

# Equipping Thoughts for Leaders



November 09, 2020

## Essentials for Leaders in Pursuing Lives of Authenticity and Integrity

A couple of high-profile leadership scandals in the past few months have rocked the church world yet again. In the late summer, allegations surfaced regarding the high profile, politically conservative, evangelical leader, Jerry Falwell Jr. He was considered one of the most influential evangelical and politically conservative leaders in our nation. He was forced to resign as president of one of the most prestigious evangelical universities, Liberty University, amid sexual and financial improprieties.

Another leadership scandal recently came to light as mega-church celebrity pastor, and father of three, Carl Lenz admitted to moral failure by being unfaithful to his wife. Lenz led the famous Hillsong Church in New York and was the pastor of famous celebrities like Justin Bieber.

**Leaders are often more concerned with how they appear than who they are.**

Leadership scandals coming to light can tend to influence God's people in one of two directions. One is a bitterness and cynical negativity, "who needs leaders anyway...they are all a bunch of perverts and crooks." The media plays on this tendency towards cynicism by relishing to report on politicians or church leaders who are not congruent with the message they stand for. It sells air time to people who can justify their own imperfections (I'm not so bad) because everyone is a mess, just look at the leaders.

The other direction, which is far better, is a yearning for authentic leaders with integrity.

## **What to Blame?**

A lack of integrity and failure in leadership isn't new. It happened throughout the history of God's people recorded in the Bible. We can look no further than David, a man the Bible claimed was "A man after the heart of God" (Acts 13:22, 1 Samuel 13:14). Yet leadership is an important gift of God that brings health to His people (Romans 12:8, Ephesians 4:11-12, etc.). The enemy knows this and longs to "strike the shepherd so the sheep will scatter" (Zechariah 13:7, 1 Peter 5:1-4, John 21:15-17).

Some may want to blame the western model of the CEO pastor who functions as a spiritual leader and business executive with a large staff and influence. Others may want to blame mega environments that promote a celebrity branding that facilitate a bigger than life leader who is largely unaccountable to anyone.

To be sure these environments tend to work against God's design for His people to live as His family. Leaders in such environments have a hard time living as a brother/sister or leading as a father/mother in a real way among a local family of God's people. In those type of structures, it is hard for the leader to really know, or be known by the people and live authentically as a real example among them (1 Thessalonians 5:12, John 13:15, 2 Thessalonians 3:7, 9, 1 Timothy 1:16, 4:12). Yet this is the type of leadership God has designed.

**"Image is what people think we are: Integrity is what we really are" - John Maxwell**

While we may want to blame such environments in facilitating unaccountable leaders, we must be careful here. There are plenty of unhealthy leaders who lack integrity in smaller environments. I have personally witnessed my share of leadership failures in smaller environments over the years. I have friends who lead

in urban environments and the rates of scandals there seem much higher, probably because there are so many smaller churches in comparison to mega environments.

Others from traditional backgrounds may be quick to blame it on the fact that these leaders and churches are not part of traditional organizations with hierarchy and structure. Well we know that this isn't accurate either. Just ask the countless number of children, now adults, who have grown up being abused by Catholic priests.

## **Authenticity and Integrity**

**The root of the problem isn't so much a big or small environment. The problem is the lack of authenticity and integrity.**

While there is no such thing as a perfect leader, God has called them to be authentic and have integrity.

- **Authenticity** has to do with living in a state of agreement with what we believe and how we live. It is a genuineness both inside and out; private as well as public.
- **Integrity** has to do with holding to strong moral and ethical principles in God that engender trust from the people around you.

Both authenticity and integrity were part of Jesus' great impact.

- *John 1:14 MSG The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, Generous inside and out, true from start to finish.*

Authentic leaders with integrity face struggles and testing, but their faith, character, and core vision remain intact. The way they live their lives backs up what they proclaim. They don't abandon what God has shown them in the day of trial. That is what makes them authentic and possess integrity.

Success doesn't reveal a leader's authenticity and integrity as much as testing does. I read a great book on leadership years ago, *The Making of a Leader* by Robert Clinton, in which he looked at about 1000 leaders mentioned in the Bible. Only 30%

of them finished well. Their authenticity and integrity were revealed over the long haul as they faced and overcame difficulties while living out their beliefs. The other 70% didn't maintain integrity.

## **The fruit of leaders' lives should confirm what they teach**

Jesus tells us that the fruit of leaders' lives is the most accurate indicator of their authenticity.

- *Matthew 7:15-16 "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. (16) "You will know them by their fruits.*

Paul says similar things when he contrasted false apostles in Corinth who were trying to discredit him. He appealed to the church based on the fruit of his own life that they had personally witnessed (2 Cor 10-11). He makes a similar appeal to the Thessalonians about knowing the lives of those who lead them (1 Thes 5:12-13). He also tells Timothy to "show yourself an example" as he "prescribes and teaches things" (1 Tim 4:11-12).

This is one of the challenges with the online world. There has never been a time in which teachings and ideas from both good and bad leaders is accessible to so many. The reach is far beyond people "personally knowing their lives " (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13). With about 600 million Christian based web and blog sites along with an unknown greater number of Christian social media sites, both good and bad leaders are speaking to many. We have an internet smorgasbord of just about any kind of theology coming from people that are largely unknown. Online posts are often just projections rather than reality.

**The fruit of leaders' lives should confirm their ideas.** Unfortunately, there is little chance to "know" them in the online world.

***Just because one can preach or write well doesn't mean they are living well! This is why leaders should have some place of real relational life among God's people where their theories are practiced and observed.***

I believe there is a deep cry in culture for authentic leaders with integrity. Culture is decaying. We continue to deteriorate with the breakdown, (or never forming) of family. People grow up without authentic family leaders who provide security, identity, and role models of a healthy life. May we experience a fresh desire for authenticity and integrity in leadership.

May God raise up an army of leaders with this same desire.

*Psalms 25:21 Let integrity and uprightness preserve me.*

*Psalms 78:72 So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart.*

**Real success and integrity in leadership is when those who know you the best love and respect you the most.**

## **Essentials for a life of authenticity and integrity**

- **Cultivate a real life with God engaging the Spiritual disciplines of private prayer, Bible reading, and study, etc.** A leader's first state of integrity is in their private life before God. Your private life before God is the platform for your public life before people.
- **Be honest with yourself and others.** Walking in a life of transparency with others is what the Bible speaks of as "walking in the light" (1 John 1:1-9, James 5:16 etc.). This includes fellow Christians and fellow team members (Ephesians 5:21). It also includes those "over you in the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 5:12, Hebrews 13:17 etc.). Leader's need to be honest and real. Admit your shortcomings. People think highly of this type of honesty more than false pretenses. Don't hide things. We have an important saying, "Every pastor needs a real pastor" that they open their life to.
- **Always do what is right in a way to honor God not please people.** Sometimes it means not doing the popular thing. Being a people pleaser will lead you away from being a God pleaser.
- **Stay true to walk in the revelation God has shown you.** Leaders must avoid shopping for a pragmatic belief or method that increases the size of their audience/church. What has God shown you to pursue? It usually isn't something that changes by the direction the wind of popularity is blowing. Authentic leaders with integrity usually are motivated over the long haul by core revelations from God that cause them to endure hardships without letting go. After all it isn't about your personal success; it is about the advancement of the Kingdom of God.



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- **Follow through on promises and take responsibility for those you are unable to keep.** The Bible says "a righteous man swears to their own hurt" (Psalms 15:4). If you consistently make promises you can't keep you are probably making too many promises to look good in front of others.
- **Have a right perspective of yourself and others.** This is what the Bible calls humility. Don't overestimate yourself based on pride or narcissism, and don't underestimate yourself based on false humility. Realize your sense of worth comes from God alone as you live as a servant of His by serving others. This enables you to be real and not behind some mask to impress others. Being authentic means being ourselves. *Romans 12:3-5 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone who is among you not to think more highly of yourself than what one ought to think, but to think sensibly, as God has apportioned a measure of faith to each one.*
- **Hold God's standards in a way that causes you to "discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness."** *1 Timothy 4:7-8 But keep away from those godless legends, which are not worth telling. Keep yourself in training for a godly life (NASV "discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness). (8) Physical exercise has some value, but spiritual exercise is valuable in every way, because it promises life both for the present and for the future.*
- **Be a continual learner.** People who don't think they need to learn anything are know-it-alls. Leaders with integrity exhibit a desire to learn and make progress especially in the area of their own integrity. They are honest with themselves and others. They seek guidance and input and do not see themselves as being above blind spots in their lives.
- **Resist comparisons, and be comfortable with who you are and who you aren't.** *Galatians 6:3-5 If you think you are better than others, when you really aren't, you are wrong. (4) Do your own work well, and then you will have something to be proud of. But don't compare yourself with others. (5) We each must carry our own load.*
- **Be respectful of others which will engender their respect.** Leaders with integrity exhibit the "wisdom from above" that is "willing to be entreated with gentleness." (James 3:13-18). Because they show respect to others, they tend to be respected themselves.
- **Run towards messes and challenges, not away from them.** David did this with Goliath. *1 Samuel 17:22-48...David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine.* Leaders with integrity do not avoid problems or problem people. If people perceive leaders avoiding trouble or problematic people in order to keep peace that leader's integrity will be questioned.

- **Seek wise counsel and live in transparent accountability.** This is part of "walking in the light (1 Jn 1:5-9). Be real with people. Admit your shortcomings. Leader's with integrity rarely blame others and don't project victimization. They quickly take responsibility for their failures and are open and honest with others (Eph 5:21). Transparency doesn't cause people to think less of you it usually causes them to think more of you.
- **Regularly ask those close to you for an honest evaluation of your life.** Are you living consistently what you believe, preach, and teach? Are you humble? Are you treating others with the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), the ethic of God's love (1 Corinthians 13:1-10), and the humble "mind of Christ" (Philippians 2:1-10)?



Integrity before God and mankind is the highest aim in a leader's life. As the Bible says, "a good name is better than riches" and "better than any other thing that can be put on our lives" (Proverbs 22:1, Ecclesiastes 7:1, Acts 2:47).

**Doug Kreighbaum [www.dougreighbaum.com](http://www.dougreighbaum.com)  
[dkreighbaum@gmail.com](mailto:dkreighbaum@gmail.com)  
[www.c2cfamily.org](http://www.c2cfamily.org)**