

CHARACTERISTICS OF CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP

Defining Christian Leadership



Before commencing study, use the space provided to write down what you understand by the term “**Christian Leadership**”:

Describing Christian Leadership

Many people have tried to describe leadership. Consider the following - which do you regard as valid descriptions of a Christian leader?

If you have to tell people you're a leader, you are probably not.

“The final test of a leader is that he leaves behind him in other men the conviction and the will to carry on.”

- **Walter Lippmann**, US journalist, writing about U.S. President Roosevelt

The art of leadership consists in consolidating the attention of the people against a single adversary and taking care that nothing will split up that attention.

- **Adolf Hitler** in *Mein Kampf*.

People ask the difference between a leader and a boss. The leader works in the open, and the boss in covert. The leader leads, and the boss drives.

- **Theodore Roosevelt** (1858–1919), U.S. Republican President.

The real leader has no need to lead—he is content to point the way.

- **Henry Miller**, U.S. author.

“The leader is like a shepherd. He stays behind the flock, letting the most nimble go on ahead, whereas the others follow, not realising all along that they are being directed from behind. There are times when a leader must move out ahead of the flock, go off in a new direction, confident that he is leading his people the right way.”

- **Nelson Mandela**, *“The Long Walk to Freedom”*.

“Of a good leader, when his task is finished, his goal achieved, they will say, “We did this ourselves.”

- **Lao-Tse**, Chinese Philosopher, 600 BC.

“Leadership is the ability to obtain followers.”

- **James C. Georges**, ParTraining Corporation.

“Leadership is one of the things you cannot delegate. You either exercise it, or you abdicate it.”

- **Robert Goizueta**, Chief Executive of Coca-Cola

The Bible offers further descriptions of Christian Leadership:

So Jesus called them together and said, “You know that in this world kings are tyrants, and officials lord it over the people beneath them. But among you it should be quite different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be the slave of all. For even I, the Son of Man, came here not to be served but to serve others, and to give my life as a ransom for many.”

- **Jesus**, Mark 10:42-45

Dear brothers and sisters, when I first came to you I didn't use lofty words and brilliant ideas to tell you God's message. And my message and my preaching were very plain. I did not use wise and persuasive speeches, but the Holy Spirit was powerful among you.

- **Paul**, 1 Corinthians 2:1-4

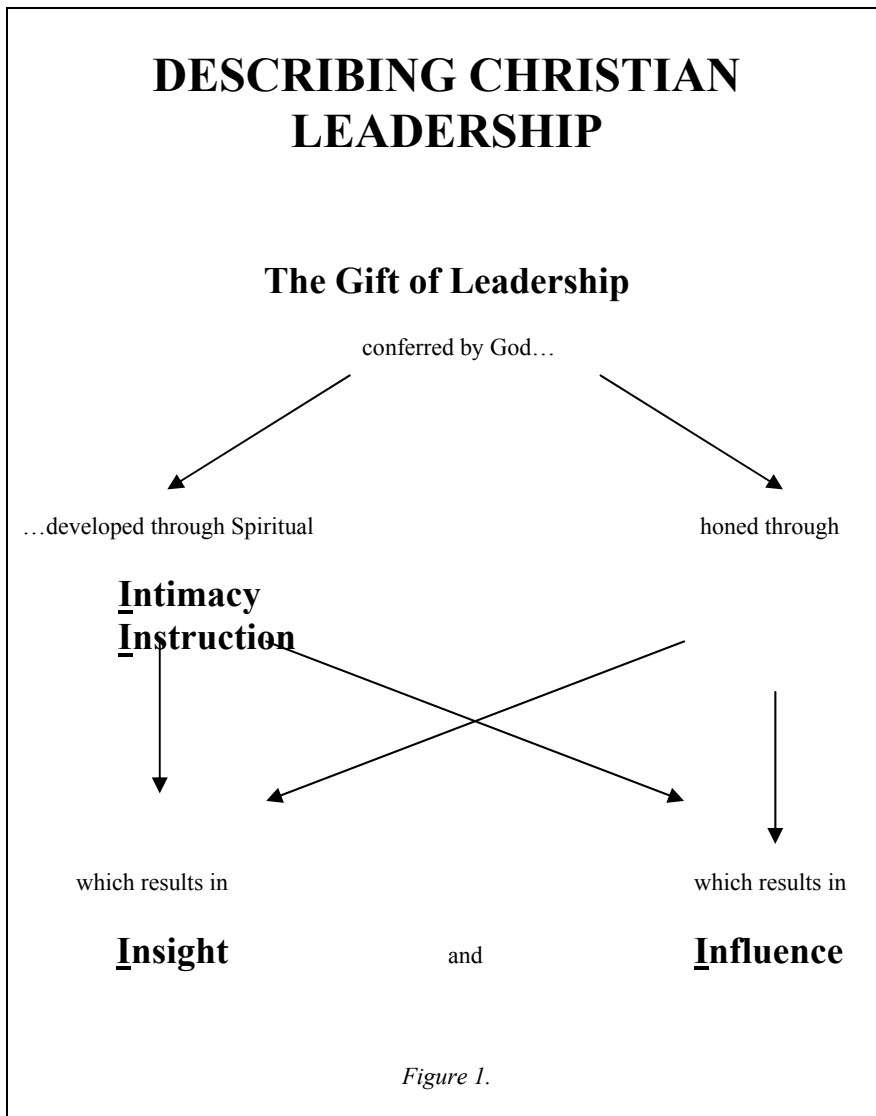
Care for the flock of God entrusted to you. Watch over it willingly, not grudgingly—not for what you will get out of it, but because you are eager to serve God. Don't lord it over the people assigned to your care, but lead them by your good example.

- **Peter**, 1 Peter 5:2-3

These descriptions of leadership take our previous definitions to a new level. There is a “spiritual” dimension added in which God is the source of authority and Jesus is the example of how it must be exercised.


The spiritual leader must be “spiritual” first and a “leader” second.

In describing Christian leadership we need to recognise that it operates in two realms: the spiritual and the physical. An adequate definition therefore must recognise that while the Christian leader is called to operate in the physical realm, in order to do so effectively they must draw upon the resources offered through the spiritual realm. This means having a gift of leadership conferred by God, which is developed through an intimacy with Him and honed by instruction in leadership principles and skills. Together these lead to the insight and influence necessary to lead effectively (see Figure 1).



The remainder of this paper will explore more fully the dynamics of intimacy and instruction.

"Leadership is influence, the ability of one person to influence others"
- J. Oswald Sanders

 Reassess your definition of "Christian Leadership". What additions or alterations do you want to make.

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Dimensions of Christian Leadership

Christian Leadership operates in three dimensions:

1. Gifting

Perhaps surprisingly, (in most translations) the New Testament does not talk specifically about “the gift of leadership”, although leadership is implied in at least some of the gifts:

- a. Administration: The ability to provide guidance in matters of organisation by recognising and co-ordinating the abilities and gifts of others.
- b. Apostleship: The ability to communicate the Christian message across cultural barriers and plant a Christian church where there is no knowledge of the gospel.
- c. Exhortation: The ability to call forth the best in others through the ministry of understanding, encouragement and counsel.
- d. Teaching: The ability to understand and communicate the Christian faith so as to make the truth clear to others.
- e. Shepherding: The ability to nurture other Christians with sensitivity and sacrificial concern.

“Spiritual authority is not won by promotion, but by many prayers and tears. It is attained by confession of sin and much heart searching and humbling before God; by self-surrender, a courageous and uncomplaining embracing of the cross, and by an eternal, unflinching looking unto Jesus crucified.”

- Samuel Logan Brengle

2. Office

Perhaps even more surprisingly, (in most translations) the term “leadership” or “leader” does not appear in relation to the church, although there is reference to the office of “overseer”, “elder” and “bishop”. These offices imply a leadership role within a church or ministry. It may be leadership within the youth ministry, the children’s ministry or the worship team. This leadership role carries with it the responsibility for the welfare and service of others.

3. Function

The function of leadership occurs when a situation arises in which an individual offers direction and guidance to another Christian or a group of believers. This may be in a one-off situation or in an ongoing activity.

The Dynamics of Gifting, Office and Function

1. Gifting is conferred by God. No amount of training or experience can imitate it. Nor can it be demanded or earned. It is given by God's grace.
2. Gifting is different from office and function. A believer can possess a gift without operating in a leadership office or function. The gift gives the believer the potential to lead but this potential needs to be shaped through consecration to God, training and experience.
3. Office is different from gifting and function. Being appointed to a particular office does not guarantee that a person is gifted or even is functioning as a leader. The believer who strives for a leadership office and pushes themselves forward, unfortunately for all concerned, may be appointed to an office without possessing the necessary gifting or even being able to function as a leader. A church that asks for volunteers for a ministry may find volunteers who do not possess the necessary gifting and cannot function effectively as a leader.
4. Function is different from gifting and office. A person may, in a given situation, temporarily function in a leadership role within an activity without possessing an ongoing gift and without being appointed to an office. Equally, a person may have a leadership gifting, be appointed to an office, but not function as a leader due to a lack of faith, laziness, or a poor attitude (Romans 12:6-8).

Most importantly...

⁶ God has given each of us the ability to do certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out when you have faith that God is speaking through you. ⁷ If your gift is that of serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, do a good job of teaching. ⁸ If your gift is to encourage others, do it! If you have money, share it generously.

- Romans 12:6-8

The role of the church is to recognise gifting through seeing it function consistently before appointing an individual to an office.

The Source of Christian Leadership

Consider the following illustration:

“A policeman is standing at a roundabout in front of a statue. Coming towards him is a criminal in a speeding car. The policeman holds up his hand and demands that the criminal stop.”

- 1. Does the policeman possess the authority to stop the car? Yes. That authority is conferred on him by society through the office that he holds and is shown by the uniform that he wears.*
- 2. Does the policeman possess the power to stop the car? No. The car has far greater power and the criminal could choose to run the policeman over.*
- 3. Does the statue possess the authority to stop the car? Of course not. It is just a lump of stone.*
- 4. Does the statue possess the power to stop the car? Yes. If the car were to hit the statue it would come to an immediate halt.*

This illustration shows us the difference between authority and power: authority is the right to lead and power is the ability to lead. Note the following:

¹ One day Jesus called together his twelve apostles and gave them power and authority to cast out demons and to heal all diseases. ² Then he sent them out to tell everyone about the coming of the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick.

- Luke 9:1-2

- a. When Jesus delegates responsibility, he confers both authority and power. (Luke 9:1-2). Without this authority and power we will fail (Acts 19:13-16).

Therefore...

“If I am called by God to lead, I can be assured that He has conferred upon me the necessary power and authority - the right and the ability.”

- b. We can be given a position of authority in the church, but without Jesus’ power we will be ineffective.

Therefore...

“I need to know that my right to lead comes from God if I am to be confident of possessing spiritual power.”

- c. We may have the power to influence others, but without God given authority we will coerce and even manipulate others in our own strength.

Therefore...

“I need ensure that I rely upon God’s power and authority working through me, not on my own ability to get others to do what I want.”

¹³ A team of Jews who were traveling from town to town casting out evil spirits tried to use the name of the Lord Jesus. The incantation they used was this: “I command you by Jesus, whom Paul preaches, to come out!” ¹⁴ Seven sons of Sceva, a leading priest, were doing this. ¹⁵ But when they tried it on a man possessed by an evil spirit, the spirit replied, “I know Jesus, and I know Paul. But who are you?” ¹⁶ And he leaped on them and attacked them with such violence that they fled from the house, naked and badly injured.

- Acts 19:13-16

Natural Leadership vs Spiritual Leadership

Needless dispute has arisen over the difference between natural leadership and spiritual leadership as if the two were unrelated. While there are significant points of divergence there are also points of commonality.

Points of Commonality

Origin

Both natural leadership ability and spiritual leadership gifting originate in God. He creates us and that process of creation includes personality and natural abilities and traits.

Development

Both natural leadership ability and spiritual leadership gifting need development. They may exist in latent form but in order for them to reach full expression and effectiveness, they need to be trained.

Recognition

Both natural leadership ability and spiritual leadership gifting need the recognition of others in order to be fully validated. Leadership, by definition, does not exist in a vacuum. One cannot lead unless there are people to be led, and a leader will, over time, naturally rise to the surface and be recognised as such.

Points of Divergence

1. Source

While both natural leadership ability and spiritual leadership gifting originate in God, natural leadership does not depend on God. The natural leader will lead whether or not they acknowledge God. They are self confident, depending on their own ability. The Christian leader however, will be God confident, recognising the need for constant dependence upon Him.

"The best spiritual leaders are strong natural servants, who assume leadership simply because they see it as a way in which they can serve."

- Robert Greenleaf

2. Motive

Both natural leaders and spiritual leaders are driven by motive. The natural leader's motives will be either self-centred or other-centred. Either they will use their ability for their own advancement or they will use it for the benefit of others. While the Christian leader will use their gifting for the benefit of others, their true motive is to benefit God and to advance His purposes.

3. Ambition

Inherent in natural leadership is the desire to lead. The natural leader will see the opportunity to lead and will naturally take the initiative necessary to get things done. They will enjoy the responsibility of leading others and will tend to guard their position of leadership against threat. The Christian leader is, however, content to not lead. They are available to God yet willing to be dispensable and to step aside if another should be appointed to succeed them.

The Example of Paul

Paul: the Natural Leader	Paul: the Spiritual Leader
<p><i>You know what I was like when I followed the Jewish religion—how I violently persecuted the Christians. I did my best to get rid of them. I was one of the most religious Jews of my own age, and I tried as hard as possible to follow all the old traditions of my religion.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">- Galatians 1:13-14</p>	<p><i>But then something happened! For it pleased God in his kindness to choose me and call me, even before I was born! What undeserved mercy! Then he revealed his Son to me so that I could proclaim the Good News about Jesus to the Gentiles. When all this happened to me, I did not rush out to consult with anyone else.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">- Galatians 1:15-16</p>
<p><i>Yet I could have confidence in myself if anyone could. If others have reason for confidence in their own efforts, I have even more! For I was circumcised when I was eight days old, having been born into a pure-blooded Jewish family that is a branch of the tribe of Benjamin. So I am a real Jew if there ever was one! What's more, I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law. And zealous? Yes, in fact, I harshly persecuted the church. And I obeyed the Jewish law so carefully that I was never accused of any fault.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">- Philippians 3:4-6</p>	<p><i>I once thought all these things were so very important, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the priceless gain of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I may have Christ and become one with him. I no longer count on my own goodness or my ability to obey God's law, but I trust Christ to save me. For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith. As a result, I can really know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">- Philippians 3:7-10</p>
<p><i>Are we trying to pat ourselves on the back again? No, we are giving you a reason to be proud of us, so you can answer those who brag about having a spectacular ministry rather than having a sincere heart before God. If it seems that we are crazy, it is to bring glory to God. And if we are in our right minds, it is for your benefit. Whatever we do, it is because Christ's love controls us.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">- 2 Corinthians 5:12-14</p>	



Underline those verses or phrases in the verses above that characterise natural or spiritual leadership. In the right hand margin indicate if these references concern origin, development, recognition, source, motive or ambition.

Servant Leadership

Christian Leadership is essentially servant leadership, and so to fully understand what it means to lead God's people, we need to examine this topic more carefully.

1. Servant Leadership is not Self-Centred

The servant leader is not preoccupied with what they gain from leadership. They are not interested in status - they are happy to see others promoted ahead of them. Neither are they concerned with comfort - they willingly undergo hardship and suffering.

²⁰ Then the mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Jesus with her sons. She knelt respectfully to ask a favour. ²¹ "What is your request?" he asked. She replied, "In your Kingdom, will you let my two sons sit in places of honor next to you, one at your right and the other at your left?" ²² But Jesus told them, "You don't know what you are asking! Are you able to drink from the bitter cup of sorrow I am about to drink?" "Oh yes," they replied, "we are able!" ²³ "You will indeed drink from it," he told them. "But I have no right to say who will sit on the thrones next to mine. My Father has prepared those places for the ones he has chosen." ²⁴ When the ten other disciples heard what James and John had asked, they were indignant. ²⁵ But Jesus called them together and said, "You know that in this world kings are tyrants, and officials lord it over the people beneath them. ²⁶ But among you it should be quite different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever wants to be first must become your slave. ²⁸ For even I, the Son of Man, came here not to be served but to serve others, and to give my life as a ransom for many."

- Matthew 20:20-28



Respond to the statements below by placing an "x" in the line:

YES

NO

"I am happy to see others excel in leadership, even when they are doing better than me."

NO

YES

*"I willingly face discomfort and inconvenience
in exercising Christian leadership."*

2. Servant Leadership is Other-Centred

The servant leader willingly humbles themselves in order to meet the needs of others. They are not too important or dignified to undertake even the lowest of tasks and they do so with no thought of personal gain.

³ Jesus knew that the Father had given him authority over everything and that he had come from God and would return to God. ⁴ So he got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, ⁵ and poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel he had around him.

⁶ When he came to Simon Peter, Peter said to him, "Lord, why are you going to wash my feet?"

⁷ Jesus replied, "You don't understand now why I am doing it; someday you will."

⁸ "No," Peter protested, "you will never wash my feet!"

Jesus replied, "But if I don't wash you, you won't belong to me."

⁹ Simon Peter exclaimed "Then wash my hands and head as well, Lord, not just my feet!"

¹⁰ Jesus replied, "A person who has bathed all over does not need to wash, except for the feet, to be entirely clean. And you are clean, but that isn't true of everyone here." ¹¹ For Jesus knew who would betray him. That is what he meant when he said, "Not all of you are clean."

¹² After washing their feet, he put on his robe again and sat down and asked, "Do you understand what I was doing?" ¹³ You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and you are right, because it is true. ¹⁴ And since I, the Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other's feet. ¹⁵ I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you.

¹⁶ How true it is that a servant is not greater than the master. Nor are messengers more important than the one who sends them. ¹⁷ You know these things—now do them! That is the path of blessing.

- John 13:3-16



Respond to the statements below by placing an "x" in the line:

YES	NO	
"I am willing to undertake menial tasks that are unseen by others."		_____
YES	NO	
"I am willing to go out of my way to meet the needs of those whom I lead."		_____

3. Servant Leadership is God Honouring

The servant leader follows the example of Jesus and gladly relinquishes status and power for the benefit of others. They do not hang on to leadership because they know it is not a privilege to be contested, but an honour to be conferred.

³ Don't be selfish; don't live to make a good impression on others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourself. ⁴ Don't think only about your own affairs, but be interested in others, too, and what they are doing.

⁵ Your attitude should be the same that Christ Jesus had. ⁶ Though he was God, he did not demand and cling to his rights as God. ⁷ He made himself nothing; he took the humble position of a slave and appeared in human form. ⁸ And in human form he obediently humbled himself even further by dying a criminal's death on a cross. ⁹ Because of this, God raised him up to the heights of heaven and gave him a name that is above every other name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

- Philippians 3:3-11



Respond to the statements below by placing an "x" in the line:

YES
 "I am willing to pass on my leadership responsibilities to another person at any time."

NO

YES
 "I am willing for my efforts in leadership to go unnoticed and unappreciated."

NO

For Further Thought...

Reflect on your role as a servant leader. What evidence is there of servanthood in your ministry. What are some practical ways in which you can begin to develop greater servanthood to those whom you lead?

