

**What is a Christian Leader?**  
**12 Ways To Conceive of Leaders**  
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We can describe leaders from several perspectives, each of which casts a different light on what goes into the complex task of leadership.

**The Leader as Visionary**

Many of the best leaders lead via vision. Such leaders get an idea (hopefully through interaction with God) that they want to share with others. The idea is often a mental picture of a possible future based on biblical principles combined with imagination or possibly, an actual special revelatory "vision" from God. This idea excites such leaders or fills them with longing. They want others to see what they see and appreciate how cool it would be. A leader may not always develop a new, unique vision, but may buy into another's vision. Some studies suggest that the best leaders are not necessarily the most creative people in a community, although they are usually more creative than average. Whether the leader's vision is original or borrowed is unimportant. Good leaders practice ways to communicate their visions, tying future pictures to past realities, showing how such a picture is better than the status quo. They can explain why attaining such a vision justifies risk and pain. Followers of visionaries find their excitement contagious, and accept the leader's vision as their own. They find themselves highly motivated to attain the vision, usually without much consideration of personal benefit.

**The Leader as Student**

In the Christian context, leaders are those who take the time to think deeply about the issues in which they lead. Most great leaders in Christian history were also scholars (e.g. Luther, Calvin, Wesley, Edwards, etc.). It makes sense that people are attracted to those who know what they are talking about because of their deep study of the word. Likewise, an agenda that has been carefully thought through, not only from the standpoint of what will give results pragmatically, but also from the standpoint of the theological implications and overall theological and biblical balance is often (though not always) more persuasive. Christians should look, not for leaders who can press their own agenda, but for those who know and can press God's agenda. Such leaders gain much of their inner strength and stability from the fact that they have reflected long and hard on their lives, the church, and the Bible, and are convinced about what God wants.

**The Leader as Influencer**

Someone is a leader when she influences other people, whether for good or bad. We lead others whenever we cause others to change their behavior or attitudes, either because they see our example and admire it, or because we persuade them with words to change. We can persuade more effectively after we carefully reflect before God on what others need to change in their lives. Practice in persuasion and learning to show others what they have to gain through change are basic skills in leadership. Also, personal investment into others' lives leads to increased influence in those lives. Some leaders focus primarily on influencing those with whom they are deeply involved relationally, and depend on them to influence others.

### **The Leader as a Passion-infuser**

Leaders may often suggest nothing new or different from what people are already doing, but are leaders in that they bring a sense of urgency, excitement, or passion to those activities. Leaders' own passion becomes contagious. People are drawn to passionate, excited people as they seek passion and excitement in their own lives. If we learn how to get passion and excitement in our own minds regarding the things of God, leadership is sure to show, and people will be influenced as a result.

### **The Leader as Team builder**

Strong leaders are effective at bringing others together in a team. This is often the difference between leaders and others who also get good ideas, but never have much impact on the Body of Christ. Bringing people together and helping them overcome barriers to understanding, personal resentments, jealousies, and prejudice is typical work for leaders. Good leaders often engage in conflict management with peaceful results. Those who try to manage conflict between others but end up fanning the flames or consistently repudiating one or the other party in conflict usually cannot lead for long, or at least must have a small following. Team-building also means that the leader is a consensus former. She is able to get more than one person to agree about key values or directions of movement.

### **The Leader as Victorious Sufferer**

Those who lead suffer just like others, and often more than others. The difference is that leaders can suffer with grace and even with thanksgiving. They remain focused and functional during times of suffering and do not lose confidence in their principles as much as others might. Leaders know how to avoid focusing only on their own suffering even during times of intense pain. They can keep their eye on the ball spiritually at least most of the time. People admire the heroism of those who can suffer without losing their trust in God or their commitment to others. They will ponder how to gain that ability for themselves and become willing to follow the leader as a result. Leaders who lose their composure too often or too completely when suffering usually forfeit influence with those they lead.

### **The Leader as a Fighter**

Leaders often have to fight negative trends or false beliefs that develop within groups. Good leaders carefully consider before God what factors are leading to the negative trends or views among their friends, and devise counter-measures. Leaders know that Satan launches attacks on the health of any group of fruitful Christians, and this knowledge leads to important conclusions: 1) Individuals within the group are not the ultimate source of wrong thought and action because "we wrestle not with flesh and blood." (Eph. 6:12) Therefore, even propagators of wrong can be, and often are salvaged and rescued from their own foolishness. Look for good leaders to be co-workers with some who were in sin in the past and some who opposed them earlier. Of course, even the best leader will lose some who fall into error, and good leaders are willing to sustain such losses rather than go soft on God's standards. 2) Anticipating spiritual attack leads to watchfulness and alertness (1 Pet. 5:8). Leaders are not always the first to discern a problem, but they are attentive to problems whether discovered by themselves or others. 3) Leaders know they have to fight in prayer and they bring others into this work. (Rom. 15:30)

### **The Leader as a Helper and Giver**

Jesus taught that the heart of spiritual leadership is servant hood. (Mk. 10:43,44) People are attracted to those who have served them and helped them in the past, and will often follow their advice. Leaders won't feel they have to meet all needs in the church, but will regularly strip themselves to wash the saints' feet. People are suspicious of leaders who put on airs and seem to feel they are too important to do common-place work. Such leaders forfeit influence

### **The Leader as Determined Man or Woman of Integrity**

Leaders are regularly battered by circumstances, by Satan, and by their own people. All good leaders must demonstrate that they can take it without losing composure. People are drawn to strength of character, and tend to believe what strong people say. While they may feel sympathetic toward the weak, they tend not to follow them. This doesn't mean leaders should pretend they are not suffering, but that their determination and integrity dictate that they maintain consistency even in the face of suffering. It also means that a leader would continue to pursue the right goals and live for God even if no one else follows. A good leader is not afraid of rejection by his followers because his concern is doing what is right, not being followed. Jesus taught that the good shepherd "goes out before them" which means that such a shepherd sets a course knowing that the sheep will follow after. When people sense that a leader is more concerned about being followed than about what God wants, they grow cynical about following. Most people are suspicious of leaders anyway, and will test leaders by threatening not to follow. Only when they see that a leader can't be manipulated will they realize their choice is to follow or to take their chances elsewhere.

### **The Leader as Stabilizer**

Good leaders tend to be relatively stable over a period of years. While poor leaders periodically strike off in radically different directions, good leaders commonly stick with their handful of central values and convictions. Innovation takes the form of finding new and different ways to achieve old goals that haven't changed in decades of the leader's life. Another common form of instability is quitting. Unstable leaders leave the work for various reasons, while good leaders are present and accounted for year in and year out. Many who demonstrate terrific natural charismatic leadership ability end up being poor leaders because of the erratic course of their lives, while others who manifest little natural leadership end up being respected and effective leaders because of their sheer dogged focus on basic spiritual principles. In times of crisis, people tend to fall apart and panic, often proposing destructive radical solutions to the problems at hand. The good leader is the one who stands firm under crisis and cannot be moved from the foundation of truth. People are attracted to such stability and reliability, rightly discerning that such reliability is the result of clear vision for God's way.

### **The Leader as Compromiser**

Ironically, good leaders are also compromisers. While doggedness and determination are important, perfectionism works against effective leadership. We live in a fallen world where our visions will never be completely fulfilled. People never quite do what they should and life always presents us with the unexpected. As a result, leaders realize they need to get the best they can, while not insisting on perfection or even on complete agreement. Wise leaders realize that the closer they come to their goal, the better, and that any movement is better than no movement. They also realize that a following must either be very small, or must include those who have a slightly different view, even though in general agreement on the most important issues. Leaders also realize they must prioritize goals and they feel good when major goals are attained even though lesser goals are not. Leaders who fail to prioritize, or who are perfectionist, run the danger of eventually breaking themselves and those around them. They are poor at team building, and cannot negotiate effectively. In the end, they nearly always forfeit their following.

### **The Leader as Encourager**

While it is possible to lead without encouraging, good leaders have learned to use this important spiritual tool. The Bible commands us to encourage one another, and the leader should show the way in this area. (1 Thes. 5:11) Leaders are those who, through encouragement, can restore confidence and enthusiasm to a group of people who are discouraged and depressed. Good leaders are constantly reminding people of their value, of God's love, of the promises of Scripture, and that failure is not the end of the world. Since followers are bound to fail often, the role of encourager, while not owned exclusively by leaders, is crucial to leaders' ability to maintain morale. Encouragement coming from a leader often has more impact for good than that coming from others.