



Leadership Character

Here we explore seven characteristics of Christian leaders :

- ♦ **Humility in the use of authority and power entrusted to them**
- ♦ **Trustworthiness and integrity**
- ♦ **Willingness to lead out of leadership *gifting* rather than from leadership *position***
- ♦ **A desire to encourage growth and development in others.**
- ♦ **A style of leadership that seeks to love and serve others and God.**
- ♦ **Future vision is earthed in an understanding of God's calling**
- ♦ **An active prayer life.**

Whilst Christian leaders are not the sole practitioners of the first four, and the fifth can be partially found in non-Christian leaders, the final two are likely to be the sole preserve of the Christian leader. It is the combination of the seven, that give a style of leadership that is distinctly Christian. This leadership is in no sense "weak", since the self-awareness and self-giving love required to display these characteristics can only be found in the most mature of personalities. Let's consider each in turn.

Humility in the use of authority and power entrusted to them

Secular leaders often seek to develop their status, power and influence. Position, and the power and status that goes with it is vital - the chairman's large car, privileged parking space, top-floor office with expensive furniture and so on. Such position, power and status is the very opposite of the humility that Jesus modeled. Christian leaders are not immune from such temptation. We need to be able to identify the initial signs of power and status causing improper feelings and actions. This is particularly important in a culture where the pastor or minister may dress differently from everyone else, sit in an honoured position at the front, and occupy a distinct office.

Trustworthiness and integrity

The traditional model of the stipendiary minister as ministry provider yields an organisation able to operate on a low level of trust. People may come to the church, but their involvement with it is limited to carrying out simple tasks. Even 'successful' churches, with many people engaged in ministry, can operate with relatively low levels of trust if they have not allowed people to take responsibility and accountability for the life of the church.

God wants us to operate at a high level of trust - in him, and within the church. God is trustworthy. *'God has said "Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you." So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid" (Hebrews 13:6)* Our experience of placing our trust in God should increase our capability to trust, and encourage us to build trust within Christian fellowships. However, not only is God himself trustworthy, he chooses to place his trust in us. Tom Marshall writes *'God's trust is real trust. It is a choice He has made, and it is a vulnerability He has accepted.'*

Trustworthy people must live consistent lifestyles. Peter Drucker describes the "*mirror test*", where leaders make sure that the person they see in the mirror in the morning is the kind of person they want to be, respect and believe in. If there is a lack of consistency between our public and private lives, then sooner or later we will be unable to manage the divide. We read of far too many Christian leaders who have fallen as the truth of their private lives emerges. Many people want to put their leaders on a pedestal and many others enjoy trying to knock them off! Our only remedy is to let the Spirit lead and direct our lives in full measure, to give over to him control of our time, our money and our desires.

Willingness to lead out of leadership gifting and ability rather than from their leadership position

Many leaders covet the power that their position gives them. The enjoyment of wielding influence and making decisions that shapes the lives of others can become an intoxicating drug. This can lead to an improper degree of control, of concentrating authority in the office of leader.

Christian leaders need to develop the necessary personal strength to lead out of their leadership gifting. Since it is may be unlikely that the leader will be the only person in the organisation to have been given the gift of leadership,

Leadership Character (continued)

we need to accept that those gifted with leadership don't have a monopoly on leadership within the organisation. This is particularly likely when we consider that leadership is only one of many attributes considered in selection of candidates for church leadership. As a result, leaders need to actively seek others to adopt leadership roles whenever it is appropriate for them to do so.

A desire to encourage growth and development in others.

Great leaders seek to train their successors, and to do so in such a way that they are able to perform their job even better than they themselves were able to do it. This requires leaders to be able to identify the potential in others, to train and develop the potential of each individual.

One of the hallmarks of such leaders is that they have the maturity to handle diversity and strength in others. Those whom they lead are not people who are weaker carbon copies, but have different and complementary gifts, and are freed to achieve their full potential. David Ogilvy, an Advertising Agency boss said *"If you always hire people who are smaller than you are we shall become a company of dwarfs. If on the other hand, you always hire people who are bigger than you are, we shall become a company of giants."*

A style of leadership that seeks to love and serve others and God.

Servant leadership is at the heart of Christian leadership. Servant leadership is different from servanthood. All Christians are called to be servants, one to another, to follow Jesus' example in washing his disciples' feet, and to love our neighbours as ourselves. Along with that call to servanthood is the need we each have to allow ourselves to receive from Jesus, just as he washed his disciples feet.

Servant leadership goes further to consider the motivation behind our actions as leaders. If personal desire was the sole decision criteria, Jesus would have chosen not to go through the pain and suffering on the cross. In the garden at Gethsemane, Jesus prayed, *'Father if you are willing take this cup from me, yet not my will, but yours, be done.'* (Luke 22:42) The weight of the burden of taking not only our guilt but also our sins themselves, had become too heavy. Even at this point, Jesus could have got up and walked away. Servant leadership will lead us too, to make sacrifices, to put the needs of others above the direction we may prefer for ourselves.

Future vision is earthed in an understanding of God's calling

One of the fundamental tasks of leadership is to ensure that an organisation shares a common vision for its future. However, truly shared vision is vastly different from a leader's personal vision which is then communicated to the organisation. A leader with a charismatic personality may be able to persuade others to follow this vision, but the risk is that the leader is left heading boldly into the future on their own, whilst others simply stand and stare! Thus shared vision becomes the sum of individual visions, expressed in a common way, rather than the lowest common denominator, or only that which all in an organisation have in common. (which may be very little indeed!) A vision which is genuinely shared will weave together common passion, energy and spiritual direction to provide a very significant force within the church.

An active prayer life.

A large part of the instruction that Jesus gave to his disciples was on prayer. They would be grateful for this teaching in the days following the Ascension as Peter and the others struggled to make sense of their situation. Yet, on the day of Pentecost, Peter was ready and able to speak out according to the words the Spirit gave him. The leadership that he provided to the church on that day provides an example of true Spirit led leadership, that can only originate in prayer.

Without praying, we cannot know God's call and direction, and we are left to our human judgement. Without prayer, any future vision put before the church will be solely human desires. If Jesus needed to spend quality time with his Father each day, then so do we.

The Christian Model

In Jesus, we see each of these seven characteristics displayed to perfection. Trying to isolate Jesus' leadership style from the rest of his ministry is a difficult and perhaps pointless task, for true leadership cannot be easily separated from either the leader's personality and character, or from the totality of activities in which he or she engages.

ACTION POINTER : Re-read the Gospels to find the many pointers to these seven characteristics.



Practising Integrity

This is a Bible study with a difference!! This sheet offers you help to work through how you can maintain integrity when confronted with a difficult decision. You should allow at least an hour to work through this - although it could take much longer - it's up to you!! To work through this Bible Study, you will need to use an example which you are either faced with currently or have experienced recently.

Men of Integrity : Daniel
Read through Daniel Chap 1 to Chap 3. We see Daniel and his friends staying with their principles, despite pressure to the contrary - a theme throughout the whole book of Daniel.

First take a moment to think what integrity means. Here, we shall take "behaviour and decisions which are consistently in line with our (Christian) principles" as our working definition of acting with integrity. One of the important elements of this is **consistency** - if we are unpredictable, if our decisions are dependent upon the day of the week, and the way we are feeling, others are unlikely to see us as maintaining integrity.

Phase One - Setting Down Principles.

When confronted with a situation, the first step is to determine what our Christian principles are. This may not be as easy as it sounds, particularly when faced with a difficult decision!! What are your principles that apply to this situation?? **Write them**

down. This is very important - we may think that we know them - setting it down on paper is a real test of whether that clarity is genuine!! Don't be surprised if you find it difficult - most people need some quality thinking time to get really clear on their principles.

The chances are you may need to expand on what you have written. For example, you may have written "love", or even "love for every individual concerned". But perhaps it needs to go deeper to clarify what maintaining love for each individual means. These principles must include all the relevant principles you are applying, not just those that you think are "Christian".

Phase Two - Developing Solutions

Now list your possible solutions. There may be a solution which meets all of the principles. It may even be a good one!! However, the chances are that there is no easy solution that comfortably fits all the principles. Otherwise you would probably not have selected it as an example of a difficult decision. More often we are faced with four or five possibilities, each with their advantages and drawbacks.

Men of Integrity : Peter & John
Acts 3 and 4 tell of Peter and John acting in accordance with their principles by healing the crippled beggar. They needed to justify their actions to the Sanhedrin, and needed to be fully aware of what their principles were.

Phase Three - Biblical Exploration.

The next phase is to work through each principle in turn, understanding it in depth. This is where the Bible Study comes in. Take some time to think of the biblical examples, models and passages that have led you to adopt this principle. List them, and explore how they may be relevant to your situation. The first time you do this will take time, but as you become used to the approach it will speed up! You may struggle to think of relevant biblical models or passages for some of your principles. This does not mean that your principle is wrong. What it does suggest, is being clear why you hold it as a principle!!

Phase Four - Praying into Action.

As you work through each principle, you may become aware of indicated action that the principle points towards. For instance, the principle of "love for each individual" may point you towards explaining your decision one on one with each person affected by it.

Finally, having worked through all your principles, then spend some time in prayer. God is interested in all of our problems - He's told us so!! This does not guarantee that the decision we take will be the right one! But, finally, we need to take the decision, and act accordingly. Explaining the principles behind our decision can sometimes help others accept the solution we have come to, and can support their view of our integrity - they may not agree with the decision, but can appreciate why you have made it.

ACTION POINTER : Work through this process for the decision you have recently taken, or are about to take. This will help you get used to the approach, and more comfortable with it.



Building Trust

The ability to build a trusting and trustworthy organisation is an essential characteristic of great leaders. Organisations that are prepared to redefine and share leadership and responsibility require a high degree of trust. Trust takes time to establish, and seconds to destroy. If trust is abused in a high trust organisation, then the impact can be serious, and people who misuse the system can expect to face significant penalties. Trust needs to be accompanied by accountability.

God wants us to operate at a high level of trust. God is trustworthy. *“God has said “Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you.” So we say with confidence “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid” (Hebrews 13:6) We need to learn to trust completely, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding.” (Proverbs 3:5) Our experience of placing our trust in God should encourage us to build trust within Christian fellowships.*

Trust is about relationships - between God and church members, between individuals within the church, and between church members and its leadership team. To trust requires us to be vulnerable, and to take risks, giving away control of a situation. Building relationships that contain a high degree of trust are likely to require servanthood and humility. Larry Reynolds identifies four major components of such relationships : **Competence**, **Openness**, **Reliability** and **Equity**. Bennis and Townsend have a slightly different set, adding **Caring** to the list.

COMPETENCE : This first component of a high trust relationship is the ability of the other person to meet our expectations, to do the job we are asking them to perform. For example, when we take a flight, we are placing our trust in the pilot, on the basis that his competence has been proved by achieving his pilot's licence. When we ask someone to lead a house group, we will not be able to trust them fully in this ministry until we feel confident that they have the necessary skills to lead such a group effectively. This underlines the need to ensure that we have matched roles in the church to the gifts and skills that people have, and to develop a proper process for matching people's skills and gifts to the ministries they perform within the church. It is not whether or not the job will get done well, it will influence the degree of trust within the relationship.

OPENNESS : Openness is the second component. We encourage others to trust us when we are willing to take people into our confidence, and share our views, thoughts and plans with them. For some church leaders, this is a challenge, as we may need to overcome a desire to hold back from sharing our personal needs and feelings. We may also need to assess the degree that true fellowship has been built up within the church - are members willing to share openly and honestly with one another? Openness requires us to talk about things as they are, and in love. *Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the head, that is Christ.* (Ephesians 4:15) Openness also suggests that we would do well to give encouragement and feedback to one another. Professionally, many church members will be expected to undergo some form of feedback gathering exercise as part of a development review. High trust fellowships can adopt some of these practices to provide encouragement and opportunity for personal development.

RELIABILITY : Reliability and consistency are vital. People will only trust us if they can depend on us to do what we say we will do, that week in, week out. That we will maintain our commitment to a relationship, and not “blow hot and cold.” Note that to maintain trust, we will need to reliably meet the expectations the other person has of the relationship, rather than the things we believe we have committed to. Clarifying these expectations can be important if we are to avoid misunderstanding and a reduction in the trust level. Even simple things like failing to return phone calls or not answering letters can create a perception of unreliability.

EQUITY : It will be virtually impossible to build trust if we lack integrity in our behaviour, if we favour one person over others, or if we lack fairness in our handling of situations. Within the church, how are decisions taken? Do people believe that they are taken fairly, without prejudice, or do some people feel excluded from the decision making process?

CARING : Without a genuine concern for the welfare of members of the church, trust can only be a shallow and task based. Building relationships with a high degree of trust requires us to go deeper, and to care for each other. For the church, this should not be news!

Finally we need to remember that, if others are to place their trust in us, we need to be trustworthy and we need to be willing to place our trust in others. By and large, trust needs to be earned. Warren Bennis describes trust as the emotional glue of all institutions. This prompts the thought that in using glue one cannot avoid potentially sticky situations - trust involves personal risk, but by taking these risks, we move to a deeper level of trust.

The Trust Effect, Larry Reynolds, 1997, Brearley Publishing Limited, Reinventing Leadership, Bennis & Townsend, 1995, Morrow