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*Equipping, Enabling, and Encouraging Marketplace Leaders*

## 13 Traits of Remarkable Biblical Leaders You Should Have

Ezekiel and his family were among the 10,000 leaders, officials, craftsmen, and artisans captured in Jerusalem by King Nebuchadnezzar and led into Babylon to serve as slaves (2 Kings 24:14). Talk about a reversal of fortune! The wealthiest leaders of Israel were suddenly slaves in a foreign land.

Ezekiel was only 25 years old when this happened. When he was thirty years old, God called him to prophesy against the people of Israel who had accommodated themselves to the rule of the Babylonians.

*“Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? You eat curds, cloth yourselves with wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals. My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them.” (Ezekiel 34:2-6).*

Within this prophesy the Lord provides some very interesting perspectives about leadership.

- **Leaders need to take care of the people for whom they are responsible.** The Lord pronounces a “woe” upon those “*who only take care of themselves.*” Those who keep the best of the food and clothing while letting the people suffer are not good leaders.
- **Leaders are servants to the people.** The sheep have many needs; the weak need to be strengthened, the sick need to be healed, and the lost need to be found. An effective leader uses his position to serve the needs of others rather than use the people to serve his needs.



- **Leaders should not be harsh dictators.** Those leaders who “*rule harshly and brutally*” found their sheep scattered because “*there was no shepherd.*” In effect, He is saying that a leader who leads harshly is not a leader at all!

## 13 Remarkable Leadership Traits

The Bible provides many examples of both strong and weak leaders. Characteristics of leaders capable of meeting the needs of the people include loyalty, courage, desire, emotional stability, empathy, decisiveness, risk-takers, a sense of timing, competitiveness, confidence, accountability, trustworthiness, and a servant’s heart.

### Loyalty

Loyalty between master and servant, and between servant and master is a reciprocal relationship common among strong leaders.

Elisha was loyal to Elijah to the extent that even though Elijah encouraged Elisha not to follow him, Elisha refused (2 Kings 2:1-12). On three separate occasions, Elisha restated his desire to stay with his master until the very end. His reward for this loyalty was to inherit Elijah’s powers and responsibilities.

Consider also the example of Peter (Mark 14). Peter declares his intention to follow Jesus even if everyone else falls away. Despite this declaration, we know that Peter failed, and in fact denied that he even knew Jesus.

Certainly, it is not wise to accept everyone’s pledge of loyalty as truth. While some fully intend to be loyal, stressful situations cause difficulties. Jesus recognized Peter’s love and remained loyal to him.

Loyalty is sweetest when it is a reciprocal relationship built on trust.

### Courage

Leaders must have courage. The job of leadership is often a lonely one, confronted with obstacles and adversity. A good leader must have the courage to bear up under these difficulties.

One of the most powerful pictures of courage in the Bible is the young boy David who steps onto the battlefield to face Goliath (1 Samuel 17). David was a shepherd whose only weapon was a sling. He faced Goliath, a giant over nine feet tall, who was a professional soldier.

David picked five smooth stones for his sling, one for Goliath, and one for each of Goliath’s four sons. What courage it took to face the best soldier of an enemy nation armed with only a sling and five small stones!

**Desire**

Strong leaders have a desire to lead that is inescapable. They would rather lead others, affect the outcomes of events, and change processes than anything else.

Consider the example of Paul, who by his own account was shipwrecked, flogged, and thrown into prison for years. Paul endured this because of his intense desire to see the job he was commissioned to do completed.

**Emotional Stability**

Ever increasing levels of responsibility bring more and more stress. Good leaders have the ability to maintain composure in the face of adversity. They can recover quickly from the disappointment of failure with their perspectives clearly in focus. This kind of emotional stability and resilience are marks of a strong leader.

Job provides a wonderful example of a man, who in the face of adversity, maintained his emotional stability. A wealthy man, Job first lost his sons and their families, then his servants and livestock, and finally he was stricken with sores over his whole body.

Despite much physical and emotional pain Job maintained his emotional stability through his faith in God.

**Empathy**

Leaders must be able to appreciate the differences between people's values and other cultures. Empathy brings about a unique understanding that is required to be able to meet people's needs.

Jesus is the greatest example of a man who understood and valued the differences between people. In the selection of the apostles he chose a wide variety of people; a Pharisee, a tax collector, Jews, Greeks, young, old, well educated, and those with no education. He chose them all with a complete understanding of how they would work to complete the missions assigned to them.

**Decisiveness**

Leaders must be able to make decisions. Wishy-washy procrastinators confuse and discourage subordinates.

Jesus never had any trouble making decisions. When He encountered the moneychangers at the temple, He immediately overthrew their tables saying, *"My house will be called a house of prayer, but you are making it a den of robbers"* (Mat 21:13).

**Risk-Takers**

Leaders are willing to step out and take risks when others retreat to the comfort of stable security.



Paul's life during his three missionary journeys, conducted over a twelve-year period, are a testimony to a man willing to take risks. He willingly placed himself in circumstances of great risk to fulfill his commission to spread the Gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 13-28).

### **A Sense of Timing**

A leader must develop a sense of timing. The ability to know how and when to make a decision, when to make announcements, when to make changes, etcetera.

Jesus provides many examples of a perfect sense of timing. He always knew the right word or the right lesson, and the perfect time to deliver them.

While he was in the garden of Gethsemane he had found, the disciples sleeping three times when He said, *"Are you still sleeping? Look the hour is near, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer"* (Mat 26:45-46).

### **Competitiveness**

Leaders have an intense desire to win. Second place is *not* good enough. Although no one wins all the time, strong leaders know which races are the most important to win.

In his letter to the Corinthians Paul writes, *"Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize"* (1 Cor 9:24). Paul encourages the Corinthians to understand which races are important and not settle for second best.

### **Confidence**

Strong leaders exude confidence. Despite personal doubts, they appear confident of their ability to succeed at all times, and this confidence carries over to subordinates.

Moses provides an example of outward confidence and inner doubt as he said, *"O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue"* (Exodus 4:10). God had directed Moses to speak to the Israelites, but Moses wasn't confident of his ability. God replied, *"Now go, I will help you speak and will teach you what to say"* (Exodus 4:12).

### **Accountability**

Leaders understand the need to praise others for their work and take responsibility for failure. Strong leaders not only give credit where credit is due but take responsibility for the failures of their subordinates.

Remember the parable of the talents that Jesus taught the disciples (Matthew 25)? The master gave three servants five, two, and one talent of money to invest on his behalf while he was away. When the master returned, he rewarded the men who invested well. The master held the man who did not invest well accountable for his actions.



## **Trust**

A leader has the trust of friend and foe alike. His word is his bond. His yes means yes and his no means no.

Jesus provides an important lesson about trust saying, *“Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much” (Luke 16:10).*

## **Servant**

Above all else, a leader knows that it is his or her job to serve. There is no need for a shepherd if there is no flock.

Certainly, no one can be seen as more of a master and a servant in the Bible than Jesus himself. Among the dozens of examples of how He cared for His flock is a simple but dramatic example of when He abruptly stopped eating dinner to wash the disciples’ feet. He did this to provide an example of how He wanted them to serve and care for others (John 13).

## **One Final Thought**

In his book, *Leadership Is an Art*, author Max Dupree notes, “The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. In between the two, the leader must become a servant and a debtor. That sums up the progress of an artful leader.”

Leadership is not a science. If it were there would be a handbook of simple rules and regulations that when followed would create great leaders.

Newspapers do not announce, “A 6-pound 12-ounce leader was born today at 2:16 pm.” Leaders are made not born. A good leader’s skills are forged through the difficulties of real life experience.

That should give us all hope. If we are not the quintessential leader that we might hope to be, we can study great leaders, understand their strengths, and try to emulate them. Eventually, with experience and dedication, you can develop the leadership skills you desire!