

Twelve Marks of a Wise and Trustworthy Leader

PSALM 101

Main Idea: A person of God will pursue the highest standards of holiness and godliness in himself and his co-laborers.

- I. **The Person of God Will Praise the Lord for His Goodness (101:1).**
 - II. **The Person of God Will Walk in the Way of Integrity (101:2).**
 - III. **The Person of God Will Continually Acknowledge His Utter Dependence on the Lord (101:2).**
 - IV. **The Person of God Will Guard His Heart as He Leads His Home (101:2).**
 - V. **The Person of God Will Keep His Eyes from Anything That Is Worthless (101:3).**
 - VI. **The Person of God Will Hate What Is Wrong and Will Not Let It Get Hold of Him (101:3).**
 - VII. **The Person of God Will Not Welcome Evil Persons into His Inner Circle (101:4).**
 - VIII. **The Person of God Will Give No Place to Slander and Gossip (101:5).**
 - IX. **The Person of God Will Seek Out the Humble, Not the Proud (101:5).**
 - X. **The Person of God Will Look to Surround Himself with People Who Are Faithful and Have Integrity (101:6).**
 - XI. **The Person of God Will Have Nothing to Do with Liars and the Dishonest (101:7).**
 - XII. **The Person of God Will Not Grow Weary in the Battle of Good and Evil (101:8).**
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There is little question that honesty, ethics, and integrity are essential foundations for faithful, long-term leadership, regardless of the profession. Unsurprisingly, the Bible places a premium on integrity:

The one who lives with integrity lives securely, but whoever perverts his ways will be found out. (Prov 10:9)

The integrity of the upright guides them, but the perversity of the treacherous destroys them. (Prov 11:3)

Righteousness guards people of integrity, but wickedness undermines the sinner. (Prov 13:6)

Better the poor person who lives with integrity than the rich one who distorts right and wrong. (Prov 28:6)

Those of us called to the office of the pastor, the overseer and elder, will also know that 1 Timothy 3:2 reminds us that we must be men “above reproach.” Titus 1:6 adds that we “must be blameless.”

Psalm 101, which King David penned, speaks directly to the issue of leadership and integrity. Its eight verses highlight trustworthiness and wisdom. Warren Wiersbe says Psalm 101 is “Leadership 101” (*Bible Exposition Commentary*, 273). Willem VanGemeren says it addresses a “Commitment to Excellence” (*Psalms*, 743). The great reformer Martin Luther even wrote an eighty-page exposition of this psalm. It is a royal psalm of the king, and the qualities it accentuates find an echo in Isaiah 11:1-5. Both texts are a prophetic portrait of Messiah Jesus. Only our Savior could perfectly fulfill the awesome expectations of the leader described in this psalm. Allen Ross says,

What it 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. (*Psalms 90–150*, 198)

The eight verses highlight twelve marks of a wise and trustworthy leader.

The Person of God Will Praise the Lord for His Goodness

PSALM 101:1

This psalm contains several “I will” statements. Verse 1 has two of them and begins the psalm on a note of praise and joyful gladness. Twice David says, “I will sing.” He sings of the Lord’s *chesed*, his “faithful love,” and he sings about the Lord’s “justice.” These two attributes of our God are twin pillars we should always keep together. They provide the 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]" (*Psalms 93–150*, 87).

"Faithful love" means we act mercifully and graciously in covenantal love. "Justice" means we act righteously and fairly. As we celebrate and sing of the perfection of these qualities we see in our God, we also pursue them as essential qualities in our own lives as faithful and fair leaders in covenant with our people. Spurgeon says, "He singeth best who worketh best for God" (*Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, 229).

The Person of God Will Walk in the Way of Integrity

PSALM 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. David says in verse 2, "I will pay attention to the way of integrity," an idea emphasized three times in the psalm (v. 2 [twice], v. 6). The phrase "I will pay attention" could be rendered "I will be wise." He gives his attention and his heart to "the way of integrity."

A faithful and just leader will be a Psalm 1 person, a 1 Timothy 3:1-7 person. He is above reproach and blameless in his conduct. He does not listen to the advice of the wicked; rather, his delight is in the teachings of the Lord. He thinks and meditates on the Word of God.

This person lives life wisely by living 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 person. His public life and his private life are the same. When only God is watching, he is the same person as if ten thousand were watching.

The Person of God Will Continually Acknowledge His Utter Dependence on the Lord

PSALM 101:2

Verse 2 contains a brief but powerful prayer: "When will you come to me?" It is a humble and sincere acknowledgment of our need for the Lord's presence and power if we are to live a life of integrity and to lead well. There is an important implication here. To lead well, we must pray well. To lead well, we must know our strengths and 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*, 99). 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. (Quoted in Newell, *Expect Great Things*, 225)

The Person of God Will Guard His Heart as He Leads His Home

PSALM 101:2

In verse 2 David identifies the home as a specific area where integrity is essential for spiritual leadership. 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. Likewise, James Boice is right when he says, “The only way to lead a blameless life is to have a blameless heart” (*Psalms 42–106*, 820). The person of integrity will order well his private world. His life of integrity will be most evident to those closest to him. He will be faithful to his spouse with whom he has 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 also 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:

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. (“Consequences”)

Wise and godly leaders will care for their homes. They will not ignore their families, nor will they take them for granted.

The Person of God Will Keep His Eyes from Anything That Is Worthless

PSALM 101:3

David says, “I will not let anything worthless guide me” (v. 3). The CSB notes that a literal translation of the Hebrew is, “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 translated “worthless” (NIV, “vile”) is literally “a thing of Belial.” That which is wicked and worthless, David will not set his eyes on. He knows 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 our eyes, we should regularly recall the words of Jesus in Matthew 6:22: “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light [i.e., goodness].” And again, we should remember the counsel of the Proverbs:

Wisdom is the focus of the perceptive, but a fool’s eyes roam to the ends of the earth. (Prov 17:24)

My son, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways. (Prov 23:26)

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. (Prov 30:12-13)

The Bible says not to put your eyes on what is worthless. Instead, we ought to put our eyes on what is worthy. Hebrews 12:1-2 is a good word here: “Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us, keeping our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.”

The Person of God Will Hate What Is Wrong and Will Not Let It Get Hold of Him

PSALM 101:3

Having nothing evil before his eyes, a wise and trustworthy leader will hate the work of those who walk away from the truth. David says that we are to “hate the practice of transgression.” The wise leader will maintain his personal purity, in part, by hating and not tolerating evil. The word translated “transgression” carries the idea of falling away, “doing apostasies” or “acts of unfaithfulness” (Ross, *Psalms 90–150*, 201). If he has people in mind, David is saying he will not put faithless people on his team. It does not matter how charismatic, gifted, or talented they are, they are not welcome in his world. They “will not cling to [him].” Their sin and unfaithfulness to the things of God, as an ongoing lifestyle, disqualifies them. Spurgeon is right: “Hatred of sin is a good sentinel for the door of virtue” (*Treasury*, vol. 2b, 240).

The Person of God Will Not Welcome Evil Persons into His Inner Circle

PSALM 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 passages that speak to this issue of the heart, especially as he considers those he would invite into his inner circle.

The heart is more deceitful than anything else, and incurable—who can understand it? (Jer 17:9)

God, create a clean heart for me and renew a steadfast spirit within me. (Ps 51:10)

Guard your heart above all else, for it is the source of life. (Prov 4:23)

A wise heart accepts commands, but foolish lips will be destroyed. (Prov 10:8)

The heart of a wise person instructs his mouth; it adds learning to his speech. (Prov 16:23)

As water reflects the face, so the heart reflects the person. (Prov 27:19)

*Brood of vipers! How can you speak good things when you are evil?
For the mouth speaks from the overflow of the heart. (Matt 12:34)*

*But what comes out of the mouth comes from the heart, and this defiles
a person. For from the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries,
sexual immoralities, thefts, false testimonies, slander. (Matt 15:18-19)*

David said that 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 he also speaks concerning those he would consider his close confidants. Integrity is crucial all around. A devious or perverse heart is a twisted heart. Its affections are warped, and the choices it makes will inevitably be evil. They are not reliable or trustworthy. They will harm the people of God and infect morale.

Although not a book about the Bible, *Good to Great* by Jim Collins offers a wealth of wisdom, particularly for team building. Collins writes that good leaders get the right people on the bus and the wrong people off the bus. When in doubt, they do not hire. They keep looking. And when they know they need to make a change, they act. Collins writes, “The old adage ‘People are your most important asset’ turns out to be wrong. People are *not* your most important asset. The *right* people are” (*Good to Great*, 13).

Spurgeon said there is “the need of extreme care in the choice of our intimates” (*Treasury*, vol. 2b, 249). The people you surround yourself with can make or break you. Be the right person and pursue the right people. The two go together.

The Person of God Will Give No Place to Slander or Gossip

PSALM 101:5

Verse 5 has strong and direct language. The poetic nature of the psalm serves as a helpful guide, especially in our application of the text. Verse 5 is a specific example of verse 4. Because David “will not be involved with evil,” he will “destroy anyone who secretly slanders his neighbor.” *The Message* says this: “I put a gag on the gossip who bad-mouths his neighbor.” 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" (*Psalms 93–150*, 91). Scripture says,

Do not go about spreading slander among your people; do not jeopardize your neighbor's life; I am the LORD. (Lev 19:16)

Whoever spreads slander is a fool. (Prov 10:18b)

Lying lips are detestable to the LORD, but faithful people are his delight. (Prov 12:22)

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

The Person of God Will Seek Out the Humble, Not the Proud

PSALM 101:5

There is a threefold criterion of the proud in verse 5: they are those who slander, who have haughty eyes, and who have an arrogant heart. Notice 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 sin in himself or in others. He will walk with integrity and expect the same in others. He will silence slanderers and refuse to run with the proud and arrogant. He will set them aside to negate their cancerous influence in the community of God's people.

Haughty eyes are the outward expression of an arrogant heart. Arrogant and ambitious people are notorious for looking down on others and oozing an air of superiority. 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).

In the context of character traits for leaders, Peter's words are instructive:

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 gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you at the proper time. (1 Pet 5:5-6)

“Humility,” as Rick Warren writes, “is not thinking less of yourself, it is thinking of yourself less” (*Purpose Driven Life*, 148).¹ Humility is crucial for all Christian activity. John Flavel adds, “They that know God will be humble, Isa. 6:5; and they that know themselves cannot be proud” (*Method of Grace*, 487). Finally, Augustine is often attributed with saying, “If you plan to build a tall house of virtues, you must first lay deep foundations of humility.”

The Person of God Will Look to Surround Himself with People Who Are Faithful and Have Integrity

PSALM 101:6

There is a common saying in business that A leaders hire A leaders and B leaders hire C leaders. David says the person of God will be on the lookout for particular people 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 may serve me.” Verse 6 stands in stark contrast to verse 5, and it returns to the theme of the eyes from verses 3 and 5. David will not allow anything worthless before his eyes, and he will not surround himself with those who have haughty eyes. He will seek out with his eyes the faithful and those who have integrity.

Notice the word “serve” (ESV, “minister”) at the end of verse 6. Set your eyes on servant-leaders, individuals with a servant’s heart. Look for people who do not expect or ask of others what they do not expect or ask of themselves. Here are some hints for what to look for in a servant-leader:

Look for a person who has worked as a janitor or custodian.

Look for a person who has worked as a server.

¹ This quote is regularly, though incorrectly, attributed to C. S. Lewis; however, Lewis never stated these words in any of his books (O’Flaherty, *Misquotable C. S. Lewis*, 8–9).

Look for a person who is kind and generous in a restaurant.

Look for a person who gladly gives attention to children and the elderly.

Look for a person who is gracious to those who can do nothing to further his or her agenda.

Look for a person who treats others like they are the most important people in the world.

Mark 10:45 reminds us of how central to the gospel being a servant-leader is: “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.”

The Person of God Will Have Nothing to Do with Liars and the Dishonest

PSALM 101:7

Verse 7 has the language of the king and his court, and it still provides application for anyone in Christian leadership. Verse 5 advises to confront and deal decisively with slanderers and the arrogant. Now, verse 7 says to do the same with the one “who acts deceitfully” and “who tells lies.” Such a person is not welcome in David’s house, and he will not receive his counsel.

Those who are dishonest and destructive, deceitful and deceptive, are not allowed a seat at the table of leadership. They cannot have access to the leader’s court. The disloyal, dishonest, unfaithful, hypocritical, lying, gossiping, and divisive are not welcome. The person of integrity will take inventory of his own life, watching out for himself so that he can avoid temptation (Gal 6:1), and he will consider carefully who his trusted counselors and advisors are.

Ross is right: “No liar should ever be put in a position of authority or honor” (*Psalms 90–150*, 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” (*Psalms 93–150*, 93). The people we listen to and spend time with 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*, vol. 2b, 241). Revelation 21:8 confirms Spurgeon’s words.

The Person of God Will Not Grow Weary in the Battles of Good and Evil

PSALM 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 know that our God wins! The war is won, but battles will remain until that day. Vigilance in the fight is a necessary characteristic of God’s people. We must not grow weary in well-doing.

In verse 8 David declares, “Every morning [ESV, “morning by morning”] I will destroy all the wicked of the land, wiping out evildoers from the LORD’s city.” This is strong but necessary language cast poetically. In the ancient world, judgment usually happened in the morning. The Lord’s city was Jerusalem. The person of God in a position of spiritual leadership will confront evil and wickedness day after day. If God will not tolerate evil, neither can we whom he has called to lead and shepherd his people. We will be on guard against the figurative dogs, pigs, and wolves of Scripture. We will protect the flock of God. At the same time, we will speak prophetically against evil whenever and wherever we see it. We will not play either the coward or the hireling!

Conclusion

The faithful servant of King Jesus believes Christian witness should permeate all of culture. Living out the kingdom ethics of Scripture, we are to be salt and light to a wicked and darkened world as we share and display 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 should contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death. The person of God does not care who is in the White House or Congress. He does not care whether it is a Democrat, Republican, Libertarian, or Independent. His allegiance is to the King, not a president. His hope and assurance are 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.

Reflect and Discuss

1. When the psalmist refers to God's "faithful love," what acts of God is he referencing? Where in the New Testament and in your own life do you see evidence of God's faithful love?
2. This section teaches that living wisely means having "healthy transparency." What do healthy patterns of transparency look like? What would unhealthy transparency look like?
3. Have you seen a difference in your prayers when you believe prayer is *important* and when you believe it is *essential*? What was different between the two?
4. Sexual immorality is a sin where by spiritual leaders often fall. Why is this the case? What are proactive ways godly leaders can pursue integrity?
5. Have you ever evaluated the people you have close to you? Do they match what you would say you want to have around you? What is present and what is missing?
6. At what point does your conversation become gossip? What can you do in those moments to bring the gospel truth into those conversations?
7. What are some actions that might be culturally acceptable, even in the church, but are evidence of an "arrogant heart"?
8. What other hints of a servant-leader would you add to the list in this section?
9. Should Christians associate with nonbelievers who sin in the way this psalm describes? Why or why not?
10. List examples of wise and faithful spiritual leaders you have known personally. What about their leadership and lives would you want to emulate?