

4 Unsung Traits of a Biblical Leader

A simple online search for “leadership” yields 734 million results including definitions, articles, magazine subscriptions, videos, and books. If you add the word “Christian” to “leadership” you trim the results down significantly, but there’s still almost 12 million. But for this article, I’m less interested in the definition and the process of leadership than I am the connotation that comes with the word.

What do we think of when we think of leadership?

Most of us, I believe, think in terms of charisma and inspiration. That leadership is about moving people to your way of thinking of doing through the sheer force of your personality. That because of your passion, rhetoric, and drive you can move people to follow where you are going. And while there is merit to that line of thinking, it assumes that leadership happens in front of a crowd. But I’m finding more and more that some of the strongest leaders I know aren’t necessarily recognized as such. These are those who don’t have a huge audience and don’t overflow with rhetorical skill, but instead are a constant source of steady strength and resolve behind the scenes.

They don’t lead masses, but they lead their families. They don’t lead the movement but they lead meetings. They don’t lead the online community but they lead their co-workers and their friends, though no one has officially knighted them as the leader. And in these quiet leaders in the home, in the marketplace, and in relationships, there are certain qualities of leadership that often go overlooked. These qualities don’t have the same notoriety as qualities like great speaking ability or persuasive words, but they are nonetheless present in spades in those who do their leading in the most quiet of ways.

Here, then, are 4 often overlooked qualities of a Christian leader:

1. A leader tells the truth.

A true leader doesn’t just tickle the ears of the people who have fallen in line behind them. Instead, they are willing to engage in the unpopular business of truth telling. That doesn’t mean they are abrasive, wielding the truth like a jack hammer. But it does mean they are willing to engage in the difficult conversation that makes both them and the person or people they are talking to uncomfortable. They choose not to placate those around them because they know the truth is important and worth fighting for. They are courageous enough to stand on principle in their home, in their job, and in their relationships even though doing so might be costly.

What does this look like? In the family, it looks like the adult who is more committed to being a father or mother than to being the best friend of their teenager. In the marketplace, it looks like someone who is willing to quietly object for the good of the people they serve even at the risk of the bottom line. Relationally, this quality of leadership is borne out when a person isn’t content to let their friends make bad decisions, but instead engages willingly in honest and difficult conversations, for they know that the best thing any friend can do is help another friend walk

with Jesus.

2. A leader is willing to get dirty.

Many times leaders are those who are out front, and part of the danger of being out front is that you don't know what life is like within the pack. But the Christian leader is not content to spout directives without actually following up and through with the people who are hearing them. Instead, the Christian leader is also the burden bearer, one who not only sets the direction but picks up the rope to help pull the load.

What does this look like? It looks like a leader who actually knows the people he or she is leading, and they know them well. A leader like this isn't afraid to be interrupted with real life concerns, and they do things like make notes to themselves to check back in regularly not for the purpose of achieving an objective but simply to be informed about what's happening in others lives. Leaders who are willing to get dirty feel deeply the struggles of those they are leading in their home, church, or workplace. Their hands are dirty with real life stuff and not sanitized with cursory and surface knowledge.

3. A leader is decisive.

Leadership is about making decisions. A thousand times a day. And one of the overlooked qualities of leadership is the ability and willingness to make those decisions – hard decisions – in a timely manner. I know for me, as a leader in different environments, the prospect of making so many decisions on a daily basis often feels like a weight. Sometimes, a crushing weight. But the Christian leader doesn't run from this responsibility. It's not that they relish it, either, but that they know they have a job to do. They have a job as a father. As a mother. As a manager. As an elder. And they mean to see that job done.

Leadership looks like a person having it all together and boldly charging into the future, but the true guts of that leadership is, I believe, the courage to make actual real-life decisions in real-time with real people. Day after day.

4. A leader knows when to listen.

When I think of great leaders, I think of the person who has the plan. The one who charts the direction. The one who inspires with the rhetoric. But one of the most overlooked qualities of the Christian leader is knowing when to just shut up. The temptation for the leader is to believe he or she always has to be the one with the great idea. But leadership is at least as much about empowering and listening to others with great ideas as it is about generating them on your own.

The Christian leader knows when to listen to their kids. Their spouse. Their co-workers. Their team. And the true leader knows when someone else has a better idea than they do, or at least has brought some information to the table that should make him or her reconsider the direction they've planned.

Sure leaders are out front. And most of the time they've got some charisma. But don't overlook

the unsung qualities of true leaders. And don't sell short those who exhibit these qualities even if they aren't the best ones to give the speech at the end.

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