

# Critical Characteristics of a Christian Influencer (Part 4)

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## Introduction

### The Text

A. Remember, Paul is saying goodbye to these Ephesian elders, the official leaders of the church there in Ephesus. He knows he will never see them again, and he's got a lot on his heart that he wants to share.

1. And we're going to dip back into his words here, focusing in once more on those same verses we looked at last week, [vv. 28-32](#):

<sup>28</sup> Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. <sup>29</sup> I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; <sup>30</sup> and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. <sup>31</sup> Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. <sup>32</sup> And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. (Acts 20:28-32)

A. For three weeks now, we've been talking about what it looks like to influence others for Jesus.

1. As elders in a local church, these guys in our text had more formal positions of influence.
2. But, as I've said, every Christian is called to influence others for Jesus in one way or another—whether inside the church or outside it (with your spouse, your kids, your neighbors, your coworkers, other believers, etc.).

a. We're all called to be "Christian influencers" in this general sense.

B. And in this farewell address given by Paul here to the Ephesian elders, we're given, I think, what I've been referring to as the "Critical Characteristics of a Christian Influencer." If you want to influence others for Jesus, and I know you do, this is what you've got to be like.

1. We've seen ten of these characteristics so far. I'll rattle them off for you quickly now: (1) They Make Time for People; (2) They Lead with Their Lives; (3) They Serve the Lord (Alone!); (4) They Come in Humility and Weakness; (5) They Share the Hard Truth; (6) They Do It All in Love; (7) They Get Alone with God; (8) They Answer with Abandon; (9) They Treasure Jesus Over Everything; and, last week we added (10) They Watch Themselves.

C. This morning, we're going to add two more to the list: (11): They Shepherd Others; and (12) They Center On the Gospel.

## Characteristic #11: They Shepherd Others

### “. . . And to All the Flock”

- A. Last week, we spent all of our time considering the idea that Christian influencers need to keep watch on themselves. “Pay careful attention to yourselves . . .” Paul says (v. 28).

But, if you noticed, the verse doesn’t stop there: “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock . . . .” That’s where this has been going!

1. Paul doesn’t ask us to merely pay attention to ourselves for ourselves.
  2. He calls us to such a thing so we can ultimately more effectively pay attention to, care for, lead, and influence others.
    - a. You watch yourself—making sure you’re spiritually healthy—so you can watch them and lead them into the same sort of spiritual health. That’s the goal in all of this.
- B. I’m getting the idea of shepherding here from two different places in our text.
1. For one thing, though it’s not clear in the English version I read, the Greek word translated “to care for” in v. 28 is *poimainō* and it could literally be translated “to shepherd” — “shepherd the church of God . . . .”
  2. But then, secondly, and more clearly in the English, you likely noticed that Paul twice uses the word “flock” to refer to the members of the church there in Ephesus.
    - a. “Pay careful attention . . . to all the flock . . . .” (v. 28).
    - b. “I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock” (v. 29).
      - i. It’s a related word in the Greek: *poimnion*.
- C. With these words Paul is giving us a very vivid picture of what a church elder in particular, and a Christian influencer in general, ought to be like. They ought to be like shepherds.
1. Shepherding is intimate work; it’s hard work; it’s tender and tough at the same time.
  2. It involves knowing the sheep; feeding the sheep; protecting the sheep; guiding the sheep; tending to the sheep; maybe even, as we see with Jesus, laying your life down for the sheep (cf. [John 10:11](#)); and so forth.

### Three Marks

- A. Obviously, there is much we could squeeze out from this metaphor. But I would prefer to simply restrain ourselves to that which seems to be particularly highlighted in the verses presently set before us.

1. Looking closely, here we see that this shepherding as described by Paul is marked by at least three things: (1) Impartiality; (2) Humility; and (3) Charity. Let me show you those one at a time.

## Mark #1: Impartiality

- A. I'm getting this from the word "all" there in v. 28: "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock . . . ."
1. It's such a small little word you may easily skip right over it.
  2. But it has massive implications for Christian leadership and anyone who wants to influence others for Jesus.
- B. The bottom line is this: You can't pick favorites.
1. Paul doesn't say: "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to some of the flock." "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to those in the flock for whom you have a particular liking."
  2. No! "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock . . . ."
    - a. You can't pick favorites.
  3. You can't say: "I think I'll love on these sheep but not those. These sheep smell nice. They've got soft wool, good manners. But those ones . . . they bite. They've got bugs all up in them. They stink. No thanks."
- C. Bringing it into the realm of humans. You can't come into the church (or anywhere really) and decide:
1. "I think I'll hang out with and invest in these people—we have the same fashion sense, the same taste in music, the same parenting philosophy, the same career trajectory, we run in the same social circles, we occupy the same economic tier, or whatever.
  2. But this other group? Oh no, they rub me wrong, they annoy me, they test my patience. I don't get them and they don't get me."
    - a. It's partiality. It's hypocrisy.
    - b. And it will eventually undercut whatever influence you may have had for Jesus, because you're not acting like Jesus.
- D. Don't get me wrong, you may still influence them.
1. But it won't be for him any longer.
  2. It will be like what was happening when Peter was pulling away from the Gentiles and only eating with the Jews ([Gal. 2:11-14](#)).
    - a. "I feel comfortable with this group. I don't want to upset my fellow Jews."
    - b. And Paul confronts him: "You're influencing the community all right—even Barnabas is following you in this now. But it's not good! And you stand condemned. It's

partiality. It's 'hypocrisy' (v. 13). It's 'not in step with the truth of the gospel' (v. 14)."

E. Now, to be clear:

1. I'm not saying you have to be best friends with everyone.
2. Jesus seems to have had various circles carved out in his own ministry.
  - a. Out from the crowd, he chose the twelve.
  - b. And out from the twelve he chose the three.
    - i. But, hear me now: never do we get any sense, for example, that he chose the three because he loved them more, because he didn't care all too much for the others, though he would put up with them I guess.
    - ii. No, if anything the three, Peter, James, and John were the most annoying of the group, the most challenging to deal with, the most pig-headed and arrogant.

(1) Perhaps he chose them because they needed the most work, the most attention!

F. This certainly seems to be in line with what [1 Cor. 1](#) says of our calling, where we see God chooses, not the "wise" nor the "powerful" nor the "noble", but the "foolish" and "weak" and the "despised" . . . "so that no human being might boast in the presence of God" (vv. 26-29).

1. It's almost a sort of reverse partiality.
2. He chooses the most obnoxious, the most needy, the most pathetic to get the closest access to him (cf. [James 2:5](#)).

G. But, now, when you look closely, you realize:

1. He doesn't choose some folks to the neglect of the others.
2. He chooses some, ultimately, with a view to the others, for the sake of the others.
  - a. What were the twelve supposed to do? Minister to the crowd, reach the nations.
  - b. What's the point of this calling in [1 Cor. 1](#)? Well, it's so the world would see amazing things happening through these apparent losers and conclude that only God could do this. And they might, then, come to faith themselves.
3. Never does he bring people in because he loves one and not the other.
4. It is always that he brings people in with a view to bringing in the others as well.

H. This is what Paul experienced personally and profoundly, is it not?

1. "I was a murderer of Christians. The chief of sinners. Yet he chose me, he called me, he brought me in. Why?"
2. Because he wants you to see that, if even someone like me could be forgiven—brother, sister, I don't care who you are or what you've done—clearly you can be forgiven as well!"

- a. “<sup>15</sup>The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.<sup>16</sup> But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life” (1 Tim. 1:15-16).
- I. Understanding this, experiencing this, how can I then go and say: “I’ll hang out with these folks and not with those? I’ll influence these for Jesus because I like them, but not these because I don’t.”
- 1. No! “God shows no partiality” (Acts 10:34; Rom. 2:11; Gal. 2:6).
    - a. That’s why Paul says of his own ministry back up in Acts 20:20-21: “<sup>20</sup>[I taught] you in public and from house to house,<sup>21</sup>testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.” I didn’t show partiality. I’d hang with anyone, anywhere, anytime.
    - b. And that’s why he instructs these elders (and, by extension, you and I and anyone who wants to influence others for Jesus) in v. 28 to: “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock . . . .”
- J. Is that your heart? Is that my heart? It certainly is Jesus’ heart. (More on this in a little bit . . .)

## Mark #2: Humility

- A. I’m getting this from what comes out next in v. 28: “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers . . . .”
- B. A lot of times, if we’re granted influence over folks, if we’re seen as leaders of some sort, if people are interested in following us or learning from us . . . we can think it’s because of us, right?
  - 1. Because we’re just that smart, just that holy, just that impressive.
- C. But, already, if you were listening to 1 Cor. 1, you know that’s not the case. And it’s made even more clear here.
  - 1. How did these elders come to occupy the position that they did?
  - 2. The Holy Spirit put them there.
    - a. Certainly it had something to do with their character and competency as we see in the elder qualifications Paul gives us in 1 Timothy and Titus.
    - b. But it all ultimately has its source in the Holy Spirit.
      - i. It’s not you.
      - ii. It’s him. He’s done it. He’s given you this position of influence.

(1) Therefore, don’t be proud, be humble.

D. I thought of what Paul says to the Corinthians in [1 Cor. 4:7](#): “What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?”

1. Here the matter is put negatively. You’re boasting about something you have that’s not fundamentally yours.
  - a. It’s like when you’re on vacation and you decide go all in and rent some flashy convertible or something.
  - b. You can’t even really afford to rent the thing, but you put it all on credit, you’ll deal with that later.
  - c. For now, you feel awesome driving down the road, the sun on your skin, the wind in your hair, and everyone’s turning and staring, and you’re acting like it’s yours. You give a little nod to your fans and hit the gas.
  - d. But then, when you park the thing, if people look in they’d see, there on the dash, the Hertz paperwork, you’re little signed agreement. It’s just a rental. It’s not actually yours.
    - i. [“If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?”](#)
2. You can speak eloquently, praise God for that! You’ve got insight into Scripture, praise God for that! You’re a powerful evangelist, praise God for that! You have a servant’s heart with a real gift for loving people, praise God for that!
  - a. It doesn’t matter what your gift is, it’s a gift . . . of grace ([1 Pet. 4:10](#)). It didn’t come from you, it came from him.
  - b. Therefore, don’t exalt yourself over others because of it. Praise God for it. And be humble.

E. John the Baptist, if you remember, puts forward a positive example for us.

1. When his disciples are all leaving him to go follow Jesus, some of his other followers are troubled by it—we’re losing our influence, our crowd, our platform.
2. But John’s not bothered by it one bit. What does he say? [“<sup>27</sup> John answered, ‘A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven.<sup>28</sup> You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, “I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.”<sup>29</sup> The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete.<sup>30</sup> He must increase, but I must decrease’”](#) ([John 3:27-30](#)).
  - a. It might be a little hard to understand at first read, but he’s saying: “These people that I’ve been leading, they’re not mine in the first place, they’re his. They’re the bride, he’s the bridegroom. I’m just his friend pointing the bride to him.
  - b. Why would I be sad when they’re leaving me and going to him? That’s the point of my ministry. It’s not about me and my gifts. It’s about God and his grace. [‘He must increase, but I must decrease.’”](#)

F. That’s it! That’s what we’re after.

1. Go all in on your ministry. Go all in trying to influence others for Jesus.
2. But if God gives you success, don't you dare let it go to your head like it's something you achieved rather than received. "[T]he Holy Spirit has made you overseers . . . ."

### Mark #3: Charity

A. I'm getting this third and final mark from what Paul says there now at the end of v. 28: "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood."

1. We love people deeply. We care for them intimately. We treat people as valuable to us because know something of just how valuable they are to God.

B. You caught that, right? "[C]are for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood." The former is meant to be influenced and shaped by the latter.

1. You feel a little different caring for something for someone when you know it was bought on the cheap by them, right? It's not all that precious to them. You'll care for it, but not so attentively.
2. But how different when you realize the very thing they are entrusting to your care is that which they have given their whole life's savings to get? Won't you handle it with utmost vigilance? Won't there be some fear and trembling in that even?

- a. That's what we have here. Only, in this instance, God didn't merely give his whole life's savings to rescue sinners, he gave his very life. He purchased the church "with his own blood." Jesus bled and died to bring them close.

- i. How valuable they are to him!
- ii. Therefore, how kind and sympathetic and tender ought to be your care!

C. If I could just address you as God's people for a moment.

1. I want you to know: The value that God places on you is as inestimable as the value of the blood of his only beloved Son.

- a. One drop of Jesus' blood is worth more than all the money in the world.
- b. And he spent it, every last drop—not to get mansions, or yachts, or vacation packages, or whatever else—he spent it all to get you!

- i. As Peter puts it in 1 Pet. 1:18-19: " <sup>18</sup> [Y]ou were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, <sup>19</sup> but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot."

2. Some of you may not get just how valuable you are to God.

- a. You feel cheap, even worthless, perhaps because you’ve been treated as such by so many in your life.
  - b. As a result you feel not invaluable, but unvaluable—not of inestimable value, but of no value.
  - c. That may really be how people look at you, and I’m so sorry if that’s the case.
  - d. But I’ll tell you this: it’s certainly not the case with God. That’s not how he looks at you.
    - i. Are you a broken sinner? Yes.
    - ii. But are you loved, desired, valued? More than you could ever dare to hope or imagine!
3. And any shepherd or elder or pastor or “Christian influencer” worth his salt is going to treat you like that.
- D. And, if I could just turn this back around: If you want to influence others you have to treat them like that—like you know something of how invaluable they are to God, no matter how unvaluable they may be to the world.
- 1. He cares for them. So you care for them.
  - 2. He shed his blood to be with them. So you can shed yours as well.
- E. And remember, to bring this full circle, this is not just for your favorites. It’s for “all.”
- 1. I want you to think of the most difficult, the most obnoxious person you know.
    - a. You can’t stand them. Oh but he died for them.
    - b. You might not think them worth your time, your energy, your attention, your care. But Jesus thought them worth his blood.
  - 2. The old Puritan Richard Baxter imagines Jesus probing us on this point: “Did I die for them, and wilt not thou look after them? Were they worth my blood and are they not worth thy labour?” (*The Reformed Pastor*). “If I was willing to give it all for them, why are you willing to give so little?”
- F. It’s one of those truths we love to receive personally—that we’re so valuable to God—but it’s hard to extend it to others sometimes, right?
- 1. But that’s what truly shepherding them involves. That’s what you have to do if you really want to influence people for Jesus.
    - a. We “care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.”

## Characteristic #12: They Center On the Gospel

- A. I'm getting this from what Paul says in v. 32. Paul is beginning to draw his little farewell speech to a close and he says this: "And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified."

## 2 Observations → 1 Staggering Implication

- A. In this verse, some amazing stuff really comes into view when you bring two observations together.

1. In the first place, we observe that these words come near the close of Paul's speech here. Meaning: these are some of the last words he will ever say to these guys.
  - a. Remember, he's going on to Jerusalem. He knows persecution awaits. And he knows he's not coming back.
  - b. So we have to understand then, this is something Paul finds particularly important for them to get ahold of. This is what he wants to leave them with! That's observation number one.
2. But then, in the second place, when we look closely at what he determines to leave them with, we come to realize it's the very thing they started with—it's something they already know well, it's the gospel. "And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace . . ." It's the message of the cross.
  - a. And, don't forget, he's talking to the elders of the church here. These would have been the men in the church most acquainted with the gospel. Indeed, they were the ones charged with teaching it and preaching it.
  - b. And yet here he's saying to them, not: "Don't forget to go and preach the gospel to others." No! That's not it. He's saying, instead: "Don't forget to preach the gospel to yourself!"

- B. When you bring these two observations together, the implications are staggering. And here's the essential point:

1. It doesn't matter if you already "know" the gospel, you always need the gospel—every day, now and forever.
2. It's not something you merely put in a tract and hand to an unbeliever. It's something for the most seasoned believer to take in again and again and again.
3. You don't begin with the gospel and press on to other things. No! You begin and you end there.
4. As Tim Keller has said: "The gospel is not just the A-B-C's but the A-Z of Christianity."
5. Or as I've put it before: "The gospel is not merely the starting line of a much longer race. It's more like the hub of a wheel. Without the gospel always at the center, nothing in the Christian life turns. Everything stalls out. You go nowhere."
  - a. That's why I say the Christian influencer centers on the gospel. If we lose this center we lose everything.

C. So he tells them: “And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace . . .” Why? “[Because it] is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”

1. The gospel doesn’t just get you started, it builds you up, and it takes you home!
2. Or, if I wanted to be a little cuter, I might say: The gospel gets you going, gets you growing, and (referring to future glory) gets you glowing!
  - a. It’s what you needed most in the past, it’s what you need most in the present, and it’s what you’ll need most in the future . . . on the last day.

## The “Gospel Gap”

A. Now, it seems to me, a lot of Christians understand how the gospel is needed at the beginning of our Christian lives (the past). And we may even understand that the gospel is important for getting us into heaven at the end of it (the future).

1. But I do wonder if we all really see how the gospel is meant to impact our day-to-day in between—how it “is able to build you up,” as Paul says, in the here and now (the present).
  - a. It’s what Paul Tripp and Tim Lane refer to as the “gospel gap” in their helpful book *How People Change*. “I know I needed it at the start, I know I’ll need it at the end, but I don’t get how it’s supposed to impact me now.” There’s a gap.

B. We’re tempted to think: “Why do I need to stay centered in on the gospel? I already know it!”

1. Jesus lived the life I should’ve lived, died the death I should’ve died, and he rose again conquering Satan, sin, and death, and he now offers forgiveness of sins and eternal life freely on the basis of his triumph, by grace, to any who would repent and believe.
  - a. You see, I know it!
2. Ah, but I’ll tell you this: If you still struggle with sin in your life—and we all do—then here’s the fact of the matter: you may know it, but you don’t really know it—at least not fully, at least not in the deepest places of your heart. There’s still something not fully understood or embraced there.
  - a. I would put it like this: Every sin I ever commit is a breakdown of gospel embrace. It’s evidence that I still don’t fully get it; or, even if I do get it, it’s at least evidence that I’m not fully believing it.
3. And, to make matters more complicated, let’s be honest, sometimes it’s a moving target.
  - a. Maybe I was walking by faith yesterday, but I’m not today.
  - b. Things were shining brightly a day ago, but now something of this world has eclipsed the sun, as it were.

- i. That's why I snapped at my spouse, or drank one too many beers before bed, or fudged the numbers a bit on my tax filings, or whatever.
- 4. I may know the gospel, but I don't know it. I may believe the gospel, but I don't believe it. That's why I need the gospel—now, today!

## Consider Anxiety

- A. Let me give you just one example of how the gospel might “build us up” where we've been breaking down lately. Consider anxiety.
  - 1. I know a lot of us struggle with that. There's a lot to be afraid of in this world it would seem. Things are hard. Things are scary. We can get paralyzed. Anxiety can really grip our throats.
  - 2. But what is anxiety really? It's a breakdown of gospel embrace. It's a disconnect between my heart and the gospel in some way. It's really a result of making too much of something else and too little of God and his grace—and what he's done for me and promised me in Jesus.
- B. Allow me to give you an illustration of this from my own life.
  - 1. When I'm anxious about my sermon, for instance—when I'm in a bit of a panic about my preparation, when I'm inflexible with my wife because her needs are threatening my studies, or when I'm irritable with my kids because they're interrupting me when I'm trying to write—when I'm anxious about this . . .
  - 2. . . . I've got to step back and ask myself: Why? I've got to trace that down a bit. What's going on in my heart?
  - 3. Well, often if I am anxious about my sermon it's because, to be honest, I'm anxious about what you'll think of me. “Will this be good enough. Will people be impressed. What if there are visitors? Will they want to be a part of this church or decide to look elsewhere?”
  - 4. But you see what's happening, don't you? You're becoming big, I'm becoming big . . . and God's becoming small. I'm making too much of you and your opinions and these perceived burdens on me, and I've lost sight of Jesus and the gospel!
  - 5. With all due respect to you, in the gospel, Jesus would get in my face and say:
    - a. “Come on Nick! Who cares what they think? What can man do to you . . . if you're right with God (cf. [Heb. 13:6](#))?”
    - b. So some of them may decide you're not eloquent or insightful enough to follow. [As we saw,] I thought you were worth dying for. Because of my blood shed for you, you are in good standing with my Father—the one who sits on the bench of the highest court in the cosmos.
    - c. Who cares what they're saying of you in the lower courts if you're right there?!
    - d. Try your best. Preach from your heart. Leave the results to me. And don't be anxious. I've got you.”
  - 6. Do you see that? But then you have a decision: Will the word of God's grace, the gospel, mean more to me than these people and their opinions? That's the fight for faith.

- a. How foolish would it be, then, to say I already know the gospel. I don't need the gospel. If I'm struggling with anxiety it must be because I have need of something else—some fresh insight, or technique, or whatever.
  - b. No! The gospel doesn't just get you started, it builds you up, and it takes you home! It's the gospel that gets you going, gets you growing, and gets you glowing! It's the gospel that you and I need—from the beginning to the end . . . and all through the middle!
    - i. It's got to be at the center.
- C. That's why Paul, with some of his last words to these guys—even though they'd already heard it a thousand times over—brings them back to it yet again: [“And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”](#)

### “Do This in Remembrance of Me”

- A. If you need any more convincing about this, I wonder if you realize: Jesus did the same sort of thing with his disciples. (This is where we'll close.)
- B. He knows the end is coming. He knows he's going away. So what does he do? He gives them a meal. The Lord's Supper. (That's what we're going to partake of here in just a minute, actually.)
- C. But what's the point of this meal?
- 1. Well, it's everything we've been talking about. It's the gospel in food form.
    - a. He holds up the bread and the cup—representing his body broken and his blood poured out for us for the forgiveness of our sins.
    - b. And what does he say? “Take and eat. Do this in remembrance of me. And don't just do it once. Do it often!”
    - c. For, as Paul later says: [“as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes” \(1 Cor. 11:26\)](#). And we proclaim it, not merely to others, but especially to ourselves.
  - 2. We need this grace, we need the gospel, all the time. That's why Jesus gives us this meal.
    - a. Just as your body needs physical food every day or you'll starve, so too your soul needs spiritual nourishment in grace or it will languish.
    - b. Just as the Israelites needed the manna from heaven every day if they were to make it through their wilderness pilgrimage to the Promised Land, so too you and I need this bread from heaven, this gospel food, to sustain us in our sojourn.
    - c. You need to feed on the gospel every day. That's the point!
- D. And so that's what we're going to do here in a minute.

1. I encourage you: don't let this be just an empty ritual.
2. Let it be a reminder of everything Paul is saying here. You need the word of God's grace. You need to feed on it. You need to center on it.
  - a. It's a critical characteristic of a Christian influencer.