



# THRIVING AS A CHRISTIAN AND A LEADER IN A WORLD THAT HATES BOTH

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## Abstract

Today, Christian leaders are under attack in the home, community, schools, businesses, and in government. Being a Christian has always been a dangerous commitment since the world hates the truth that Christianity represents. Political and cultural shifts have also put leaders regardless of their faith at odds in the eyes of the public. Being both a Christian and leader is a survival test. So how does a person thrive as both a Christian and leader in a world that hates both?

*Keywords: Christian leadership, Philippians, leadership success, commitment*

## Introduction

I am both a Christian and a leader who strives to be highly engaged in the world around me. I am a leader in my organization, my community, and my family. This makes me an easy target for blame, criticism, and frustration from those who disagree with the decisions that I make daily. However, what make me a prime target is that I am fundamentally and to my core a believer in

Jesus Christ. I am first a Christian. I serve a mighty God and that is who I strive to follow and please first. This makes me not just an easy target, but a priority target for those against Jesus and the saving truth that He brings. The following discusses how to not just survive, but truly thrive as a Christian, a leader, and effective practitioner of both.

## Thriving as a Christian

The Apostle Paul in his book to the Philippians describes how Christians should live in the world. Christians are not to be withdrawn from the world and huddled in safe places with other believers. Rather, they are to actively engage with the world. Paul challenges Christians, who truly desire to thrive, to both develop and practice in eight key areas: thanksgiving and prayer, ambassadors of the Gospel, courageous followers, humble stewards, be a light, practicing righteousness, staying on mission, and with the clear understanding that our strength comes from God.

### *Thanksgiving and Prayer*

Being sincerely thankful is challenging when a person faces tragedy, struggles or disappointments. Christians facing the loss of a loved one or the loss of a job feel the same pain as others in the world who do not believe. However, Christians have a hope of eternal salvation as shown in John 3:16 “for God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.” It is this hope that encourages Christians to remain thankful in all things. Prayer is a Christian’s primary communication tool with God. It provides a means for Christians to state their thanks directly to God through the bridge established through Jesus. Paul, in his address to the Christians in Philippi, states “I thank my God in remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine” (Philippians 1:3). Being truly thankful through prayer sets apart a Christian from another.

### *Ambassadors of the Gospel*

An engaged Christian has a daily opportunity to advance the Gospel. Whether walking free or in prison, Paul showed Christians how they could point others to Christ. In Philippians 1:12, Paul

describes his experience in prison as a way to “advance the gospel...throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest...” Similarly, Christians that walk free in countries such as America have the daily opportunity to be ambassadors of the Gospel. Those that are being aggressively persecuted and imprisoned in many countries in the world today have Paul as their example.

### *Courageous Followers*

Philippians 1:21 states “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” Christians may be asked to give up a lot more while living in the world than just opportunity, favor, possessions or freedom. They may be asked to give their life. With this mind, Christians should take courage in knowing that their salvation is secure, and the victory is already won. However, what does it mean to be courageous in the little things that a Christian may be bombarded with every day? It might be a cutting remark by another, a denial of an opportunity at work, or an exclusion from a group. We are called to stand firm and “not be frightened in anything” (Philippians 1:28). Christians are called to be courageous in both the big and little things.

### *Humble Stewards*

Evidence of humility occurs when a person consistently put others first. “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves” (Philippians 2:3). This is hard to do. Being humble in all things is a struggle for many Christians. However, Jesus is the perfect example of what it means to be a humble steward. By humbling Himself and becoming “obedient to death” He became “highly exalted” (Philippians 2:8-9). High exaltation is not a Christian’s reward; however, we can rest assured that when we practice as a humble steward that God sees it and He will provide accordingly.

### *Be a Light*

Being a light to others in the world requires a Christian to “do all things without grumbling or disputing” (Philippians 2:14). No one wants to follow or model their life after someone who is always complaining about something. Being a bright light for the Gospel, requires Christians to strive to be positive with those around them. Being positive in a negative situation requires

discipline. It also requires perspective in knowing that others are watching to see if you will start complaining when something goes wrong.

### *Practicing Righteousness*

Paul challenges Christians in Philippians 3:9 to have “the righteousness from God that depends on faith.” Having faith is critical in being able to practice righteousness. Hebrews 11 describes the faith that Christians should seek to have in their own lives. Without faith, righteousness, or striving to be like God in his manner and actions, would not be a realistic goal for Christians.

### *Staying on Mission*

Christians are not called to build up riches for themselves or bring glory through conquests that only seek to prop up their own lives. Christians are challenged to stay on a very specific mission. Philippians 3:14 defines the mission of a Christian as “press[ing] on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” This is the primary calling for all Christians who are being challenged in the world. Christians are called to stay focused on this and to not let the distractions of the world cloud the real mission.

### *Strength Comes from God*

A thriving Christian understands that their needs are met through God. These needs can be in the form of provisions, encouragement, protection or strength. “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13). Without the strength of God, Christians would fail quickly and decisively in their daily activity and interactions in the world. Christians know that the world is against the truth that they are striving to tell. It is only through God’s grace and strength that Christians stand a chance.

## Thriving as a Leader

In many ways, learning to be a Christian and a leader are the same. A study of the New Testament shows that Christians develop over time through study, observations, discernment, and experiences in their walk with the Lord. Christianity is process. Peter Northouse, a

renowned authority on the study of leadership, defines “leadership [as] a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (1). It is the process itself that defines how developed and effective both a Christian and a leader will become. The following details the perspective, commitment, attitude, and character that thriving leaders develop and employ when seeking to influence others.

### *Perspective*

Leadership is a life journey. The popular song “Life is a Highway” by Rascal Flatts and showcased in the Disney movie “Cars” depicts life as a long race with trials and struggles along the way (2). Leaders will be challenged in life. They may fail, or they may succeed. The effective leaders know this and uses this long-term perspective to gain an edge. Jesus in His ministry took the long-term perspective with the Disciples. Building an effective team takes time.

Successful leaders create clarity and alignment for their teams (3). Leaders select organize and point those that they lead to accomplish a certain mission. It is the crew team in sync that will win the race. It is the business team focused on delivery of a great product that will achieve marketplace dominance. It is the ministry team serving effectively in their giftings that will grow a church. Leaders know the importance of clarity and alignment and guard it fervently.

In addition, perspective for a leader entails paying attention to the little details and holding team members accountable for results. Simply put, results matter. A leader that builds a team is accountable to and for that team. When a detail is dropped, or a team member fails, then the entire team suffers. Leaders need to keep pushing themselves and their followers to get better and hold each other accountable for results. A healthy leadership perspective has a big dose of accountability in the mix.

### *Commitment*

Being committed to physically work out every day takes discipline. Similarly, leaders that are committed to a team requires a leader to show up, engage, and stay active with those that they lead. Leadership requires a dedication that followers can see. Influence of others can be gained

through a leader showing commitment. Teams without a committed leader are vulnerable to failure. Commitment is easy when there is nothing to lose. Leaders that risk themselves to stay committed to a team proves to them that what they are doing is important and really matters. Commitment is crucial to a leader in building their team.

### *Attitude*

Throughout the Bible leaders had attitude. Jonathan in 1 Samuel: 14 used his faith in God to mold his attitude to route the Philistines. Peter in serving Jesus had a healthy attitude as shown throughout the book of Matthew as he sought to get better and become a stronger follower of Christ. Jesus saw both his faith and attitude and said in Matthew 16:18 “you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church.” It has been stated that “attitude often determines altitude” or how high a person or team will go. Leaders with a healthy attitude can inspire and influence teams to achieve amazing results.

### *Character*

The character development of a leader is important as they seek to lead others. The following are four key characteristics that effective leaders possess. It starts with integrity. Followers need to be able to trust the character of the leader they follow. Second, a leader must be authentic. Leadership actors may fool some for a while, but most followers will see through it over time. Third, a humble leader, is one who truly puts the needs of others first. Humility is a clear indicator that leaders fully understand that their real role as a leader is to benefit others even at their own expense. Fourth, they must have the courage to stand up for their team and to make the tough decisions that are often required of leaders who are doing great things with their teams.

## **Practicing as an Effective Christian Leader**

Being an effective Christian leader requires a commitment to adhere to what the Bible says about both being a believer and a leader. In the world today, the truths about leadership found in both the Old and New Testaments are just as relevant today as they were thousands of years

ago. Active study and knowledge gathering are critical for a Christian leader in achieving success.

Many Christian leaders fail when they lose perspective or faith. They allow the world to beat them up and change them for the worse. Christian leaders need to be strong, focused, and courageous to face the daily struggles. Keeping their eyes fixed on God will help a Christian leader to keep their perspective.

In addition, faith plays a pivotal role in a Christian leader's ability to thrive. A strong faith and perspective allow a Christian leader to see a struggle for what it is and to develop a plan of action that will with God's strength be conquered. God uses Christian leaders more when they show that they faithful to His work.

## The Challenge

Hopefully, you have the desire to be a Christian leader because the world definitely needs you in the game. Are you willing to put in the hard work and make the commitment to be not just a survivor, but a thriving Christian leader in a world that hates both?

## References

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