for Christian ministers because spiritual leadership requires character that can withstand correction, accountability, and responsibility.

**Moral Discernment and Responsible Decision-Making:** A mature Christian increasingly evaluates choices according to biblical values rather than merely personal interest, social pressure, financial gain, or cultural expectations. Such maturity enables individuals to recognise ethical challenges and respond to them with wisdom, justice, courage, and love. Christian character formation, therefore, involves both the development of virtues and the ability to exercise those virtues appropriately in concrete situations.

Perseverance and faithfulness also reveal the depth of character transformation. Genuine formation is not demonstrated only during favourable circumstances; it becomes particularly evident when an individual encounters disappointment, temptation, opposition, suffering, or ministry difficulties. A transformed character develops the capacity to remain faithful to Christian convictions despite difficulties. Character formation is therefore a gradual process rather than an instantaneous achievement, involving sustained growth through practice, community, discipleship, and dependence on God (Huber, 2021:2-3 and Oxenham, 2025:1).

### **Role of Transformative Character Formation in Ministry**

Good character is indispensable in effective ministry. The author affirms that no character, no ministry, because the call of God can take a minister of God to a greater height in ministry, but character will sustain him in the place. Thus, characters manifest themselves in relationships and determine how the minister performs in ministry. It shapes how ministers relate to their

congregations, make decisions, and handle various challenges. Integrity, humility, compassion, and accountability are crucial traits that influence their leadership and effectiveness.

The transformation of human character by the Holy Spirit is a dynamic and multifaceted process. It requires intentionality and commitment from individuals as they seek to embody Christ-like values in all aspects of their lives. Through this journey, they are equipped not only for personal spiritual growth but also to effectively serve and impact their communities.

Transformative character formation seeks to equip young gospel ministers not only with the skills and knowledge needed for ministry but also with a deeply rooted character that reflects Christ-like values, enhancing their ability to lead and serve their communities effectively. It is an ongoing journey that requires intentionality, support, and commitment to personal and spiritual growth. Character formation is evident in how an individual treats family members, fellow believers, colleagues, neighbours, and even those with whom they disagree. Growth in empathy, reconciliation, forgiveness, patience, service, and sacrificial love indicates that transformation is extending beyond private spirituality into social life. Willard (2021:179) specifically considers the transformation of the social dimension as part of comprehensive spiritual formation.

### **Necessity for Transformative Character Formation in Ministry**

Transformative character formation is indispensable in the pastoral ministry, and the failure of any minister of the gospel in Nigeria and beyond to cultivate it will bring about the shipwreck of the ministry, leaving indelible scars. The paper explains the necessity of the transformative character formation in ministry.

***Christ-like Living:*** Transformative character formation is indispensable to Christian ministry because ministry is not merely the exercise of spiritual gifts, theological knowledge, preaching ability, or administrative competence; it also requires developing a life that reflects Christ's character. The New Testament places considerable emphasis on the moral and spiritual qualities of those who lead the church. In 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9, the qualifications for church leadership focus substantially on qualities such as being above reproach, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, faithful, and able to manage one's household well. These qualifications demonstrate that Christian leadership is fundamentally connected with the character of the minister.

***Exemplary Living:*** Transformative character formation is necessary because the minister's life serves as a model for the people being led. Paul instructed Timothy to “set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12). Ministers teach not only through sermons but also through their conduct, relationships, attitudes, and responses to difficult situations. A minister whose public teaching contradicts his private conduct can undermine the credibility of the gospel. According to Carrell (2022:81-82) character formation enables ministers to embody the message they proclaim. Christian ministry rests on integrity and exemplary character as essential dimensions of healthy ministry leadership.

***Maintain Integrity and Trust:*** Transformative character formation is also necessary for maintaining integrity and trust in ministry. Ministers occupy positions of spiritual influence and are entrusted with the lives, resources, and confidence of members of the Christian community. Without a properly formed character, authority can be abused and ministry responsibilities compromised. Trull and Creech (2017:25-26) emphasise moral formation, personal integrity, and ethical decision-making as essential components of Christian ministry.

The above submission further establishes that ministers need more than knowledge of ethical principles; they need habits and virtues that enable them to practice those principles consistently.

***Overcoming Satanic Temptation:*** Ministers may encounter temptations involving money, power, sexuality, pride, recognition, competition, and misuse of authority. Strong character does not mean that a minister is incapable of failure; rather, it involves developing spiritual and moral dispositions that foster self-control, accountability, humility, and faithfulness. Goodliff (2017:5-6) affirms that ministerial formation places character formation alongside intellectual and spiritual formation and connects it with pastoral integrity and the practical responsibilities of ministry.

***Preservation of the Credibility of the Christian Witness:*** The minister represents Christ before the congregation and the wider society. When ministers demonstrate honesty, humility, compassion, purity, justice, patience, and servant leadership, their conduct can reinforce the credibility of their proclamation. Conversely, Damazio (2005:7-8) add that serious moral inconsistency can damage confidence in both the minister and the ministry. For this reason, character should be regarded as a continuing process of spiritual formation rather than something acquired once through theological education.

***Effective Leadership and Sustainable Ministry:*** Ministry often involves conflict, disappointment, criticism, pressure, and demanding responsibilities. Ministers, therefore, require qualities such as patience, emotional restraint, wisdom, perseverance, humility, and love to respond appropriately to these challenges. Carrell (2022:83-84) observes that the integrity of ministry leaders bears directly upon the effectiveness of their ministry, emphasising the relationship between character and the practice of Christian leadership.

***Effective Pastoral Leadership:*** Transformative character formation is necessary because Christian ministry is a vocation of service rather than merely a position of authority. Jesus presented leadership in terms of servanthood, teaching that greatness in God's kingdom is expressed through serving others (Mark 10:42–45). A well-formed minister, therefore, understands leadership as stewardship and service rather than personal status or self-promotion. Transformative character formation helps ministers cultivate humility, sacrificial love, accountability, and commitment to the spiritual welfare of others. In this sense, the formation of character provides a foundation upon which knowledge, gifts, skills, and ministry strategies can be responsibly exercised, which will lead to effective ministry, which will be productive, and its productivity will be measured by the transformation of lives in the Church and society.

## EQUIPPING YOUNG GOSPEL MINISTERS FOR SUSTAINABLE MINISTRY IN NIGERIA

To effectively equip young gospel ministers for sustainable ministry in Nigeria involves the following:

***Training and Mentoring Young Generation of Gospel Ministers:*** This is essential for the continuity and sustainability of Christian ministry in Nigeria. Experienced ministers should intentionally teach young ministers biblical knowledge, practical ministry skills, spiritual discipline, leadership principles, and ethical conduct. According to Forman, Jones, and Miller (2004:87), mentoring also allows young ministers to learn from the experiences and mistakes of older leaders while receiving guidance, encouragement, and accountability. Such intentional

transfer of knowledge and experience helps prepare a new generation of ministers to serve the Church faithfully and responsibly.

***Building Resilience and Integrity:*** Young gospel ministers need resilience and integrity to remain faithful amid the pressures and challenges of ministry. Resilience enables ministers to endure disappointment, criticism, financial difficulties, opposition, and other challenges without abandoning their calling. Integrity, on the other hand, requires honesty, moral discipline, accountability, and consistency between a minister's teaching and personal life. Christian leadership is strengthened when ministers develop character that makes them trustworthy and able to maintain their witness even under difficult circumstances (Blackaby and Blackaby, 2001:147).

***Cultivating Lifelong Learning:*** Sustainable ministry requires young gospel ministers to develop a commitment to lifelong learning. Ministers should continue studying Scripture, theology, ministry practices, leadership, culture, and the changing needs of the people they serve. Forman, Jones, and Miller (2004:193) submit that continuous learning helps ministers remain teachable, improve their ministry skills, correct weaknesses, and respond wisely to new challenges. Leadership development is therefore not a one-time activity but a continuing process through which ministers grow in knowledge, character, wisdom, and practical competence.

***Fostering a Culture of Collaboration:*** A culture of collaboration encourages young gospel ministers to work with other ministers, churches, denominations, and Christian organisations to advance the Gospel. Blackaby and Blackaby (2001:293) affirm that collaboration promotes the sharing of ideas, resources, experiences, and ministry opportunities while reducing unnecessary competition among ministers. When young leaders learn to value teamwork and mutual support, they can contribute their different gifts toward common ministry goals and strengthen the wider Christian community in Nigeria.

## CONCLUSION

Transformative character formation is essential for equipping young Gospel ministers for sustainable ministry in Nigeria. Effective ministry requires more than theological knowledge and preaching skills; it demands integrity, humility, resilience, discipline, faithfulness, and a strong commitment to Christ. Through intentional training, mentoring, lifelong learning, collaboration, and practical Christian living, young ministers can develop the character needed to serve God and His people faithfully. When these qualities are cultivated, they will be better prepared to withstand the challenges of ministry, provide positive leadership, and contribute meaningfully to the growth of the Church and the transformation of Nigerian society.

Sustainable ministry requires more than short-term success; it requires ministers who can remain faithful, spiritually healthy, ethically responsible, and fruitful over time. Transformative character formation can, therefore, equip young Gospel ministers to build ministries that are grounded in Christlike leadership rather than personality, material achievement, or institutional influence. By emphasising integrity, servant leadership, emotional and spiritual maturity, accountability, and commitment to the Gospel, churches and theological institutions can help prepare a new generation of ministers capable of serving faithfully and influencing society positively. Consequently, intentional character formation should be regarded as a central strategy for strengthening the credibility, resilience, and long-term sustainability of Gospel ministry in Nigeria.

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