

# 6 Unique Characteristics of the Best Christian Leaders I've Known

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I've had the privilege of learning from Christian leaders—clergy and laity alike—for almost 50 years. As a seminary professor who teaches courses in leadership, I pay attention when I see leaders who seem uniquely gifted. I offer this list of characteristics today (1) to push myself to evaluate my own life and (2) to challenge you to evaluate your own life as well.

They see the big picture, but they're also at least aware of the details. Yes, they focus on the vision—but they also recognize that the people they lead live at the detail level. As opportunity allows, they learn names, listen to stories, and give time for their followers. Indeed, I call these folks “leader-shepherds” because they've learned how to do both: lead without neglecting shepherding.

They see their role as not only casting vision, but also raising up and equipping the next generation of leaders. It's amazing to see leaders who have significant platforms that could easily allow them to build their own kingdoms, but who instead choose to challenge others to do greater things than they've ever done. The best Christian leaders I know think as much about what will remain after they're gone as they do about what they might accomplish today.

They work hard on communication. Listen to these leaders, and you'd likely assume that communication comes naturally to them. “They surely have always been good speakers,” you might think. And, to be fair, many are gifted in this work, but even they strive to improve in communication because they know the importance of leadership clarity and conviction. Communication status quo is never sufficient for them, even if the status quo for them is stronger than most leaders.

They balance family and calling well. It's easy for any of us to get out of balance here. Sometimes we sacrifice family on the altar of calling—a grievous mistake—but I've also seen leaders use “family” as an excuse to be lazy in calling (in fact, some of these

families would be surprised to hear the leader speak of his priority of family because it's not apparent to them). The best Christian leaders I know, though, are role models in their calling and heroes in their family at the same time. That's part of what makes them so unique.

They are committed to an area of leadership that most followers will not readily see: their personal time with the Lord. I've known some leaders who are good at leading, but they're operating out of their own power more than out of God's power. The best leaders I know, however, recognize the significance of their being with God before they lead. Drill down into their lives (as I often have because I want to learn from them), and you'll find consistency, quality, and deep relationship in their spiritual disciplines.

They genuinely love what they do. It might be hard to believe (and I've even second-guessed myself as I write these words), but I don't ever recall hearing one of these leaders complain about the work to which God had called them. I'm sure they've had rough days through the years, but I've never seen them wear their burdens so externally that you wonder if they even like their work. Here is one place where they deeply challenge me when I get frustrated in ministry.

Well . . . I have work to do. How about you?