

Grow in character: four outstanding qualities

(James 3 *i.a.*)

It can be helpful at times to find a single overarching principle, or at least a minimum number. Jesus did this when summarizing the law in just two commandments. Condensed statements are easier to remember and offer a framework for the more detailed instructions.

This is true with leading. The apostles did it in Acts 6 when they told the believers to find seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom. Four character qualities stand out in passages on leaders and leading because of their repetition and combinations: faithfulness and wisdom, gentleness and humility.

I. *Gentleness*

1. Gentleness characterized Jesus.

As the Messiah, Jesus fulfilled the OT prophecy of gentleness (Matthew 21:5). Jesus himself claimed to be gentle (Matthew 11:28–30; cf. 12:20).

2. Gentleness characterized Paul's ministry (1 Thessalonians 2:7).
3. Gentleness is required of leaders (2 Timothy 2:24).
4. Gentleness is expected of all believers, especially as they grow spiritually (Galatians 5:22–6:1).

II. *Humility (meekness or lowliness of heart)*

1. Humility characterized Jesus (Matthew 11:29; Philippians 2:8).
2. Humility should be a characteristic of every believer (Philippians 2:5–8).
3. Humility is advantageous to every believer (James 4:6; cf. 1 Peter 5:5).
4. Humility and gentleness are logically connected, since the humble have greater freedom to be gentle.

III. *Faithfulness*

1. Faithfulness characterized Jesus: faithful to the Father and a faithful High Priest (Hebrews 2:17; 3:2).
2. Faithfulness should characterize leaders as stewards (1 Corinthians 4:2).
3. Faithfulness should characterize all believers as they expect the return of the Lord Jesus (Luke 12:35–42).
4. Faithfulness should be seen in the small tasks of life (Luke 16:10).
5. Faithfulness is logically connected with humility, since it requires caring for the “little” things and submitting to the Master.

IV. *Wisdom*

1. Wisdom characterized Jesus (1 Corinthians 1:24; Colossians 2:3).
2. Wisdom should be a quality in leaders (e.g., Acts 6:3).
3. Wisdom should be the goal of every believer (Luke 12:42; Matthew 22:36–40; Proverbs 9:10).
4. Wisdom brings together gentleness, humility and faithfulness (James 3:13–18).
 - a. The wise show it in deeds done in the humility/meekness that comes from wisdom (v13; cf. Matthew 11:29).
 - b. Godly wisdom is in contrast to “earthly,” “natural,” “demonic” wisdom.
 - c. Heavenly wisdom is primarily a moral quality as described in 3:17.

Every believer should grow in these qualities and leaders especially should demonstrate them. Becoming Christ-like means becoming more gentle, humble, faithful, and wise.

For further thought and discussion:

- How have you failed in being faithful? What has prevented faithfulness? What might you do to change? (E.g., be careful in your commitments.)
- How might you best distinguish between earthly wisdom and heavenly wisdom in yourself and in others (especially potential leaders)? I.e., how would you identify someone “full of wisdom”?
- How can we encourage one another to grow in these qualities?
- Why would you want these qualities in a church leader (elder or deacon)?