

[The ONE Thing that Should Characterize Every Christian Leader](#)

The one thing that should characterize every Christian leader...often doesn't.

I'm hesitant to tell you what it is up front because you will do what I would be tempted to do...say 'well of course' and move on.

Who needs another lesson in *that*?

Well, honestly, I do.



And second, it's not that simple.

This one thing is:

The easiest thing to say you understand but so difficult to put into practice.

Something no one really teaches you in seminary.

A casualty of leadership for many people who are focused on being right and making progress, and equally for those who aren't as A-type.

Often so poorly understood that even people who claim to have mastered it haven't.

And I only write about it because *I'm* still trying to figure out its application to my life and leadership *daily*.

So what is it?

Love.

I told you that you'd roll your eyes and want to move on. Or think "well I've got that covered".

But I'm not sure the church does. I'm not sure Christian leaders do anyway, regardless of our denominational stripe or style of leadership.

[Jesus said](#) the mark that would define every authentic follower is *love*. He was so clear: our love would be proof to the world that we are Jesus' followers.

And yet church leaders are rarely known for our love.

Why is that?

Two Kinds of Leaders

Most of us (including those of us who resist categories) still fall into one of two categories.

There are truth people.

And then there are grace people.

The truth people stand up for what's right. They don't compromise when it comes to doctrine. They feel compelled to enforce the rules in a world that is bent on ignoring them. They point out when others are wrong because the truth needs to be defended. And in the name of truth, leaders savagely attack others.

The grace people are more about love and relationship. They feel for others. They don't want to rush to judgment. They don't want to sacrifice a relationship for the sake of a disagreement. They don't want to confront because they don't want to judge. In the name of grace, people avoid issues that honestly need to be addressed.

The truth people think the grace people have no spine.

And the grace people think the truth people have no heart.

What Love Looks Like

The reality is our Savior came full of both grace AND truth.

He never spoke truth without speaking it gracefully.

He never displayed grace in a way that compromised the truth.

Never.

Grace was never separated from truth. Truth was never separated from grace.

Every leader needs to understand that:

Truth isn't truth without grace.

Grace isn't grace without truth.

Think about it. You know this:

Truth that doesn't originate in love is harsh and cruel.

Grace that is spineless is meaningless and leads people nowhere.

Only when grace and truth come together do we really see any power.

I think one of the things that made Jesus' ministry so compelling to outsiders (and maybe so threatening to insiders) is that they saw this rare and tremendously powerful synthesis of grace and truth—and it was spellbinding.

5 Ways to Lead

So what does love look like in leadership?

How do you embody grace and truth every day?

It's a rather inexhaustible treasure. I'm sure you could come up with many examples (and please do in the comments).

But here are five simple practices that if followed, can lead to a greater marriage of grace and truth in your life and leadership. These will at least get us started.

1. Think more of others than you think of yourself. Self is at the root of most (or all) sin. When I over focus on my wants and my needs, I ignore others. A leader who loves thinks of what's best for others, what's best for the organization, what's best for the mission and what's best for the cause rather than what's best for themselves (like winning an argument or avoiding a tough situation). When I think more of others, I die to myself and can begin to live in love.

2. Speak well of people publicly, and deal with disagreements privately and directly. Human nature is to do the opposite; complain publicly and say nothing privately or directly. Just flip that. If you have a disagreement, go direct and deal with it. But speak kindly of the person publicly.

3. Disagree without being disagreeable. We're humans. Of course we are going to disagree. But how we disagree is almost more damaging than the fact *that* we disagree. Don't attack when you disagree. Show empathy. Respect. Imagine how the blogging world might change if we learned to disagree without being disagreeable. Imagine how local congregations might change.

4. Take the high road. Okay that's a cliché, I know. But think about it, you know what it means, don't you? And looking back over your life, have you *ever* regretted taking the high road? Not once. The high road is never the easy road but it's the best road. And here's the truth—you *know* what the high road is, don't you? So take it. It's hard now, but you'll be so grateful later.

5. Serve those you lead. One of the best questions you can ask as a leader is 'how can I help you'? If your primary leadership orientation is to help others, you will reflect the heart of your Heavenly Father far more than when you lead to serve yourself. And your leadership will resonate more with people.

About Carey Nieuwhof: Carey Nieuwhof is lead pastor of Connexus Community Church and author of the best selling books, *Leading Change Without Losing It* and *Parenting Beyond Your Capacity*. Carey speaks to North American and global church leaders about change, leadership, and parenting.