

Christian Leadership



God has called you to take responsibility! That is what leadership is all about. If you have doubts about this bold statement, then open the Bible to Genesis 1:26: *“Then God said, ‘Let us make humans in our image, in our likeness. Let them rule...’ (GW).* It doesn’t matter if you are the CEO of a company, a mother, the pastor of a church or a youth leader, you can make a positive impact in this world.

WHAT IS LEADERSHIP?

Who do we turn to in search for good leadership models? We can copy leadership patterns from business managers, military generals, village chiefs, or mission pioneers. But the best manual to learn leadership from is the Bible. Throughout four thousand years of Bible history we read about God leading his people, we follow Christ’s footsteps and watch him train his disciples and deal with the self-righteous religious leaders of that time. We also learn from many mistakes that people in the Bible made. When the Israelites had a good king, a good leader, everything went well. When they had a bad king, things went poorly for everyone.

A leader is a person who has followers. He is the person in charge, or the guide. A good leader knows where he is going. We might say he has a vision and the ability to influence others to head in the same direction. God wants to live through us, so that our influence on others is steered from the inside-out, from a heart transformed by the Holy Spirit (Eph 4:11-13).

THE NEED FOR LEADERSHIP

There is a great need for effective leaders in this world. Where are the mature believers who have the mind of Christ, who boldly confront ancestral beliefs and warn against false prophets or prosperity teaching, who do not practice favoritism, who lead by being a servant and stand up for what is right? Our generation needs Christians who take up responsibility in leading a house church, who do not get carried away by their emotions but stand up for the truth. We need leaders who are not blinded by money, even if it means personal disadvantage. Christ-like leaders are wanted today!

CHRIST – OUR MODEL

Jesus Christ is the exact model of true leadership. If spiritual leadership is to be called Christian, then it has to be Christ-like in every aspect. We may define Christian leadership in this way:

Christian leaders have the desire to become like Christ and to influence others to become like Christ.

The nature of Christ’s leadership has nothing to do with prestige and status but with being a willing and humble servant.

In Jesus’s day, the biggest desire a disciple had, was to become like the Rabbi, his teacher. In those days people would wish a new disciple well saying, “May you be covered in the dust of your Rabbi.” This means, the disciple would be very close to their teacher and watch him carefully in what he says and does. *“Those who say that they live in him must live the same way he lived” (1 Jn 2:6 GW).*

This is not done by mere imitation or out of a strenuous effort. It is the Holy Spirit who lives in us and who brings forth fruit that lasts (Gal 5:22-23). He also keeps on forming us into Christ’s image with increasing glory (2 Cor 3:18). Only Christ-like leaders make a godly impact in this world!

QUALITIES OF A CHRISTIAN LEADER

If the greatest desire of a Christian leader is to become like Christ, then his greatest concern must be to study his life carefully. By this, we find qualities that we can learn from.

Love for God. Jesus loved his father. He wanted to be alone with his father whenever he could. His passion was nothing less than to do the will of his father here on earth (Jn 4:34).

Vision from God. The Bible teaches that without a vision people perish (Prov 29:18). A vision is a God-given idea that leads to the glory of God, not to fuel man’s fame. Vision is like faith that comes alive when we see our problems through the eyes of God and are not intimidated by the impossible. “Not great faith is needed, but faith in a great God” (Hudson Taylor, remarkable pioneer to China). Despite human limitations this great God is able to do great things through us. To get a vision, a Christian needs to read and study the Bible, primarily the life and teachings of Christ. Jesus had a clear vision of what the kingdom of heaven is like (Mt 13:31-32).

Passion for God’s kingdom. Vision needs to be fuelled by passion. Jesus was ready to go through pain and suffering for the sake of fulfilling God’s will. Moses seemed to lack leadership qualities. He was impulsive and had difficulties in speaking (Ex 4:19). But God saw passion in Moses’ heart for his people and called him after forty years of shepherding sheep to leading his people out of Egypt. God put passion in the heart of Jeremiah, and it was like a fire in him that kept him going, even in times of great hardship (Jer 20:7-9). Paul says, we should serve the Lord with a heart full of devotion and passion (Ro 12:11).

Have a calling. Being called by God for a certain task is crucial because there are many challenges that await a Christian leader. Often, leaders give up along the way due to severe opposition. But if we know what we are striving for, then we can persevere even

in hard situations. A calling often comes to us by getting to know three things:

1. Know who God is.
2. Know who we are.
3. Know the need.

When you are sure of your calling, then adversities become opportunities to grow and become stronger. But there needs to be a word of caution:

Leaders, in a position of authority, are in danger of using their influence and power to oppress others. We need to discern between God's passion in our hearts and our own strong-willed desires. Being enthusiastic about something without wisdom is not good (Prv 19:2). It needs to be fuelled by the desire to glorify God and to accomplish his purpose.

LEADING MYSELF

The topic of leadership could be illustrated with a tree and its two major parts. The first part includes everything about self-leadership, dealing with the inner life – our being (the roots); the second part about leading others – doing out of being (the crown).

Things that are below the surface illustrate principles and values that come from within, originated by the Holy Spirit in us. If my inner life is healthy and in order, my outward being will reflect that and be a blessing to others.

The first battle leaders need to win is the battle within. If they cannot master their personal life, they are ineffective in the long run. A bad tree with rotten roots will never bring forth good fruit (Mt 7:18). Therefore, discipline is needed for all personal renewal and learning. The apostle Paul mentions beating his body to bring it under subjection to the obedience in Christ (1 Cor 9:27). Without discipline, leaders lose the respect of their followers and become ineffective.

Paul shows the importance of self-leadership when he talks to the elders of Ephesus, "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock" (Acts 20:28). He also writes to the young pastor Timothy and tells him to watch his life closely (1 Tim. 4:16).

May we accept discipline and be transformed by the Holy Spirit to become effective leaders. May our character become more and more like Christ in the following areas:

1. Spiritually

I will maintain a continuous and growing relationship with God and exercise spiritual self-renewal (Rom 12:2). This includes reading the Bible regularly, according to a plan, having prayer times, fasting regularly, and taking time out to be alone, learning Bible verses

with the family, guarding my heart from sin, and expecting Christ's return.

A Christian leader needs to stay connected with God. He is the source of life, strength and wisdom. Leaders grow in maturity as they accept guidance from God's word, through the Holy Spirit who gives them inner peace, through other mature Christians, and through circumstances.

2. Physically

I will keep up healthy eating habits to prevent overweight, keep away from alcohol and drugs, dress appropriately, exercise two or three times a week or work physically, have recreational times, and rest sufficiently to ensure a vigorous body to serve and honour God.

The physical part also includes managing my time (Eph 5:16) and not wasting it by roaming around for no reason, spending too much time and money on my mobile phone or playing endless computer games, watching TV too long, surfing aimlessly on the internet, or just gossiping with mates.

Our money also needs to be managed well. We should never become slaves to our money (1 Tim 6:6-11). We should give God what belongs to him, resist the temptation of making debts, and be generous to others. We should guard against buying unnecessary things like jewellery, expensive clothes, the newest electrical gadgets (tablets, TVs, etc.), and luxury items to impress others. We should not spend too much on funerals, weddings and naming ceremonies, borrow money from others, or be manipulated by advertisements.

3. Mentally

I will cultivate the habit of studying Scripture or other inspirational literature; train my mind in reading, writing, planning, pondering and listening, and so maintain the habit of being a life-long learner (Phil 3:12, Ez 7:10).

Jesus also grew in wisdom, knowledge and favour before men (Lk 2:52). We can grow in wisdom and knowledge by going to school and reading books but also by reflecting on daily experiences and seeing the hand of God in our circumstances. Christian leaders can learn especially from conflicts, adversities, and in times of crisis. Leaders never graduate from the school of life.

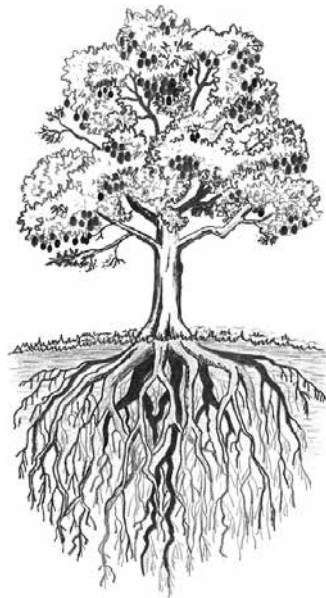
4. Emotionally

I take up responsibility for my emotions. In conflicts I will listen attentively, seek diplomacy, be patient and compassionate, thankful and content. I will strive to be positive, of encouragement to others, share my life and serve others to help them become what God wants them to be.

Imagine our emotions being like a horse. You are the rider that needs to train the horse and not let it run off. We need self-control, especially with emotions like anger, fear, and worries (1 Pt 5:7). Paul is a good example in experiencing the power of God through emotional disturbances (2 Cor 4:8-11).

5. Socially

I will strive to share my life wholeheartedly with my wife, be a loving father and guide to my children, have some close friends that keep me accountable, show unconditional love to others and be responsible for my own life.



The leader's closest earthly companions are his or her spouse and children. Christian leaders will sacrificially love and share their life with their spouse and nurture, train, and be a role model to their children. Neglecting the family means that leaders disqualify themselves of leading in the church (1 Tim 3:5). No leader is perfect and even great leaders have their flaws, but God can use them even when they make mistakes. Important is that they humble themselves, repent and learn from their flaws.

Leaders need to have a few good friends of their own sex to share their lives with. Being accountable to each other will guard them from various pitfalls. Examples of good friendships in the Bible are: Daniel, who rushed to his friends to strengthen his faith (Dn 2:17), David and Jonathan, Ruth and Naomi, and Paul with his companion Titus.

Self-leadership is not so much getting a grip on myself, it is more allowing God to get hold of me and using me as he wants. This means obedience to his word and to the guidance of the Holy Spirit as expressed in Ephesians 4. By giving special care to my "roots" (spiritually, physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially) my effectiveness as a leader, or the "crown" of the tree, will grow.

LEADING OTHERS

After dealing with the roots (healthy inner life), we will now examine the crown of the tree. A healthy tree produces fruit, the leaves provide good shade to sit under, birds make nests in the branches, and even the wood is used for fire to cook food and to give warmth in cool nights.

What kind of fruit is evident in a Christian leader? Some qualities are: humility, discipline, wisdom, courage, integrity, patience, respectful and polite behaviour, diplomacy or attentiveness. But the fundamental nature of Christ's leadership is servanthood!

Servant Leadership

The principle of serving is indispensable for Christian leadership. "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk 10:45). Leadership training, therefore, should not focus entirely on leadership but rather on servanthood. Christ calls his followers to be servants for building his kingdom (Lk 22:26), not rulers of this world system who "lord it over them, and [...] exercise authority over them (Mt 20:25)." Leaders are most effective when laying their lives down for their friends (Jn 10:11). Jesus said, "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet" (Jn 13:14).

John Kirkpatrick states: "In this world, the test of greatness lies in the number of followers one can control. In the kingdom of God, the test of greatness lies in the number of people one can serve."

Jesus washed his disciples' feet (Jn 13). They were the "kings" and he was the servant. This attitude was contrary to the culture of that time. In the same way, Christian leadership is opposite to the "big-man" mentality of many cultures where the chief is superior to the rest and the one to be served. When Jesus washed his disciple's feet, he risked that his followers might not respect him anymore. But no, people follow and respect leaders who serve humbly. As a servant leader Jesus modelled what it is

like to invest in people's lives, to be "with them" and to nurture their growth.

Servant Leadership in Africa

The aid convoy stopped at the refugee camp. "Food! Food at last," cried the starving crowd. The British soldiers who were there to protect the convoy from rioters, tried to bring order into the chaos. The stronger aid-seekers easily pushed the weak aside and elbowed their way to the front of the line. When everyone had received his share, the food was gone, and the crowd dispersed. But one of the soldiers noticed the small and thin woman, who had been pushed aside. Her worried eyes met his. He remembered the banana he had saved for his own lunch. It was all he had. He walked over and handed it to her. Only then did he see the two little boys lying in the shade, too weak to get up. She peeled the banana, broke it in two, and gave a piece to each of them. Then she ate the peel."

<https://www.dreamsindeed.org/news/recognizing-servant-leaders-not-drum-majors/>

"It was the most moving illustration of servant leadership I have ever seen," the soldier confessed years later. "She changed the course of my life. I resigned from my career to follow her example, serving with communities in need in Africa."

The true nature of Christian leadership, therefore, is servanthood. The opposite of a servant leader is a selfish and a proud ruler. This kind of leader is characterized by competing with others, desiring power, being insensitive, and considering himself bigger and better than others. We know that our old self has died with Christ on the cross with all its anger, pride, and selfish ambition. In faith we live in a new creation (2 Cor 5:17), and as a Christian leader we have been given the strength by the Spirit to "carry the cross of Jesus" and be a servant to others.

I am touched by the example of Epaphroditus. He is more like an unknown hero because we don't read much about him. He risked his life and nearly died for the sake of Christ to serve Paul and the church (Phil 2:30). It might be appropriate to ask ourselves today again: "Why am I leading? Is it for selfish gain or is it to serve others and to glorify God?" Servant-leaders eat banana peels and change the world!

CONCLUSION

How badly do you want to become like Christ? We lead like Christ when we are filled with the Holy Spirit and have a vision and passion for the kingdom of God. We are disciplined in leading ourselves first and as a result compassionate in leading others. By taking "the towel" we demonstrate service, not status. Such Christ-like leaders leave a lasting impact in this world; they serve the body of Christ and bear fruit to glorify God.

Torsten Kugler

APPLICATION TO YOUR PERSONAL LIFE

Answer the questions below. You might need a separate sheet of paper for the answers. If you have questions, discuss them with another Christian leader.

1. What has God called mankind to do right from the beginning?
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2. Where do we find the best leadership lessons?
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3. Think of some needs in your community where leadership is essential.
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4. Can you still recall how Christian leadership is defined in this article?
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5. What was the biggest desire of a disciple in Jesus' time?
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6. Which quality of a Christian leader do you think is most important?
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7. Can you think of some other qualities that a Christian leader needs?
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8. What three things should we get to know to receive a calling from God?
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9. Why is it so important to lead ourselves before we lead others?
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10. In what five personal areas should we lead ourselves?
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
 - e.
11. Take your time and think carefully about all five areas in your life. Make notes. Where do you need to grow more?
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12. Name at least one or two good friends you can share your heart with.
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13. According to our article, what is the true nature of leadership?
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14. In what way was the leadership style of Jesus contrary to the leadership style of his day?
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15. The act of Jesus washing his disciple's feet was a risk. Explain why?
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16. Think of some ways you can serve others better.
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17. What are your motives of being a leader?
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Bible Translations used:
NIV where nothing else mentioned; God's Word (GW).



We encourage Christian workers to study this paper seriously and to make your personal notes. We pray that God will richly bless you personally and also your ministry and church.

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| ◆ BBT 01 God — Father | ◆ BBT 10 Relationship with God |
| ◆ BBT 02 God — Son | ◆ BBT 12 Revival |
| ◆ BBT 03 God — Holy Spirit | ◆ BBT 13 Holy Communion/Water Baptism |
| ◆ BBT 04 The Bible | ◆ BBT 14 Christian Virtues |
| ◆ BBT 05 Creation and Man | ◆ BBT 15 Christian Stewardship |
| ◆ BBT 06 Salvation | ◆ BBT 18 The Church and its Pastor |
| ◆ BBT 07 Christian Life I | ◆ BBT 19 Leading a Church |
| ◆ BBT 08 Christian Life II | |
| ◆ BBT 09 Marriage and Family Life | |

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