

12 Marks of a Wise and Trustworthy Leader

Psalm 101

Introduction: 1) In December 2016, Gallup released their annual survey on how American see various professions in terms of honesty and ethics. Pastors did crack the top 10 coming in at #8, sandwiched between College teachers and Chiropractors. Unfortunately only 44% viewed the clergy as high or very high in terms of their honesty and ethical standards. Sadly, 2016 marked another year in what has become a steady decline. The clergy approval rate dropped below 50% in 2013. Last year's report noted that the 44% of 2016 was the lowest approval rating for ministers since Gallup began asking the question 50 years ago in 1967.

2) There is little question that honesty and ethics, integrity, is an essential foundation for faithful, long-term leadership, regardless of the profession. In a survey by Robert Half Management Resources 75% of employees said hands down that integrity was the most important attribute in a leader, more than fairness (58%), decisiveness (37%) or strategic mindset (32%). (Terry Williams, Why Integrity Remains One of the Top Leadership Attributes," *The Economist*).

3) Not surprisingly, the Bible places a premium on integrity.

- Proverbs 10:9, "The one who lives with integrity lives securely, but whoever perverts his ways will be found out."

- Proverbs 11:3, “The integrity of the upright guides them, but the perversity of the treacherous destroys them.”
- Proverbs 13:6, “Righteousness guards people of integrity, but wickedness undermines the sinner.”
- Proverbs 28:6, “Better the poor person who lives with integrity than the rich one who distorts right and wrong.”

4) And of course those of us called to the office of the pastor, the overseer, the elder, know 1 Timothy 3:2 reminds us that we must be men “above reproach.” Titus 1:6 adds, we “must be blameless.”

5) Interestingly, there is a particular psalm, Psalm 101 penned by King David, that speaks directly to the issue of leadership and integrity. The 8 verses highlight issues of trustworthiness and wisdom. The wonderful expositor Warren Wiersbe says Psalm 101 is “Leadership 101” (*BEC*, 2730). Willem VanGemeren says it addresses a “Commitment to Excellence” (640). The Great reformer Martin Luther wrote an 80 page exposition of this psalm. It is a royal psalm of the king, and the qualities it draws attention to find an echo in Isaiah 11:1-5. Both text are a prophetic portrait of Messiah Jesus. Indeed only our Savior could perfectly fulfill the awesome expectations of the leader described in this Psalm. Allen Ross says, “what the psalm adds up to is a description of the ideal King, for none of the Kings

of Israel were able to live up to this. But as a royal psalm the description also looks ahead to the ideal King who will reign with righteousness, the promised Messiah (See Pss. 45 and 72) (*A Commentary on the Psalms*, vol. 3, 198). The 8 verses highlight 12 marks of a wise and trustworthy leader.

I. The Man of God will praise the Lord for his goodness 101:1

- This psalm is filled with “I will” statements. Verse 1 contains two of them and begins the Psalm on a note of praise and joyful gladness. Twice David says, “I will sing.” And, for what does he sing? First, he sings of the Lord’s *hesed*, His “faithful love.” Second, he sings about the Lord’s “justice.” These two attributes of our God are twin towers that should always kept together. They provide an essential foundation for our own leadership. Calvin says, “To sing therefore of mercy [faithful love] and of judgment [justice] is equivalent to declaring in solemn terms, that he would be a just and an upright king [leader]” (John Calvin, *Psalms 93-150*, Calvin’s Comm., vol. 6, 87).
- “Steadfast love” says we act faithfully, mercifully, graciously in covenantal love. “Justice” says we act righteously and fairly. We celebrate and sing of the perfection of these qualities we see in our God. We pursue them as essential qualities in our own lives as faithful and fair leaders in covenant with our people.

- Spurgeon said, “He sings best who works best for God” (“A Holy and Homely Resolve,” Sermon # 1230). Our work for the Lord should be characterized by “steadfast love and justice” (*ESV*).

II. The man of God will walk in the way of integrity 101:2

- Praise for our Lord’s faithful love and justice should find a companion in our commitment to live and act toward others in faithful love and justice. Thus David says in verse 2, “I will pay attention to the way of integrity,” an idea we find emphasized 3 times in the psalm (vs. 2 (twice), vs. 6). The phrase “I will pay attention” could be rendered “I will be wise.” And to what will he be wise, give his attention? It is “the way of integrity.”
- A faithful and just leader, simply put, will be a Psalm 1 man, a 1 Timothy 3:1-7 man. He is a man above reproach, blameless in his conduct. He does not listen to the advice of the wicked, but his delight is in the teachings of the Lord. This is what he thinks and meditates on.
- This man lives life wisely with healthy transparency. He avoids the places of evil. He says no to the things that can enslave him or cause others to stumble. There is no dishonesty, duplicity, foolishness or compromise in this man. His public life and his private life are in sync. When only God is watching, he is the same man as if 10,000 were watching.

- My friend Sam Storms well says, “the only reason integrity should be a burden to you is if you enjoy being dishonest.”

III. **The man of God will continually acknowledge his utter dependence on the Lord 101:2**

- Verse 2 contains a brief but explosive prayer, “When will you come to me?” Spurgeon calls it “a devout ejaculation” (Ibid). It is a humble and sincere acknowledgement of our need for the Lord’s presence and power to live a life of integrity and to lead well. There is an obvious implication. It is possible to lead in the Lord’s work without the Lord. This, plainly put, is the leadership of a fool.
- To lead well we must pray well. To lead well we must know our strengths but also our weaknesses. We must know we are utterly dependent on our Lord for any true success in ministry.
- Oswald Sanders says, “The spiritual leader should outpace the rest of the church, above all, in prayer. . . Prayer is indeed the Christian’s vital breath and native air” (*Spiritual Leadership*, 85).
- Pastor Dee Duke adds, “Almost everyone believes that prayer is important. But there is a difference between believing that prayer is important and believing it is essential. ‘Essential’ means there are some things that will not happen without prayer” (*Expect Great Things*, 225).

IV. The man of God will guard his heart as he leads his home

101:2

- In verse 2 David identifies a specific area where integrity is essential for spiritual leadership: the home. David says a leader must live with a heart of integrity in his home. Paul said much the same thing in 1 Timothy 3:4-5 where he writes of a pastor, “He must manage his own household competently and have his children under control with all dignity. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of God’s church?)”
- James Boice is right, “the only way to lead a blameless life is to have a “blameless heart” (*Psalms*, vol. 2, 820). The man of integrity will order well his private world. His life of integrity will be the most evident to those closest to him! He will maintain fidelity and faithfulness to his mate with whom he entered a divine and sacred covenant before God in marriage. He will love and care for his children, bringing them up “in the training and instruction of the Lord.” (Eph. 6:4).
- He will avoid, like a deadly and infectious virus, the flirtatious and home destroying woman of Proverbs 5. He will heed the wise words of Randy Alcorn who writes,

“Whenever I feel particularly vulnerable to sexual temptation, I find it helpful to review what effects my action could have: grieving the

Lord who redeemed me; dragging His sacred name through the mud; one day having to look at Jesus, the righteous judge in the face, and give an account of my actions; following the footsteps of people whose immorality forfeited their ministries and caused me to shudder; losing my wife's respect and trust; hurting my daughters; destroying my example and creditability with my children; causing shame to my family; losing self-respect; forming memories and flashbacks that could plague future intimacy with my wife; wasting years of ministry training; undermining the faithful example and hard work of other Christians in our community; and on and on.”
(*SBC Life*, Aug. 2005).

- In a *Leadership* magazine survey (Winter 1988, 12-13), 77% of ministers admitted doing something sexually inappropriate with women other than their wives at some time in their lives, and 12% acknowledged sexual relations with someone other than their wives while in ministry.
- Wise and godly leaders will care for their home. They will not ignore them, nor will they take them for granted. They will live with a heart of integrity with those who are closet to them and who knows them best.

V. **The man of God will keep his eyes from anything that is worthless** 101:3

- David says “I will not let anything worthless guide me” (v. 3). Literally the text reads as the *CSB* notes, “I will not put a worthless thing in front of my eyes.” The word “anything” speaks of the absolute and comprehensive nature of this commitment and conviction. The word “worthless” (*NIV*, “vile;”) is literally “a thing of Belial.” That which is wicked and worthless I will not set my eyes on. I know the intimate relationship that exists between the eyes and the heart. Because this commitment follows on the heels of the end of verse 2, Job 31:1 is an appropriate warning in this context “I have made a covenant with my eyes. How then could I look at a young woman?” To properly guard my eyes, I will regularly recall the words of Jesus in Matthew 6:22 that, “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light (goodness).” I will remember the counsel of the Proverbs:
 - Proverbs 17:24 “Wisdom is the focus of the perceptive, but a fool’s eyes roam to the ends of the earth.”
 - Proverbs 23:26 “My son, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways.”

- Proverbs 30:12-13 “There is a generation that is pure in its own eyes, yet is not washed from its filth. There is a generation—how haughty its eyes and pretentious its looks.”

The Bible says do not put your eyes on that which is worthless. The counter to that is put your eyes on that which is worthy. Hebrew 12:2 is a good word here, “Fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.” There is where our gaze should be directed.

VI. The man of God will hate what is wrong and will not let it get a hold of him. 101:3

- Having nothing evil before his eyes, a wise and trustworthy leader will hate the work of those who fall away and walk away from the truth. He will embrace the wisdom of Proverbs 6:16-19, “There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devised wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.” (*NIV*).
- David, says we are to “hate the practice of transgression.” The wise leader will maintain his personal purity, in part, by hating and not tolerating evil. Ross notes the word translated “transgressions carries the idea of falling away, “doing apostasies” or “acts of unfaithfulness”

(*Psalms*, vol. 3, 201). If he has people in mind, and that is certainly a possibility, David is saying I will not put faithless people on my team. It does not matter how charismatic, gifted or talented they are, they will not be welcomed into my world. They “will not cling to me.” Their sin and unfaithfulness to the things of God, as an ongoing lifestyle, is a disqualifying marker.

- Spurgeon is right “Hatred of sin is a good sentinel for the door of virtue.” (*The Treasury of David*, vol. 2, 240).

VII. The man of God will not welcome evil persons into his inner circle 101:4

- A wise and godly leader must know and embrace a biblical theology of the heart. Repeatedly, he will recall the wisdom of key Scripture that speak to this issue of the heart, especially as he considers those he would invite into his inner circle.
 - Jeremiah 17:9 – “The heart is more deceitful than anything else, and incurable—who can understand it?”
 - Psalm 51:10 – “God, create a clean heart for me and renew a steadfast spirit within me.”
 - Proverbs 4:23 – “Guard your heart above all else, for it is the source of life.”

- Proverbs 10:8 – “A wise heart accepts commands, but foolish lips will be destroyed.”
- Proverbs 16:23 – “The heart of a wise person instructs his mouth; it adds learning to his speech.”
- Proverbs 27:19 – “As water reflects the face, so the heart reflects the person.”
- Matthew 12:34 – “Brood of vipers! How can you speak good things when you are evil? For the mouth speaks from the overflow of the heart.”
- Matthew 15:18 – “But what comes out of the mouth comes from the heart, and this defiles a person.”
- Matthew 15:19 – “For from the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, sexual immoralities, thefts, false testimonies, slander.”
- David says a godly leader must hate the practice of transgression and not allow it to cling to him (v. 3). He now says in verse 4 that a godly leader will not come close to a devious (*NASB*, “perverse”) heart.” It “will be far from me” he says. Indeed, David declares, “I will not be involved with evil.” David begins with himself but also speaks concerning those he would consider for his inner circle as his close confidants. Integrity is crucially important all around. A devious or perverse heart is a twisted

heart. Its affections are warped and the choices it makes will inevitably be evil. David admonishes us to not let such people on the bus but, if by chance we make a mistake and let them on, we must have the convictions and courage to kick them off. They are not reliable or trustworthy. They will harm the church and infect negatively the morale.

- I know it is a secular book, but *Good to Great* by Jim Collins is a wealth of wisdom. In the area of team building he is especially helpful. Collins notes quite simply that good leaders get the right people on the bus and the wrong people off the bus. When in doubt, they don't hire. They keep looking. And, when they know they need to make a people change, they act. Collins notes, "The old adage "People are your most important asset" is wrong. People are not your most important asset. The right people are." (*Good to Great*, 63-64).
- Surgeon said there is "The need for extreme care in the choice of our intimates" (*Treasury of David*, vol. 2, 249). He is most certainly correct. The people you surround yourself with can make or break you. Be the right person and pursue the right people. The two go together.

VIII. The man of God will give no place to slander or gossip

101:5

- Verse 5 is stated in strong and direct terms. The poetic nature of the Psalm serves as a helpful guide, especially in our application of the text.

In a sense verse 5 is a specific example of verse 4. A godly leader “will not be involved with evil.” Point of application: “I will destroy anyone who secretly slanders his neighbor.” *The Message* says, “I put a gag on the gossip who bad-mouths his neighbors.” Alec Motyer renders the verse, “One covertly slandering his associate – him I will exterminate” (*Psalms By The Day*, 282).

- A secret slanderer is an evil gossip who spreads lies. He is a whisperer of untruth. He has an agenda to hurt others and will stop at nothing to destroy a pseudo-friend. He does not mind making a false accusation or ruining someone’s reputation.
- Calvin says a slanderer is, “like one who administers poison to his unsuspecting victim, [he] destroys men unawares.” (p. 91).
- Proverbs 12:22 says, “Lying lips are detestable to the Lord, but faithful people are His delight.”
- Proverbs 10:18 simply says, “Whoever spreads slander is a fool.”
- Leviticus 19:16 adds, “You must not go about spreading slander among your people; you must not jeopardize your neighbor’s life.
- Socrates says, “When the debate is lost, slander becomes the tool of the loser.”
- Samuel Johnson said, “Slander is the revenge of a coward.”

- Wise leaders will not run with cowards and losers. They will reject liars, separate themselves from gossips, and have nothing to do with slanderers.

IX. The man of God will seek out the humble not the prideful 101:5

- There is a 3-fold criteria set in negative categories in v. 5: a slanderer, one with haughty eyes and one with an arrogant heart. Note the reverse order connection. An arrogant heart will lead to haughty eyes (an arrogant swagger) which will give way to a lying tongue! The godly leader will not tolerate this in himself or others. He will walk with integrity and seek out the same in others. He will silence slanderers and refuse to run with the prideful and arrogant. He will set them aside to negate their cancerous influence in the community of God's people.
- Haughty eyes are simply the outward expression of an arrogant heart. Arrogant and ambitious people are notorious for looking down on others and oozing an air of superiority. Of course the opposite of pride is humility, something God prizes and extols as one of the Christian's most important virtues. Oswald Sanders says, "Humility is the hallmark of the spiritual leader" (*Spiritual Leadership*, 61). Of course very few of us like coming in second. Few, if any, aspire to a runner-up. What is the cure to this ever-present affliction?

- I believe Philippians 2:3-4 points us in the right direction concerning this issue. These are verses I read in every wedding ceremony as I urge the future spouses to exhibit the mind of Christ in how they treat one another. Paul writes, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. Everyone should look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.” These are good words for spouses. These are good words for shepherd-leaders.
- And, in the context of character traits for leaders, Peter’s words are quite instructive in 1 Peter 5:5-6 when he writes, “In the same way, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. All of you clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because God resists the proud but give grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you at the proper time.”
- C. S. Lewis was right, “Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it’s thinking of yourself less.”
- John Flavel adds, “They that know God will be humble, and they that know themselves, cannot be proud.”
- Finally St. Augustine says, “If you plan to build a tall house of virtues, you must first lay deep foundations of humility.”

X. The man of God will look to surround himself with people who are faithful and have integrity 101:6

- My spiritual hero Adrian Rogers says, “A” leaders surround themselves with “A” people. “B” leaders surround themselves with “C” people. David says that the man of God will be on the lookout for particular persons for his team. He says, “My eyes favor the faithful of the land so that they may sit down with me.” Then in typical Hebrew parallelism he adds, “The one who follows the way of integrity [“the faithful”] may serve with me [sit down with me].” Verse 6 stands in stark contrast to verse 5 and picks up again the theme of the eyes in verse 3 & 5. I will not allow anything worthless before my eyes and I will not surround myself with those who have haughty eyes. I will seek out with my eyes 1) the faithful and 2) those who have integrity (3rd use).
- I like to use the “draft model” when building a team. Go after the 1st pick in the 1st round. If you miss out on him, pursue the 2nd pick in the 1st round. Aim high. Aim for the best. As a man who is faithful, look for those who are faithful. As a man of integrity, look for others who demonstrate integrity.
- And notice the word “serve” or “minister” (*ESV*) at the end of verse 6. Set your eyes on servant-leaders, men with a servant’s heart. Look for men who

do not expect or ask of others what they do not expect or ask of themselves.

Some hints:

- Look for men who have worked as a janitor or custodian.
- Look for men who have worked as a waiter.
- Look for men who are kind and generous in a restaurant.
- Look for men who gladly give attention to children and the elderly.
- Look for men who are gracious to those who can do nothing to further their agenda.
- Look for men who treat others like they are the most important person in the world (ex. Adrian Rogers in SEBTS chapel).
- Mark 10:45 reminds us, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

XI. The man of God will have nothing to do with liars and the dishonest

101:7

- Verse 7 is clearly cast in the language of the king and his court.

Application is still easily made to anyone in Christian leadership. In verse 5 we are told we must confront and deal decisively with slanderers and the arrogant. Now in verse 7 we are told we must do the same with those who “act deceitfully” and “who tell lies.” They are not welcome in my

house (“will live in my palace”) and I will not receive their counsel (“not retained to guide me.”)

- Those who are dishonest and destructive, deceitful and deceptive, are not allowed a seat at the table of leadership, they are not granted access into the leader’s court. The disloyal, dishonest, unfaithful, hypocritical, liar, gossip and divisive are not welcomed nor should they be. The man of integrity will take inventory of his own life, “considering himself lest he also be tempted” (Gal. 6:2), but he will consider carefully who are his trusted counselors and advisors.
- Ross is right, “No liar should ever be put in a position of authority or honor” (p. 203). And Calvin makes a direct application to those called to leadership. A wise leader, he says, “will exercise discretion and care, that, instead of taking persons into his service indiscriminately, he may wisely determine each man’s character, so as to have those who live a life of strict integrity as his most intimate friends. . .” (93). It really matters, Scripture teaches, who we hang out with and who we listen to. They are certain to influence who we are and how we live.
- Spurgeon pointedly adds, “If David would not have a liar in his sight, much less will the Lord; neither he that loves nor he who makes a lie shall be admitted into heaven. Liars are obnoxious enough on earth; the

saints shall not be worried with them in another world” (*Treasury*, 241). Suddenly, I hear the sound of Revelation 21:8 ringing in my ears, “But the cowards, faithless, detestable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars—their share will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.” (emp. Mine)

XII. The man of God will not grow weary in the battles of good and evil

101:8

- Followers of the crucified and risen Lord Jesus do not fight for victory. We fight from victory. We have read the last book of the Bible and we know that in the end our God wins! The war is won but battles remain until that day. Vigilance in the fight is an absolutely necessary characteristic for God’s Army Rangers and Navy Seals. We must not grow weary in well doing.
- “Every morning” (*ESV*, “morning by morning”; lit. “in the mornings”) I will destroy all the wicked of the land, wiping out evildoers from the Lord’s city.” This is strong but necessary language cast once more in a poetic genre. In the ancient world judgment was usually in the morning. The Lord’s city was Jerusalem. The man of God in a position of spiritual leadership will confront evil and wickedness head on day after day. If God will not tolerate evil then neither can we who have been called to

lead and shepherd his people. We will be on guard against the dogs, pigs and wolves of Scripture. We will protect the flock of God. At the same time we will sound a prophetic voice against evil whenever and wherever we see it! We will not play either the coward or the heirling!

- The faithful servant of King Jesus believes the Social Order should be permeated by Christian witness. Living out the kingdom ethics of Scripture, we are to be salt and light to a wicked and darkened world as we share and show forth the gospel. We should oppose racism, bigotry, greed, selfishness, all forms of sexual immorality and pornography. We should help the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, and the helpless. We contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death. The man of God cares not who is in the White House or Congress. He cares not whether it is a Democrat, Republican, Libertarian, Independent or whatever. His allegiance is to a King not a President. His hope and assurance is in Calvary's Hill not Capitol Hill. Evil is evil. Wrong is wrong. Wherever he sees it he must speak and act. He cannot be silent. He cannot remain inactive.

Conclusion

In his classic work *The Reformed Pastor*, the wonderful Puritan pastor Richard Baxter (1615-1691) enumerates several essential ingredients of integrity that will

keep the man of God safe and sound for the ministry to which God has called him. His list provides a fitting conclusion to our study of Psalm 101. His marks number 12 as well!

- 1) See that the work of saving grace be thoroughly wrought in your own souls. Take heed to yourselves, lest you be void of the saving grace of God which you offer to others, and be strangers to the effectual working of the gospel which you preach.
- 2) Content not yourselves with being in a state of grace, but be also careful that your graces are kept in vigorous and lively exercise, and that you preach to yourselves the sermons which you study, before you preach them to others.
- 3) Take heed to yourselves lest your example contradict your doctrine, and lest you lay such stumbling-blocks before the blind, as may be the occasion of their ruin; lest you unsay with your lives, what you say with your tongues; and be the greatest hinderers of the success of your own labors.
- 4) Take heed to yourselves, lest you live in those sins which you preach against in others, and lest you be guilty of that which daily you condemn.

- 5) Take heed to yourselves, for you have a heaven to win or lose, and souls that must be happy or miserable for ever; and therefore it concerneth you to begin at home, and to take heed to yourselves as well as to others.
- 6) Take heed to yourselves, for you have a depraved nature, and sinful inclinations, as well as others.
- 7) Take heed to yourselves, because the tempter will more ply you with his temptations than other men. If you will be the leaders against the prince of darkness, he will spare you no further than God restraineth him.
- 8) Take heed to yourselves, because there are many eyes upon you, and there will be many to observe your falls. You cannot miscarry but the world will ring of it.
- 9) Take heed to yourselves, for your sins have more heinous aggravations than other men's . . . a teacher of others, cannot commit a small sin.
- 10) Take heed to yourselves, because such great works as ours require greater grace than other men's.
- 11) Take heed to yourselves, for the honor of your Lord and Master, and of his holy truth and ways, doth lie more on you than on other men.

12) Take heed to yourselves, for the success of all your labors doth very much depend upon this. God useth to fit men for great works, before he employs them as his instruments in accomplishing them.

People are indeed watching. Let them see a man of integrity. Let them see a wise and trustworthy leader who faithfully follows in the footsteps of His Master!