

Attributes of a Leader

Proverbs 29:2: *When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn.*

Everything rises and falls on leadership. In periods of Biblical history where there was no certain or definite leader, there was a slow but sure moral and societal breakdown (see **Judges** 17:6; **18:7**; 21:25). If the shepherd be smitten, the sheep shall be scattered (Zechariah 13:7), and if the ruler hearkens to lies, all who serve him will be wicked (Proverbs 29:12). For want of a leader to spiritually guide the masses, Jesus, in the wake of his own ministerial success, uttered his well-known lamentation of compassion (Matthew 9:36-38). By the same token, though, as essential as a leader is, not just any will do. God's leaders in the Bible have a medley of characteristics which set them apart for divinely-appointed ministry.

Because God is the chief leader above all leaders (II Chronicles 20:6; Psalm 103:19; Daniel 4:17), he is to be taken as the principal ruler in our life (e.g., Psalm 23:2-3; Isaiah 48:17). Human authorities will inevitably come short of God's expectations—the meek Moses pompously exalted himself in the congregation (Numbers 20:7-13), and the mighty David was mired in an adulterous, murderous scandal (see II Samuel 11). Thus, God beckons us to find in him our infallible leader and peerless guide (Isaiah 49:8-11; see also Psalm 31:3). A good leader according to God's heart is one who most closely follows after the Lord, “knowing that your Master also is in heaven” (Ephesians 6:9). They are, in the sincerest sense of the term, *godly*, because “the LORD hath set apart him that is godly for himself” (Psalm 4:3).

Judges 8:23: And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the LORD shall rule over you

Key Attributes of a Leader

The Leader's Character

Righteousness

A good leader has a commitment to righteousness and justice (see II Samuel 23:3). They, like **Ezra** and **Paul**, are appalled to hear of gross wickedness being committed and tolerated (see Ezra 9-10; I Corinthians 5). They, like **Solomon**, take immediate action against moral corruption (see I Kings 1-2), and execute speedy justice (see Ecclesiastes 8:11). They, like **Jesus** in his millennial reign, wield a rod of iron as a symbolic testimony that they will not tolerate evil (Psalm 2:9; Revelation 2:27; 12:5; 19:15). A righteous leader will not continue in the sins of his predecessors (II Kings 13:6; 14:24), nor shy from exposing and deposing any wicked-doer, regardless of their person (I Kings 15:13; contrast: II Samuel 2:29-30), nor will he fear the reproach of the people for how he leads (I Samuel 15:24), but “in righteousness” he will “judge” his neighbor (Leviticus 19:15), condemning the wicked and justifying the righteous (see I Kings 8:32).

Proverbs 20:8, 26: A king that sitteth in the throne of judgment scattereth away all evil with his eyes. . .²⁶ A wise king scattereth the wicked, and bringeth the wheel over them.

Wisdom

A good leader is exceedingly wise. When Joseph advised Pharaoh to appoint a leader over Egypt to prepare the nation for the coming famine, he related that the man must be “discreet and wise” (Genesis 41:33). Joshua, who took Moses' judgeship seat, was “full of the spirit of wisdom” (Deuteronomy 34:9). When selecting the seven proto-deacons for the church at Jerusalem, the apostles specified the criteria of them being greatly imbued with wisdom (Acts 6:3). The children of this world generally understand that a leader must be one astute and abundant in knowledge, and in this they can often be wiser than the children of light (see Luke 16:8), who occasionally

will set up a leader having very little qualification by way of acumen. David was a man much set by on account of his wisdom. He “behaved himself wisely” (I Samuel 18:5), “wisely in all his ways” (v. 14), “very wisely” (v. 15), “more wisely than all the servants of Saul” (v. 30). To know God’s word on an intimate, intricate, intellectual level is what we naturally expect from a spiritual leader—the best Bible teacher, in every instance, is at first the best Bible student (I Timothy 3:14, “the things which thou hast learned”; Titus 1:9, “as he hath been taught”). Not one with a superficial level of Biblical erudition, but one who, like **John** of the incarnate Christ, has heard, seen, looked upon, and handled the word of God (I John 1:1). We want a preacher who will confidently say with **Jesus**, when challenged by opponents, “show me a penny” (Luke 20:24). We desire an expositor of the word who will proclaim with **Solomon**, in a spiritual dilemma, “bring me a sword” (I Kings 3:24). Give us a **Paul**, who when he teaches, we may understand his knowledge in the mystery of Christ (see Ephesians 3:4).

Proverbs 8:16: By me [wisdom] princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth.

Courage

A good leader is bold and courageous. It is unbecoming of a Christian, but most especially a Christian leader, to be racked and taken with fear. Joshua was four-times charged in his divine commission to “be strong and of a good courage” (**Joshua 1:6, 7, 9, 18**), and he likewise instilled this spirit in those under his charge (Joshua 10:25; 23:6; see also I Chronicles 28:20). Jeremiah mocked the men of Judah, stiff-necked and stubbornly refusing to obey the words of the Lord from his mouth, by comparing their fearful stance to that of women in labor (Jeremiah 30:5-6; see also 50:37; 51:30). What was set to be spoken unto the military men of Israel, we may rightly say to any would-be preacher of the word: “What man is there that is fearful and fainthearted? let him go and return unto his house...” (Deuteronomy 20:8; cf. Judges 7:3). Godly preachers will evince a bold and unwavering demeanor in the face of trial, trouble, and tribulation. They, like **Amos** and **the apostles**, will put their finger in the face of political potentates who try to silence them (Amos 7:10-17; Acts 5:27-29). They, like **Jesus** and **Paul**, will teach and preach with all authority, no man forbidding them (Matthew 7:29; Acts 28:31; see also Titus 2:15). They, like **Nehemiah** and **John**, will courageously confront and condemn the workers of iniquity (Nehemiah 13:7-8; III John 9-10).

II Timothy 1:7: For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

The Leader’s Behavior

Service

A good leader is a servant. The greatest leader (“the chiefest”) is defined by Jesus as the “servant of all” (Mark 10:44). Many regard the apostle Paul as the greatest Christian who ever lived. This can well be attributed to his unselfish and unceasing service to others (see I Corinthians 9:19). What Paul preached about being a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1-2), he practiced, being “offered upon the sacrifice and service” of the faith of others (Philippians 2:17). Those who exploit their spiritual position as an opportunity to reign as a king (see **I Corinthians 4:8-13**) are not following in the steps of him who bid us follow him as he followed Christ (see John 6:15; 18:36). The Bible writer chronicles this as an evil under the sun, that “there is a time wherein one man ruleth over another to his own hurt” (Ecclesiastes 8:9). Sad as it may be, there seems to be no end of spiritual leaders who “with force and with cruelty” rule over the flock (Ezekiel 34:4)—they seek their own, not the things which are Jesus’s Christs (Philippians 2:21). They love their seat (Matthew 23:6), their lofty titles (vv. 7-10), and their honor of men (v. 14), but they do not love their people. As it was for the Israelites under Egyptian bondage, “they that hated them ruled over them” (Psalm 106:41). They, as Solomon, set a heavy yoke upon their subjects (I Kings 12:4), and reign over them with rigor (see Leviticus 25:43, 46, 53; see **Mark 10:42**). However, just like the husband, leader of his wife (see I Corinthians 9:5; Esther 1:22), is to love his wife as Christ loved

the church (Ephesians 5:25), so too those who are spiritual leaders of the people of God should have a strong love for others, a love which compels them to distribute, of their life, to the necessity of the saints (Romans 12:13) in whatsoever way they can. As one man put it, “Before you become a leader, success is about growing yourself. When you become a leader, success is all about growing others.”

Godly leaders, like **Jacob** and **Paul**, gently lead the people as they are able to endure (Genesis 33:14; Philippians 2:28). They, as **Moses**, attend habitually to the lives of the people God has entrusted to them “from the morning unto the evening” (Exodus 18:13). Servant-leaders, like **Boaz**, foster and naturally possess a joyful, sweet communion with those under their authority (see Ruth 2:4). They will, as **Nehemiah**, be afflicted in all that wherein the congregation of believers is afflicted, and will purposely not take advantage of special privileges they might procure unto themselves, out of compassion for others (see **Nehemiah 5:14-19**; cf. II Samuel 11:11).

Productivity

A good leader leads by example, and accomplishes what he expects to be done, in part, by himself. Nothing is perhaps more frustrating than a leader who demands of others what he himself will not even attempt; for, says he, “they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers” (**Matthew 23:4**). When the leader takes part in the toil of the people, it lightens the load physically (part of the work passes to him) and emotionally (the people are encouraged). Thus, it seems in the ancient world that kings had a custom of going forth to battle in their own person (see II Samuel 11:1; e.g., I Kings 22:29; II Kings 23:29). Indeed, **David**, stricken in years, had to be told to “go no more out with us to battle,” lest he be killed (II Samuel 21:17). Many of those sloths of the cloth, however, are of the number about whom Job says he “would have disdained to set with the dogs of my flock” (Job 30:1; cf. Genesis 47:6). They are the leaders condemned by Nehemiah’s pen with this solemn aside: “but their nobles put not their necks to the work of their Lord” (**Nehemiah 3:5**). **Nehemiah** himself refused the Tirshathan-repose he may have clutched, and for the duration of the building project of the Jerusalem wall kept his work-clothes on even as he slept (**Nehemiah 4:22-23**). A godly leader, like **Joshua**, is not one who has to be told to work, but rather always finds themselves *telling others* to get to work (Joshua 17:14-18). **Jesus** clearly didn’t send his disciples to preach in all the cities of Israel as he reclined drinking a soda pop in a hammock, as it were—immediately after he “made an end of commanding his twelve disciples,” it is reported that “*he* departed thence to teach and to preach in their cities” (Matthew 11:1).

Determination

A good leader has, implements, and follows through on a definite plan. Jesus famously described false teachers as “blind leaders of the blind” (Matthew 15:14/Luke 6:39): blind to *right doctrine* (or, beliefs; Matthew 15:1-12; 23:16-19), blind to *right practice* (or, duties; Matthew 23:23-24), and blind to *right behavior* (or, deeds; Matthew 23:25-26; John 9:39-41). They who are such cause those who follow them “to err” (see Isaiah 3:12; 9:16). Bad leaders, like Elimelech, will lead a people outside the will of God for their life (Ruth 1:1), whereas good leaders, like **Samuel**, “will teach you the good and the right way” (I Samuel 12:23). God’s leader will always be *a man with a plan*, who can produce a certain sound on his trumpet that will straightway cause his people to prepare themselves to the battle (see I Corinthians 14:8). They, like **Nehemiah**, long have thoughts and preparations about what should be done for the furtherance of the kingdom of God before the plan is officially implemented (Nehemiah 2:11-16). The look into the future, as **Joseph** did, and ready the people for it (Genesis 41:28-36; see also Acts 14:21). They seek God’s guidance and counsel by prayer (see Acts 18:21; **Romans 1:10**; I Thessalonians 3:10), like **Paul**, and chart a ministerial course on the basis of the help in planning given them by the Spirit of God (see Acts 16:7; **Romans 1:13**). They don’t quit when things get difficult, but, like **Joshua**, they press on to fulfill their ministry, to finish what they began, that it could be said of them that they “left nothing undone of all that the LORD commanded” (Joshua 11:15).