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TRAINING QUALITY FOLLOWERSHIP THROUGH
OPTIMIZED LEADERSHIP

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To my faithful wife, Julie, for your support and love through these endeavors. Thanks to Reilly, Shea, McKinley, Camdyn, Macy and Dax for loving and following your Pop so well. The Lord has blessed me with you, and I want desperately to follow Him as I lead you.

Thank you to the leadership of The Grove Bible Chapel, Tampa for the honor of serving as an under-shepherd beneath the true Shepherd and Guardian of our souls (1 Pet 2:25).

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PREFACE

This project was born out of a desire to maximize the glory of Jesus Christ in the church. Maximizing the glory of Jesus Christ means more to me than words could express. Lord, teach me to lead in so that Your Son Jesus Christ is always put on display.

I am thankful for the tremendous grace of my Lord Jesus Christ. I am grateful to the elders, Dan Claassen, Kevin Huggins, and Chad Driggers who encouraged me in finishing this project. My gratitude is full for you, Grove Bible family. May my leadership mirror Christ's, since your followership honors Him greatly.

I am thankful for my faithful wife, Julie, and our six fantastic kids; joy upon joy. Thank you, Julie and crew, for your devoted partnership in the ministry. I consider it life's greatest privilege to be entrusted with your well-being.

Something happened on my way to writing a paper about developing quality followers: I lost my followers. I was dismissed from a pastorate that I loved, and at once lost my position and in a moment lost the years of work on followership. The season that followed allowed me the time and space to reflect deeply and develop more fully the ideas advanced in this work.

Thank you to Dr. Matt Haste, Dr. Beau Hughes and Dan Dumas for the encouragement and assistance to finish this thesis. Your help has made all the difference. And to my partner Daniel Gillespie- the remote control is all yours. And lastly to The Frat, no man deserves brothers and friends of your faithfulness and calibre.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The landscape of organizational efficiency has long been dominated by the topic of leadership. However, new thought is beginning to shift attention to a more significant concept. Leaders now realize that organizational productivity is far more dependent on the quality of followership than the quality of its leadership. The topic of followership has taken a new position and in some conversations is beginning to eclipse leadership as the answer to organizational optimization.

Leadership is a subject of tremendous interest in the church today. Dozens of leadership books and conferences clamor for the leader's attention. However, churches should have a special interest in followership. First, many Christians see themselves as followers of God. Furthermore, the Bible clearly commands followers of God to be quality followers of God's leaders. Understanding the nature of New Testament followership and training leaders to enhance a believer's followership of Christ will produce optimally effective churches for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. The day has arrived for churches to recognize the importance of understanding and developing quality followers.

A church whose leadership and followership are focused on their individual growth will generate an extraordinarily Christ-honoring and Christ-promoting church. The world has seldom seen what God can do with a church whose leaders and followers seek Christ in order to be faithful in their respective roles. The product of good leadership and great fellowship in the church promotes great glory to Christ, the head of the church (Eph 1:22). Pastors who desire their churches to glorify the Lord should look not only to develop their leadership but also develop the church's followership.

Followership is a neglected concept in the field of the leadership studies. Establishing productive, faithful, and knowledgeable followers of Christ is the master-stroke of effective church leadership. Leaders should leverage the fact that Christians self-identify as followers of Christ. Godly shepherds should teach and model faithful followership. The followership of the church is more important than the leadership of the church as it relates to the glory of God. The time has come that every leader that desires to increase their organization's effectiveness must consider their development of their followership.

Familiarity with the Literature

In recent years, the topic of followership has joined the leadership conversation. Leadership has been an exalted topic, featuring hundreds of conferences, and producing thousands of books. But leaders do not exist without followers. The realization of the leader's dependence on follower and his interrelationship with followers has thrust the topic of followership into the leadership milieu. This section offers a few of the most important voices filling the vacuum of followership thought.

Barbara Kellerman's landmark book, *Followership*, thrust the discussion of followership into the mainstream.¹ Her thesis is to identify the four distinct types of follower: bystanders, participants, activists and diehards. She argues that because of changing cultural tides, followers will continue to grow in significance.

Ronald Riggio, Ira Chalef, and Jean Lipman-Blumen write perhaps the most substantial book on the topic in *The Art of Followership*. These authors have written a broad book on the subject of effective following.² Their thesis is that great followers create great leaders and great organizations. This book explores the relationship between

¹ Barbara Kellerman, *Followership: How Followers are Creating Change and Changing Leaders* (Boston: Harvard Business, 2008).

² Ronald Riggio, Ira Chaleff, and Jean Lipman-Blumen, *The Art of Followership: How Great Followers Create Great Leaders and Organizations* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2008).

leaders and followers. This relationship between effective following and effective leading is at the core of organizational effectiveness. Defining effective followership is where this helpful book begins and then the pitfalls and challenges are identified. The last portion of the book considers research that explores the relationship between leaders and followers.

In *The End of Leadership*, Kellerman follows up her ground breaking work with deeper analysis of how followers are gaining strength and confidence.³ Followers today have greater power because of social media, globalization, and growing individualism. While followers are being upgraded, leaders are being downgraded through very public leadership failures. The day of the follower has come.

In 1986, Trudy Heller, Jon Van Til, and Louis Zurcher broke ground on this nascent topic with *Leaders and Followers*.⁴ This book is written as a behavioral science manual and consequently it is relatively technical and academic. Their thesis is that followership must be cultivated and optimized. The chapter on how good leaders enhance followers provides insight for effective followership development. One beneficial assertion is that the leader/follower dynamic is a relationship. A helpful chapter on leading volunteers yields helpful insights for pastors who deal with volunteers in ministry.

With *Leading so People Will Follow*, Erika Andersen offers one of the newest books to the market that explores the leader-follower relationship.⁵ She details the qualities of leaders that people are prone to follow: farsighted, passionate, courageous, wise, generous, and trustworthy. She also categorizes followers into three groups: ones

³ Barbara Kellerman, *The End of Leadership* (New York: HarperCollins, 2012).

⁴ Trudy Heller, Jon Van Til, and Louis Zurcher, eds., *Leaders and Followers: Challenges for the Future* (Greenwich, CT: Jai, 1986).

⁵ Erika Andersen, *Leading so People Will Follow* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012).

with great insight (“wizards”), people who respond well (“well-wishers”) and those with a mixed response (“wild cards”).

Ira Chaleff’s monograph, *The Courageous Follower*, explores the dynamics of the leader/follower relationship.⁶ Regarded as a classic on the theme of followership, the premise of the book is to train leaders to utilize their followers effectively. His argument includes challenging followers to find their courageous voice to speak critically and honorably into the leader’s blind spots.

Robert Kelley writes one of the earliest works on followership, *The Power of Followership*. This book serves as a foundation stone for the topic of followership. He addresses both leadership and followership, encouraging the enhancement of both disciplines.⁷ In the small fraternity in the followership discussion, Kelley’s book is quoted often. He describes the leaders that followers gravitate toward. This book includes the most effective argument for the preeminence of followership. Followership is the most valuable real estate on the landscape of leadership: “Without his armies, Napoleon was just a man with grandiose ambitions.”⁸

Michael Wilkin’s great work on New Testament following, entitled *Following the Master*, grants insights on the nature of following Christ. Wilkins develops the topic of New Testament discipleship.⁹ He details Christ’s interactions with and commands for the disciples. This is one of the most thorough books on the theme of Christ and His followers. He emphasizes the ways that Jesus leads and the message that Jesus teaches. However helpful and thorough Wilkins book is, it simply does not address institutional (horizontal) leadership/followership relationship.

⁶ Ira Chaleff, *The Courageous Follower: Standing Up to & for Our Leaders* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2009).

⁷ Robert Kelley, *The Power of Followership: How to Create Leaders People Want to Follow and Followers Who Lead Themselves* (New York: Currency Doubleday, 1992).

⁸ Kelley, *The Power of Followership*, 12.

⁹ Michael Wilkins, *Following the Master* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992).

In *Followership*, Tracey Armstrong asserts that organizations are dependent on quality followers.¹⁰ His concern is for leaders to understand and respect the followers that enable their leadership. He concentrates on developing a dynamic followership culture. His aspiration is to develop high performance teams through training followers.

Most recently, Michael Wilder and Timothy Paul Jones have released *The God Who Goes before You: Pastoral Leadership as Christ-Centered Followership*.¹¹ In this helpful and salient offering, the theme of leadership as followership is explored. The entirety of Scriptures is explored to divulge the dimensions of followership. Shepherding is dominant biblical theme to explain God’s leadership and church leadership as well.

Similarly, Christopher Carver wrote a thesis on the topic of followership in the pastoral epistles.¹² Carver’s dissertation involves surveying 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus to understand the leadership lessons taught through the lens of followership. He states explicitly that he desires to extend the effectiveness of Wilder and Jones book, applying it specifically to training young-adult, male leaders.¹³

Void in the Literature

There is a massive void in the literature on the theme of followership. There are at least three gaps that comprise the greater void. First, there is virtually no discussion on the positive implications for followership or the reality that Christians self-identify as followers. The fact that Christians view themselves as both followers of Christ and followers of Christ-honoring leaders should be of great importance to Christian leaders developing effective followers.

¹⁰ Tracey Armstrong, *Followership: The Leadership Principle that No One is Talking about* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2011).

¹¹ Michael S. Wilder and Timothy Paul Jones, *The God Who Goes before You* (Nashville: B & H, 2018).

¹² Christopher Alan Carver, “Be the Example: Christ-Centered Followership in the Pastoral Epistles.” (DEd diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020).

¹³ Carver, “Be the Example: Christ-Centered Followership in the Pastoral Epistles,” 7.

Second, none of the material defines godly followership. While many works detail what it means to follow the Great Shepherd, how would a good follower of an under-shepherd be described? Third, virtually no resources can be found in the Christian arena to define what it means for a leader to train a follower. How profitable would it be if Christian leaders understood followership and purposefully trained the Christian disciples to follow Him well and follow godly leaders simultaneously?

Thesis

Optimized leadership demands the development of quality followers. The productivity of any organization is dependent upon the product of the leadership/followership relationship. Both leaders and followers should understand their responsibilities and strive toward faithfulness. In the church, believers should understand how God expects them to follow His under-shepherds. New Testament followership must be understood and developed within God's people for the church to be all that Christ intended it to be. If Christ calls believers to be His followers and followers of His leaders, then all Christians should pursue that identity with relish.

CHAPTER 2

THE IMPORTANCE OF FOLLOWERSHIP

Optimized leadership understands and embraces the importance of followers. This chapter focuses on the need for leaders to acknowledge the significance of followers for ministry optimization and to understand the changes in the leadership culture that facilitate that shift. First, the importance and value followership must be considered.

The vision being cast by this chapter is simple: Christian ministry optimality will skyrocket as leaders understand followership and train followers to dedicate themselves to their followership. The multiplicative power of good leadership and good followership is of extraordinary value for ministries pursuing Christ's commission. Such organizations should purposefully implement great leadership and develop great followership. When both are valued and applied, Christ will receive the greatest glory, as each category maximizes its faithfulness.

Between leadership and followership, a clear understanding of followership and its value is lacking. Disappointingly, when it comes to defining and developing followership, the Christian literature is sparse. This thesis deliberately relies on the Bible for its flawless contributions. Since so little work has been done by Christians concerning followership, this effort will focus on the dynamics of followership within Christian ministries.

This chapter establishes the importance of followership through four arguments. First, the value of followership is featured through the preponderance and power of followers. Second, with the flattening of leadership hierarchies, long-standing leadership paradigms like "The Great Man Theory" are being exposed as inadequate.

Third, the fact that all legitimate Christian leaders are followers first underscores the value of followership. Lastly, a preliminary understanding of followership is offered.

The Value of Followership

This section will ascertain the value of the study of followership. First, the inadequacy of leadership to optimize institutional effectiveness will be considered. Second, the power and prevalence of followers establishes the value of followership as a discipline within leadership and organizational thinking. Third, changes within the world and culture facilitate followership implementation.

Leadership Is Not Enough

Leadership alone is not enough to optimize institutional or missional effectiveness.¹ The modern obsession with leadership, to the detriment of followership, leads to the error that developing leadership alone is adequate to achieve organizational optimality. Michael Maccoby agrees that this focus on leadership alone presents a problem:

But in our understandable effort to grasp and master the skills of leadership, we tend to lose sight of the fact that there are two parts to the leadership equation. For leaders to lead, they need not only exceptional talent but also the ability to attract followers. Regrettably, however, it's becoming harder to get people to follow. The problem is the followers get short shrift in the management literature.²

Most leaders lack appropriate awareness of the value of and need to develop followers. John McCallum complains that followership “only gets a fraction of the airtime that leadership does.”³ Barbara Kellerman accents the significance of followers suggesting

¹ Barbara Kellerman, *Followership* (Boston: Harvard Business, 2008), xvii.

² Michael Maccoby, “Why People Follow the Leader: The Power of Transference,” *Harvard Business Review*, September 2004, <https://hbr.org/2004/09/why-people-follow-the-leader-the-power-of-transference>.

³ John McCallum, “Followership: The Other Side of Leadership,” *Ivey Business Journal* (September/October 2013), <http://iveybusinessjournal.com/publication/followership-the-other-side-of-leadership/>.

that followers are “more important to leaders than leaders are to followers.”⁴ Beyond that, she laments,

The concept of followership languished. This is not to say that leadership scholars, in particular, failed to add knowledge that leadership is a relationship between a leader and at least one follower. Rather it is to point out that, overwhelmingly, even now, we overemphasize the former and underemphasize the latter. Leaders are presumed to be so much more important than followers that our shared interest is in leadership, not in followership.⁵

The discipline of leadership is vastly more developed than the study of followership. Robert Kelley suggests that there exists a glut of leadership material: “2,500 years of research, and 10,000 published leadership studies and endless best-selling books.”⁶ More than 50,000 books per year are published on leadership.⁷ This imbalance feeds the misimpression that leaders are all-important to the success of an institution. The leadership industry had not deeply considered followership until Robert Kelley authored *The Power of Followership* in 1992.⁸ And it was not until over fifteen years later that Kellerman thrust the concept more fully into the leadership spotlight with her groundbreaking book, *Followership*.⁹

The material dedicated to the discussion of leadership overwhelms the paucity of material devoted to the discipline of following. Kellerman laments, “Contrary to what the leadership industry would have you believe, the relationship between superiors and your subordinates is not one-sided. Yet the modern leadership industry, now a quarter-century old, is built on the proposition that leaders matter a great deal and followers hardly

⁴ Kellerman, *Followership*, 242.

⁵ Kellerman, *Followership*, xvii.

⁶ Robert Kelley, *The Power of Followership* (New York: Currency Doubleday, 1992), 17.

⁷ Joel Garfinkle, “Followership the Other Side of Leadership,” SmartBrief, accessed September 15, 2014, www.smartbrief.com/original/2014/09/followership-other-side-leadership.

⁸ Kelley, *The Power of Followership*.

⁹ Kellerman, *Followership*.

at all.”¹⁰ While Kellerman is not speaking to a ministry environment, her comments relate to ministry. In the church, optimized leadership understands the essential importance of followers and their followership. Ministries will bring Christ maximal glory when thoughtful, biblical leaders engage the neglected topic of followership. This engagement includes understanding followers and followership, fostering a healthy leader/follower relationship, and learning how to train zealous and faithful followers.¹¹

The New Testament features instructions for both leaders and followers. Consequently, a ministry that only features an emphasis on leaders and leadership growth, as opposed to a ministry that also features followership and followership development, falls short of the scriptural blueprint for the church. It is apparent that the church should be mindful of both sides of the ministry. Leaders understanding and respecting followers is a scriptural value (1 Thess 2:17-20; 3:10). Christian ministries would be revolutionized if both leadership and followership were intentionally developed. But sadly, in many churches, followership is unknown and undeveloped.

The Value of Followers and Their Followership

It is time to wrest organization optimality from the hands of the leadership experts. For too long almost all the emphasis associated with institution growth has come out of the leadership corner. While this effort should continue, it is incomplete; woefully so because leaders represent a small portion of an institution’s influence. Followers are far more numerous and for that reason (among others) far more critical to mission success. Kelley suggests,

90 percent of most workers spend as much as 90 percent of their time as followers. And followers contribute 90 percent to the success of any organizational outcomes, while leaders account for 10 percent. For every committee where a worker holds

¹⁰ Barbara Kellerman, “What Every Leader Needs to Know about Followers,” *Harvard Business Review* 85 (December 2007): 152.

¹¹ Rob Goffee and Gareth Jones, *Why Should Anyone Be Led by You?* (Boston: Harvard Business Review, 2006), 189-90.

court as chairperson, there are dozens more, over the span of a career where he or she is merely a member.¹²

The value of followers and their followership is obvious if one pauses to consider the great preponderance of followers and the relative minority of leaders. Kelley further explains, “It is the way the business world is set up, but the glamour bias pushes workers to devalue what they spend most of the time doing.”¹³

During Kelley’s consultation with leaders at General Motors, he received negative feedback concerning his emphasis on followers. He asked them to provide a number of leaders throughout the company, and they identified 2,000 leadership roles throughout the 400,000 employees. Kelley explains,

One half of one percent are leaders and if you follow models of (leadership) effectiveness already established out there, this group (or leaders) has an impact equal to 10 percent of the workforce. I think that these seasoned executives wanted to believe their leadership accounted for as much as 50 percent of the productivity in the organization. They had to confront that fact that 90 percent of the success is coming from people who implement their directives.¹⁴

The point of this analysis and anecdotes is simple: “Leadership skills are important, but follower skills are probably more important when it comes to adding bottom-line value to a corporation.”¹⁵

Since followers are important too, the success of any enterprise is contingent upon the coordination and cooperation of leaders and followers. First, Charles Spurgeon, in a chapter titled “The Preacher’s Power and the Conditions for Obtaining It,” captures this reality in a very plain statement: “Our work is, no doubt, greatly affected, for good or for evil, by the condition of our congregation.”¹⁶ This venerable pastor understood the dynamic between leaders and followers, preachers and hearers. Followers are essentially

¹² Robert Kelley, “Followership in a Leadership World,” in *Insights on Leadership: Service, Stewardship, Spirit, and Servant-Leadership*, ed. L. C. Spears (New York: Wiley, 1998), 192.

¹³ Kelley, “Followership in a Leadership World,” 192.

¹⁴ Kelley, “Followership in a Leadership World,” 192.

¹⁵ Kelley, “Followership in a Leadership World,” 192.

¹⁶ Charles Spurgeon, *An All-Around Ministry* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2000), 355.

important. First, leaders need followers to execute the mission. A task of any significant size simply cannot be accomplished without followers. Second, conscientious followers enhance the process, vision, and process with frontline feedback.

Another value of followership includes the follower's capacity to actuate the leader's directive. Douglas Brown asserts, "Ultimately it is followers who legitimize leaders, empower them, and provide them with the means to attain their visions and goals."¹⁷ This has always been true, yet only in the twentieth century has society advanced to a place where followers can find their voice and wield their influence on a broader scale.

The responsibilities associated with quality following are important to understand, because without quality followership, church effectiveness is stymied. Optimized organizational effectiveness is a product of excellent followership development. If followership is important, then analyzing it is essential. Kellerman states with finality, "It's long overdue for leaders to acknowledge the importance of understanding their followers better."¹⁸ At the very least, equal treatment should be given to followership and leadership. This thesis makes a small contribution to rectify that imbalance.

Followership is grossly undervalued as a discipline of study.¹⁹ To remedy this imbalance, Kellerman warns against a fixation on leadership to the demise of followership:

To obsess about superiors at the expense of subordinates is to distort the dynamic between them. And it sends a message: to underestimate, to undervalue, the importance of those whom Shakespeare once referred to as underlings as to

¹⁷ Douglas Brown, "In the Mind of Followers: Follower-Centric Approaches to Leadership," in *The Nature of Leadership*, ed. John Antonakis and David Day (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2017), 103.

¹⁸ Kellerman, "What Every Leader Needs to Know," 145.

¹⁹ A Google search on the term "followership" yielded 905,000 hits in January of 2018. To put what seems like a large number in perspective, at that same time, purple M&M's showed 21,000,000 results. Mars Co. does not even mass produce purple M&M's. By contrast, the term "leadership," with 833 million hits, was almost 920 times more plentiful than "followership." These numbers support the concern of established followership experts who claim that the field is woefully underrepresented.

disempower them. So long as we fixate on leaders at the expense of followers, we will perpetuate the myth that they don't matter much.²⁰

Another potential reason for the struggle that followership has had in gaining a significant foothold in the conversation of leadership is the sheer difficulty in speaking about followers. Kellerman observes three challenges with the study of followership: “The conventional wisdom that followers are less important, much less important, than leaders, the confusion between rank and behavior, and the fear of being called a follower: a mindless member of a mindless herd, a sheep.”²¹ For Kellerman, the use of the term *followership* is fraught with difficulties. However, the word has gained a toehold in leadership dialogue as leaders and followers begin to discover new ways to understand and relate to each other.

Kelley also feels regret over the lack of consideration of followership: “There is a clamoring for business leadership seminars and specialized courses in graduate schools, but when was the last time someone in your workplace came up to you and said, ‘Hey, I just finished this great training course on how to be a great follower. You really should get in on this; it’s hot stuff?’”²² Since the New Testament teaches directly on this topic, the church should take the lead in developing a Christ-honoring theology of followership for the glory of God (Heb 13:7, 17; 1 Thess 5:12, 13).

Followership is more than half of the leadership/followership dynamic for three main reasons. (1) There are many more followers than leaders. In fact, in any church there are a few leaders, and yet everyone is a follower.²³ (2) Every Christian leader is also a follower of Christ. (3) Every wise Christian leader also is subject to other leaders. Old leadership models that rely exclusively on leadership development have restricted the

²⁰ Kellerman, *Followership*, xvii.

²¹ Kellerman, *Followership*, xx.

²² Kelley, “Followership in a Leadership World,” 174.

²³ Goffee and Jones make the plain observation, “Although *some* may become leaders, we are *all* followers.” Goffee and Jones, *Why Should Anyone Be Led by You?*, 196, emphasis original.

leadership dialogue by excluding followership.²⁴ The theme of followership is gaining more attention and it is time to consider more deliberately followership's place in the discussion of maximizing the church's potential.

The Changing World

Changes in modern culture and technology are shaking and shaping views of leadership and followership. The spirit of the age and its shifting values are thrusting forward the importance of followers. Warren Bennis describes the world as “hyper-turbulent.”²⁵ Warren Bennis suggests traditional hierarchical leadership is “ending,” and concludes, “I think that it is now possible to talk about the end of leadership without the risk of hyperbole. But much of (the change) is a legacy of our times, ignited by that dynamic duo: globalization and relentlessly disruptive technology.”²⁶ For the first time in world history, a large portion of society enjoys the use of technology and exposure to gain traction (through online exposure) against leaders with greater institutional power. William Steere explains the changes in culture as “resulting in a confluence of rapid, interdependent, evolutionary changes and political shifts” in business.²⁷

Bennis identifies multiple societal factors chipping away at leadership's dominance: (1) waning trust in leadership, (2) the proliferation of electronic resources, and (3) global exposure through social media.²⁸ Whereas in decades past relatively

²⁴ Kelley, “Followership in a Leadership World,” 174.

²⁵ Warren Bennis, “Farewell to the Old Leadership,” in *Leadership and Management* (Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates: The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 2002), 14.

²⁶ Warren Bennis, “The End of Leadership,” *Organizational Dynamics*, 27 il (July 1999): 71.

²⁷ William Steere, “Key Leadership Challenges for Present and Future Executives,” in *Leader of the Future*, ed. Frances Hesselbein, Marshall Goldsmith, and Richard Beckhard (New York: Drucker, 1996), 266.

²⁸ Bennis, “The End of Leadership,” 71. Steere gives a similar list of dynamic changes disrupting the leadership discourse:

The forces that require large companies to keep changing and improving constantly are dramatically increasing. They include 1) the increasing globalization of the world economy, 2) the

powerless followers were unable to effect change, today power has shifted greatly in favor of “the little guy.” These changing factors are forcing leaders to reconsider the importance of followership.

Consequently, today, as people (and leaders) fall in and out of favor with shocking rapidity. As the speed of information increases exponentially, the ease of capture rises as quickly and the narcissism of decades-gone-by finds a worldwide audience through the internet; the individual is on the rise. When these tendencies are broadcast with the technology to display the most outrageous (or creative and death-defying) acts, everyday people surge forward to find significance in their exposure. Compiling likes and subscribers is the new way to measure acceptance and accomplishment for thousands seeking affirmation through the internet. Kellerman explains how followership is becoming more important:

Spurred by cultural and technological advances, more and more followers are either challenging their leaders or, in many cases, simply circumventing them altogether. Participant, activist, and diehard followers invested in animal rights can, for instance, on their own now mass send messages via email, collect data using concealed cameras, and post their galvanizing images on their own websites.²⁹

These surging cultural tides affect the study of followership in almost every way. Before the modern age of technological ubiquity, followers were more easily relegated to the periphery. It was challenging to gain influence as a follower since information was difficult to disseminate. However, now, the internet has given virtually everyone a voice, or even a megaphone to the rest of the world. A blog about an experience, a rating at the restaurant, or a picture of a sensitive subject are ways an individual’s voice is greatly enhanced through technology. The playing field of influence has leveled dramatically. Now that media circulates the globe in seconds, one might

shifting sands of the regulation and regulation to major industries, 3) the competitive challenge of emerging companies, whether in bio technology, electronics, software, retailing or other areas, and 4) the accelerating rate of technological progress, which is reshaping the boundaries of markets.” (Steere, “Key Leadership Challenges for Present and Future Executives,” 266)

²⁹ Kellerman, “What Every Leader Needs to Know,” 141.

consider the notoriety a simple follower can gain in a single online post. In generations past, stories of leadership misdeeds would be transmitted by word of mouth, traveling slowly, but now they can become part of a very public record and available to a watching world. Leaders must become mindful of these changes and adapt accordingly.

Bennis observes that a major change in the culture that is promoting a surge of followership is globalization.³⁰ Globalization involves the decentralization of economies. In many cases, information is open-source and ubiquitous. Ronald Lippitt observes that leaders should expect more initiative and risk-taking by their followers. He claims, “Along with a decentralizing of decision-making responsibility and authority goes a complementary trend of centralization of accountability for the quality of output and organizational functioning.”³¹ In other words, leadership is flattening as power is shared with many and accountability increases throughout all levels of the organization. Leaders err significantly in underestimating the power of their followers and their new-found ability to capture and communicate the errors and excesses of poor leaders. This accountability is fostering more sharing among leaders and followers.³²

Bennis observes, “The world that we live in today is a vastly different one from the world that existed just 10 years ago.”³³ These changes in society, along with massive advancements in technology, have offered follower unimaginable power. Understanding and promoting good, healthy followership has never been more important.

³⁰ Bennis, “The End of Leadership,” 71.

³¹ Ronald Lippitt, “Leader-Follower Relationships,” in *Leaders and Followers: Challenges for the Future*, ed. Trudy Heller, Jon Van Til, and Louis Zurcher (Greenwich, CT: Jai, 1986), 94.

³² Bennis argues for more sharing across leadership and followership levels, but even as the loan hero continues to gallop through our imaginations, shattering obstacles with silver bullets, taking tall buildings in a single bound, we know that that’s a falsely lulling fantasy that is not the way real change, enduring change, takes place. We know there is an alternative reality . . . The most urgent projects require the coordinated contributions of many talented people working together. . . Effective change (comes from) the workforce and they are creative alliance with top leadership.” (Bennis, “The End of Leadership,” 71-72)

³³ Bennis, “Farewell to the Old Leadership,” 23.

Flattening the Leadership Hierarchy

The world is experiencing a leadership shift.³⁴ Top-down leadership and the “hero-leader” are antiquated forms of leadership that will not optimize the most talented and dynamic of followers. Furthermore, technology and globalization have permanently changed leadership structures. The Bible accords with this shift away from being leader centric to a include followers in the discussion of organizational health and growth.

The “hero-leader” is an antiquated leadership relic.³⁵ The Great Man (or hero-leader) theory of leadership suggests that a dominant leader at the top can send an organization to dramatic heights by the force of his gifts. James Burns suggests that the “Great Man” view of leadership has passed. Humans are too human after all, “just as great men often stumble, so did the Great Man theory.”³⁶ This hero-leader was based on a top-down hierarchy and a dominant personality. Kelley watches its downfall: “The domineering, ego-centered style of leadership—what I have labeled the ‘Big L’ leadership attitude—brings far more failures than successes.”³⁷ A common misconception related to leaders and organizational success is the pursuit of the “hero-leader” or the “Great Man” in leadership.

Even the formidable Warren Bennis has been shocked by an epiphany regarding the deficiency of traditional leadership models: “I came to the unmistakable realization that top-down leadership was not only wrong, unrealistic, and maladaptive but also, given the report of history, dangerous. I think that it is possible to talk about the end of leadership without the risk of hyperbole.”³⁸

³⁴ Kellerman, “What Every Leader Needs to Know,” 141.

³⁵ James M. Burns, *Transforming Leadership* (New York: Grove, 2003), 11.

³⁶ Burns, *Transforming Leadership*, 11.

³⁷ Kelley, “Followership in a Leadership World,” 173.

³⁸ Bennis, “The End of Leadership,” 71.

In many companies, a new leadership model is replacing the antiquated authoritarian managerial approach. What results is a flatter structure with greater amounts of equality and freedom. Bennis concludes that this flattening of the leadership hierarchy

is not quite the end of leadership, but it clearly points the way to a new, far more subtle and indirect form of influence for leaders to be effective. The reality is that intellectual capital, brain power, know-how, and human imagination have supplanted capital as the critical success factor, and leaders will have to learn an entirely new set of skills that are not understood, not taught in our business schools, and for all of those reasons, is rarely practiced.³⁹

Bennis suggests that leadership should be a nonhierarchical relationship with followers. Goffee and Jones agree that the flattening of leadership hierarchies completely would limit organizations: “But we also maintain that leadership is a (non-hierarchical) relationship. Subordinates may not decide who their bosses are, but it is the followers who ultimately decide who their leaders are.”⁴⁰

It is fascinating that these voices in the secular leadership milieu would highlight the passing of the “hero-leader” model. Eugene Habecker is a Christian leadership author who writes critically of the domineering leader: “Such leaders see themselves as the primary fountain of organizational truth and corporate enlightenment. Woe to any subordinate who crosses this kind of leader.”⁴¹ Bennis adds, “Our contemporary views of leadership are intertwined with our notions of heroism, so much so that the distinction between “leader” and “hero” (or “celebrity,” for that matter) often become blurred.”⁴² However, while significant shifts are occurring along the fault lines of traditional leadership consideration, undoubtedly some aspect of authority should be retained. How could it be called leadership without some distinction between follower and leader?

³⁹ Bennis, “The End of Leadership,” 74.

⁴⁰ Goffee and Jones, *Why Should Anyone Be Led by You?: What it Takes to be an Authentic Leader*, 198.

⁴¹ Eugene Habecker, *Leading with a Follower’s Heart: Practicing Biblical Obedience and Humility in the Workplace* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1990), 19.

⁴² Bennis, “The End of Leadership,” 71.

Giving up all authority must be called abdication instead of non-hierarchical leadership. While authority is not a major feature of New Testament teaching on leadership, Paul acknowledges that a leader should retain some authority (2 Thess 3:14-15; Titus 2:15). However, he only uses authority sparingly (1 Thess 2:6). Consequently, the world's tendency to flatten the leadership hierarchy may outpace the church's willingness to abandon all semblances of authority. Christian leaders take their cues from the Scriptures not from the world's swings and shifts. In the church, the Spirit of God who wields the Word of God is louder than the shrillest sirens of the zeitgeist. Consequently, Christian leaders should value followers and seek to establish a flourishing relationship through influence with people throughout the ministry.

With such a dynamic and mutually-empowering interaction between leader and follower, a crucial change occurs—a relationship of interdependence is formed. In one extreme model of a flattened hierarchy, the process is so complex and multidimensional, so fluid and transforming, that persons initially labeled “leaders” or “followers” come to succeed each other, merge with each other, and substitute for each other. Leader and follower roles become ephemeral, transient, and even indistinct.⁴³ Burns recognizes that “the person on the front lines often has the best solution to a difficult problem is at the heart of entrepreneurial thinking.”⁴⁴ Giving followers the freedom to think independently unleashes this creative dynamic toward many positive advancements.

This leadership shift is positive, and in a number of ways echoes what the Bible says should be true of leaders and followers. The Bible asserts that the follower is a dignified role that demands the respect and honor of the leader (1 Pet 2:17). Top-down authoritarian leadership is inferior, unbiblical, and outdated. Followers should be more than thoughtless executioners of the leader's bidding. Followers and leaders should be

⁴³ Burns, *Transforming Leadership*, 185.

⁴⁴ Burns, *Transforming Leadership*, 143.

locked in a collaborative effort, each working with love, respect, and humility (Eph 5:21).

While the world is caught up in the pursuit of the hero-leader, the church should lead the way in acknowledging the One Hero-Leader and His pioneer work on the study of followership in the New Testament. As conferences and leadership volumes seek to craft the leader-hero, the church has found its Leader, and He has taught about leadership and followership (Eph 1:19-22). Jesus criticizes the world's typical approach to leadership and condemns the authoritarian leader (Matt 20:25-27). The Lord came as a servant and walked humbly. Christian leaders should eschew traditional top-down leadership models and rush to the vanguard to champion the value of followers. It is this deficiency, of recognizing and developing followership, that this thesis desires to rectify.

The self-destructive acts of ineffective leaders have killed the "hero-leader" mirage through many public failures. Public scandals for politicians, pastors, and CEOs have weakened the esteem leaders once enjoyed. Today, great influence rests in the hands of the many (followers) and not just the few (leaders). Followership must be valued as important since the old model of the "hero-leader" has become a relic of the past.

The Leader as Follower

Followership is important because followership applies to followers and leaders. This section teaches, first, that leaders are followers because the Lord Jesus Christ is the leader of all believers, especially Christian leaders. Second, leaders begin their careers as followers first, before they become leaders. Third, leaders should learn to submit wisely to their leaders and boards just as followers submit to their leadership.

Leaders are followers as well. One observation highlights the importance of understanding followership: following is a virtually universal human experience. In this age, there is no true isolated autocrat (despite perhaps Kim Jong-Un, the despotic leader of North Korea). All leaders, in at least some sense, are subject to the influence of other leaders or the followers they lead. Kellerman states that even in the secular realm "none

among us is always a leader and never a follower.”⁴⁵ The Christian leader is called to be under authority as well as called to exercise authority.⁴⁶

Christ Is the Ultimate Leader of All Believers

Jesus Christ is the ultimate Leader for all Christians. He is the Master who believers follow (Matt 8:18-22). While the next chapter will discuss at greater length the shepherding leadership of Jesus Christ over the entire Christian flock, this section deals with how both leaders and followers are called to follow Christ well. Once again followership’s importance is highlighted by virtue of the fact that all Christians honor Jesus Christ as their leader. Leaders and followers alike are “fellow followers” of Jesus Christ.⁴⁷

All Christians are called to submit to one Leader. Christ’s reign eclipses any human leadership endeavor.⁴⁸ His glory and His purposes infinitely surpass the work of any pastor or leader. The Reformation doctrine of the priesthood of all believers emphasizes that each believer has direct access to God (1 Pet 2:5, 9). This great truth reminds Christian leaders that in some ways every soul enjoys the same standing before God.

Since Christ is every believer’s leader, all Christians are following together. The steep hierarchical models of the world’s system, including dominant, heavy-handed leaders, are not Christ’s way (Matt. 20:25-27). There are differing roles within the church, but the overall purpose is for all to grow in followership of Christ (Eph 4:16). This essential purpose orients Christian leaders and followers toward Christ and His honor,

⁴⁵ Kellerman, *Followership*, 243.

⁴⁶ David Bennett, *Metaphors of Ministry* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1993), 187-88.

⁴⁷ Michael S. Wilder and Timothy Paul Jones, *The God Who Goes before You* (Nashville: B & H, 2018), 205.

⁴⁸ Wilder and Jones, *The God Who Goes before You*, 175.

instead of self-aggrandizement. A believer's first loyalty is to Christ. Then, God commands followers to submit to, emulate, and follow fallible earthly leaders.

Jesus Christ's leadership is salient to Christian leadership in the church for two significant reasons: (1) Jesus is a preeminently effective leader and mimicking His leadership in the church is honorable and wise (1 Cor 11:1), and (2) Christian leaders desire people to follow Christ ultimately and so imitating His leadership allows believers to simultaneously follow Christ and pastors (1 Pet 2:22).

Christ's perfect leadership is worthy of emulation for Christian leaders. Consequently, circumspect Christian leaders view their leadership in light of Christ's Lordship over all (1 Cor 15:27). Jesus mediates His leadership through other spiritual leaders. Peter names Jesus Christ as the Great Shepherd and Guardian of souls (1 Pet 2:25). Subsequently, Peter challenges church leaders to "shepherd the flock of God" (1 Pet 5:2, 3).⁴⁹ In this way, Christian leaders should be considered under-shepherds of the flock of God.

Hebrews 13 similarly highlights the connection between Christ's leadership and the church's leadership. Twice the author of Hebrews links vertical leadership (men following God) with horizontal leadership (men following men). Vertical leadership is what He provides as the One who is the "same yesterday, today and forever" (v. 8). For certain, followers are called to emulate Him, the Immutable One, but followers are also called to imitate earthly leaders (v. 7). Similarly, in verse 17, followers are exhorted to submit in a way that encourages leaders. Then, the "great Shepherd of the sheep, even Jesus our Lord" is highlighted as equipper (v. 20). Leaders and followers alike are equipped "in every good work to do His will" by their ultimate Shepherd (Heb 13:21).

There are two primary correlations between leaders' followership of Christ and their ability to lead believers in the church. First, a leader's mindfulness to manifestly submit to God in his leadership underscores the importance God of as the primary leader

⁴⁹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations come from New American Standard Bible.

of all Christians. God’s leadership is ultimately superior and over-arching, but He calls earthly leaders to mediate His care for His people (1 Pet 5:3). Shepherds must remember they are accountable to the Chief Shepherd. Second, leaders who are great followers tend to generate great followers since they know what the role requires. As leaders learn to follow well, they are able to train other followers with patience and skill. Leaders who follow well typically lead with great effectiveness.

Leaders Are Followers

The Christian leader is a follower first, in two primary ways: great leaders are normally followers before they are leaders; and wise leaders submit to the gifts and talents of others in the areas where they lack expertise.

First, great leaders are normally followers before they are leaders. Goffee and Jones underscore this basic fact: “In a modern organization, many leaders must at times occupy followers positions. Indeed, Aristotle once noted that all great leaders must first learned follow.”⁵⁰ Many gifted leaders learn to follow before they are given a post to lead. Ultimately, as Calvin Miller states, “every Christian that desires to be a leader must first know how to follow.”⁵¹ Many of God’s best men throughout the epochs were followers before they were leaders: Joshua, David, Elisha (Josh 1:8; 1 Sam 26:10-11; 2 Kgs 3:11). Following prepares people to understand the challenges of following and to be sympathetic toward followers. In the earliest phases of their careers, leaders learn invaluable lessons as followers. They may feel the joy of service, listening, and supporting. These qualities should only be enhanced and not diminished with greater responsibility.

Also, burgeoning leaders who follow for a season can learn the less savory side of followership. They feel the pain of being ignored, misunderstood, or micro-managed. Faithful followers learn under imperfect leadership how to avoid the same mistakes when

⁵⁰ Goffee and Jones, *Why Should Anyone Be Led by You?*, 198.

⁵¹ Calvin Miller, *The Empowered Leader: 10 Keys to Servant Leadership* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), ix.

blessed with a position of authority. A burgeoning leader knows no greater training center than being a thoughtful and wise servant-follower. Before taking a position of alpha leadership where the need for followership is perhaps less obvious, most leaders benefit from a season where they receive training as followers by submitting to leaders.

When God chose David to be the King of Israel, He plucked him out of the field (1 Sam 16:11). As a shepherd, the Lord characterizes his life as “following the sheep” (2 Sam 7:8). This is a statement of the lowliness of the follower. Such is an encouragement for every leader to remember where God found them: in a place of spiritual deadness (Eph 2:1), and then God raises some up to leadership in the church to serve His people (Titus 1:7).

It is best for leaders to think of themselves as followers before they are leaders. Following Christ is the leader’s primary calling. Abiding in Christ precedes fruitfulness for Christ (John 15:5-8). The broad spectrum of challenges facing leaders exposes the leader’s demand for God’s resources and wisdom (2 Cor 12:9). A spiritual leader’s communion and reliance with Christ may be the single greatest factor in leadership effectiveness.

A second feature of leaders’ followership of God involves their awareness of their weaknesses. A leader’s weakness should cause him to depend on God’s sustaining grace and strength (2 Cor 12:10). A leader’s inadequacy should cause him to look to the One who is adequate (2 Cor 3:5). A leader’s limitations should remind him that the body of Christ, the church, is designed to offer support in the place of one’s weakness (1 Cor 12:7). There is a beautiful reciprocity between leaders and followers of support and love (Phil 2:25-30). Goffee and Jones capture the interrelationship of leader and follower effectively: “Followers are prepared to complement the leader. . . . Those in a tightly knit communal cultures actively seek out the intense, collective interactions that typically hold such organizations together.”⁵²

⁵² Goffee and Jones, *Why Should Anyone Be Led by You?*, 199.

In Christ-honoring ministries, an interrelated commitment is fostered among leaders and followers. Henri Nouwen challenges the independent leader with these words: “When you look at today’s church, it is easy to see the prevalence of individualism. Not too many of us have a vast repertoire of skills to be proud of, but most of us feel that leadership is something that we have to do solo.”⁵³ While the spiritual leader’s first impulse is to look to God, a leader’s shortcomings should also prepare him for help from generous brothers and sisters.⁵⁴

Christian leaders must realize that following Christ as a Christian is more essential than their Christian leadership. Therefore, Christian leaders should focus on their followership of Christ before engaging in their leadership for Christ. This followership is the foundation and capstone of spiritual leadership. Christ is the source from which leaders derive their lives, and Christ-following is the goal of all godly leadership.

The Leader’s Submission

Leaders submit to God in three primary ways: (1) Christian leaders submit to Christ foremost, (2) leaders are bound, in almost every case, to submit to leadership boards; and (3) leaders should submit to the feedback and ideas of followers.

First, the faithful leader will submit to God in everything (Jas 3:1). God holds Christian leaders accountable for their followership of Him (Heb 13:17). Habecker states, “I am convinced that I will be effective in leadership only as I faithfully submit all of my leadership responsibilities (and the way that I carry them out) to the teaching of what it means to be an obedient follower of Jesus Christ *and* only as I seek to be sensitive to and

⁵³ Henri Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* (New York: Crossroads, 1989), 55-56. Wilder and Jones agree, “God did not design his church to be led by isolated individuals. In what areas of your ministry are you attempting to lead on your own? If you’re trying to leave by yourself, oh my God be working behind the scenes to raise up a team of fellow leaders? What structures and relationships do you need to develop that will hold you accountable to God into the people that you lead?” (Wilder and Jones, *The God Who Goes before You*, 181)

⁵⁴ Boyd Bailey, *Learning to Lead Like Jesus* (Eugene, OR: Harvest, 2018), 60.

follow the input from the people I lead.”⁵⁵ Elders are stewards of God and accountable directly to Him (Titus 1:7).

A second way in which leader’s should submit is to their leadership boards. A submissive leader will be an accountable and responsive leader.⁵⁶ Ultimate followability will be a product of leaders’ submission to their leaders and eager responsiveness to their followers. An influential leader is an influenced leader—a leader influenced by leaders, mentors, and followers. A leader’s humble heart will resonate with the centurion who described, “For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me” (Matt 8:9).⁵⁷

The primary expression of leaders’ followership is how they respond to their leadership boards. There are formal and informal expressions of accountability. Most leaders are not “independent” leaders and must submit structurally to other leaders. A humble leader expresses a desire for accountability by actively submitting to leaders around him. Many leaders in Christian environments have leaders or boards to which they report. This is an expression of formal accountability. Wise leaders also cultivate less formal, mentoring relationships that offer wisdom and guidance to the receptive leader.

A third way leaders should submit is by being responsive to the feedback and ideas of their followers. Humble servant leaders recognize opportunities to submit to subordinates, allowing their opinions or perspectives to override leadership opinions. Habecker accents the need for accountability and cooperation: “One of the great mistakes made by some leaders is there a tendency to see followers as having little if any capacity

⁵⁵ Habecker, *Leading with a Follower’s Heart*, 18.

⁵⁶ Bailey, *Learning to Lead*, 59.

⁵⁷ Bailey observes that a submitted leader is accountable because of their fear of God: Fear of God tends to be ignored or look down on as a passe belief, only for old-school fundamentalists. Jesus said, “I will show you whom you should fear, fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you fear him” (Luke 12:5). The love of God without the fear of God is not genuine, only man-made and artificial. Fear of God causes us to run toward moral authority and run away from sin. (Bailey, *Learning to Lead*, 63)

to influence direction of the problems with the opportunities faced by the organization.”⁵⁸ Believers submit to one another because of their mutual reverence for Christ (Eph 5:21). He is the Great Leader over all believers. Consequently, leaders are called at times to submit to followers who generally submit to them. Furthermore, wisdom that comes down from above includes a spirit of deference (Jas 3:17). A willingness to yield marks leaders who are inspired by God, while selfishness and selfish ambition mark ineffective, worldly leadership (Jas 3:14-15). Yielding, in part, comes from an awareness of one’s weaknesses and need for others.

Leaders are limited. They are bound to others to compensate for shortcoming and at times find themselves under the superior skills of some followers. When leaders embrace their limitations, dependence on gifted followers increases (1 Cor 12:6, 7). A leader who does not know his limitations does not realize his need for partnership with others (Rom 12:3). God created man with deficiencies and shortcomings. These limitations are designed to drive men toward interdependence in the church. When a leader’s weaknesses cause him to join with followers and form a team, the ministry is enhanced through everyone’s best spiritual contribution (Eph. 4:16).

Ultimately, ministry is enhanced as leaders practice and teach biblical followership to both their followers and leader. Leaders who are great followers are able to train great followers. Leadership’s foundation is being a good follower of Christ and others. Since one cannot teach what one does not know, leaders should maximize their followership to optimize followership in others.

Leaders should recognize the importance of their followership. Followership is important because followership applies to both followers and leaders. Jesus Christ is the true and ultimate leader of all Christians. Also, almost all leaders are followers before they are leaders. The opportunities to follow enhance their leadership. What is more, Christian leaders live submitted lives to Christ, leaders around them, and even submitting

⁵⁸ Habecker, *Leading with a Follower’s Heart*, 18.

to the Spirit-led followers whom they lead. Humble leadership is an expression of Christ's servant leadership (Matt 20:44, 45).

A Preliminary Understanding of Followership

If followership is so important, and if it has been overlooked and neglected, then how should it be defined? Followership is the complex of motivations, character, actions, and relationship associated with following. Just as leadership involves the motives, character, activities, and involvement associated with leading, so followership is a term that analyzes and evaluates a person's effectiveness at fulfilling his role. At its most basic, followership is the reciprocal organizational role and function to leadership. McCallum simply describes followership as "the other side of leadership."⁵⁹ In other words, many aspects of leadership have a corollary component in the field of followership. For example, since leadership demands communication, followership includes being an effective listener. Leadership wields authority and followers are designed to submit.

Kellerman's definition prominently features the relational aspects of followership: "Followership implies a relationship (rank), between subordinates and superiors, and a response (behavior), of the former to the latter."⁶⁰ The lines between leading and following are fluid. Kelley emphasizes that leaders and followers are similar in many attributes and functions: "Followership is not a person but a role, and what distinguishes followers from leaders is not intelligence or character but the role they play. . . . Effective followers and effective leaders are often the same people playing different parts in different parts of the day."⁶¹ Followership and leadership are often practiced by the same person at different times of the day based on the different roles he plays.

⁵⁹ McCallum, "Followership."

⁶⁰ Kellerman, *Followership*, xx.

⁶¹ Robert Kelley, "In Praise of Followers," *Harvard Business Review* 66 (November/December 1988): 143.

Disappointingly, much of the followership discussion springs from the pages of secular authors. That is tragic for two reasons: (1) Christians have a rich theology of followership disclosed in the Bible; and (2) followers are a privileged class in the Bible (Luke 9:23). A consequence of these observations is that this present work will focus on the implications of followership from the Bible and for Christian institutions.

Followership should be valued as a theology in the church and in Christian organizations. Followership is important because leadership excellence alone is not sufficient for organization optimization. Also, followership should be recognized and honored since organizations are filled with followers and often only a few leaders. Another reason to value followers is the fact that culture is shifting toward recognizing followers, and in this way is leaning toward a strength of Christian thought. Finally, followership should be valued since even leaders are followers. In essence every person in ministry is a follower. Consequently, understanding and valuing followership will promote Christ's glory through the fulfillment of Christ's mission.

CHAPTER 3

THE GLORY OF FOLLOWERSHIP

Secular leadership theoreticians, while acknowledging the value of followership, in some cases are concerned that followership is inglorious, and consequently unpopular.¹ However, Christian organizations have a great advantage in featuring and fostering followership because of believers' embrace of their identity as followers and the Bible's description of followership (1 Thess 5:12, 13). So, while followership is important, it is also glorious. This chapter will establish that followership is a valued and dignified calling for the Christian's life.

Why should followership be viewed as a dignified calling? First, followership is significant because God created humans to follow. Second, followership is glorious because of Christ's call to follow Him. Third, followership is elevated in Christian environments because Christians self-identify as followers. Fourth, Christians are ennobled through the graces of followership.

The follower must be drawn out of the shadows and included as a main player in the church. Shining the spotlight on the follower demands an accurate assessment of the follower's role and importance. The Scriptures teach that the follower holds a position of dignity and honor. Since followers provide significant value, wise and godly leaders will honor followers and recognize their importance for ministry optimality.

¹ John McCallum, "Followership: The Other Side of Leadership," *Ivey Business Journal* (September/October 2013), <http://iveybusinessjournal.com/publication/followership-the-other-side-of-leadership/>.

Followership Is Glorious because Humans Are Created to Follow

Creator God made man with flaws, weaknesses, and fallibilities in order to elicit followership. The weaknesses of sheep should cause the sheep to follow. While the world may suffer under misgivings about the notion of followership, Christians who understand God’s creative genius will embrace the call to follow as the Good Shepherd calls His sheep.

God Created Mankind like Sheep to Follow

A well-developed picture of leading and following in the Bible is the shepherd/sheep image. Jesus’s leadership teaching features the image of His role as the good shepherd (John 10; Luke 15). Understanding the Bible’s usage of this image provides exceedingly helpful insights concerning the dignity of followership. The Bible calls people “sheep” and uses the pasture as an image to highlight the truth that man is innately limited and in need of leadership.² Man is greatly dignified to follow Christ as the ultimate authority.³

God has placed followership in the human heart and made following intrinsic to the human experience. The Bible describes all people as sheep (Isa 53:6). Sheep need shepherds for protection, guidance, and provision (John 10:2-4). Godly men reflect upon their limitations and choose to follow (1 Pet 5:5, 6). God limits man to cause him to look up and reach out for help (Prov 11:14; 20:18). The Bible warns people against

² Michael Wilder and Timothy Paul Jones observe that all Christians are sheep but only a few leaders are called to be shepherds, “United with Christ the perfect shepherd in sacrificial land, all of God’s people become sheep—but not all of God’s people are called to become shepherds.” Michael S. Wilder and Timothy Paul Jones, *The God Who Goes before You: Pastoral Leadership as Christ-Centered Followership* (Nashville: B & H, 2018), 111.

³ Joseph Stowell writes, “Interestingly, God created us to follow. Being made in God’s image means we are designed for a reflective following relationship toward creator. Adam and Eve were given responsibilities that defined how they were to follow and then were released to enjoy all that he had made. God was the singular purpose of their lives, and their environment was a place to express their followership as an act of gratitude and love. (Joseph Stowell, *Following Christ* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996], 27)

independence and reliance on their own understanding (Prov 3:5, 6; 16:25). In other words, followership is dignified because God made it a natural part of all human experience.

The Scriptures employs sheep imagery not to demean people or insult them, but to use an image of need. Charles Jefferson explains the weakness of sheep:

Sheep are among the most defenseless animals. They are not provided with weapons of attack or defense. They can neither bite nor scratch nor kick. They can run, but not as fast as their enemies. A sheep is no match for many an animal half its size. Its helplessness is pitiable. It is dependent absolutely on human strength and wisdom. Man is its refuge, its buckler, its shield, its rock, its fortress.⁴

Sheep need guidance, support, and constant care.⁵ Joseph Stowell comments, “Perhaps the greatest self-deceit is to tell ourselves that we can be self-sufficient that runs counter to our creators intention for us.”⁶ God graciously uses an image of the hapless and charming sheep to gently accent humans’ need for Him, our Great Shepherd, and also for earthly shepherds. When followers realize they are like sheep, their need for guidance increases. Ultimately, this guidance is perfectly provided by God (Ps 23). Jesus Christ is the great Shepherd of souls (John 10:1-18; 1 Pet 2:25). God Himself is to be the ultimate defender and strength (Ps 18:1, 2).

While non-Christians may be offended by sheep imagery, the Scriptures paint a beautiful portrait of the worth of followers and the limitations of followers.⁷ Followers

⁴ Charles Jefferson, *The Minister as Shepherd* (Fort Washington, MD: CLC, 1998), 38. Jefferson continues,

Sheep are not independent travelers. They must have a human conductor. They have, apparently, no sense of direction. The greenest pasture may be only a few miles away, but the sheep left to themselves cannot find it. What animal is more incapable than a sheep? For no animal is more docile. The shepherd cannot drive the sheep, he must lead them. Mules and hogs can be driven, but not sheep ; their nature is to follow. (40)

⁵ Jefferson, *The Minister as Shepherd*, 38.

⁶ Stowell, *Following Christ*, 28.

⁷ Stowell acknowledges the counter-cultural nature of the call to follow:

We should not be surprised that Christ call to a following relationship with him goes against the grain. Our fallenness is full of the seductive influence of that bogus offer of a better life apart from God. Not only were we born with this notion implanted in our sinful nature, but we live in a world

are both (1) gifted and worthy of honor and (2) limited and in need of leadership. Since all believers are following Christ together, there are numerous reasons for leaders to view followers as fellow sheep; not as sheep beneath them but alongside of them as an undershepherd or with them as a sheep themselves. Christian leaders should employ flat organizational structures, instead of steep and hierarchical structures with the authority and power coveted at the top. Since all humans share the humble nature of a sheep (leaders and followers alike), Christian ministries should esteem and empower followers, not merely laud the accomplishments of leaders. As followers are empowered, leaders are forced to utilize influence instead of authority. The need for greater influence demands more significant relationships. Both Christian leaders and Christian followers are sheep in His flock, both sinners in need of God's saving grace. This equalizing feature should cause leaders to engage followers with respect and tenderness.⁸

Followers can find meaningful agency in following well (1 Pet 5:5, 6). Michael Maccoby observes, "Followers are as powerfully driven to follow as leaders are to lead."⁹ It is instinctive for man to follow, just like it is instinctive for sheep to be led. Following is not a diminished or demeaning position, it is a ubiquitous reality for all mankind.

Misgivings about Followership in Secular Leadership Theory

There is a stigma concerning followership in the secular mind. In fact, there is conflict in the modern leadership movement whether it is beneficial to call it

managed and controlled by the very one who still hawks the destructive offer on the streets of our culture. Because Satan is the God of our age, we find ourselves in the midst of an upside down, inside out world that seems to connect with the wrongness of its fall in nature this explains why Christ teaching so often flu in the face of the general climate of his society. (Stowell, *Following Christ*, 35)

⁸ The Scriptures' expectations for followership within the church will be discussed in detail in the chap. 4.

⁹ Michael Maccoby, "Why People Follow the Leader: The Power of Transference," *Harvard Business Review*, September 2004, <https://hbr.org/2004/09/why-people-follow-the-leader-the-power-of-transference>.

“followership.”¹⁰ The term seems to be too pejorative for the dignity of modern man. Douglas Smith is concerned that “following suffers from a serious image problem. Few children aspire to grow up to become followers. We are treated to a steady diet of groupies, cult members, and brainwashed masses and are bluntly warrant against the horror and destitution the following.”¹¹ However, Jesus Christ has designed for the Christian (and for Christian organizations) a paradigm for leadership and followership throughout the New Testament.¹² For the believer, Jesus Christ has created mankind and has defined the parameters of leadership and followership.¹³ Modern Christian leadership and followership gains significant organizational ground as leaders and followers return to Jesus Christ’s original ideas and definition of both terms.

Followership Is Glorious because Christians Are Called to Follow

Followership is glorious because it accords with God’s creative order and because followership is the foundation of the Christian’s relationship with Him. To be called by the Messiah into a following relationship and then to cultivate that proximity throughout a lifetime of following is of extraordinary honor and glory.

¹⁰ Barbara Kellerman, *Followership* (Boston: Harvard Business, 2008), xx.

¹¹ Douglas Smith, “The Following Part of Leadership,” in *Leader of the Future*, ed. Frances Hesselbein, Marshall Goldsmith, and Richard Beckhard (New York: Drucker, 1996), 202.

¹² While Jesus Christ and His disciples carried out the mission together, the success of the mission had more to do with God’s power than the quality of the disciples. Efrain Agosto observes, “Jesus did not carry out his mission alone. He gathered a group of followers—the disciples. One of the fascinating aspects of the stories about Jesus and his disciples was that they were not the ‘cream of the crop’ from among Israel’s constituencies. Rather, they include working class fisherman, hated tax collectors, and women disciples in a society that undermined the leadership of women.” Efrain Agosto, *Servant Leadership: Jesus & Paul* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2005), 198.

¹³ Stowell comments, “Deep down, all of us cringe at the thought of giving up our independence to another control. This resistance relates directly to our fallenness—the condition we inherit from birth.” Stowell, *Following Christ*, 27.

The Glory of the Call to Followership

Followership is significant because Jesus's commands to follow constitute the foundation of relationship with Him. First, understanding Jesus's many calls to "follow Me" are foundational to the study of followership. From the earliest months of His ministry, Jesus called His apostles to follow Him (Mark 1:17). Jesus Christ calls all true disciples into a followership relationship with Him (Matt. 26:18). John Kramp accentuates the importance of followership throughout Jesus's ministry:

Jesus' first invitation was for people to follow him, then throughout his ministry, he continually challenged them to follow him with full commitment. At the close of his ministry, he challenged his most committed disciples to follow him through all that was to come, and ultimately, he ended his ministry by extending fresh invitations to follow once again.¹⁴

Understanding Christ's call to follow Him involves the analysis of two terms. First, ἀκολουθέω is traditionally translated "to follow" (Matt 9:9; John 12:26). Second, δεῦρο is also a following term, typically translated, "come, draw near" (Matt 11:28). These two terms appear to be used almost interchangeably. The term ἀκολουθέω is an action. The term δεῦρο is a position; namely "near." These terms depict Jesus's desire for His people to follow closely.

Jesus Christ's Commands to Follow

Jesus's command "to follow" is the most common way He engages new followers. He repeats this call to "follow Me" again and again to multiple people in many different settings, whether He was addressing future apostles (Matt 4:19; Mark 1:17; John 1:43), or large crowds of people (Matt 26:18, Luke 9:23). Both terms appear to be used almost interchangeably. Both terms are translated "follow" in Matthew 4:19, 25. Jesus calls the fishermen to "follow Me" (δευτε ὀπισω μου; Matt 4:19). Then, Matthew narrates that "large crowds followed Him from Galilee" (Matt 4:25). Also, Jesus uses the terms together when he calls the rich young ruler to follow Him (Mark 10:21). He amplified the call to close followership to ratchet up the call of discipleship for the young

¹⁴ John Kramp, *Getting Ahead by Staying Behind* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997), 21.

materialistic man (Matt 6:24). These calls to followership fill His ministry from beginning to end.

While ἀκολουθέω is the traditional word for “follow,” the use of δεῦρο and its cognates paint a more dynamic picture. It is also noteworthy to observe that Jesus amplifies His call to “follow Me” with the adverb δεῦρο (translated “come”). Δεῦρο is an adverb that carries an imperatival force in a few notable instances, which expresses Christ’s desire for close followership. Actually, the adverbial phrase with ὀπίσω (“after”) is translated “follow” (Matt 4:19; Mark 1:17). Consequently, in English, the phrases δευτε ὀπίσω μου (Matt 4:19) and ἀκολούθει μοι (John 1:43) are both rendered “follow Me.”

Stephen’s use of the term during his preaching in Acts 7 highlights the truth that God has always been calling His people to “come.” God called Abraham to come to a land that God had chosen for His people (Acts 7:3). He also chose Moses to come to Egypt so that he would be used by God to rescue his people (Acts 7:34). God wanted Abraham and Moses to draw near to God and his purposes and called his men to “come.” God throughout the centuries has cultivated a group of followers.

Jesus Christ weaves together the concepts of following, drawing near, discipleship, and fellowship throughout the gospel. He called Phillip to follow Him (John 1:43). The discipleship aspect of Jesus’s command is highlighted in His appeal to the rich young ruler (Matt 19:21; Luke 18:22). Similarly, Jesus’s call to follow Him in Luke 9:59 constituted a call to proximate followership. In many passages He commands His followers to draw near to Him in an intimate relationship (Matt 16:24; Luke 14:27; Luke 9:23; Mark 8:34). He cares for the believer’s fellowship (John 15:15). This fellowship then leads to a life of service in His name (John 15:15, 16).

The two terms Jesus uses to call followers evoke the image of closeness.¹⁵ Jesus desires near and intimate followership. For Lynn Anderson, shepherding is “a compelling and fitting model for leadership. No wonder the shepherd metaphor is a constant theme of the Bible. . . . Its root is in *relationship* and its model is Jesus.”¹⁶ Furthermore, following God intimately is essential to a leader’s effectiveness. In the midst of Moses’s crisis of leadership, God personally manifested Himself (Exod 3:11, 13). Michael Wilder and Timothy Paul Jones feature the significance of God’s immediate, intimate presence: “Everything Moses needed to accomplish the task to which was called, God provided through his own perfect presents. He still does. Because God is present with us in Christ, we has Christian leaders possess every resource we need to accomplish every task to which God calls us (Phil. 4:10-20).”¹⁷ Christ’s commands to “follow Me” are grace and strength for follower and leader alike.

Jesus’s command to follow Him was a call to join Him in a personal mission, and to walk with Him and learn from Him daily. Included in Christ’s invitation to follow was an intimate relationship of shared ideas and shared lives. The disciples of the itinerate preacher were always on the move, traveling with the Master (Luke 9:58). His disciples shared in His transient and austere lifestyle (Luke 9:57-62). Following Him was equivalent to joining Him, personally and purposefully. The two terms for “follow” convey the message of communion and commission. Drawing near to Him (δεῦρο) is His call to

¹⁵ There is undeniable intimacy, tenderness, and closeness in the shepherding images in Scripture: (1) “He will tend His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs in His arms; He will carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young” (Isa 40:11); (2) “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. . . . You are with me, Your rod and Your staff thy comfort me. You anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows” (Ps 23:1, 4-5); (3) “The sheep hear His voice and He calls His own sheep by name and leads them out” (John 10:3).

¹⁶ Lynn Anderson, *They Smell Like Sheep: Spiritual Leadership for the 21st Century* (New York: Howard, 1997), 1:21.

¹⁷ Wilder and Jones, *The God Who Goes before You*, 36-37. God promises, “My presence will go with you” (Exod 33:14). Wilder and Jones comment further, “God not only sent a representative ahead of his people but also remain present with his people. Over and over, the God of Israel revealed himself to this leader of his people as the God who goes before us” (37).

communion. Following Him (ἀκολουθέω) contains the idea of walking with Him on mission.

Christians Begin Their Christian Lives as Followers

“Following Jesus” is a technical expression for pursuing Christ as a disciple. Following Jesus meant togetherness with Him and service to Him while traveling the Christian path.¹⁸ The twelve were chosen to share a “special relationship” with Him.¹⁹ The call to follow also included a call to leave former allegiances and abandon former enterprises. Jesus is calling followers to deprioritize former relationships (Luke 8:60; Luke 14:26) and let go of former occupations (Luke 5:11; 28). Stowell comments on Christ’s demands to leave all behind: “Followers are necklace believers. A net is anything that inhibits or prohibits our negotiated commitment to follow Christ.”²⁰ The purpose of that demanding call is that he offers a superior friendship and vocation.²¹ The followers left everything to learn from a new teacher and take up a new task. Jesus demands robust and exhaustive followership, a call to total surrender.²²

Jesus’s call to communion is a call to committed personal allegiance. Jesus tells His disciples, “Follow Me, allow the dead to bury their own dead” (Matt 8:22). Jesus calls Christians to “hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters” in light of their love for Him (Luke 14:26). Jesus’s call to followership also includes a commitment to his ministry cause: “Follow Me and I will make you fishers of

¹⁸ Michael Wilkins, *Following the Master* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 125.

¹⁹ Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 125.

²⁰ Stowell, *Following Christ*, 136.

²¹ Stowell comments, “Christ calls us away from everything that stands between us and him. It is vital that his followers we understand that Christ wishes to introduce his transforming influence into every area of our lives, not just those that need cleansing. Following Christ means that he will transform our view of, in response to, all of life, all its components.” Stowell, *Following Christ*, 146.

²² Stowell, *Following Christ*, 146.

men” (Mark 1:17). Serving Jesus is commensurate with following Jesus (John 12:26). Sacrifice is another aspect of Jesus’s call to discipleship: “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me” (Matt 10:38; 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23). There are many examples in the Gospels of people following Jesus. This is a prominent theme and description of those who affiliated with Jesus (Luke 5:28; 9:49, 57, 61, etc.). Following Jesus is a common way the Bible describes those who adhered to his ministry (Matt 8:19; 9:19).

Jesus utilizes the concept of following in His discourse on the Good Shepherd. The image of shepherd/sheep (as discussed in chap. 2) correlates well with the leader/follower paradigm (John 10:4, 5). In this discourse following Jesus is a function of “knowing the [Shepherd’s] voice.” Familiarity and trust are aspects of why Jesus is so followable. Jesus’s knowledge of his sheep and their intimate familiarity with his voice generates followership (John 10:37). Christians should follow in His footsteps (1 Pet 2:21). Jesus wants people to follow Him, to imitate Him and the join Him on mission.

This invitation is repeated many times in the Gospels and constitutes a major feature in what it means to be a Christian. “Follow Me” is more than a simple command; it is a profound and meaningful call to followership. Consequently, the usage and the terms behind the command instruct leaders about the nature of followership.

Jesus’s call to follow is the same as his call to salvation. Michael Wilkins writes, “The disciples of Jesus, therefore, we’re all those who responded to Jesus called to follow him. It was a call to salvation, a call to the kingdom of God, a call to believe on Jesus for eternal life. The term disciple designated a believer in Jesus.”²³ Jesus Christ emphasized followership repeatedly throughout His ministry: “Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:27). Wilkins rightly observes, “Following is required for all.”²⁴

²³ Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 111.

²⁴ Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 131.

During Jesus’s earthly ministry, following was literal—following Him from town to town. Jesus, the itinerate preacher, expected His disciples to follow Him as he preached throughout the region of Galilee. However, true following is not a physical act, it is spiritual. It became clear throughout His ministry that those who followed Him were not in every case true followers (John 2:23, 24; Matt 7:21; 25:41-46; John 6:66). So, following is a matter of the heart. Christ calls believers to follow Him figuratively by committing one’s ways to Jesus.²⁵

Followership of Jesus Christ is an extraordinarily glorious calling. A disciple of Jesus Christ is privileged to walk closely with the Master. Following the perfect Shepherd closely is a truly dignified life. Believers should recognize the importance and glory of followership and devote themselves entirely to following Christ well.

Christians Self-Identify as Followers

All Christians have responded to Christ’s command to “follow Me” (Matt 4:19). Because of this, Christians should never bristle against following. What is more, disciples should think of themselves as followers. The commands of Christ to follow generates a significant advantage within the church. Christian leaders should leverage the fact that Christians consider themselves followers and cultivate followership within the church. The New Testament employs several images to underscore the idea of believers as followers: disciple, priest, and one who submits.

Follower as Disciple

The New Testament idea of following is dominated by the concept of “disciple” (μαθητής). Christ’s disciples are called to a life of radical followership (Luke 9:23-26). However, Christians are first and foremost followers of Christ. Wilkins states, “The term disciple is simply the most common title for a person who has made a commitment of

²⁵ Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 131.

faith in Jesus.”²⁶ An implication of followership of Christ is that believers should be following undershepherds in the church (1 Pet 5:2, 3). David Bennett observes, “A number of New Testament terms can be included under the heading of those who have decided to ‘follow’ Jesus, identifying with his life and calling.”²⁷

A disciple is someone who has a relationship with the teacher and obeys the teacher. Believers are called into a life of commitment. Wilkins writes, “All disciples were to be attached to Jesus spiritually, to draw their spiritual nurture from him, to learn from him, to become like Him. But figurative following was for all disciples, in which they would grow to become like Jesus.”²⁸ Truly the Lord Jesus showed that this training happens in the context of a deep relationship. Bennett explains, “Although the disciple is under the authority of the teacher, it is a relationship which the student enters voluntarily, born out of a desire to become like the teacher.”²⁹ So, as followers of the Lord Jesus choose voluntarily to follow Him, preachers must be cognizant of that followers choose who they will learn from.

Discipleship is a tiered relationship that features followership in the environment of a deep and developing relationship. This is true of followership of Christ (Christological followership) and also true of followership in the church between leaders and followers (ecclesiological followership).

Follower as a Priest

Followers of Christ are disciples and also priests. This identity as priests for believers is a superior starting point for rethinking the establishment and development of

²⁶ Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 133.

²⁷ David Bennett, *Metaphors of Ministry* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1993), 110.

²⁸ Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 132.

²⁹ Bennett, *Metaphors of Ministry*, 38.

the church. What if the people reclaimed their mantle as a priesthood of believers (1 Pet 2:9) and the followers became a leading force in mission optimization?

The priesthood of believers is central to the Protestant faith.³⁰ The priesthood of the believer includes two primary blessings: (1) direct access to God and (2) direct oversight over the work of God. Unmediated access to God is the first and greatest blessing of being a priest. The second great privilege is performing the work of service in the church (1 Pet 2:5). In the New Testament, followership (e.g., the priesthood of believers) is exceedingly more valuable to the church than leadership normally realizes. Christians (all of them) are the priests of God and should eagerly commit to Christ's cause. As priests, Bennett comments, "The privileges of leading and worship, and of offering sacrifice, usually reserve for the priests, now belong to all of God's people."³¹ A culture that facilitates followership through emphasis on the priesthood of believers can, as Wilder and Jones write, "develop a diverse community of fellow laborers who are equipped and empowered to pursue shared goals."³²

Three great blessings associated with the priesthood of believers dignify followership. First, followers filled with priestly anointing are offered unfettered access to God (Heb 4:14-16). The believer has one mediator with God, Jesus Christ (1 Tim 2:5). Human priests are no longer needed to reach God.

The second aspect of the Christian's privilege, through the priestly office, involves the presence of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, Christ the believer's Advocate, empowers the Christian follower with the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4). The indwelling power of the Holy Spirit is a glorious aspect of new covenant priests (Acts 1:8). First John 2:27 explains, "As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you

³⁰ Wilder and Jones, *The God Who Goes before You*, 104.

³¹ Bennett, *Metaphors of Ministry*, 104. He also states clearly, "Nor are these functions given to a special class of people within the church. The image of priesthood is not used to imply special authority for the leader. Rather the privileges described are open to all" (104).

³² Wilder and Jones, *The God Who Goes before You*, 106.

have no need for anyone to teach you, but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him.” Priests are designed to serve God’s purposes through the power and guidance of the Spirit. The priesthood of believers does not necessarily obviate the importance of teachers and leaders in the church.³³ Pastors, teachers, and leaders are still provided by God for the edification of the saints (Eph 4:12; Heb 13:17).

A third privilege of priestly followership is reward from God. Priests enjoy the privilege of serving the Lord (1 Pet 2:9). Jesus Christ, in the Gospel of John connects following Him with serving Him: “If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me. And where I am, there will be my servant also. If anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him” (John 12:25). Jesus Christ artfully combines serving Him (a necessary function of priesthood) with following Him. Furthermore, He features the extraordinary glory of the proximity of His presence (“where I am, there will My servant be also”) and the approbation of the Father (“the Father will honor him”).

Followership as One Who Submits to God

Followership is greatly dignified in the fact that the believer is following Christ and submitting to God. The presence of God elevates followership to levels of greatness. While the world struggles to see the dignity in followership, the believer should be thrilled when considering closely following God. Wilder and Jones explain, “The centeredness in the calling in the power of God is clear throughout every line of this exchange between God and Moses. Near the center of his dialogue with Moses, God described himself as ‘I

³³ Wilder and Jones raise an insightful question:

If everyone is a holy priesthood, why do we still need leaders? The reality of a holy priesthood that includes all God’s people has never negated the need for God-called leaders among these people. Leadership and followership were, after all, part of God’s plan before humanity’s fall. Even before sin entered the world, Adam and Eve together constituted a royal priesthood that included both a leader and a follower living in complementary union with one another. The primeval sin perverted the practices of leadership, but God’s design for a comprehensive priesthood persisted along humanities need for leadership. (Wilder and Jones, *The God Who Goes before You*, 104-5)

AM WHO I AM’ and promised he would ‘be with’ Moses.”³⁴ The glory of God’s presence, promise, and advocacy greatly dignify the one who submits to God.

Christ wants followers, not mere subordinates. Subordinates enact the will of their superiors out of a sense of duty. Followers respond to their leaders out of a sense of relational joy. Jesus Christ emphasizes this joyful friendship in John 15:14-16.³⁵ Eugene Habecker artfully differentiates between the motivations of a subordinate and one who submits: “When I carry out my responsibility or role because *I want to* rather than because *I have to*, I move in the direction of being a follower.”³⁶ A subordinate is forcibly constrained to subject himself to the dictates and desires of a leader. A pure follower has chosen the degree to which he will align with the priorities of the leader. The subordinate says, “I have to,” while the follower says “I want to.”³⁷ This dynamic of relational joy is a great key to followership development and optimization.

Many leaders by nature desire an institution of acolytes—followers full of supportive enthusiasm bowing to their every whim. However, most leaders can also be benefitted by adversaries—followers with the courage to be contrarian. Wise leaders realize the value of followers who are willing to vocalize their support and their dissent. Christ seeks followers, not obsequious subordinates.

Good leaders need to receive critical feedback too (Prov 11:14). However, leaders typically desire vocal supporters. The preference of most leaders is to fill their organization with cheerleaders. Truly, both uniformity and diversity are needed.

³⁴ Wilder and Jones, *The God Who Goes before You*, 37. See also other promises of God’s intimate engagement with Moses’s followership: Exod 3:6, 7, 8, 12, 14, 20, 21; 4:5, 12, 15. And another plain promise of God’s advocacy in Exod 33:14: “My presence will go with you.”

³⁵ Jesus Christ’s teaching on fruitfulness concludes with powerful words about the nature of our followership of Him and His mission: “You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father, I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide” (John 15:12-16).

³⁶ Eugene Habecker, *Leading with a Follower’s Heart* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1990), 18.

³⁷ Habecker, *Leading with a Follower’s Heart*, 32.

Combatants without collaborators is a warzone of steamy frustration. However, when leaders are blessed with collaborators, combatants can sometimes provide the agitation needed to catalyze change and growth. A leader's first work should be to generate faithful, lovingly predisposed followers, but leaders should not allow the enjoyment of generous-hearted followers to be frustrated by the other value: critical feedback.

All Christians gladly obeyed Christ's command to follow Him. By virtue of that fact, believers are followers and should see themselves as followers. This self-identification as followers accords with three other callings for the Christian. First, the follower of Jesus Christ is known as a disciple. Second, followers also serve God as priests. Third, the follower of Christ submits to God and His leaders. All three callings are beautifully dignified privileges offered by God as blessings.

Christians Ennobled through Followership

Contrary to the world's opinion that following connotes a lowly, dishonorable position, following Christ is a truly dignified and glorious calling from God. The Scriptures elevate the position of the follower with many critical teachings. The New Testament raises the significance of followers in three primary ways. First, Christ illustrates followership through His humble submission to the Father. Second, the Holy Spirit's indwelling presence and Christ the Advocate represent amazing power within every believing follower. The Sovereign Lord gives great gifts and aptitudes to His followers to equip them for every good work. Third, the Scriptures testify to the elevated position that all believers share in the presence of the Lord.

The primary factor that dignifies followers is that Jesus was a perfect follower Himself. His submission to the Father is an aspect and expression of followership (1 Cor 11:3). It is unwarranted to press all the dimension of leadership and followership into the relationship of God the Father and God the Son, yet it is not controversial to suggest that Christ dignifies followership through His glorious (and exhaustive) submission to the will

of His heavenly Father. Jesus's relationship with the Father highlights that following is an honorable calling in many ways.

Jesus Christ is such an exceptional follower that He exclusively performed the bidding of His Father (John 5:19). Jesus Christ learned obedience through His suffering, submitting to His Father's will (Heb 5:8). While He lived on earth, Jesus refused to act on His own initiative and sought only the will of His Father (John 8:28). Furthermore, this dependence following flowed from a relationship of great depth with His Father (John 8:29). Also, Jesus spoke only the words the Father chose for Him to speak (John 12:49; 14:10). Jesus followed His Father perfectly. It is Jesus's testimony that "my food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work" (John 4:34).³⁸ When Christians humbly follow fallible leaders, they are walking in the honorable footsteps of their Savior.

A second way followers should be dignified is because all Christians are called into a relationship with and have access to the ministry of the Holy Spirit. First John 2:20 teaches that every believer receives the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Also, the believer enjoys the instruction of two primary teachers: the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt 11:29) and the Holy Spirit (1 John 2:27). While earthly teachers serve a critical role in the edification of Christians (Eph 4:11), all believers enjoy the direct teaching ministry of God Himself. This anointing endows the Christian follower with immense wisdom. The believer's relationship with the Holy Spirit should cause the conscientious leader to honor the input and contribution of every believing team member.

Further, all followers are called to display the gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:7). What is more, every believer participates in the full presence of the Holy Spirit and in a full sovereign dispensation of His gifting (Rom 8:9). First Corinthians 12 accentuates the value of the contributions of all believers. Every contribution is necessary and valuable

³⁸ The submission of Jesus Christ is a significant theme in the gospel of John. Jesus's words of complete submission to God and His will are recorded seven times (John 4:34; 5:19; 5:30; 6:38; 8:28, 29; 12:49; 14:10). His words, initiative, and actions were all captive to God's pleasure and plan. This utter submissive and perfect followership should serve as a powerful inducement for Christians to follow earthly leaders diligently.

to the cause of Christ. Leaders and followers need each other.³⁹ Paul's instruction places leaders and followers equally in the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:27). Similarly, 1 Peter 4:11 tells that the spiritual ministry of every contributor brings glory to God. Every Christian follower enjoys the indwelling presence of Holy Spirit and a full complement of divinely distributed gifts (Eph 4:7). Followership is greatly dignified as one reflects on the contributions of followers. God designs for followers, the priests of the church, to be the workers of the ministry. In light of the Holy Spirit's empowerment, Christians are extraordinarily capable to accomplish the mission of God (Acts 1:4, 5, 8).⁴⁰ Wilder and Jones add, "In the new covenant, the entire community of faith participates in this priestly work of proclaiming and preserving the truth that has been inscribed in words but also on our hearts (Jer. 31:33)."⁴¹

The third way the Bible features the glory of followership is in the believer's position of great dignity. That Christians are named as ambassadors (2 Cor 5:19, 20) constitutes a calling of high status. The least of all Christians (like the Corinthians) will judge angels in the end (1 Cor 6:3). Furthermore, every believer can relish the blessings found in heavenly places (Eph 3:1). The graces God dispenses are not based on hierarchy or seniority but are available to all believers. Every Christian is lifted to a position of tremendous stature in the kingdom of God. Therefore, when Christians are called to follow, they are following from a place of profound honor.

³⁹ Bennis states, "If there is one generalization we make about leadership and change, it is this: no change can occur without willing and committed followers. . . . I'm saying that exemplary leadership and organizational change are impossible without the full inclusion, initiatives and cooperation of followers." Bennis, "The End of Leadership," 73.

⁴⁰ Stowell underscores the value of followers: "Leaders see a vision and set strategy, but it is the followers, the foot soldiers, who guarantee the outcomes and bring the vision to fruition. It is not a coincidence that scripture goes to great pains to instruct followers." Stowell, *Following Christ*, 36.

⁴¹ Wilder and Jones, *The God Who Goes before You*, 96.

Conclusion

All believers should feel dignified with a call to followership. Godly leaders recognize the reality that those they are leading, even the weakest vessels, carry an authority that eclipses any power this world knows; namely, the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:9). By their adoption into a royal family, believers should receive respect as a person with a magnificent standing and heritage.

Modern culture's emphasis on the dignity and value of the follower accords with the New Testament's dignifying of the role of the follower. Leaders who study the Scriptures should find it natural to honor their followers and elevate their position in any Christian organization. Christians are honored as followers by the fact of creation, calling, and the multiplied identities that ennoble the believer's life.

CHAPTER 4

THE PRACTICE OF FOLLOWERSHIP

This thesis has considered a few expressions of the believer's followership of God (e.g., disciple, sheep, priest). The value and glory of followership have been established. The shifting cultural priorities and significance of the Bible's emphasis on followership position followership as a significant force in the church today. Christian leaders should understand and teach Christians the practice of followership.

However, how does that followership relate to following fallible human leaders in the church? In other words, what are the New Testament's expectations of following within the church? When it comes to following other people, what are the implications of believer's followership of Christ? Understanding and instilling excellent organizational followership is critical to mission optimization. This chapter includes a discussion of the New Testament teaching directed at followers within the local church.¹

This thesis now turns its attention to these questions and details the practice of followership within the local church. It is necessary at this juncture to differentiate between two distinct types of followership within the New Testament. The first form of followership is the foundation of the believer's faith, which will be called *Christological followership*. The New Testament also teaches Christians about how to submit and obey within the local church. This chapter discusses the responsibilities elucidated for Christians

¹ There are several secular followership constructs (lists of followership values and virtues) in the books used to research this thesis. However, this thesis takes a deliberate turn to consider mostly how the New Testament defines the actions and attitudes of followership. For an example of a secular (and not altogether unhelpful) list of followership virtues: "A quick snapshot of the four cardinal virtues will show how habits need to be ethical if they are to be affective. Doing the right thing (*prudence*), for the right reason (*justice*), often requires *courage* and always requires not acting out (*temperance, soundness of mind*)." Ronald Riggio, Ira Chaleff, and Jean Lipman-Blumen, *The Art of Followership* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2008), 22, emphasis original.

within the church. This will be called *ecclesiological followership*. Ecclesiological followership is founded on Christological followership. The institution of the church is established and enhanced by ecclesiological followership (following human leaders within the church). While these expectations might apply in Christian ministries outside the church, the New Testament only has the church in its purview and consideration.

The New Testament defines quality followership in ministry with eight primary actions. More leaders (and followers) should study and embrace these New Testament truths. Certainly, Jesus Christ deserves great followership, however, following human leaders is different and more challenging, which is why the Bible specifies certain expectations for followers within the church.

Specific Scriptures place expectations on followers to respond rightly to human leaders. Those expectations come in two forms: actional expectations and attitudinal expectations. The four actional commands are objective actions taken by godly followers. The four attitudinal expectations reflect the type of relationship God wishes to generate between leader and follower.

Actional Expectations of Ecclesiological Followership

There are four objective expectations in the New Testament for followers in the church: submission and obeying, imitating, sharing, and praying. These four actions are disciplines that the Lord expects of followers of church leaders. Followers should understand the need for these essential actions. Barbara Kellerman comments, “Followers can be defined by their behavior.”² The New Testament agrees.

Submit to and Obey Spiritual Leaders

Followers are called to submit to their leaders. Obedience and submission are expected of all followers within Christian organizations. Hebrews 13:17 advances this

² Barbara Kellerman, “What Every Leader Needs to Know about Followers,” *Harvard Business Review* 85 (December 2007): 140.

discussion of followership in three specific ways. The author of Hebrews states, “Obey your leaders and submit to them for they are keeping watch over your souls as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning for that would be of no advantage for you” (13:17). There are several initial observations: (1) the use of the term “obey” accentuates the command to submit; (2) the reminder to followers that leaders are accountable; and (3) great followership profits followers.³

The writer of Hebrews gives two commands for followers: to obey and to submit. Obeying is the term *πειθω*, which denotes being persuaded, inclined to believe and connotes, and hearing intently to the point of observance.⁴ This term features the followers’ responsibility to listen deliberately to the leader. As the shepherd-leader selflessly cares and sacrifices for the sheep, so followers eagerly positions themselves to be persuaded by the leader.

Submit is the term *υπεικω*, which means “to yield and submit, from a posture of retirement or withdrawal.”⁵ Peter O’Brien explains, “The first verb means to put one’s trust in someone, while the second which occurs only here in the New Testament is stronger and means ‘to give way, yield or submit’ to someone usually in authority.⁶ The word *υπεικω* refers to a person actively yielding and being willing to step aside. Followers are bound to incline their hearing, place themselves under the direction of, and be inclined

³ R. Kent Hughes writes,

Clearly all Christians are called to obedience and submission to authority—a call that demands careful definition. We must understand that this does not mean unqualified blanket obedience. Neither does it provide the basis for authoritarian churches. Of course, this call to obedience was never meant to entice anyone to contradict Biblical morality or individual conscience. It was, instead, a call to an obedient heart. (R. Kent Hughes, *Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul*, Preaching the Word [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1993], 2:235)

⁴ G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), 350-51.

⁵ Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon*, 457.

⁶ Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2010), 529. *Πειθω* is used in Heb 2:13 (“trust”) and Heb 6:9 (“feel sure”), and generally conveys a sense of trust or persuasion.

to obey their leader's directives. Hebrews 13:17 speaks of a disposition of followership. The stronger word for submission (e.g. ὑποτασσω) is replaced with softer terms that highlight persuasion, and yieldedness rather than subjection.

The second significant contribution these verses make to the discussion includes the reminder to followers that leaders have a Judge. When followers forget that God holds leaders accountable, their followership can be compromised. Remembering that God will hold leaders accountable allows followers to submit with greater confidence in His righteousness. This obedience assumes that the leaders spoken of are imitating Christ faithfully.⁷ The accountability draws in the author's admonitions to remember, consider, and imitate from verse 7.⁸

The writer of Hebrews states that great followership has a boomerang effect on the follower, promoting the joy of everyone. This is an important motive for proper submission. When the follower follows poorly, a tension enters the relationship. The tendency to resent each other as leaders and followers has been discussed, so one could imagine that tenuous relationship under stress. When there is a followership breakdown, distrust and judgment can quickly arise. Then, an unfortunate cycle can lead to greater tension. This is where glad submission is a value to the follower. The writer argues that glad obedience that remembers the leader's accountability to God leads to a profitable relationship (Heb 13:17).

⁷ Hughes emphasizes the Christlike character of leaders fitting of faithful followership: "The words 'keep watch' literally means 'to keep oneself awake.' So the idea may well mean that some of the leaders had lost sleep over certain people in the church. The pastors to which the writer calls people to submit were good, energetic, conscientious, caring shepherds." Hughes, *Hebrews*, 2:235.

⁸ O'Brien writes,

The pastoral injunctions in vv. 7 and 17 regarding leaders are complementary: earlier reference was to the leaders through whom the concertation was founded. They had spoken the word of God to the members and were exemplars of faith – both of which are central to leadership. In succession to them those mentioned in verse 17 now lead the congregation. The author is concerned that the listeners put their confidence in them and submit to their authority. (O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 529)

One necessary component of submission is simply accepting the assignment to follow. Joel Garfinkle suggests that embracing one's role as a follower is the first step to effective following.⁹ Believers' embrace of the status of follower liberates them to honor all that is expected of them as a follower.

Submission can be difficult unless it is built on a foundation of a life placed in subjection to God and authorities. Paul tells believers to subject themselves to rulers and authorities that God places over them (Rom 13:1-3). It is the will of God for followers to subject themselves to their leaders (1 Pet 2:13). In the same way, Paul admonishes believers to "be in subjection to such men" in the church (1 Cor 16:15, 16).

Garfinkle acknowledges four features of good followership: the follower should (1) embrace their role; (2) maintain a servant's mentality; (3) make one's boss look good—this blunt pro-leader language does little to advance Christ-honoring followership; and (4) support the leader's vision.¹⁰ This description is relatively blunt, and yet features a few aspects of a submission.

Tonal errors notwithstanding, there is value to Garfinkle's suggestions. He rightly suggests that a follower should desire to support and promote the vision of the organization. In fact, it would be excellent followership to desire "make one's boss look good." However, it is a little coarse to list that trait as a defining characteristic of followership. Such insensitivity by leaders causes followers to be wary of leadership abuse. Loyalty and support are important followership responsibilities. Loyalty should not be blind, but in Christian organizations tempered by the final arbiter of all matters: the Bible. Also, support should not overlook sin in leadership; however, that does not mean that followers should hunt for indiscretions to expose.

⁹ Joel Garfinkle, "Followership the Other Side of Leadership," SmartBrief, accessed Sept. 15, 2014. www.smartbrief.com/original/2014/09/followership-other-side-leadership.

¹⁰ Garfinkle, "Followership the Other Side of Leadership."

Leaders need to know that everyone is pulling in the same direction. Followers and leaders are called to impact and influence one another. However, while influence is two-way, authority is given by God to spiritual leaders to wield with love.

Imitate Spiritual Leaders

Hebrews accents the value of following leaders and the priority of focusing on Christ as the ultimate exemplar. The author says, “Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct imitate their faith. Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today and forever” (13:7-8). These two verses seem disconnected until realizing that these Jewish believers were being told to remember human leaders while they remember their Lord as their perfect and unchanging Lord. So, when Christian leaders exhort saints to imitate them, a thick accent must be placed on the fact that imitating is proper as long as it involves mutual followership of Christ (1 Cor 4:16; Phil 3:17; 4:9).

The clearest example of this injunction reflecting an interest in people following Christ is 1 Corinthians 11:1, where Paul commands the Corinthian Christians, “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.” Likewise, he correlates their followership to his faithfulness to Christ when he encourages believers who had become “imitators of us and the Lord” (1 Thess 1:6). Godly leaders know that the saint’s followership is ultimately of Christ. However, believers also recognize that church leaders have been given as mediators of Christ’s leadership in the church.¹¹

¹¹ Paul appears to use his command to imitate him as an extension of Christ’s command to “Follow Me.” Paul converts Jesus’s command into “join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.” Paul expands on Jesus’s call to discipleship. Paul exhorts the Thessalonian believers to follow his example of hard work and discipline (2 Thess 3:7). The 144,000 are called “the ones that follow the Lamb wherever He goes” (Rev 14:4). It is interesting that Paul does not tell the churches to follow him as often as he calls believers to “imitate me.” However, Paul says, “Follow my example” (2 Thess 3:7, 9). The use of the translation “follow” is unfortunate because Paul avoids using the Greek term ἀκολουθέω (“to follow”), instead using μιμέομαι (“to imitate”). Though, that expectation is clarified by his exhortations to “be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1). Furthermore, Paul’s ultimate interest is that people are imitating God directly (Eph 5:1), not thoughtlessly aping his ministry. He praises the Bereans for searching the Scriptures rigorously and testing what he taught (Acts

Imitation is an important habit of an effective follower. Followers are called to consider the faith of their leaders and imitate their faithfulness (Heb 13:7). Hebrews 13:7-8 makes three contributions to the discussion of followership. First, when Christians “remember” and “consider” their leaders, deep and personal relationships develop. Second, imitation should be an outgrowth of that close relationship. Third, everyone should remember that Jesus Christ is the ultimate example of faithfulness (v. 8). This verse celebrates the leadership of the unchangeable Christ over everyone. Great followers always remain mindful of their ultimate Leader.

All believers are called to follow Christ ultimately. Also, imitation is built on an appreciation of leaders (1 Thess 5:12, 13). Furthermore, leaders are to be embraced (προσδεχομαι, to receive favorably) by their followers as Scripture prescribes (Phil 2:29-30).

Leaders should build relationships of encouragement and partnership. Cultivating rich and deeply personal relationships is critical to church vitality (1 Thess 2:17-20). Paul invested his heart and life into the churches that he led (1 Thess 2:8). Even with the rebellious Corinthians, Paul opened his heart to them (2 Cor 6:11-13). Paul’s sacrificial vulnerability with the Corinthians positioned him to correct them (2 Cor 6:12). Solomon teaches, “Faithful are the wounds of a friend” (Prov 27:6). Normally, the wounds of an enemy feel like an attack that is intended to tear down. However, if that follower is purposed to esteem and encourage the leader, then the criticism is easier to receive.

Share All Good Things with Spiritual Leaders

Paul desires followers to be generous with their leaders. He admonishes followers, “The one who is taught the Word is to share all good things with him who

17:11). Christ is the example. His servant’s humility is the Christian example (John 13:15). His trust in God through overwhelming suffering is the believer’s example (1 Pet 2:21). God’s under-shepherds are designed to image for Christ’s followers the faithfulness and humility of Christ, always pointing to him.

teaches” (Gal 6:6). Generosity of heart is an important discipline for a follower. Selfless leaders give generously of their lives (1 Thess 2:7, 8). In the same way, followers should share liberally with their leaders. Paul challenges the Corinthian church to pay the preacher when he admonishes, “Do not muzzle the ox” (1 Cor 9:17). Furthermore, the elder who rules well and works hard at preaching and teaching is worthy of double honor (1 Tim 5:17). Just as leaders serve selflessly, so followers should receive and care for the needs of Christ-honoring leaders (Phil 2:28). Generosity between leaders and followers is a hallmark of a healthy relationship.

Pray for Spiritual Leaders

In 1 Timothy 2:1, 2 Paul commands believers to offer petitions and thanksgivings for authorities and leaders. While this entreaty is broader than church leaders, it applies to church leaders. Praying for leaders is an act of generosity that humbly solicits the help of God in a leader’s life. He also solicits prayers of the churches often in the Epistles. In Colossians 4, he earnestly asks for the believers to pray for his preaching clarity (vv. 3-4). Also, Paul solicits the intercession of the Ephesian Christians seeking for gospel preaching (Eph 6:18-20).

Followers derive significant benefits from obeying God’s expectation to pray. First, the grace of obedience falls to supplicant Christians. Second, followers praying for leaders fosters a deeper partnership and sharing in the ministry (Phil 1:7, 8). Third, God’s faithfulness to answer the prayer requests yields significant blessing and growth.

These four actional expectations begin the discussion of God’s design for ecclesiological followership. Submitting and obeying, imitation, sharing all good things with pastors, and prayer are the first four makers of faithful followership in the church. As leaders consider their faithful leadership, so also followers should be mindful of their faithfulness to God’s description of their role. The four relational expectations fill out the list of God’s requirements for faithful ecclesiological followership.

Attitudinal Expectations of Ecclesiological Followership

There are four attitudinal expectations in the New Testament for how followers respond to human leaders in the church: live in peace, care for, support, and honor spiritual leaders.

Live in Peace with Spiritual Leaders

Paul exhorts biblical followership in 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13, “We ask you, brothers, to respect those labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.” It is interesting that the injunction to “live in peace” is in the context of followers responding to leaders (1 Thess 5:13). Some followers tend to rebel against leaders. Living in peace involves submission and believing the best in love (1 Cor 13:7). Paul teaches followers to not malign their leaders and to show consideration to those in authority (Titus 3:2). Irresponsible followers are prone to malign leaders and lack consideration for the difficulties of their role, which leads to a contentious relationship of strife. Followers who live in peace will show deference and consideration for their leaders. But in reality, the church is a set of relationships between leaders and followers, with both parties loving and leaning in. Kellerman comments, “Contrary to what the leadership ministry would have you believe, the relationship between superiors and their subordinates is not one-sided.”¹²

Care for Spiritual Leaders

Beyond merely living in peace with leaders, there persists an expectation to develop a caring and meaningful relationship with leaders. Paul had an extraordinarily challenging relationship with the Corinthian church. In 2 Corinthians 6:11-13; 7:2, Paul

¹² Kellerman, “What Every Leader Needs to Know,” 152. Edwin Hollander agrees that relationships are essential: “Leadership involves race relationships, not just one person directing others. The leader cannot do everything though he or she might try. In any group or organization, there are different leadership roles. Being a leader is therefore a complex role, and these roles often must be delegated among several people.” Edwin Hollander, *Leadership Dynamics* (New York: Free, 1984), 11.

admonishes the Corinthian church to let Paul “into their hearts.” Paul had opened his heart to them, spoken freely and openly to them, and had initiated and was committed to their relationship, but the Corinthians had not reciprocated. They had not let Paul into their lives and hearts. In a similar fashion, Paul commands the Philippians to “welcome” (προσδεχομαι) Epaphroditus. The term means “to receive to oneself, to receive favorably, to accept.”¹³ The emphasis in these Scriptures is the significance of care that springs from a relationship.

Paul understood that a healthy relationship is needed to foster the submission, obedience, and care that the Scriptures call followers to. Kellerman suggests, “Followership implies a relationship (rank) between subordinates and superiors, and a response (behavior), of the former to the latter.”¹⁴ These relationships are quite significant for institutional success.¹⁵ Developing and fostering relationships is essential for both leaders and followers.

Jesus Christ highlights the importance of accepting His leaders in Matthew 10:40: “Whoever receives you, receives Me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent Me.”¹⁶ Jesus Christ is vying for a relationship that reflects honor toward Christ’s emissaries. An additional illustration of caring for God’s leaders is found in 1 Corinthians 16:10: “When Timothy comes, so that you put him at ease among you, for he is doing the

¹³ Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon*, 384.

¹⁴ Barbara Kellerman, *Followership* (Boston: Harvard Business, 2008), xx.

¹⁵ Lee Thayer observes,

The leader-follower relationship is a very complex one. To attribute the magic solely to a “leader” misses the point. If the leader needs a follower in order to be a leader, and if the follower needs a leader in order to be a follower, their interdependence can’t be “deconstructed.” The success of either depends upon the relationship. Ask any married couple. Ask any teacher. Ask any loser. Ask the person who provides her own leadership, and who follows her own leadership. The magic is in the compounding, not in the one or the other. (Lee Thayer, “Followership,” The Thayer Institute, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://leethayer.typepad.com/leadersjourney/followership>)

¹⁶ Jesus Christ adds, “The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet receives a prophet’s reward and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person’s reward” (Matt 10:41).

work of the Lord, as I am.” What if people in the church saw it as their privilege to put leaders at ease, caring for them and building the relationship? Receiving, caring for, and putting at ease are important responsibilities of godly followership, and are essential elements of a good and flourishing relationship.

Support Spiritual Leaders

Two Scriptures highlight that followers should have a general disposition of support for their leaders. So, beyond honor and esteem, and beyond paying faithful pastors, a spirit of support is involved in New Testament followership. Paul commands the Corinthians to help Timothy on his way (1 Cor 16:11). Paul had been helped by the Corinthians (1 Cor 16:6), and it appears that this help was customary (e.g., Acts 15:3). Paul sought to propagate this general support and care among followers in the early church.

A caring relationship comes in different forms. Followers should offer a generous spirit of support to their leaders. Rob Goffee and Gareth Jones’s description of generous followership includes three features: (1) willing to speak up; (2) prepared to complement the leader; and (3) skillful appreciation of change and timing. For Goffee and Jones, the greatest followership combines courage, generosity, and malleability.¹⁷ These expressions of generosity are important.

One meaningful expression of support is speaking truth lovingly and boldly to leaders. John McCallum emphasizes the value for followers to courageously address their leaders. In his list of essential qualities of an effective follower, three of the eight relate to courageous confrontation.¹⁸ He lists honesty, courage, and loyalty to the enterprise (not the leader) as critical components of quality followership.

¹⁷ Rob Goffee and Gareth Jones, *Why Should Anyone Be Led by You?* (Boston: Harvard Business Review, 2006), 198-200.

¹⁸ John McCallum, “Followership: The Other Side of Leadership,” *Ivey Business Journal* (September/October 2013): <http://iveybusinessjournal.com/publication/followership-the-other-side-of-leadership/>.

Honesty is an essential when caring about God and His mission, the church. Allegiance to the Lord and the cause demand candor about what is not working well or honoring the Lord. Christian followers are ultimately accountable to Christ (2 Cor 5:10). This accountability should motivate believers to speak up concerning anything in the church that dishonors Christ or His Word. This is a point where followership of Christ is distinct from followership of men. Also, the Christian's followership of Christ might cause a division with a sinning leader.

Robert Kelley realizes that followership is commonly misperceived as obsequiousness: "I know how to toe the line and not threaten the leader, take orders without question, and stick to the boundaries of my job description."¹⁹ This is not fully-orbed followership. Ultimate followership includes an active engagement in improving the ministry, giving critical feedback, not mere submission to what one is told. Poor leaders train followers to serve as obsequious, unquestioning automatons. This, however, is not what the Scriptures ask followers to be. Kellerman highlights the value of assessing and engaging leaders: "Good followers invest time and energy in making informed judgments about who their leaders are and what they espouse. Then they take the appropriate action."²⁰

Effective leaders generate a ministry environment where dissent is welcomed and contrary ideas flow freely. Since Christian followers are well equipped, good leaders listen to ideas from others. Douglas Brown lists these attributes of quality followers: "proactive, competent, self-managing, high in integrity and who willingly contribute to the success of their groups and organizations. Good followers help drive outstanding outcomes by pushing their leaders to be better, whereas bad followers do the opposite."²¹

¹⁹ Robert Kelley, "Followership in a Leadership World," in *Insights on Leadership: Service, Stewardship, Spirit, and Servant-leadership*, ed. L. C. Spears (New York: John Wiley, 1998), 172.

²⁰ Kellerman, "What Every Leader Needs to Know," 140.

²¹ Douglas Brown, "In the Mind of Followers: Follower-Centric Approaches to Leadership," in *The Nature of Leadership*, ed. John Antonakis and David Day (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2017), 333.

There will always be challenges between leaders and followers.²² In fact, Eugene Habecker argues that faithful feedback is positive: “Effective followers must question the judgment of leaders. To be sure, leaders do have insights about the organization and its vision. But so do followers.”²³ When Christian followers feel the need to challenge their spiritual leaders, they should do so by appealing to their common authority: Scripture. The faithful Bereans were commended for comparing Paul’s teaching to Scripture (Acts 17:11). All godly leaders find joy when their followers go directly to God to assess their leader’s directives.

Honor and Esteem Spiritual Leaders

Honor, esteem, and appreciation are important attitudes for followers within the church. Paul calls believers to appreciate their leaders (1 Thess 5:12). Appreciation is based on the intimate knowledge of their leader’s exertion for their benefit. The standard is to esteem leaders in love. Similarly, the Corinthian believers were to “acknowledge” the work of their leaders. Leaders that are hard working in the Word of God and teaching are worthy of “double honor” (1 Tim 5:17). This double honor could be pay as well as recognition. Paul again links honor with effort in Philippians 2. Paul commands the believers to “hold men like him (the sacrificial Epaphroditus) in high regard” (v. 29). The word for “high regard” is ἔντιμος, and is used to speak of the “precious value” of the Lord Jesus Christ in 1 Peter 2:4, 6.²⁴ Certainly, followers know to honor Christ above everything (Phil 2:9, 10), but the notion that leaders should be esteemed so highly challenges followers to esteem their leaders with deliberate honor.

The honor commanded by Paul toward the sacrificial Epaphroditus can be

²² Eugene Habecker, *Leading with a Follower’s Heart* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1990), 19.

²³ Habecker, *Leading with a Follower’s Heart*, 19.

²⁴ Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon*, 156. This term is a cognate of τιμή, meaning “honor, esteem.” The five instances of this term include the two occurrences in 1 Pet 2:4, 6, which refer to the infinite glory and honor of Christ Jesus, the chief cornerstone.

difficult to find in the church. Paul faced many challenges regarding honor and esteem. In 1 Thessalonians 5:12ff., Paul challenges the church to respect (εἰδέναι, “to know”), and esteem (ἐγείομαι) very highly (superabundantly) in love because of their work. The word respect “most frequently indicates to know by reflection, based on intuition or information.”²⁵ This information is the foundation of trust that facilitates respect and esteem.

Faithful ministry can create an environment that makes it difficult for people to follow. First Thessalonians 5:12-13 says that leaders are placed over followers. Also, leaders are called to admonish and correct followers. A couple of observations are that (1) it is easy to resent those in leadership; and (2) it is hard to care for someone who admonishes you.

The greatest challenge to honorable followership is the shortfalls within the hearts of followers. While cultural phenomena have made leadership and followership difficult, the greatest difficulties related to unity in the church typically arise from human sinfulness. Isolation and pride tempt followers to judge leaders instead of honoring them. The truth is that it is challenging to honor those “who are placed over you who admonish you” (1 Thess 5:13). It is often more natural to isolate.

Isolation is an especially damaging human temptation. Proverbs warns, “He who isolates himself seeks his own desires. He quarrels against all sound counsel” (18:1). Isolation is forbidden for believers (Heb 10:24). Christians are enjoined to live lives connected and committed to one another. True fellowship generates the relationships required for great leader-follower relationships. Paul commands the Thessalonian church to “appreciate” (“to see, experience, to care for”).²⁶ In the soil of those relationships the

²⁵ William Hendrickson and Simon Kistemaker, *Exposition of Thessalonians, the Pastorals, and Hebrews*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 134.

²⁶ Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon*, 320.

esteem and honor of good followership grows.²⁷ Isolation keeps followers from the knowledge and exposure needed to honor their leaders.

Pride and self-inflation are another great inhibitor in the heart. Christians are enjoined to live soberly, with proper judgment (Rom 12:3). Sobriety causes followers to consider thoughtfully their role before they complain about their leadership. Also, complaining and slander arise from the heart (Col 3:8). These sins compound difficulties between following and leading as followers build their case against inept leaders. Also, slander and spreading strife among brothers is prohibited as a severe sin (Prov 6:19). The divisive works of selfish ambition and slander impede the cooperative dynamics of the leader/follower relationship (Phil 2:3; 1 Pet 2:1). Too often pride and selfishness strive against good leadership.

Leadership is difficult, and exceedingly so at times. Leaders must strive to grow in their leadership excellence, which includes healthy, worshipful self-criticism. Followers similarly should be self-aware of the tendencies of isolation, pride, and selfishness that harm the leader/follower relationship. If leaders and followers both practiced esteem for others and criticism of self, then the church would flourish.

While the heart is the genesis of many followership difficulties, many cultural features render followership difficult as well. American cultural hurdles are compounded by the spirit of the age. American culture features two main aggravations for healthy followership: rugged individualism and personal freedom. Godly followership is difficult in the modern cultural milieu. Understanding those cultural challenges allows followers to resist succumbing to them.

Rugged Individualism may be an effective way to inhabit a nation but a lousy way engage the church. Ultimately, individualism renders the individual sovereign and

²⁷ Hendricksen and Kistemaker write, “The immediate context speaks about ‘disorderly persons’ (v.14). Evidently some of them were loath to obey the rules lay down by the religious authorities. This is the reason why Paul writes “we request you, brothers, to appreciate those who labor among you. It is clear that the two verbs to appreciate into a steam very highly are used synonymously.” Hendricksen and Kistemaker, *Exposition of Thessalonians, the Pastorals, and Hebrews*, 134.

the arbiter of truth. Approaching church with a consumer mindset is perilous to the goal of the church: ascribing glory to the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph 3:20). The Lord is to be honored through the unity of the church (John 17:21-23). That unity is displayed through great leader/follower relationships.

These eight disciplines summarize New Testament expectations for followers. Scripture defines followership of human leaders in the church. The habits of great followers include four actions and four attitudes: submit, imitate, pay, and pray. The four attitudes are: live in peace, care for, support and honor.

Followers should know that they will be held accountable for how they follow and will be judged by God according to their faithfulness in their roles (2 Cor 5:10). Critiquing leader's failures is easier for most but much less profitable than focusing on their followership faithfulness.

Conclusion

Christian leaders enjoy several significant advantages in leadership. These advantages should be understood and implemented. If not, then God's intended value of followership is wasted. The first advantage is that Christians should self-identify as followers. Another advantage is that the New Testament details the actions and attitudes of excellent followership. An additional advantage is that wise leaders have a standard to appeal to when instructing and leading great followers. Average followers instinctively criticize their leaders instead of considering their own faults. One reason for this is that they have not been instructed to be self-critical of their following. Followers who understand what the Bible calls them to are able to be self-critical first, not just leader critical. So, teaching biblical followership allows Spirit-led followers to serve and obey God faithfully. Followership is important because it is valued and glorious, but also because the New Testament details God's expectations for good followership.

Since followership is so important in the church, God detailed specific practices for ecclesiological followership. Ecclesiological followership can be summarized in

actional expectations and attitudinal expectations. God expects and commands Christians to follow leaders in the church through submission, imitation, sharing physical blessings, and prayer. God also expects a godly attitude, including living in peace, care, support, and honor. God's intention is to secure followership to Christ and encourage godly relationships in the church. Therefore, He details both godly leadership and godly followership so that all actors in the church know to function faithfully. For the believer, when ecclesiological followership is added to Christological followership, Christ's glory can more dynamically radiate through their faithfulness in the church.

CHAPTER 5

DEVELOPING FOLLOWABLE LEADERS

Jesus Christ's leadership has proven to be eminently followable. On the global landscape (with more than 2 billion adherents to religions associated with His name) and on a personal level (His personal shepherding care over each follower), Jesus is a leader without parallel.

What if Christian institutions realized the greatness of followership and reimagined their ministries from the bottom up? When the topic of church development arises, most instinctively think of the leaders, the pastors, the elders. However, what if Christian institutions also teach and empower followership? Followership is a burgeoning concept on the contemporary leadership landscape. Interestingly, followership is an ancient idea featured prominently in the earthly ministry of Jesus. Jesus's ministry and the attributes of followability provide leaders with a foundation to establish a great leader/follower relationship. One must understand biblical followership to train biblical followership. Jesus's ministry grants tremendous insight into how He generated followership. Understanding leadership that is followable provides church leaders and pastors a framework for leadership and the cultivation of a culture that fosters followership. Focusing on Christ's leadership and His perfect generation of followership will provide pastors with a leadership path that will optimize followership.

Dimensions of Christ's Followability

This section analyzes Jesus's ministry to determine what makes Him followable. First, Jesus's perfect leadership includes His extraordinary capacity to cultivate followership. Second, Jesus's leadership will be analyzed to determine the aspects that

comprise His followability. Affection, mission, humility, and sacrifice are essential components of Christ's followability.

A leader can be defined as someone who has followers. Jesus enjoys many followers and quality followers at that. Understanding the dynamics of Jesus's leadership that renders Him so followable is instructive for leaders that want to lead according to Christ's character and who want to generate quality followers. To understand followership and followability, one must look at Christ our leader, the One who called us to "follow Him" (Matt 8:22).

Jesus's World-Impacting Leadership

Jesus Christ should be considered the world's greatest leader for three primary reasons. First, more people in the world affiliate with Christianity than any other world religion.¹ Since leadership is defined as a function of people who follow, the leader with the most followers might qualify as the greatest leader. The assertion that Christ has the most followers does not suggest that all his followers are good followers or are following Him faithfully. It could be claimed that, as world religion statistics are considered, there would be an even spread of faithful and nominal adherents across all religions. However, that approximately one-third of the human population aligns themselves with the name of Christ even nominally suggests He is a great leader.

Second, Christ is the greatest example of leadership virtue that the world has ever known. The virtues that highlight His followability include His affection, mission, humility and sacrifice. Third, Christian leaders are called to lead like Christ.² Paul

¹ Howard Friedman, "5 Religions with the Most Followers," accessed June 25, 2011, www.huffingtonpost.com/howard-steven-friedman/5-religions-with-the-most_b_853000.html.

² The notion that Christian leadership should imitate Christ's leadership is almost tautological. Many Christian leadership books feature this common concept as its primary thesis. Efrain Agosto, *Servant Leadership* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2005); Boyd Bailey, *Learning to Lead Like Jesus: 11 Principles to Help You Serve, Inspire and Equip Others* (Eugene, OR: Harvest, 2018); Ken Blanchard and Phil Hodges, *Lead like Jesus* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008); Bob Briner and Ray Pritchard, *Leadership Lessons of Jesus: A Timeless Model for Today's Leaders* (Nashville: B & H, 1998); Laurie Beth Jones, *Jesus, CEO: Using*

engaged His followers according to Christ's character (2 Cor 10:1). A significant way for pastors to emulate Christ's leadership is to follow His example as the Good Shepherd.

Shepherding is an extraordinarily important image and expression of biblical leadership. Shepherding is essentially important in the Christian leadership discussion since both God and Jesus Christ are called Shepherds (Ps 23; John 10:1-17). What is more is that pastors are also called shepherds (1 Pet 5:2). Many books celebrate the correlation between Christ's shepherding and pastoral shepherding.³

Christian leaders should purposefully mimic Christ's shepherding. The shepherding motif is woven throughout this chapter, including many allusions. As Christ Jesus is the Chief Shepherd and Overseer of souls, so pastors are called to shepherd the flock (1 Pet 2:25; 5:1-2). As the Lord Jesus Christ guarded and cared for the flock, so now Christian leaders are designed to play that role on His behalf. As the Savior fed His followers while on earth, so now His proxy leaders are called to "feed [His] sheep" (John 21:15-17). Pastors serve as Christ's undershepherds and should deliberately emulate Christ's perfect and glorious leadership and care for the flock. Pastors must strive to be "shepherds after God's own heart" (Jer 3:15). Jesus Christ is a perfect shepherd and pastors should model their pastoral ministry after Christ's leadership.

Four Key Dimensions of Christ's Followable Leadership

The Lord Jesus Christ is the perfect example of the followable leader. Christ designed this great phenomenon of Christian followership. Jesus employs two leadership images to teach about followership: master/disciple and shepherd/sheep. These pictures

Ancient Wisdom for Visionary Leadership (New York: Hyperion, 1992); Michael Wilkins, *Following the Master* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), Michael Youssef, *The Leadership Style of Jesus* (Eugene, OR: Harvest, 2013).

³ The following books feature the theme of Christian leaders following Christ's example as the Good Shepherd: Timothy Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2006); Benjamin Merkle and Thomas Schreiner, *Shepherding God's Flock* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014); Michael S. Wilder and Timothy Paul Jones, *The God Who Goes before You* (Nashville: B & H, 2018); Timothy Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2010).

supply leaders with insight about followability. The master/disciple paradigm highlights Christ's relational affection and missional zeal. The shepherd/sheep underscores Jesus's humility and sacrifice.

There is legitimate challenge in compiling a complete list of Jesus's leadership qualities since there is no consensus of His leadership attributes. However, concentrating on the characteristics of Jesus's leadership that enhance His followership will forward the argument of this thesis. Michael Youssef lists courage, gentleness, generosity, truthfulness, and forgiveness as the general qualities of Jesus' leadership.⁴ Lynn Anderson's list of Christ's leadership qualities includes availability, commitment, and trust.⁵ Boyd Bailey compiles this list of Christ's leadership traits: humility, love, accountability, relationships, teachability, discipline, gratitude, generosity, forgiveness, encouragement, and faithfulness.⁶ Others have added many insights concerning Christ's leadership strengths. Laurie Beth Jones's book contains 83 separate observations concerning Christ's leadership approach.⁷ Gene Wilkes features these themes in describing followership: servanthood, humility, taking risks, sharing authority, and building a team.⁸

While the Lord's leadership contains many features, four attributes relate most directly with His followability: affection, mission, humility, and sacrifice. These four attributes draw in followers and sustain their followership with inspiration and care. Considering these qualities and how modern leaders can emulate Christ's leadership and generate followership is essential to this thesis.

⁴ Youssef, *The Leadership Style of Jesus: How to Make a Lasting Impact*, chaps 5-9.

⁵ Lynn Anderson, *They Smell Like Sheep* (New York: Howard, 1997), 1:23.

⁶ Bailey, *Learning to Lead Like Jesus*.

⁷ Jones, *Jesus, CEO*. Jones features these observations in her book, which include chapters on "He Guarded His Energy," "He Was in a Constant State of Celebration," "He Did Not Kick the Donkey," and "He Knew that Nobody Wins Until We All Do."

⁸ Gene Wilkes, *Jesus on Leadership: Discovering the Secrets of Servant Leadership from the Life of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1998). The attributes lists are sections of his book.

Affection. The first and primary characteristic of Jesus’s leadership that inspires followership is His affection and desire for an intimate relationship with His followers. This desire is pronounced throughout His ministry. His condescension expresses His passion to dwell with us (John 1:14). He came in the flesh and came out of love (John 13:1). His experience was truly human and yet remained perfectly holy (1 Pet 1:19). Ken Blanchard and Phil Hodges capture the Lord’s passion for relationship: “One of the greatest challenges in seeking to lead like Jesus is the intimacy it requires. The biggest barrier to intimacy is a fear of vulnerability—fear of having to admit you don’t know all the answers, that you may need help, and that your ability as a leader may be in question.”⁹ Jesus’s relationship with His disciples, women, and children broke the social conventions of His day. The crippled man (Mark 2:1-12), woman with an issue of blood (Luke 8:43), demon-possessed boy (Luke 8:48), tax collector (Matt 9:9-13), and even children were welcome to draw near (Luke 18:13). The blind, lame, and dumb were His companions (Matt 15:30). Jesus came pursuing sinners (Luke 19:10) and He cared for them patiently and mercifully. God is attracted to the needy and humble (Ps 34:8; Isa 55:17; 66:2). Jesus offered them an incalculable treasure: a relationship with Him. The Great Physician’s office is always open for the sick, and never open for the healthy (Matt 2:17). God desires to relate to those who humbly acknowledge their need for Him (Matt 11:28).

Followers eagerly follow leaders who actively exhibit affectionate care for the flock. Sheep respond to the caring shepherd’s voice (John 10:16). True shepherds pursue a relationship with the people they shepherd. To know and be known is Jesus model of personal ministry (John 10:14). The Bible features shepherding as a personal and intimate expression of leadership. Youssef writes, “The leadership style of Jesus is based on love. The leader who practices shepherd-leadership knows his sheep personally and cares about

⁹ Blanchard and Hodges, *Lead like Jesus*, 59.

them individually.”¹⁰ Jesus does not merely know about His sheep, but He knows His sheep intimately and personally.

Mission. A leader moves followers toward a destination. A leader focused on mission will attract quality followers. A leader focused on a mission provides direction and motion. Furthermore, the leader should passionately pursue their mission as Jesus did. Jesus was focused on His mission and driven to accomplish God’s purposes (Luke 9:51).

A critical aspect of a leader’s followability is the selflessness of their mission. If the mission is self-serving, then followership is hindered. Jesus only did the bidding of the Father (John 6:38), which showcases Jesus’s humility and purity of motivation. He was not self-seeking but yearned to glorify the Father (John 17:4). Jesus pled with the Father, “My Father, if possible, let this cup pass from Me, yet not as I will, but as You will” (Matt 26:39). He was willing to submit to the Father’s unfathomably painful purpose. Jesus explains that His performance of the Father’s bidding was greater than physical sustenance: “My food it to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work” (John 4:34). Jesus’s devotion to the Father’s will was complete: “Truly, truly I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner” (John 5:19). His actions and words were designed by the Father (John 5:30; 12:49). Jesus came to perform the will and work of the Father (John 14:10), which is significant because it highlights the purity of His mission. Jesus’s selflessness in His mission certainly inspired His disciples to faithful followership.

The discussion of followership would be incomplete without considering how the Lord Jesus Christ purposed to follow His Father. Another feature associated with Christ’s submission to the Father is His painful persistence. He persevered in obeying the Father’s will even at the point of tremendous cost and pain (Luke 22:42). While being fully

¹⁰ Youssef, *The Leadership Style of Jesus*, 34.

God, he became obedient to death on the cross (Phil 2:8). Paul teaches that the Father is the head of the Son (1 Cor 11:3). In these acts of submission and service, Christ Jesus models something invaluable for leaders: perseverance through pain and hardship. The selfless act of crucifixion generated great followers. Jesus's purity of motivation and perseverance in mission shine brightly on the cross.

The master/disciple relationship shows two features of Christ's followability: affection and mission. While Jesus is Master, He is also the Great Shepherd (John 10:11). The Bible uses the shepherd/flock metaphor over five hundred times in the Bible, making it, by a large margin, the dominant image for leadership/followership in all of the Scriptures.¹¹ The Shepherd/sheep image yields two more attributes: humility and sacrifice.

Humility. Christ's humility is the third foundational element of His followability. All of these major traits, affection, mission, humility, and sacrifice, are intertwined. Jesus commands, "Follow me for I am gentle and humble in spirit" (Matt 11:29). Christians follow Jesus because He is humble in spirit. He provides what people yearn for: rest for their souls. He attends to the needs of His followers with approachability and lowliness of spirit.

In Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus appeals to followers: "Come unto Me all you who are weary and heavy laden and you will find rest for your souls. Learn from Me and take up My yoke for I am gentle and humble in spirit and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and burden is light." The Great King offers His guidance ("yoke") and His instruction ("learn from Me"); namely, His leadership. The key incentive for this appeal is accentuated by repetition. He says the reason people should follow Him is because He is "gentle and humble in spirit" (v. 29). He uses two nearly synonymous terms to emphasize His great humility. Jesus is making a leadership appeal based on His humility. His humility

¹¹ Anderson, *They Smell Like Sheep*, 1:12.

is the foundation of the rest He offers His followers: “you will find rest for your souls” (v. 29).

Two other biblical leadership teachings emphasize humility: the dominating usage of the term shepherd (ποιμήν) and the commands not to lord authority over the people. The Lord Jesus is the Good Shepherd (John 10:11). He is also the Savior that came to serve and not to be served as a dominating despot (Matt 20:45-48). The Bible consistently teaches a model of gentle and meek leadership based on the example of Christ. One remaining aspect of His leadership that highlights His humility is His condescension. Christ’s self-emptying, self-humbling grace is remarkable because of all that He gave up (Phil 2:6-8). He lowered Himself to take on the humiliating form of a man. This humility in character, shepherding, and condescension highlights the importance of humility to followership.

When all the scriptural data is considered, an antinomy remains: leaders are to carry their authority with a spirit of lowliness. This is a great challenge that Jesus has accomplished perfectly. So, Christian leadership structures should be much flatter than traditional leadership structures and yet more tiered than some modern followership proponents would suggest. In summary, the Scriptures demand that Christian leaders follow Jesus Christ in His lowliness.

Sacrifice. Jesus’s self-sacrifice is the fourth characteristic of His followability. Jesus states plainly that He as the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep (John 10:17). Someone’s willingness to sacrifice for another’s benefit invariably makes him persuasive and influential. This selfless approach to leadership leads ultimately to personal sacrifice (Matt 20:28). Self-sacrifice is the pinnacle of Christian leadership: “Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). One aspect of sacrifice is His willingness to serve (Mark 10:45).

Another aspect of His sacrificial leadership is His willingness to bear burdens (Matt 11:30). His selfless sacrifice is a hallmark of His leadership and is what makes Him

eminently followable (Matt 20:28). Jesus confesses, “I am the One among you that serves” (Luke 22:27). Contradistinctively, the enemy of Christ-honoring leadership enemy is selfishness. Blanchard and Hodges observe, “The most persistent barrier to leading like Jesus is a heart motivated by self-interest.”¹² He continues, “A heart motivated by self-interest looks at the world as a ‘give a little, take a lot’ proposition. People with hearts motivated by self-interest put their own agenda, safety status and gratification ahead of that of those affected by their thoughts and actions.”¹³ The air of self-service is noxious to good followers. Because of His obvious selflessness, believers trust Jesus’s motivation and are compelled by His selflessness. Blanchard and Hodges drive the importance of a service mindset home: “This call by Jesus to servant leadership is clear and unequivocal.... For followers of Jesus, servant leadership isn’t an option; it’s a mandate. Servant leadership is to be a living statement of who we are in Christ, how we treat one another, and how we demonstrate the love of Christ to the whole world.”¹⁴

Anderson accurately states, “Godly leadership is to be understood in terms of service rather than authority. Jesus is adamant on this point.”¹⁵ While Jesus is the truest servant of all, one should not neglect the authority of Christ’s lordship (Rev 17:14). He is servant and Lord (Phil 2:6-9). Some, however, like Anderson push egalitarian aspects of New Testament leadership to an extreme. Anderson’s critique of the authoritative aspect of leadership appears to go too far.¹⁶ Anderson’s appeal to the mutual dynamics of the Christian life (i.e., submission; Eph 5:21) does not inviolate the command to submit in Hebrews 13:17.¹⁷ Despite the clear statement of Hebrews 13:17, Anderson argues that

¹² Blanchard and Hodges, *Lead like Jesus*, 39.

¹³ Blanchard and Hodges, *Lead like Jesus*, 41.

¹⁴ Blanchard and Hodges, *Lead like Jesus*, 12.

¹⁵ Anderson, *They Smell Like Sheep*, 1:200.

¹⁶ Anderson, *They Smell Like Sheep*, 1:196.

¹⁷ Anderson, *They Smell Like Sheep*, 1:199.

believers are “not *mandated* to obey.”¹⁸ His statement that “Good shepherds carry enormous authority, but it is the authority of *moral suasion*” is at least unclear and potentially inaccurate.¹⁹ His attempt to define the elder’s authority as influence (or moral suasion) does not maintain the Bible’s balance. Unfortunately, Anderson overemphasizes the aspects of mutuality. Regarding authority, Jesus’s words should be analyzed carefully. He does not say His followers have no authority, but that they should not use it in a selfish, abusive manner (Matt 20:25-27). Christian leaders conduct their ministry with authority as they teach and stand for the Scriptures (Titus 2:15).

The Christian leader’s sacrifice is an essential aspect of their followability. Epaphroditus’s near-death service provides an example of Christlike leadership (Phil 2:28-29). Furthermore, the hard-working teacher is worthy of double-honor (1 Tim 5:17). Leaders are commonly described as workers and laborers (Titus 2:14; 3:1, 8, 14). Christian leaders are worthy of esteem because of their work (1 Thess 5:13). Leaders earn the followership of good people as they exhibit Christ’s sacrifice.

The picture of Jesus washing the disciples’ feet sums up all four predominant aspects of Christ’s followable leadership (John 13:1-11). His affection, mission, humility, and sacrifice are all featured in this grand moment. His affection is evident in His personal care (v. 5). His mission of redeeming mankind is symbolized powerfully (vv. 14-16). His humility is pictured beautifully as He takes up the loincloth of a servant (v. 4). Lastly, His sacrificial love and work are featured as well (vv. 1-3). Affection, humility, and sacrifice all coalesce in a great mission: the gospel extending to the ends of the earth (Matt 28:19-20).

¹⁸ Anderson, *They Smell Like Sheep*, 1:200, emphasis original.

¹⁹ Anderson, *They Smell Like Sheep*, 1:208-9, emphasis original.

Transferring Christ's Followability to Modern Ministry

Growing quality followers is one of the most valuable skills a leader can develop. Understanding the type of leader that followers are attracted to will unlock a leader's capacity to attract those followers and optimize the ministry. To that end, this section will consider the transferrable qualities of Christ's leadership are applied to leaders leading organizations.

Transferable Qualities of Christ's Followability

Replicating Jesus's followability is necessary for leaders to optimize their effectiveness. Jesus's affection, vision, humility, and sacrifice should be emulated by ministry leaders who seek to enhance their leadership and ministries. Understanding what makes Jesus followable, and actively cultivating those traits, will bring Christ's exemplary leadership to each organization or church.

Acts 4:13 includes an extraordinary statement that should inform Christian leadership. While Peter and John were naturally unimpressive men, the dynamism of their lives was attributable to the presence of Christ in them and through them. The Jewish skeptics saw their "confidence" and were "amazed" at the fruit of the ministry and "began to recognize them as having been with Jesus." Two observations can be extracted from this simple comment: the priority of the spiritual leaders is to maintain communion with God; and the leader's proximity to Christ is apparent (to non-believers and believers alike). The power of God rests on the person who soaks in the presence of God. His great qualities fill the leader through immersive communion. Christ's affection, mission, humility, and sacrifice flow through Christian leaders who follow Christ well. Since this work has already defined the terms of Christ's followability, consider the transferability of those traits.

Affection. Paul emulated Christ's deep hearted affection for his followers. In so doing he images for modern leaders a way to lead like Christ and enhance followability.

First Thessalonians 2 offers a couple examples of Paul's great affection. First, he tells them about his willingness to serve them because the Thessalonian believers "had become very dear" to him (v. 8). Then he explains his willingness to suffer for them because "he was all the more eager with great desire to see their face" (v. 17). Paul's greatest concern was the welfare of the churches, not his own well-being (2 Cor 11:29). He also had great affection for the people He led. He states, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that he held the Philippian believers with Christ's affection (Phil 1:8). Paul recognized the extraordinary nature of that mammoth claim and invoked the testimony of God to bear witness to His heart affection. He yearned for the believers He served. Just as Christ loves His own completely, so Paul also shared a deep affection with his followers (Acts 20:36-38).

Followers also desire to feel that they are belong to a community. Goffee and Jones highlight the importance of relationship: "If leaders get this balance right, followers feel comfortable. They are glad to be close to their leader; they feel that their individuality is recognized and that they are part of the team."²⁰ A host of important attributes flow from affectionate leadership: compassion, encouragement, and listening. Compassion is an important component of affectionate leadership. The ability to feel the concerns and pain of others is to lead according to the example of Jesus Christ (Matt 9:35, 36). Having their people's best interest in mind is an expression of affectionate love and selflessness. Compassion also drives leaders to encourage followers. A spirit of genuine encouragement fills an atmosphere with the grace that God provides (1 Pet 4:10, 11; Eph 4:29). Leaders should walk in Christ's affection to optimize followership.

A modern leader is greatly advantaged if he understands that people are made to follow. Leaders should mimic Christ's care of His sheep. Jesus's compassion was stirred as He observed the masses and noted that they "were distressed and dispirited like sheep

²⁰ Rob Goffee and Gareth Jones, *Why Should Anyone Be Led by You?* (Boston: Harvard Business Review, 2006), 189.

without a shepherd” (Matt 9:36). Similarly, the prophet Isaiah uses the simile, “All we like sheep have gone astray. Each has gone his own way” (Isa 53:6). In these instances, God bemoans the hapless condition and wayward nature of sheep. These Scriptures clearly teach the truth that people need to be led. Godly leaders are His mediatorial shepherds to bring sheep safely home.

Jesus passes the baton of His shepherding care to the apostles during His post-resurrection ministry. As He walks and teaches His closest associates on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus Christ places the mantle of under-shepherd on the shoulders of the leaders He commissions in His place. In the three-fold command for Peter to “tend His lambs,” He accentuates the role and responsibility under-shepherds take in caring for His flock (John 21:15-17).

Peter undergirds the idea that the Lord Jesus shares His shepherding leadership to His follower/leaders in his first epistle. He singles out the Lord as the great-shepherd and guardian of souls (1 Pet 2:25). As the Good Shepherd, Jesus is the paradigm of followability and the model for modern Christian leadership. In 1 Peter 5:1-5, Jesus’s leadership is applied to human leaders. His selfless service, humility example is expected of Christian leaders (vv. 2-3). Furthermore, Christian leaders are held accountable by the Chief Shepherd (v. 4). The successful shepherd engenders quality followership by mimicking the Lord’s leadership and thereby intentionally developing his followability.

Mission. A followable leader is one who passionately pursues Christ’s mission. Followers are dissuaded by leaders who lead without clarity. Paul’s passion was to continue the mission the Lord Jesus Christ set for His disciples: gospel propagation. Paul invested himself in the spread of the gospel as his privilege and calling (1 Cor 9:16). He aggressively promoted the glory and gospel of Christ where Jesus had not yet been named (Rom 15:20). Paul was a leader with tremendous-mission focus (1 Cor 9:23). Erika Andersen teaches that being farsighted is the skill that envisions possible futures, articulates the vision clearly and compellingly, models the vision, sees past obstacles, and

invites participation.²¹ Paul leads in the passion for mission as he sought to make the most gospel progress as possible (Phil 1:12, 25).

Similarly, modern leadership will inspire followership if a scripturally defined mission centers on the glory of Christ and the spread of the gospel. However, sometimes this missional mindset demands courageous choices. Andersen teaches that being courageous includes “tough choices, leaders putting themselves at risk for the good of the enterprise, doing difficult things, taking responsibility for their actions, and in many mistakes and apologizing when wrong.”²² Paul lived out this life of risk and hardship for the progress of Christ’s mission (2 Tim 2:3-6).

A leader’s clear mission-focus renders them stable, which is another important trait for followability. Inconsistency hampers followership by instilling insecurity. Mission-focus normally alleviates instability, especially since the mission is defined by God in His Word. This objective clarity about the mission will ensure consistency and clarity for everyone in the institution on the level of what should be done.

Inspiration springs from God’s mission communicated clearly. Furthermore, unwavering belief that the vision is God’s purpose bolsters followership. This passion, for Andersen is, “committing honestly, being clear without being dogmatic, inviting dialogue from followers acting in support of other’s actions, and remaining committed and focused despite adversity.”²³

Humility. At the core of all followable leadership is humility. Christ leads with a pattern of humility, which is essential for effective leadership. Jesus Christ appeals to His humility in calling for followers and workers (Matt 11:28-30). In fact, His appeal for people to learn from Him is founded on His gentleness and lowliness of spirit. Jesus

²¹ Erika Andersen, *Leading so People Will Follow* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 47-48.

²² Andersen, *Leading so People Will Follow*, 82.

²³ Andersen, *Leading so People Will Follow*, 62.

Christ's followability is grounded in His humility. Christian leaders should similarly develop their humility to grow their followability. Paul pressed his followers firmly but according to Christ's humility (2 Cor 10:1). Humility is a necessary hallmark of Christ's leaders, and a key to developing followability.

However, pride tempts many leaders. Hubris and humility are two distinct paths and leaders must choose assiduously. Just like when Jesus was pressed by His prideful disciples to grant them privileged positions in His kingdom (Matt 20:20-28), Jesus rebukes pride and selfishness. Jesus had just told them about His impending suffering and death on the cross (Matt 20:18-19), and immediately they were bickering about who was the greatest among them. Jesus responded to their presumptuousness with two critical lessons (Matt 20:20-28). The first lesson involves Jesus Christ challenging them with two questions. Jesus Christ asks if they were willing to bear the responsibility associated with the position. Jesus responds to their prideful aspirations with two specific questions. First, Jesus asked them if they were able to drink the cup He was preparing to drink: the cup of God's wrath on the cross (Matt 26:42). This suffering on the cross was a humiliating experience (Heb 12:3).

The second question is whether they would receive the baptism of His suffering. Jesus Christ was referring to the enormous suffering that was prepared to overwhelm Him (Mark 10:38; parallel passage to Matt 20:22). Jesus refers to the suffering He would endure in His humiliation and crucifixion as a baptism. Jesus's "baptism" would be a horrific immersion of suffering and scorn (Matt 27:28-31). He was challenging His disciples to repent of their arrogant preference for preeminence and recognize that His way is a way of humble suffering. An essential question for these young leaders was whether they would pursue the prideful path of privilege or the humble way of responsibility. Jesus shifts their attention from the pride of privilege to humility of responsibility.

The second lesson Jesus challenges His prideful followers with is His reprimand of their prideful mindset of leadership. The me-first attitude that seeks prominence is prohibited by the Savior (Matt 20:25). Jesus Christ also rebukes an arrogant leadership posture of preeminence and demands a posture of lowliness (Matt 20:26). An elevated posture of dominance is the opposite of Christ's way of leadership (Matt 20:27). Jesus is calling His followers to emulate His sacrificial and humble leadership (Matt 20:28).

Therefore, leaders should develop their humility. Paul exemplifies this humility, as one of his preferred titles is "servant of Christ" (1 Cor 4:1). Similarly, in many of his letters, he introduces himself as a "bond-servant" (δουλος; Rom 1:1; Gal 1:1; Phil 1:1). This humility was a hallmark of Paul's imitation of Christ (cf. Phil 3:15-17; 2:1-5). Andersen values wisdom as "being deeply curious and listening well, assessing situations fairly, learning from other's experiences, making moral choices."²⁴

Leaders simply need to see themselves for who they are: sinful people.²⁵ While Jesus truly condescended, earthly leaders need to step off the stoop of self-importance to embrace what is actual: that leaders are on the same spiritual plane with their followers. Leaders and followers have a tremendous amount in common. Sober-minded leaders are quick to flatten the hierarchy in light of Christ's example (Rom 12:3-4). Paul walked in Jesus's example as a servant. Paul confesses, "Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God" (1 Cor 4:1). Paul's humility underscores the value of Jesus's example. Christian leaders are to lead as Christ led.

There are several positive ramifications of humble leadership: transparency, accountability, and authenticity flow from humility. Humility provides a platform for

²⁴ Andersen, *Leading so People Will Follow*, 102-3.

²⁵ Joseph Stowell adds these profound words about leaders' fallibility and commensurate accountability and humility that undergirds integrity: "Rarely is a leadership disaster rooted in the persons and capacity to lead. It is most often an issue of failed followership. In fact, all of our failures can ultimately be traced to ceasing to follow Christ. We are too easily seduced by the external qualities of charisma, competence, and credentials." Joseph Stowell, *Following Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 37.

transparency. Proverbs 18:1 explains the relationship between pride and privacy: “He who isolates himself seeks his own desires. He quarrels against all sound counsel.”

Conversely, humility promotes transparency.

Accountability also arises out of humility. A prideful person eschews accountability, while a humble person is willing to risk exposure. A Christ-like leader will subordinate himself to others in two ways. First, a godly pastor will submit himself to elders or collection of leaders that retain accountability. Also, a godly leader will remember that he should not be a totalitarian leader. Consequently, the godly leader finds ways to model Christ’s meekness by subordinating himself. Christian leaders must think on the realities that all believers are subordinate to Christ. Both Christian leaders and followers are marked by subordination to Christ and His will.

Wilkes points out the obvious, when he reminds that Jesus’s mission was to be the Messiah.²⁶ This is significant in that His holy calling was fulfilled through lowly service. How much more is it necessary for the Christian leader, whose goal is to be an under-shepherd, to take on the role of the servant. The best Christian leaders imitate the lowliness of a shepherd.

Paul as tender mother is reticent to utilize the authority he enjoyed as an apostle (1 Thess 2:6). This hesitation is instructive. He applies the Lord’s teaching concerning servant-oriented leadership by appealing to them gently and tenderly. Paul teaches that authority is not inherently bad, it merely needs to be utilized sparingly and cautiously (1 Thess 2:6). He shows that the hierarchical New Testament leadership is not abusive leadership but loving leadership. Christian leaders should understand that their most authoritative tone should be on topics directly associated with the truth of the Scriptures.

Christian leaders have authority that is borrowed from the Scriptures. Christian leaders must understand that their only authority is by proxy, on loan from the truth of Scripture. This is one reason for the pastor to be an expert in the Bible. The preacher is

²⁶ Wilkes, *Jesus on Leadership*, 19.

called to preach the Word so God can wield His authority in His Word in His church for His glory. This is the authority Paul exhorts Titus to wield (Titus 2:15).

Leadership is an act of service and humility. Jesus tells plainly, “If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all” (Mark 9:35). Paul saw himself as a bond-servant of the Lord and His people (1 Cor 4:1). One significant challenge is how to lead and at the same time enjoy all the benefits of mutuality. However, high quality followers often desire to wield influence. That influence comes from a relationship that includes mutual exchange. These limitations are designed by God to promote humility in leaders. A leader’s humility is key to garnering excellent followers.

Selfish leadership is prevalent today. Selfish leadership is judged severely by the Lord (Ezek 34:2). Also, harshness and brutality are sternly prohibited (Ezek 34:4). The Lord desires humble, tender leadership (Is 40:11). Humble leaders remember what it is like to follow. Followers suffer under the brutal tyranny of self-absorbed (Ezek 34:8). Pride leads to selfishness. In the same way, humility leads to sacrifice. The predictability and assurance of a fixed and Scripture-inspired mission facilitates followership. Humility anchors authenticity, which is a cornerstone of followable leadership.

Sacrifice. Paul once again emulates Jesus’s leadership by his willingness to sacrifice his life for the welfare of others. He lived for the spiritual prosperity of others (2 Cor 12:15). Paul ultimately was willing to be poured out as a drink offering for the prosperity of the faith of others (2 Tim 4:8). Paul sacrificed his personal welfare throughout his ministry. He returned to the cities whose mobs had tried to kill him in order to strengthen the churches (Acts 14:23). He struggled against the enemy himself in his intense desire to see the Thessalonian believers (1 Thess 2:17-20). He endured immense personal suffering for the prosperity of the cause and of the benefit of believers (2 Cor 6:4-5).

Interestingly, Paul uses his sacrifice for his followers as a stimulus for their followership. In 2 Corinthians 12:15, Paul highlights his sacrificial, others-oriented ministry. Then he explains that love inspires his willingness to exert for their benefit. He

asks the Corinthians why they responded with a hard heart when he showed them such selfless love. Similarly, leaders today gain credibility when they walk in Christ's selflessness. Andersen states, "A spirit of generosity includes assuming positive intent in the actions of others, sharing power and authority, sharing knowledge, freely giving credit, praise and rewards to where the contributors, and providing resources for people to succeed."²⁷

One essential element of followable leaders relates to the sacrificial work ethic of their leaders. Followers will give as much as they see their leaders giving. The New Testament emphasizes this many times. In 1 Corinthians 16:15-16, Paul admonishes believers to subject themselves to men that were "devoted to the ministry" and to those who helped with works and labors. Similarly, Paul tells the Philippian Christians to esteem highly men like Epaphroditus who had sacrificed their own well-being in ministry (Phil 2:25-30). Epaphroditus longed for the welfare of the Philippian believers with great love, and that pushed him to sacrifice (vv. 26-27). Epaphroditus risked his life to promote the welfare of others. Paul underscores the significance of personal sacrifice in ministry, "So, death works in us (sacrifice) so that life works in you" (2 Cor 4:12). The leader's sacrifice is the platform of trust on which to build a strong leader/follower relationship (1 Thess 2:8).

Jesus's affectionate, missional, humble, and sacrificial leadership is modeled faithfully by Paul. Paul serves then as an example of how modern leaders can take Jesus's followability to develop their own leadership. Jesus Christ authorizes the shepherding activities of those that lead on His behalf.

The Goal of Christian Leadership

A goal of effective Christian leadership is leading people to follow Christ better (Phil 1:27). Paul modeled Christlikeness to such a degree that the Thessalonian

²⁷ Andersen, *Leading so People Will Follow*, 134-35.

believers realized God was speaking to them instead of a mere man (1 Thess 2:13). Christian leaders today are shepherding people so that they will listen better to Christ and follow Christ better (Gal 4:19). The ultimate goal is the imitation of Christ (Rom 8:29). Whenever a Christian leader puts Christ on display, he advances the glory of Christ; which is the ultimate goal.

The archetype of leadership in the New Testament is certainly Jesus Christ. He reigns as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Rev 19:11). Jesus reigns as supreme ruler over all (1 Cor 15:24-25). Furthermore, His sovereign reign is beneficent. While Christ rules supremely, Christian leaders have no such authority, either intrinsic or borrowed. All Christian leaders rule by His authority (not their own) and for His glory (not their own). Jesus teaches that the follower will become like the teacher when he is fully trained (Luke 6:40). The Christian leader's goal is to present everyman complete in Christ (Col 1:28). Consequently, Christian leaders should emulate Christ so that as followers imitate them, they become more like Christ (1 Cor 11:1). Great Christian leadership is the process of maximizing and facilitating people's followership of Christ.

Christians are prone to follow leaders that have obviously communed closely with Jesus Christ (Acts 4:13). The leader's closeness with Jesus is a critical component of followability. The Christian leader is able to bear fruit for Christ as he abides in Christ (John 15:7, 8). As leader's footsteps closely mirror Jesus's and their voice resonates with the timbre of His grace, godly followers will respond. The people discerning that a leader has been with Jesus is critical to full followership.

This section determined how pastors can emulate Christ for ministry maximization. Jesus Christ's leadership and shepherding proves to be the pastor's ultimate model of developing followership. Deliberately training followership is one final note to emphasize the necessity of valuing and building followers.

The Need to Train Followers

Leadership and its development are not enough to optimize the church's mission. There is so much emphasis on leadership and leadership growth, but the reality is that Christ is the leader, and we are all followers. So, what if followers were deliberately trained concerning their followership of Christ and His leaders? That training would generate a surge of Christ-magnifying, New Testament followership and enhanced missional success.

The reality is that many leaders fail to train followers. Training followers is imperative to maximizing any ministries outreach. As stated, the goal of Christian leadership is to build up followers for the glory of God. Godly leadership is a service to God's people that leads them to better follow God. A crucial component of followership involves understanding what it means to follow Christ, as well as pastors in the church. Bobbie Reed and John Westfall state plainly that the goal is to build strong people, including strong organizational followership.²⁸ Indeed the goal is edification leading to maturity and multiplication.²⁹ Sharon Latour and Vickie Rast suggest,

Developing dynamic followership is a discipline. It is jointly an art and a science requiring skill and conceptualization of roles in innovative ways—one perhaps more essential to mission success than leader development. Without followership, a leader at any level will fail to produce effective institutions. Valuing followers and their development is the first step toward cultivating effective transformational leaders.³⁰

Training followers must be a priority for leaders. Training followers should be as great a priority as developing great leadership.

Conclusion

Just as good leaders deliberately develop their leadership, good followers should develop their followership. However, followers need to be taught about followership for

²⁸ Bobbie Reed and John Westfall, *Building Strong People* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 30.

²⁹ Lawrence Richards and Clyde Hoeldtke, *A Theology of Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 137.

³⁰ Sharon Latour and Vickie Rast, "Dynamic Followership, The Prerequisite for Effective Leadership," *Air and Space Power Journal* 18, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 1.

two main reasons: followership is not a commonly understood doctrine; and followers commonly critique leaders instead of focusing on their responsibility. Competent leaders have a leadership development plan. Excellent leaders should create a followership development plan, and when all members of the team are focusing on their roles, then the mission will flourish.

This thesis sought to raise awareness concerning the significance of followership. To that end this work argued for the value of followership by understanding that leadership is not enough for mission optimization. Modern leadership theoreticians have identified that the world is changing, and leadership hierarchies are flattening. Furthermore, followership is valued by virtue of the fact everyone is a follower since leaders are followers first.

This thesis then established the glory of followership by considering the New Testament's characterization. Followership is glorious since mankind has been created by God to follow, just like sheep need shepherds so mankind was created to follow. Another grace that dignifies followership is Christ's wonderful command to follow Him—Christological followership. Consequent to Christ's command to follow is that Christians should self-identify as followers. Christians seeing themselves as followers should offer an advantage in generating followership within the church.

Next, the thesis progressed to describe the New Testament's expectations of followers in the church—ecclesiological followership. God gives Christians eight practices for honorable followership. The four actional expectations include submit, imitate, share, and pray for leaders. The four attitudes expected of believers in the church are to live in peace, care, support, and honor. These eight practices of ecclesiological followership honor Christ as believers fulfill their commitment to follow Christ faithfully.

At the last, leaders have been taught how to emulate Jesus Christ's followability and finally challenged to teach followership. Considering Christ's ministry leads one to ascertain four emulatable traits that leaders can develop to cultivate an environment of

followership. Christ's affection, mission, humility, and sacrifice are marks of faithful shepherds that build great followers.

The discourse concerning organizational optimality has been dominated by leadership for decades. The myriad books, hundreds of blogs, and scores of conferences saturate the market with guidance for great leadership. However, the nascent theme of followership is gaining recognition. The growth of the followership movement constitutes a victory for those considerate leaders willing to adjust their vision of institutional optimality. Organizations are filled with followers and enhancing their followership. Any church will thrive if leaders and followers turn to God and heed His instructions. The church should be a place where both leaders and followers focus on God's instructions and deliberately concentrate on their growth.

God loves and teaches followership. He is the ultimate leader and has written at length in the Bible to describe great following, hereafter known as "followership." Followership is a vastly underdeveloped field of study that evaluates the dignity and attributes of quality followership. Maximizing followership dramatically ameliorates any initiative as leaders and followers work together effectively. Consequently, leaders should understand followership and be equipped to develop quality followers for the glory of Jesus Christ.

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ABSTRACT

TRAINING QUALITY FOLLOWERSHIP THROUGH
OPTIMIZED LEADERSHIP

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2023
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The purpose of this thesis was to underscore the significance of followership and the need to train followership in the church for the glory of Jesus Christ. Chapter 1 identifies the need for this study, highlighting the significant paucity of literature for the church about followership. Chapter 2 discusses the importance of followership, featuring the value of followership in light of changes in modern culture and among secular leadership theoreticians. Chapter 3 explains the glory of followership as an elevated call from Jesus Christ, the church's Shepherd. Chapter 4 outlines the eight practices of followership detailed in the New Testament. Chapter 5 lists four character traits of Christ that should be emulated by church leaders to foster followership.

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