

# Qualities of a Good Leader - Determining Who to Follow

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | February 4, 2021



When I served in the military, strong leadership was emphasized. A good commander does certain things, such as:

- Never ask his soldiers to do what he would be unwilling to do if in their same position
- Share the soldier's experience - i.e., do physical training with them, go into the field with them, maintain the same fitness for duty they are expected to maintain - physical fitness, weapons and jump qualification, and any other unit-specific certification
- Ensure your troops eat and rest before you do; at chow time, a leader eats last
- Inspect soldiers frequently and require that they maintain their gear, personal fitness, cleanliness, and good order
- Ensure your troops have the resources they need to fulfill their mission
- Ensure soldiers are taking care of themselves, such as maintaining adequate hydration, food, rest, and foot care on long road marches, etc.
- Discipline those troops who need it.

These are just some of the actions a good leader in the military will take so that his troops will know that he (1) cares for their welfare, (2) understands their struggles, (3) is willing to share in their

burdens, and (4) wants what is best for them. All of this is intended to instill trust so they will follow orders.

Do you see that Jesus has done many of these same things? He:

- Became one of us (Matthew 1:23)
- Took our burden of sin and was tempted in every way just like we are; because He did, we can know that He understands our struggles (2 Corinthians 5:21, Hebrews 2:14)
- Doesn't ask us to do anything that He wouldn't do (John 13:13, 14)
- Puts us first, ultimately sacrificing Himself for us (John 10:11)
- Disciplines us to develop us to our maximum potential (Hebrews 12:10)
- Provides us with all we need to fulfill our mission for Him (Ephesians 4:11-13)
- Inspects us to see what we need - e.g., where we need pruning and strengthening (John 15:1, 2).

Jesus has earned our trust and is our ultimate leader.

But what are the qualities that you want in a human leader, someone you would be willing to follow, and how can you tell if they possess those qualities?

Let's examine the attributes that good leaders possess. Ask yourself which of these do you value in a leader and how you can determine whether someone possesses them.

- Honesty
- Integrity (own one's mistakes, puts safety/quality over profits, does what's right/moral/ethical no matter the political or social cost)
- Sincerity/enthusiasm, has the ability to inspire others
- Ability to listen to others and understand their perspective
- Decisive, can assimilate information, integrate it, and make decisions
- Visionary, has a vision where they want to go or the goal to achieve
- Confident in their ability, but not arrogant in their demeanor
- Effective communicator
- Competent in their skills to fulfill their position
- Loyal to subordinates and/or the organization
- Delegates and empowers others and rejoices in their successes
- Problem solver
- Self-disciplined/motivated/self-starter
- Empathic/emotional intelligence
- High energy and resilient
- High intelligence
- Just and fair
- Kind
- Sensible and reasonable
- Discerning
- Loves others; puts others or mission before self-advancement
- Lover of truth - lifelong learner
- Follower of God's will
- Can forgive - doesn't hold grudges

Is there anything on this list with which you don't agree? If you had to pick five absolute, non-negotiable

qualities, which ones would they be? What are the qualities that differentiate a world leader from a church leader?

While you may agree with this list, do you find it functional, helpful, actionable in choosing a leader for your nation, state, city, or church? Is there something missing that, despite your recognition of the value of these qualities, limits their usefulness when choosing a leader?

For instance:

- Honesty
  - If most people want honesty in leaders, why do so many politicians have histories of dishonesty and why do they get re-elected? In other words, why do people keep electing leaders who have histories of dishonesty if we value honesty?
- Integrity (own mistakes, puts safety/quality over profits/does what's right/moral/ethical no matter the political or social cost)
  - If most people want leaders with integrity, why do so many politicians have histories that reveal a lack of integrity and why do people keep re-electing them?
- Sincerity/enthusiasm, has the ability to inspire others
  - Does it matter what the person is sincere about? If we see a charismatic, sincere, enthusiastic leader who inspires others, does that mean they know where they are going, are honest, or have integrity? Have you seen people who follow charismatic leaders down destructive paths?
  - How about if someone is honest and does have integrity but is sincerely wrong in their understanding of what is best; is it wise to follow the sincere person of integrity who inspires us with their charisma?

What about qualities like:

- Loves others - other-centered, puts others or the mission first
  - Would this make someone safe to follow?
  - Can a person love others or put the mission first but have no idea what they are doing, where they are going, or how to fulfill the mission?
  - Can a person be completely self-centered but present themselves as interested in others, compassionate, and concerned? In other words, if we don't have a personal relationship with someone, can we actually know their heart motives?
- Just and fair
  - How can you determine if someone is just and fair?
  - Are the reports of others reliable evidence?
  - If you don't know all the variables, all the secret details of the various cases or issues, if you don't know both sides of a story, can you truly know whether the person is just or fair?
- Kind
  - What determines what is kind and what is cruel?
  - Can you always tell by the action itself? Do the circumstances matter?
  - Can people tell whether another person is kind or cruel based on how it feels - "it felt unkind"/"that hurt my feelings?"
- Sensible or reasonable
  - What determines whether something is sensible or reasonable? Would a person's intelligence, understanding, wisdom, and perspective impact our understanding?

- When Jesus refused to go to Passover and publicly promote Himself in the way His brothers encouraged Him to do, did His brothers think Jesus was being sensible? (John 7:1-7).
- When Jesus went to Jerusalem on crucifixion weekend, did His loyal disciples think He was being sensible or reasonable? (John 11:7-16).
- How many turned away from Jesus after He said they must eat His flesh and drink His blood? (John 6:53-67). Why? Did they think He was being unreasonable?
- Do our own biases, prejudices, and beliefs impact our ability to understand? Do we accept as reasonable things that are unreasonable? What determines whether something is reasonable or not? Would their understanding of God's law ([design versus imposed](#)) matter?
- Follower of God's will
  - Is this the litmus test - the one question that can tell us who we can trust as our leader?
  - Certainly, we don't want leaders who refuse to follow God's will, but how can we tell if someone is following God's will?
  - When false messiahs come, who will they claim to be following?
  - Can someone be a genuine follower of God yet misunderstand and need correction? Did King David, when he wanted to build the temple for God, need redirection from the prophet Nathan? (1 Chronicles 17:4).
  - Can someone actually be following God's will and yet we are still not to follow them? For instance, can someone be called by God to a specific action or mission, while at the same time God has called us to a different action or mission?
  - So even if someone is a follower of God, does that always mean we are to follow them?
- What if they have gifts of the Spirit, such as the gift of prophecy? Surely, we could follow anyone who has confirmed genuine gifts of the Spirit - right?
  - If that is so, then we would follow the apostle Peter when he refused to associate with certain people. Or would we have some way to realize that this leader of God's church should not be followed but corrected, as Paul did (Galatians 2:11-13)?

What are we missing? Is there some additional element that you can think of that would help us differentiate a leader we can support from one we should not?

What about leaders who:

- Understand Design Law and God's methods and principles - meaning they actually speak and promote integrated truth, applying the integrative evidence-based approach that harmonizes Scripture, science, and experience. They demonstrate a knowledge of how reality works, and their explanations make sense and are testable, reproducible, and reasonable. They practice the principles of truth, love, and liberty, meaning they don't coerce people who won't agree with or follow them, but rather leave them free and show respect for them as people.
- Understand the great controversy over God's character and methods
- Demonstrate the ability to make evidence-based, not feelings-based, decisions - a leader who can be aware of feelings but isn't governed or swayed by them; in other words, they follow the truth
- Have maturity and possess the ability to discern at a mature level of moral decision-making ([See my blog on the seven levels of moral decision making.](#))
- Have a record of outcomes that people can review to evaluate whether their rhetoric comports with reality.

Without the Design Law, great controversy perspective, if someone doesn't actually know God, His methods, and that God's laws are what reality is built upon, then they may be:

- Honest, yet they lead by wrong methods, wrong principles, and false ideas
- Sincere/enthusiastic, but they lead in wrong directions
- Decisive, but their decisions may frequently be harmful
- Visionary, but their vision might be warped
- Confident, but their confidence might be misplaced
- Seek to be just and fair, but their justice may be punitive, worldly, warped, like the justice of the Pharisees, who wanted to stone Jesus – and who did stone Stephen, etc.
- Claim to be reasonable, but they may actually be unreasonable as they apply the world's methods of rule enforcement instead of God's principles for life and health.

The qualities of good leadership are very difficult to determine in people with whom we don't have a personal relationship. So, the best approach for each of us is to develop our own ability to reason and discern. This means that we are to have our own personal relationship with God, understand His character, design laws, principles, purposes, and the great controversy over His character and principles for ourselves. We are to have a working knowledge of Scripture.

This means that we use the integrative evidence-based approach to knowing truth and then we examine the evidence of a prospective leader's achievements – the outcomes of past actions, along with their stated mission, platform, goals, intentions, plans, and agenda. In other words, we evaluate where they are going and decide if they are someone who we could support for the role they are pursuing, because we share their goals, support their vision or mission, and have evidence of their achievements.

---