

## Christian Leaders Who Want To Change: Self-Reformation As The Key To Effective Leadership

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### ABSTRACT

*This research examines the challenges of Christian leadership in the information age, an era characterized by rapid information flow, public scrutiny, and increasing demands for transparency and accountability. In such a context, leaders are expected not only to demonstrate competence but also to maintain strong moral integrity. The primary issue addressed in this study is the growing crisis of trust among followers, which often arises when leaders fail to live consistently with the ethical and spiritual values they proclaim. This research employs a qualitative method using a library research approach. Data were collected through an in-depth analysis of biblical texts, scholarly journals, and theological literature related to leadership principles. The findings reveal that personal renewal and self-reform, particularly by modeling leadership patterns rooted in the teachings and example of Christ, are essential for restoring credibility. Leadership strategies that emphasize humility, service, and consistency of character prove effective in rebuilding trust, strengthening community relationships, and inspiring renewed motivation among members within Christian organizations.*

**Keywords:** *Christian Leadership, Leader Integrity, Followers' Trust, Christ's Example, Service and Character.*



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## INTRODUCTION

Christian leadership is one of the fundamental pillars that shapes the spiritual dynamics and credibility of the church as a moral institution within society. Through leadership grounded in integrity, the church not only fulfills its pastoral functions but also provides an ethical example that shapes the life of the faith community. However, contemporary realities reveal a rather serious crisis of integrity among church leaders. Leniwan, Deni (2022) as well as Lase, Selviawati, and Sirait (2025) assert that the failure of some leaders to align normative statements with real-life practices has had significant consequences, such as spiritual stagnation among congregants and the weakening of the church's role as a light to society. In the context of the information age, characterized by data openness, high social scrutiny, and public demands for transparency and accountability, such moral inconsistencies are increasingly exposed and have the potential to erode congregational trust on a broad scale. Consequently, the relationship between leaders and followers undergoes erosion, ultimately hindering the church's effectiveness in carrying out its spiritual and social missions.

A number of previous studies have highlighted the importance of integrity in Christian leadership, such as those by Bina M ardiati Lase<sup>1</sup>, Selviawati (2025) and have examined the biblical principles underlying church leadership practices by Manafe & Mudak. (2025) Nevertheless, there remains a research gap that requires further exploration. Most previous studies tend to stop at the stage of identifying moral crises normatively or at conceptual theological explanations. Studies that comprehensively formulate an integrative model of leaders' self-reform are still relatively limited. Specifically, there has been little research elaborating on how a leader's inner transformation process, rooted in Alexander's concept of "To Live is Christ" spirituality (Situmorang et al., 2025) can be translated into concrete and relevant leadership strategies for navigating the dynamics of the digital age including technological disruption, information openness, and the growing criticality of modern congregations. Therefore, the novelty of this article lies in the effort to integrate the ontological depth of a leader's identity in Christ with practical steps for self-reform applicable to contemporary Christian leadership practice.

Based on this background, this study aims to address three main issues. First, to identify the characteristics of Christian leadership capable of rebuilding congregational trust amidst a crisis of integrity. Second, to analyze the mechanisms of a leader's self-reform that can yield authentic, consistent, and values-rooted Christian ministry. Third, to formulate adaptive leadership strategies in facing the challenges of social pluralism and digital disruption without neglecting the spiritual and theological dimensions that form the primary foundation of church leadership.

Theoretically, this article is expected to contribute to enriching the academic discourse on Christian leadership through the integration of the concept of servant leadership with a character reform paradigm grounded in biblical principles. This integration offers a perspective that emphasizes not only the structural aspects of leadership but also the spiritual and moral transformation of leaders as the core of Christian leadership practice. Practically, the results of this study are expected to serve as a reference for church leaders in carrying out tangible and sustainable integrity transformation, so that church ministry is not merely understood as an

organizational activity but as a living testimony that restores the relationship between leaders and the congregation and strengthens the church's relevance amidst ever-evolving social dynamics.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative design using a descriptive-analytical library research approach. The primary focus of the study is to explore the phenomenon of self-reform among Christian leaders through an in-depth analysis of theological texts and contemporary academic literature (Sugiyono, 2021). Pemilihan metode ini didasarkan pada kebutuhan untuk membangun kerangka konseptual yang kokoh mengenai integritas dan karakter kepemimpinan yang tidak dapat diukur secara numerik, melainkan memerlukan interpretasi makna yang mendalam. Penggunaan desain ini memungkinkan peneliti untuk menyintesis berbagai pemikiran teologis guna menjawab tantangan etis dan moral yang dihadapi pemimpin gereja saat ini secara komprehensif.

The choice of this method is based on the need to construct a robust conceptual framework regarding leadership integrity and character qualities that cannot be measured numerically but require a deep interpretation of meaning. This design allows the researcher to synthesize various theological perspectives to comprehensively address the ethical and moral challenges faced by church leaders today.

The subject of this research is not a physical individual but a corpus of texts selected purposively based on thematic relevance. The primary data source in this study is the Bible as the foundation of theological authority, while secondary data sources include theological journals, reference books, and academic articles published between 2020 and 2025. This timeframe was established to ensure the data remains up-to-date regarding the dynamics of Christian leadership in the era of digital disruption. The literature review focuses on works discussing servant leadership, inner transformation, and moral accountability to ensure the processed data possesses high academic credibility (Mestika Zed, 2008). Data collection was conducted through systematic documentation involving the stages of identification, classification, and verification of texts. The researcher screened relevant literature, particularly from reputable sources such as *Proskuneo: Journal of Theology*, to identify patterns of effective self-reform. In this process, personal reflection was used sparingly solely to sharpen the context of the issues, while conclusions were drawn entirely based on literary evidence to minimize subjective bias. To maintain objectivity, the researcher applied strict reflexivity procedures to ensure a methodological separation between personal assumptions and literary data.

Data analysis was conducted using content analysis techniques, which include data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The collected data was categorized into main themes such as character consistency, ministry strategies, and Christ-centered leadership models. The validity and credibility of the research are ensured through source triangulation, in which the researcher compares biblical text interpretations with empirical findings reported in various scientific journals (Hartono, 2018). Through this procedure, the researcher clearly

distinguishes between normative theological reflections and applied research findings, thereby producing conclusions that are objective and scientifically accountable.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Definition And Purpose Of Christian Leadership Change

Leadership from a Christian perspective is not merely understood as the ability to direct or manage a group, but as a calling to influence others to live in accordance with God's will. This leadership is rooted in the relationship between the leader and those being led, in which the leader serves as a role model who demonstrates the values of faith through daily attitudes, decisions, and actions. Thus, leadership is not merely an organizational activity, but also a spiritual ministry aimed at guiding others toward growth in faith and a life closer to God. This principle aligns with biblical teachings that emphasize the importance of a leader's exemplary life. 1 Timothy 4:12 states that a leader must be an example in speech, conduct, love, faithfulness, and purity. This indicates that the success of Christian leadership is closely tied to the character of the leader.

Various theological and leadership studies also show that the success of a Christian leader is largely determined by the process of developing a strong character. Such character reflects Christian values such as humility, love, integrity, patience, and a willingness to serve others. Research conducted by Suryana (2016) confirms that the development of a leader's character is a crucial aspect in cultivating interpersonal and professional skills. The study explains that leadership is not merely an innate talent but the result of a learning process gained through organizational experience, social interaction, and continuous mentoring. In other words, an effective leader is someone who experiences continuous character growth, thereby becoming a trustworthy role model for others.

In addition to character development, studies on Christian leadership also emphasize the importance of self-renewal as part of a leader's spiritual growth process. Self-renewal is a process of change within an individual through the renewal of thought patterns, attitudes, and actions to align more closely with Christian values. This process is crucial because a leader influences others not only through words but also through a life that has been renewed. This concept of life renewal is affirmed in Romans 12:2, which states that every believer is called to experience a renewal of the mind so that they may discern God's good and perfect will. Through self-renewal, a leader learns to abandon old ways of life that are inconsistent with Christian values and replace them with a lifestyle that reflects the character of Christ.

The primary model of Christian leadership can be seen in the life of Jesus Christ. In His various teachings, Jesus demonstrated that true leadership is rooted in service to others. This leadership model is known as servant leadership—leadership that places service at the core of every leader's action. This is explained in Panjaitan's (2020) research, which emphasizes that Jesus' leadership focuses on devotion to others, not on power or domination. This principle is affirmed in Mark 10:45, which states that the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve. This verse illustrates that Christian leaders are called to prioritize the interests of others over

their own. Furthermore, Christian leadership also has a broader purpose: to lead others to know and follow Christ. Therefore, a leader is not only responsible for managing an organization or community but also for guiding others toward spiritual growth. Jarangga's (2024) research confirms that leaders who understand Christian values will be better equipped to face the challenges of changing times and guide their communities to remain steadfast in the truth of the faith. These values form the foundation for formulating effective leadership strategies within the context of ministry and evangelism.

Based on this discussion, it can be understood that Christian leadership involves several interrelated key elements: the leader's character, the process of self-renewal, and strategies for leading others to follow Christ. These three elements form a crucial foundation for understanding how Christian leadership can be effectively practiced within both the church and society.

### **Characteristics Of Successful Christian Leadership**

The characteristics of successful Christian leadership are closely tied to a proper understanding of the purpose of leadership itself. From a Christian theological perspective, leadership is not merely about managing an organization or leading a community administratively, but also about guiding others toward growth in faith and a deeper knowledge of God. An analysis of Yaterongo Zebua's (2021) ideas shows that the success of a Christian leader is largely determined by the clarity of their leadership orientation specifically, whether that leadership is truly centered on the values of Christ. A leader who understands this purpose will strive to exhibit a character that reflects the life of Jesus Christ as the primary model. Thus, the success of leadership is not only measured by externally visible results but also by the quality of character that influences the spiritual life of the community being led.

One of the main pillars of successful Christian leadership is integrity. Integrity refers to a consistent way of life rooted in truth and honesty, both in words and actions. A leader with integrity will carry out their responsibilities transparently and be trusted by those they lead. Integrity is also tied to a commitment to the values one holds. In his book "Make Today Count" (2012) John C. Maxwell emphasizes that commitment is the key to maintaining one's position and upholding integrity in leadership. When a leader demonstrates loyalty to the commitments they have made, they build a sense of security and trust within their community. This example can be found in the life of Jesus Christ, who demonstrated perfect alignment between His teachings and His actions, so that His followers had strong confidence in His leadership.

In addition to integrity, morality is also a crucial aspect in shaping effective Christian leadership. Morality, in this context, is formed through the internalization of biblical teachings that guide a person to distinguish between right and wrong (Ranting et al., 2025). A leader with strong moral character will make God's Word the foundation for decision-making and action in various situations. With this foundation, a leader can avoid actions that harm others and foster the creation of a harmonious social life. Morality rooted in biblical values also helps reduce conflict within the community, as every decision is made based on the principles of justice and truth. Through this approach, a leader can create a peaceful atmosphere that is felt by all segments of society, whether those of high social status or those of humble means.

The next pillar is leadership ethics grounded in Christian principles. Ethics serve as a guide directing a leader's behavior to remain within the bounds of proper values. Research by Fingfing dan Styadi (2024) confirms that Christian ethics act as a tool for self-control, helping leaders to act wisely in various situations. Leaders with strong ethics not only follow established rules but also demonstrate attitudes that reflect love and forgiveness. This principle is evident in the example of Jesus Christ, who did not repay evil with evil but responded with love and forgiveness. Such an attitude demonstrates that Christian ethics are not merely about compliance with rules but also about the ability to bring goodness into difficult situations.

Humility is also a crucial character trait in Christian leadership. Research by Sahat and Ryna, cited in Sinaga and Tambunan (Sinaga & Tambunan, 2021) indicates that humility serves as the foundation for building strong and trustworthy leadership. A humble leader does not view themselves as superior to others but is willing to listen, value, and serve those they lead, regardless of their background or social status. This attitude enables leaders to have a broad positive impact on their communities (Chandler et al., 2023). Humility also reflects a leader's focus on a greater spiritual responsibility: introducing God's love to humanity, as emphasized in John 17:3 regarding the importance of knowing God as the source of eternal life.

In addition to these characteristics, several studies also highlight the importance of a continuous learning process in Christian leadership. Rengnge, as cited in Layuk (2019) and Mangape's (2023) research indicate that leadership that reflects the character of Christ will have a lasting impact, not only in this life but also from the perspective of eternal life. This underscores that Christian leadership possesses a spiritual dimension that transcends temporary success. Nainggolan and Paradesha (2022) also note that an integral learning process is a crucial component of leadership effectiveness. Leaders who continuously learn are better equipped to understand the dynamics of ministry and navigate the changes occurring in society.

Conversely, leaders who stop learning tend to lose the ability to adapt to emerging challenges. Hillson (2024) explains that leaders who do not develop themselves often avoid risks and are reluctant to take innovative steps. This situation can hinder the development of the organization or community they lead. In fact, Thobias's (2020) research indicates that leadership failure often stems from a reluctance to continue learning and improving oneself. Therefore, an open attitude toward learning and self-development is an essential component of effective Christian leadership. Thus, the characteristics of successful Christian leadership can be understood through several key pillars: integrity, morality grounded in God's Word, a service-oriented ethic, humility, and a commitment to continuous learning. These traits form the foundation of leadership that is not only organizationally effective but also has a profound spiritual impact on the lives of those being led.

### **The Role Of Reform In Christian Leadership**

The results of the literature review indicate that self-reform is rooted in a deep spiritual awareness of humanity's complete dependence on God. This awareness encourages individuals to view personal growth as a never-ending journey. Within this framework, self-reform demands a commitment to continuous learning, in which leaders continually open themselves to new knowledge, experiences, and reflections. Without such an attitude, leadership risks

becoming trapped in a comfort zone that avoids challenges, thereby hindering both personal and organizational development, as highlighted by Hillson (2024). Furthermore, theological reflection on Paul's teaching regarding the principle "To Live is Christ" enriches our understanding of the nature of self-transformation. This expression affirms that the center of a believer's life no longer lies in personal interests, but in an orientation fully directed toward Christ. Thus, self-reform is not merely an enhancement of personal capacity, but an inner transformation that demands the denial of the ego and a realignment of life's motivations. This process guides individuals to make service to others their top priority, so that self-renewal functions as a means to bring about a broader impact in communal life.

The findings of this study reinforce the relevance of Servant Leadership theory by providing a more specific theological emphasis through the leadership model of Jesus Christ. From a Christian faith perspective, the concept of servant leadership is not merely understood as an ethical approach to managing people, but as a spiritual calling rooted in the example of Christ himself (Setiawan & Abraham, 2024). The Gospel depicts that the leadership desired by God is oriented toward service to others, not toward the pursuit of status or power. This principle is affirmed in Matthew 20:26–28, when Jesus states that whoever wishes to be great must become a servant, for the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many. This statement places service at the core of Christian leadership practice, while simultaneously shifting the leadership paradigm from a power-oriented focus toward sacrifice and moral responsibility.

Furthermore, Christ's example demonstrates that true leadership is closely tied to humility and a willingness to place the interests of others above one's own. This is symbolically evident in the washing of the disciples' feet (John 13:14–15), which carries a pedagogical meaning that a leader must not be detached from the concrete reality of service. This act is not merely a moral illustration but also a model for leadership character formation that emphasizes spiritual integrity. Thus, Christian leadership demands not only competence in managing an organization but also a willingness to live out Gospel values in concrete actions. Within this framework, leadership authority is not understood as a privilege, but rather as a mandate to build up, nurture, and equip others.

The findings of this study also engage with Suryana's (2016) perspective, which states that leadership is shaped through organizational experience. Such experience indeed plays a crucial role in developing practical skills, such as decision-making, conflict management, and institutional strategy development. Through continuous interaction within organizational structures, a leader learns to understand group dynamics, communication patterns, and effective coordination mechanisms. However, the results of the literature analysis in this study indicate that for Christian leaders, organizational experience cannot be understood in a neutral or purely pragmatic manner. Such experience must be situated within a theological framework of reflection so that the leadership learning process remains aligned with the values of faith.

In this context, the Bible provides guiding principles on how life experiences should be interpreted. The Apostle Paul emphasizes in Romans 12:2 that believers must not conform to the world but must be transformed by the renewal of their minds so that they may discern God's will which is good, pleasing, and perfect. This verse affirms that every experience, including

organizational experiences, must be filtered through a process of spiritual reflection so as not to lead leaders toward a leadership style that merely follows worldly logic. Without this filtering process, leadership practices risk becoming trapped in an orientation focused solely on efficiency and productivity, without considering the ethical and spiritual dimensions that are the hallmark of Christian leadership.

Furthermore, the integration of organizational experience and biblical values enables the formation of leadership that is not only structurally effective but also spiritually transformative. The principle of wisdom that stems from a relationship with God becomes the basis for assessing every experience and decision made. Proverbs 9:10 states that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, affirming that the source of true wisdom lies in a true knowledge of God. Thus, organizational experience serves as a learning space that enriches leadership capacity, while biblical values act as a moral compass that maintains the direction of that growth. The integration of the two produces a leadership paradigm that emphasizes not only institutional success but also faithfulness to the calling of faith and the formation of character that reflects the example of Christ.

### **Strategies For Leading People To Follow Christ**

The advent of the information age presents new challenges for leadership practices, particularly regarding personal and public integrity (Dondokambey et al., 2025). The rapid flow of information and open access to various sources of knowledge have made the public increasingly critical in assessing the behavior of leaders. In this context, the demand for transparency is no longer merely about administrative openness, but also about consistency between the values taught and the actions manifested in daily life (Nendissa et al., 2025). The findings of this study indicate that integrity is a key factor in addressing these demands. Authentic integrity enables a leader to maintain credibility amidst a social environment saturated with public scrutiny. Without strong integrity, leadership easily loses its moral legitimacy, as today's society possesses a greater capacity to observe, compare, and openly evaluate leaders' behavior.

From a theological perspective, integrity is understood not only as an ethical quality but also as a reflection of a life aligned with God's will. The Bible affirms that a righteous character is the foundation for a life pleasing to God. Proverbs 11:3 states that "the upright are guided by their integrity, but the treacherous are destroyed by their deceit." This verse indicates that integrity serves as a guiding force directing one toward righteous decisions (Rumangu & Tamaweol, 2025). In the context of leadership, this principle underscores that honesty and sincerity are not merely abstract moral values but a source of strength that builds community trust. When a leader consistently practices integrity, they create a healthy and stable relational environment, which ultimately strengthens social cohesion within the community they lead.

The findings of this study also indicate a close relationship between integrity and the restoration of social trust in a society that is increasingly skeptical of authority. In situations where public trust is often eroded by various moral crises, leadership rooted in love becomes a relevant approach to rebuilding fractured social relationships. This principle aligns with the teaching of the Gospel of John 13:34–35, where Jesus Christ gave a new commandment to His

disciples: that they love one another as He has loved them (Simamora et al., 2024). Furthermore, Jesus emphasizes that through this love, the world will recognize the identity of His followers. This statement indicates that love possesses not only a spiritual dimension but also a tangible social dimension, as the practice of love fosters relationships grounded in trust and mutual respect.

Within a sociological framework, this practice of love can be understood as a relational strategy that strengthens social capital within the faith community. Love manifested through concrete actions such as empathy, forgiveness, and concern for others' well-being creates a network of trusting relationships. This trust becomes social capital that enables the community to endure and thrive amidst complex social change. Thus, the commandment of love in John 13:34–35 functions not only as an ethical norm but also as a social mechanism that strengthens solidarity and cohesion within the community. When a leader embodies this principle in practice, they not only teach the value of love but also facilitate the formation of an organizational culture grounded in trust and mutual respect.

This perspective aligns with the thinking of Mangape and his colleagues (2023) which emphasizes that the moral and spiritual growth of leaders is a key factor in motivating the congregation. Spiritually mature leadership is able to set an example that inspires the community to live out authentic values of faith. In this regard, the leader's character serves as a source of social learning for community members. The congregation receives instruction not only through words but also through observing the leader's life, which reflects integrity and love. Therefore, the formation of a leader's spiritual character is a crucial aspect in maintaining the vitality of church life. Thus, integrity, love, and spiritual growth form a leadership framework relevant to the information age. These three elements complement one another in rebuilding the trust that forms the foundation of healthy social relationships. Leadership rooted in biblical values is not only capable of meeting the demands for transparency in modern society but also offers a tangible testimony of faith through a life that is consistent, full of love, and characterized by integrity.

### **Implications for Christian Leaders**

Christian leadership cannot be understood merely as a structural position or managerial skill, but rather as an ongoing process of self-formation rooted in Christian values. An understanding of change and self-reform in Christian leadership emphasizes that leaders are called to continually grow spiritually, morally, and ethically in order to address the increasingly complex challenges of our time. This has implications for leadership practices in the church and Christian communities, where a leader's success is not measured solely by program achievements or organizational growth, but primarily by the quality of character, integrity, and exemplary conduct that reflect Christ. Conscious and consistent self-reform enables leaders to build the trust of their followers, create a spiritually safe environment, and foster healthy and sustainable growth in faith.

The emphasis on the characteristics of successful Christian leadership such as integrity, morality, ethics, humility, and commitment has direct implications for the formation of a leadership culture oriented toward service, not power. Christian leaders who embody these

values tend to be able to make wise decisions, manage conflicts peacefully, and influence others through exemplary conduct, not coercion. In this context, the leadership of Jesus Christ as a model of servant leadership serves as the primary and relevant benchmark to be applied in contemporary leadership. The theological implication is that true Christian leadership is always associated with sacrifice, love, and a willingness to serve, thereby shaping leaders who are not only functionally effective but also spiritually impactful and have an eternal legacy. Another important implication is the role of self-reform in shaping a Christian leader's ability to adapt to social, cultural, and spiritual changes. Self-reform encourages leaders to learn from experience both successes and failures and to view challenges as opportunities for growth in faith and leadership maturity. This leads to an increased spiritual awareness among leaders as they rely on God through prayer, the Word, and a disciplined spiritual life. Thus, continuously reformed Christian leadership will produce leadership strategies that guide others to know Christ through the teaching of the Word, a life of prayer, and a tangible example of love. The practical implication is the creation of a Christian community that lives in truth, peace, and love, and is able to be a relevant and contextual witness for Christ in the midst of society.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the effectiveness of Christian leadership in the era of information disruption no longer rests on formal authority, but rather on the depth of self-renewal rooted in Christ's model of servant leadership. Reflectively, leadership is not a static status but a dynamic process of "becoming," in which moral integrity and humility serve as the primary instruments for restoring the congregation's crisis of trust amidst boundless public transparency. The practical implications of these findings demand that church organizations and theological education institutions shift the focus of their curricula from merely developing technical competencies toward stricter standardization of character audits and moral accountability. Organizational policies need to institutionalize mentoring systems and peer evaluation to prevent moral isolation, while integrating Christian ethics with digital literacy so that leaders can authentically respond to the critical voices of the modern congregation.

However, this study has limitations due to its literature-based nature, meaning it has not yet been able to capture the empirical dynamics of self-reform within the context of real-world conflicts across various church denominations. The author also acknowledges that the variable of digital disruption in this study is still discussed at a conceptual-theological level and has not delved deeply into the technical aspects of digital behavior. Therefore, future research is recommended to employ qualitative field methods or case studies to evaluate the application of the self-reform model among church leaders in urban areas. Furthermore, additional research is needed regarding the perceptions of congregants across generations regarding digital integrity, as well as the development of a "Leader Integrity Index" measurement instrument to convert biblical normative values into more objective and measurable leadership evaluation indicators for the advancement of contemporary church management science.

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