

Application of a Wisdom Test to Christian Leaders

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ABSTRACT

Wisdom is an ancient concept. It has been a fascinating subject in philosophy, psychology, and religion for centuries. Leading a church requires a lot of wisdom. The role of wisdom in effective Christian leadership remains understudied. This study considers wisdom from the Christian leadership perspective. The purpose of this study is to develop a wisdom test and then apply it in measuring wisdom in Christian leadership. The study developed an appropriate wisdom test, which was used to assess wisdom of selected the Christian leaders. Forty participants who are Christian leaders from Nigeria based in the United States were surveyed. The study shows that wisdom is demonstrated by a humble and modest lifestyle; Christian leaders are guided by integrity and the Golden rule; and setting lifetime goals is important.

KEYWORDS: *wisdom, Christian leadership, Nigerian Christian leaders in US*

INTRODUCTION

Like love, wisdom is a virtue or quality that is easier to describe than define. The Random House dictionary defines wisdom as: "Knowledge of what is true or right coupled with good judgement." Wisdom is the ability to sort things out properly and make sound judgements. It is being able to perceive the true nature of things or true character of a person. It is making the right choices. It is knowing and doing the right thing.

Practical wisdom requires knowing how to live well. Sociologists believe that individuals develop wisdom as personality characteristics encompassing reflection, compassion, and the pursuit of truth. Psychology places wisdom within the domain of cognitive character strengths, along with creativity, intelligence, love of knowledge, decision making, experience, emotional regulation, and common sense. For example, creativity is demonstrated when someone comes up with a new idea. It may include finding a novel solution to a problem. People are often creative in some domains, but not in others.

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Highly creative people usually have intense knowledge about an idea, work on it for some time, look at novel solutions, seek out the advice of others, and take risks [1].

The Bible is extravagant in its praise of wisdom. Job said that "the price of wisdom is above pearls" (Job 28:18). Solomon said, "Wisdom is supreme. Get wisdom. Yes, though it costs all your possessions, get understanding. Esteem her, and she will exalt you. She will bring you to honor when you embrace her" (Proverbs 4:7-8, WEB).

The necessity of wisdom in all areas of human lives is best captured by Larry Lea [2]: "Gain wisdom and you will learn how to become a truly whole, fulfilled, purposeful, contented man or woman; Get wisdom and you'll know how to lead a church, or a business or a practice, or an organization. Obtain wisdom and you'll learn how to become healthy and whole. Wisdom is the foremost key to having everything you need and desire in life."

The Bible encourages us to walk in wisdom. Walk simply refers to our lifestyle and manner of living. Walking in wisdom means that we conform to certain standards of living. It is essentially living wisely, with eternity in mind. Everyone is given a measure of wisdom. To some degree, we are a mixture of the simple, the mockers, the fools, and the wise (Proverbs 1:22), as shown in Figure 1 [3].

WHAT IS LEADERSHIP?

Leadership is one of the most extensively studied topics in social sciences. Leadership is as the heart of every group, church or organization. Every one of us is a leader in some sense. Parents have an obligation of leading their children in the right way. A pastor is a spiritual leader in his congregation. A college president is an academic leader. An ability to lead effectively in these leadership roles has a cumulative effect on others because leadership is influence. Leadership skills are needed in the workplace, schools, politics, organizations, churches, and families. Leadership is regarded as a single, most crucial factor that determines the success or failure of an organization. It is all about setting a vision for a group and engaging them in carrying out the vision. Leaders are generally responsible for planning, organizing, delegating, problem solving, team-building, consulting, goal-setting, and rewarding subordinates.

Leadership may be regarded as the process of leading followers. Leaders are needed in many social contexts including the workplace, religious and secular communities, schools, colleges, classrooms, business, healthcare, government, politics, law enforcement, military, organizations, and families. Leadership in these areas often influences the way we work and live. Leaders are aware of the fact that they are not perfect, are aware of their strengths and weaknesses, and strive for continuous improvement [4]. Today, leadership is regarded as a process of social influence in which one person can work cooperatively with others in the accomplishment of a common task.

For decades, people have been asking the question: are leaders born or made? Leadership is regarded as an art and something to be learned over time. Since people are uniquely different, there are different leadership styles, as shown in Figure 2 [5].

What are the marks of a great leader? Leadership potential is in a person with the following five major traits [3]:

1. **Faith:** Faith is the first and perhaps the most important mark of a Christian leader. This is the quality that shapes the leader's life. A leader must think ahead and plan for tomorrow. Leaders are

risk-takers. Faith is the ability to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

2. **Mission:** Faith and mission go hand in hand. A mission is a vision that is acted upon. People with missions change our world. When a leader has no vision, his followers have no sense of purpose and direction.

3. **Character:** You recognize a leader by his/her spiritual and moral integrity. Good reputation and sound character are required of the Christian leader (Acts 6:3; 1 Timothy 3:1-13). Reputation is what others think that you are; character is what you really are.

4. **Competency:** Competency is the ability to create, recognize, motivate, and inspire people to action. It may also mean the ability to lead a group, handle complex tasks, see relationships between apparently unrelated objects, and draw accurate conclusions from chaotic data.

5. **Compassion:** Lack of compassion for hurting people disqualifies one from leadership. Good leaders genuinely care for people. They rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn (Romans 12:15). They are sensitive to people's needs, wants, feelings, temptations, struggles, and hurts

Followers naturally admire and respect these five qualities in a leader. We consciously or unconsciously gravitate toward a leader who has these qualities. One can argue that the five traits discussed above are components of wisdom.

WISE LEADERSHIP

Leadership always matters, and it has never mattered more than it does now, particularly in the Christian community. God has destined the end-time Church to demonstrate His manifold wisdom (Ephesians. 3:10). Hence, wisdom is required of Christian leaders at the end time: wisdom for making tough decisions, wisdom for management, wisdom for strategic warfare, wisdom for intercession, wisdom for bearing fruit, wisdom for financial prosperity, etc. This study seeks to understand the role wisdom plays in Christian leaders.

The wise leader is guided by integrity in decision making (Proverb 11:3). He/she is forward thinking and makes the most of their time in knowing and doing God's will. Someone has well said, "Wisdom is knowing what path to take next. Integrity is taking it." As a leader, Solomon learned from experience the value of wisdom. He compared wisdom with other things and concluded that nothing on earth can compare with wisdom. Solomon's exaltation of

wisdom above all other possessions finds a Pentecostal parallel in 1 Corinthians 12:8, where Paul placed the "word of wisdom" first in his list of charismatic gifts, showing how important wisdom is in Christian leadership.

A Christian leader is a person of wisdom. As a wise leader, he/she must pursue knowledge and wisdom.

➤ **Knowledge:** Knowledge and wisdom are different, but they are related. Wisdom is often regarded as understanding how to apply knowledge in the real world. Learning and applying knowledge is a crucial to acquiring wisdom. For those in leadership positions, mental stretching should be the way of life. Seeking knowledge in their respective fields should be one of their top priorities. Leaders must do their homework when it comes to having the necessary information. Knowledge is gained by diligent study. It takes commitment to learn something new. A commitment to study will keep you from stagnating. If one wants to continually advance, to stay mentally alert, then one should read, study, and accept new mental challenges. Learning and applying knowledge are crucial to acquiring wisdom. "Learning how to gain access to knowledge, how to receive knowledge, how to accept knowledge, how to interpret knowledge, how to apply knowledge and how to become a vehicle for its expression in life requires the cultivation of wisdom"[6].

➤ **Wisdom:** Wisdom is the virtue that enables one to make good choices in the complicated circumstances of life. It is doing the right thing at the right time, in the right way, and for the right reason. Wisdom may be regarded as the use of knowledge to reach a goal.

The fear of the Lord comes first in our pursuit of wisdom because it is the "beginning of wisdom." Without this foundation, God is deleted in our quest; if anything goes, then in the end everything goes and all becomes futile and meaningless. If the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, righteous living is the end of it. The wise person avoids sin and does not live like the rest of the world does. Righteousness is doing the right thing, acting according to the standard of right, namely the law of God. The great need of the world today is righteousness—justice in all, by all, and for all. Righteous living is the main burden of the Bible. It was a basic thrust of Jesus' Magna Carta of righteousness in the Sermon of the Mount (Matthew 5-7). The strategies for successful living include goal setting, planning, and setting priorities. The goals we choose have serious consequences; they determine our destiny.

WISDOM MEASUREMENT

The question of how wisdom can best be defined and measured is still an ongoing debate. Defining and accurately measuring wisdom is a major challenge in psychology. Several measures of wisdom have been developed in the literature. Which measure of wisdom a researcher chooses for a particular project may have a strong influence on the results.

Measures of wisdom can be grouped in two different but overlapping ways: self-report measures and performance-based measures. Measures of wisdom can be personal wisdom or general wisdom. Personal wisdom is obtained through personal experiences and insights concerning one's own life. The SAWS, the ASTI, and parts of the 3D-WS predominantly pertain to personal wisdom. General wisdom concerns human life and the world in general and is not necessarily related to personal experience. It refers to wise ways of thinking about complex problems without particular concern for other people. The Berlin wisdom paradigm belongs into this category.

We designed a survey that is easy to understand and easy to complete. It is a simple, self-report wisdom-scoring questionnaire consisting of 20 items or statements. Participants were administered the wisdom test. The participants were exclusively Christian leaders from Nigeria who are based in the United States. They rated the statements following a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A Likert scale is a psychometric scale that is effectively used to assess the opinions, attitudes, and experiences of customers regarding brands, products, and services. Creating a Likert scale involves summing or averaging the responses to measure a concept or phenomenon. The questionnaire used for this research study specifies that the responses of the participants will remain anonymous.

FINDINGS

We now present the responses of various participants to the 20-item questionnaire. The wisdom test, in the form of was sent to about 150 Christian leaders and selected only the first 40 to respond. As shown in Figure 3, more than half of the participants realize that they are wise. Figure 4 shows that the majority of the participants claim that they grow in wisdom by reading the Bible. Figure 5 clearly demonstrates that integrity matters to Christian leaders. Integrity is the moral dimension that separates wisdom from intelligence, learning, and cleverness. Living by integrity helps us know what is right for us. Wise people are guided by integrity and walk securely (Proverbs 10:9;11:3). Figure 6 shows that wisdom is proved by a humble and modest lifestyle. An

overwhelming majority of the participants indicate that they need to be humble and modest leaders. As shown in Figure 7, almost all participants agree that setting good example is important for those under them. Exemplary living is the greatest influence we as Christians, parents, political or religious leaders or teachers can exert on others around us. A considerable number of the participants indicate that they serve as pastors. Majority of them serve in different capacities besides being pastors and associate/assistant pastors. These other roles include being an elder, deacon, deaconess, prayer leader, teacher or Sunday school teacher, evangelist, and children coordinator.

This study concludes with the following major findings:

- Wisdom is demonstrated by a humble and modest lifestyle.
- Christian leaders are guided by integrity.
- Christian leaders follow the Golden rule.
- A dynamic leader learns from other cultures.
- A leader would feel bad upon realizing that his/her decision is unwise.
- Setting lifetime goals is important.

If our findings would apply to people from Nigeria, they should apply to others from India, China, Spain, Mexico, Brazil, or Ghana.

CONCLUSION

Wisdom is a critical aspect of human life. It is increasingly important in several areas such as education, philosophy, psychology, leadership, management, friendship, health, communication, business, military, decision making, and use of time. This study looks at wisdom from the Christian leadership perspective. The main objective of the research study was to get an in-depth understanding on the influences and effects of wisdom on Christian leaders. It is highly recommended that researchers using the wisdom test developed in this study should have a good understanding of the principles and limitations of psychological testing and assessment. More information about wisdom in leadership can be found in the books in [2,3, 7-14].

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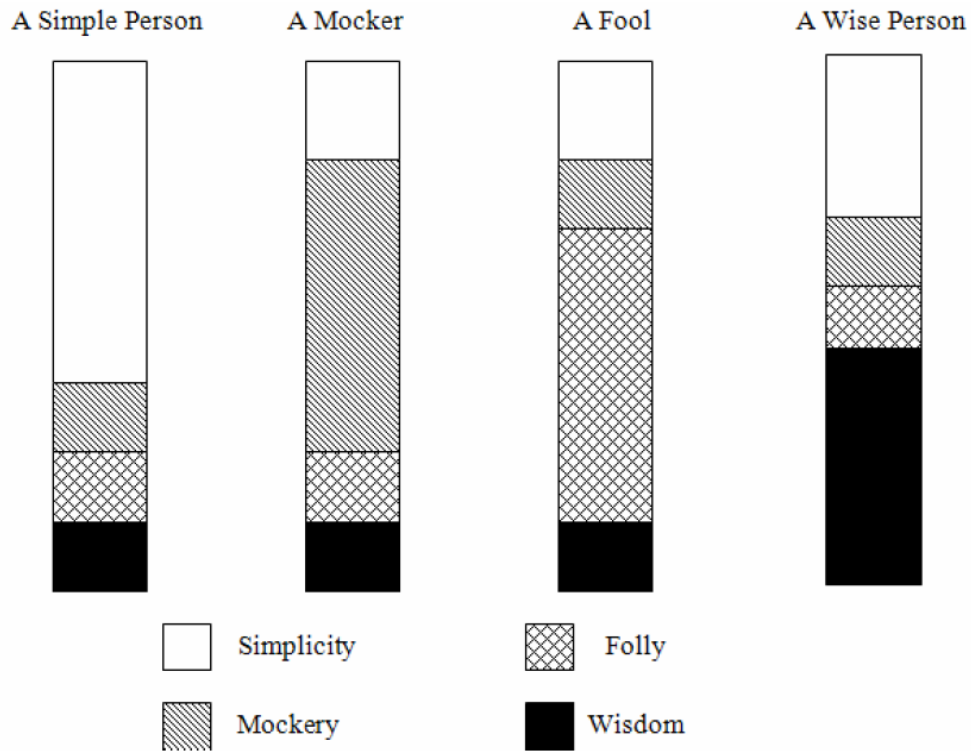


Figure 1 Four categories of people, each indicating a mixture of a simple person, a mocker, a fool, and a wise person [3]

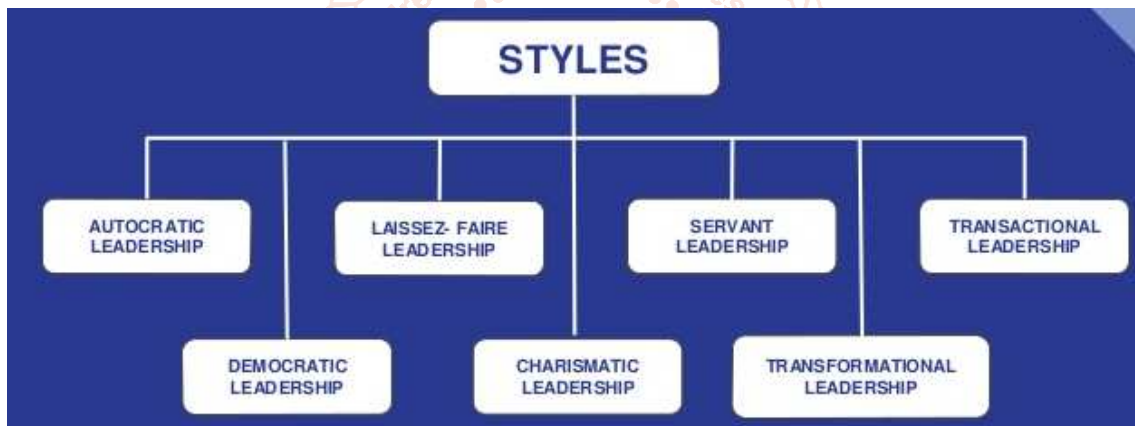


Figure 2 Different leadership styles [5].

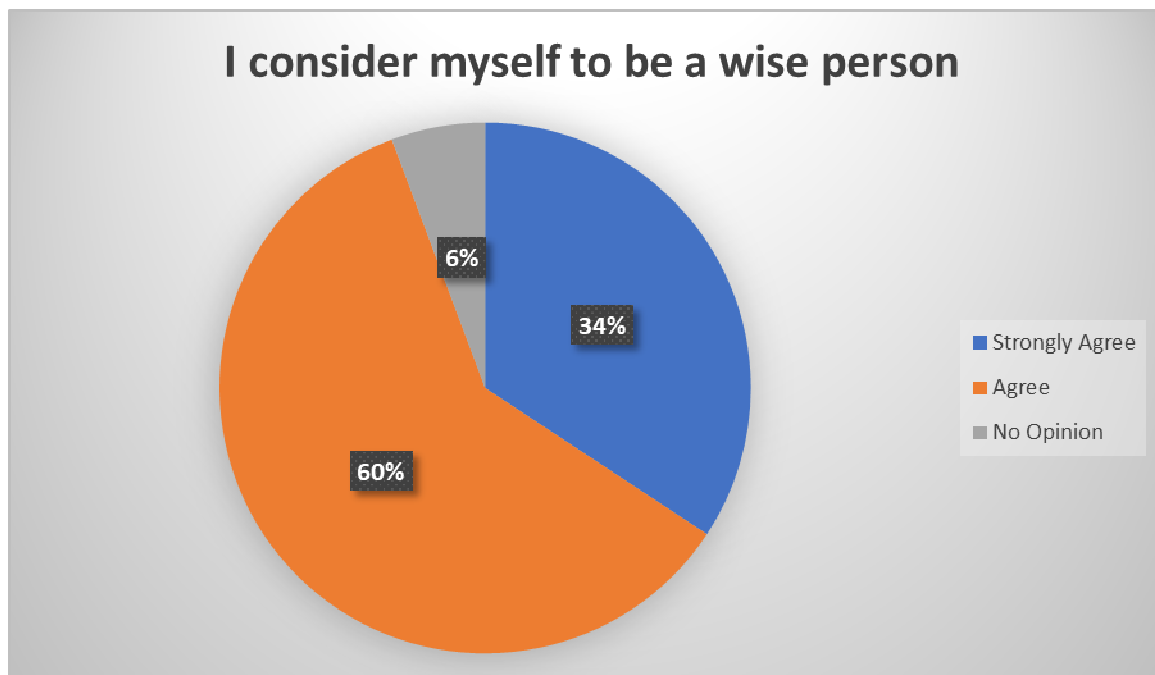


Figure 3 Wise leadership

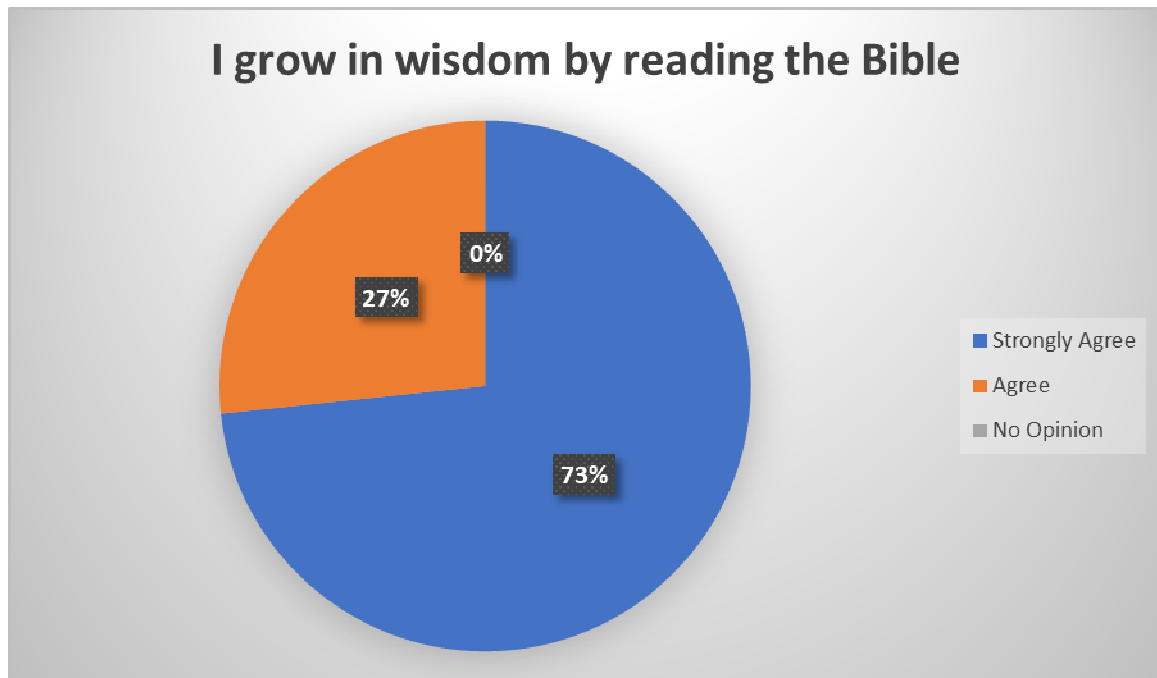


Figure 4 Bible helps leaders to grow in wisdom.

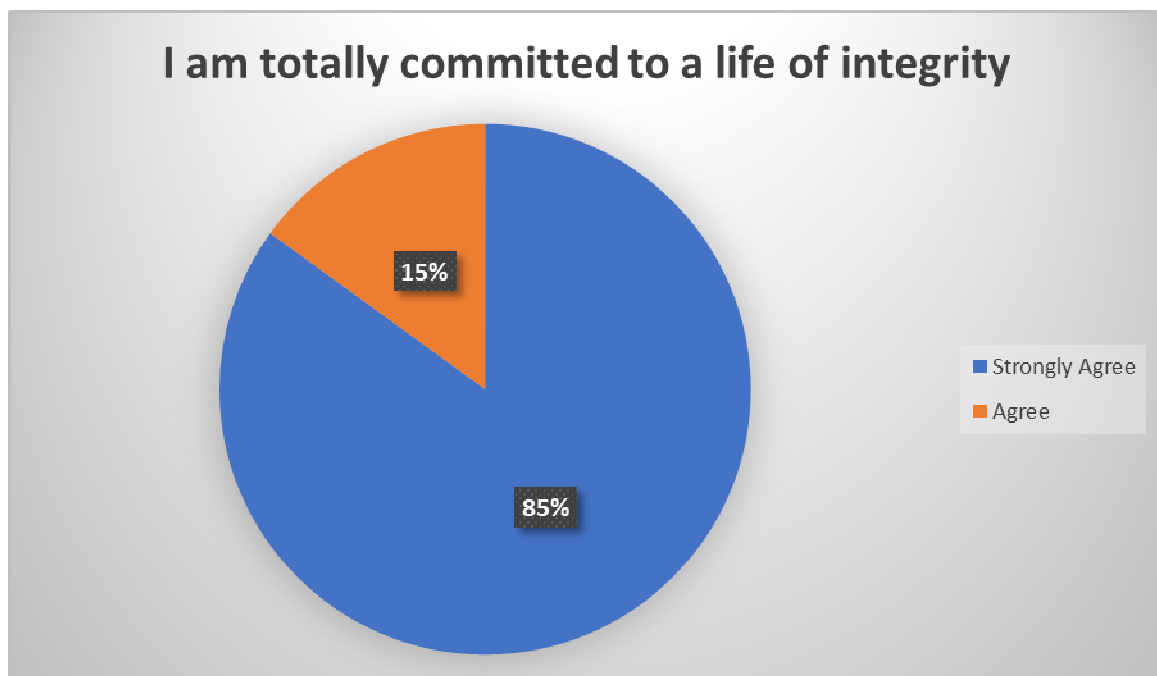


Figure 5 Integrity matters to Christian leaders.

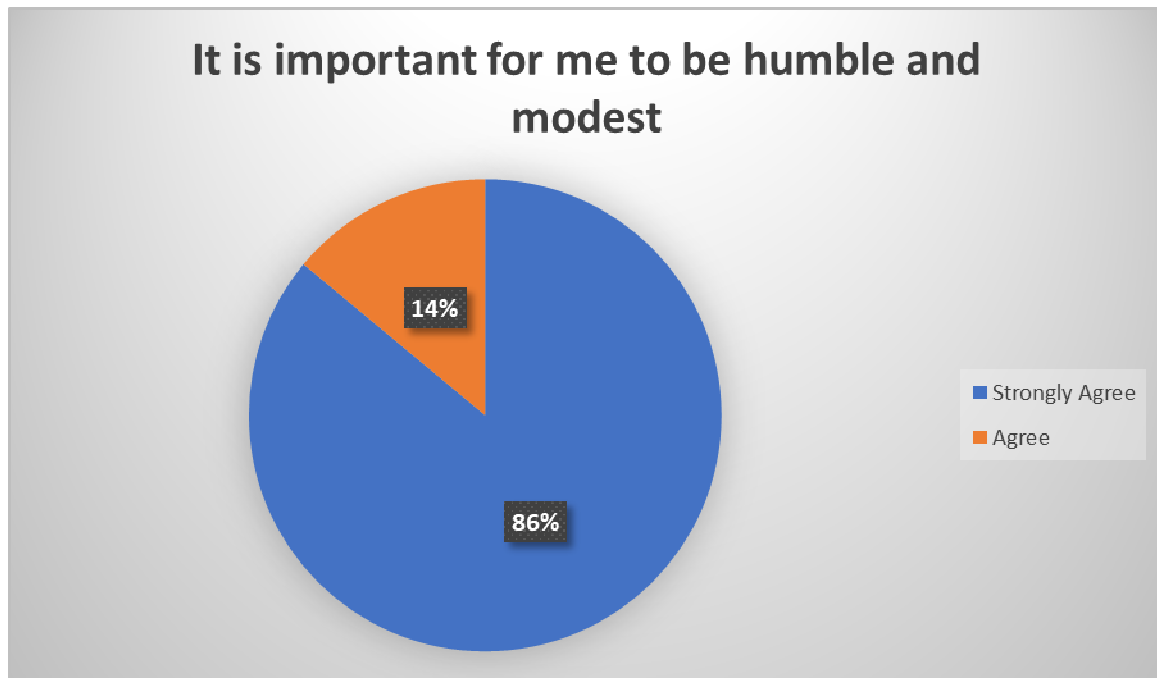


Figure 6 We need leaders to be humble and modest.

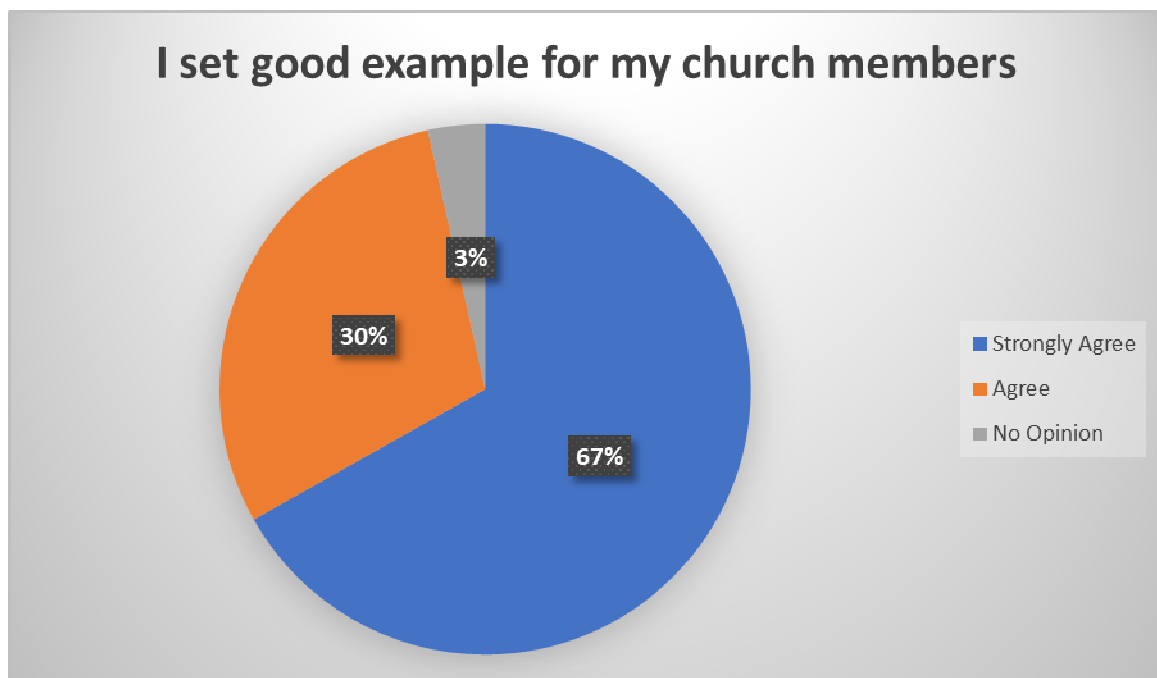


Figure 7 Setting good example is important for leaders