



Jesus as Perfect Follower

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Abstract

Christians have long held that Jesus was the perfect leader. Yet, the scriptures record that Jesus said, "I have come to do the will of Him who sent me" (John 6:38). Thus, by His own admission, Jesus explains His role on earth as that of the perfect follower. This perspective of Jesus as follower empowers the Christian in the workplace to conscientiously perform responsibilities with integrity, credibility, and competence knowing that practicing a Christ-centered followership in the workplace is consistent with Jesus' own role as a follower. By following the model of Jesus, established follower responsibilities of assuming responsibility, serving, challenging, participating in transformation, and taking moral action

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(Chaleff (2014) *The courageous follower: standing up to & for our leaders*, 3rd edn. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, San Francisco) become a natural response to the challenges within the workplace. In addition, Robert Kelley's ((1992) *The power of followership*, Doubleday Currency, New York) perspective on the follower's self-management, commitment, competence and focus, and courage all dovetail with the follower of Christ's instruction to "do your work heartily as for the Lord rather than for men" (Colossians 3:23). As a follower of Christ, when given the role and responsibility to lead others, this following-leader (Ricketson (2014) *Followerfirst: rethinking leading in the church*, 2nd edn. Heartworks Publications, Cumming) will act with an ethic based upon the life and teachings of Jesus while respecting those with whom she/he works while accomplishing the purpose of the organization. By following the perfect follower, Jesus, in the workplace, workers can experience a tremendous sense of fulfillment as they perform whatever duties they are given. The lure of having to be the leader will have no effect because following is their fulfillment, as it was Christ's.

Keywords

Jesus · Follower · Followerfirst · Leader · Leadership · Courage

Jesus as Perfect Follower

With the plethora of books and articles dedicated to the leadership of Jesus, one might think that much of Jesus' teachings revolve around the subject of leading others (Wilkes 1998; Blanchard and Huges 2005; Manz 2011). However, there is very little specific teaching from Jesus regarding leaders and how they should respond toward others. A search of the New Testament reveals that there are only two instances in the New Testament where Jesus specifically addresses the subject. In Matthew 20:25–28, in response to His disciples arguing about who would be the greatest in Jesus' kingdom:

Jesus called them to Himself, and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them, It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave: just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Hendricksen (1973) suggests that this teaching of Jesus is an accurate account of those who do not follow the person and teachings of Jesus, for "they spend all their energies in order to get to the top; and, once having reached that peak, they cause all others to feel the weight of their authority. . . . These worldly rulers, once "arrived," often think of themselves alone, and cause all their subjects to quail under the crushing weight of their power" (p. 747). In contrast to this particular practice of leadership, Hendricksen believes Jesus teaches, "a course of action which is the exact opposite of that which is followed in the unbelieving world. Greatness consists

in self-giving, in the outpouring of the self in service to others, for the glory of God” (p. 748).

The only other specific statement from Jesus occurs when He compares the actions and desires of His followers over and against those of the religious leaders of the day. In Mathew 23:10, Jesus states clearly, “And do not be called leaders, for One is your Leader, that is Christ.” The context of the passage clarifies the context of the message. Jesus is making a comparison and contrast between the actions and motivations of what His followers should be with the actions and motivations of the current religious leaders. Hendricksen (1973) states:

In the light of both the preceding and the following context the statement is justified that what Jesus is here condemning is the yearning for rank, for special recognition above one’s fellow members. . . . So Jesus is saying that the attention of his followers must not be fixed on human titles and distinctions but on God in Christ, worthy of all reverence, praise, and honor.” (p. 824)

It is important to note that Jesus does not say that His followers should not be leaders. Instead, Jesus emphasizes that being the leader with all its supposed rewards and privileges should not be His followers’ motivation.

If these two verses are the only recorded instances where Jesus speaks specifically to leaders and their relationship to others, then what is the basis for the preponderance of literature propounding Jesus’ teaching on leadership? An analysis of both academic and popular press literature reveals that many of the points presented as Jesus’ teachings on leadership are actually principles drawn from the historical narrative (Ricketson 2014). This exercise requires the writer to know something of leadership theories and then project the tenants of those theories onto the actions and words of Jesus, the assumption being that Jesus, as the perfect leader, lives His life as an example for us to follow. Many leadership theories can be massaged quite easily into an explanation for the actions of Jesus. Burns’ (1978) transformational leadership theory identifies a leader who cares for his followers and seeks to increase the motivation and morality of both the leaders and followers. Bass’ (1985) proposition of the transactional leader can certainly be applied because of the biblical idea of covenant – I will do this if you do that. Servant leadership (Greenleaf 2002) has been adopted quite often to explain how Jesus was a servant leader to his disciples.

The major problem with seeing Jesus’ life as an example of leadership is that Jesus’ actions do not always fit within developed leadership theories. One might question what leadership theory Jesus was espousing when He chased the animals and the moneychangers out of the temple (John 2:13–17). On another occasion, Jesus intentionally and publically embarrassed His most vocal follower, even going so far as to accuse him of being in league with the devil (Matthew 16:23). An accurate understanding of the scriptures becomes difficult if writers choose what actions of Jesus are legitimate leadership teaching and which are not.

As the divine Son of God (Luke 22:70, 1 John 5:13), Jesus lived a sinless and perfect life (Hebrews 4:15). Therefore, it seems reasonable to assume that Jesus had a divine purpose behind every word and action He performed while He was alive.

Rather than presume to identify some of Jesus' actions as being leadership lessons and others not, perhaps the best course of action is to allow Jesus to speak in His own words about His purpose, His actions, and His teachings and the reasons why He lived the way He lived.

A Biblical View of Followers

Jesus as Perfect Follower

When Jesus talks about His person and His mission, all His words are follower-centric. From childhood Jesus told Mary and Joseph that, "I must be about my Father's business" (Luke 2:49). The Gospel writer, John, records Jesus as saying, "For I have come down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of Him who sent Me" (John 6:38). In Jesus' own words, He shares that his purpose was to follow the will of the Father. Jesus never claimed to do anything in His own power, "I can of Myself do nothing. . . because I do not seek my own will but the will of the Father who sent Me (John 5:30). Jesus never claimed to speak on His own authority, "For I have not spoken on My own authority, but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak" (John 12:49-50). Then finally, at the end of His life, Jesus prays, "Father, if Thou art willing, remove this cup from Me, nevertheless, not My will, but Thine be done" (Luke 22:42). In His own words, Jesus never claims and even seeks to dispel any notion of being a leader. The testimony of Jesus is clear. Jesus considered Himself a follower. His purpose on the planet was to perfectly follow the will of the Father.

The Apostle Paul records that Jesus understood who He was and that this understanding needed to be evidenced in the churches as much as it was evidenced in the life of Jesus while He was alive. Paul writes:

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore, God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5-11)

Paul teaches that Jesus' fulfillment of the will of God required humility before the Father, and obedience to the Father's will, even when that meant His own death. Jesus manifested all of these attributes through taking the role of a servant. In His own words Jesus states, "For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). It is important to point out that this particular statement does not say that Jesus came to be a servant leader, but a servant. Jesus modeled a way of influencing others by following the will of the Father and assuming the role of the least valued person in society.

Perhaps it was Jesus' willingness to humble himself and serve that prompted Paul to encourage the followers of Christ of his day to "follow me as I follow Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1).

Jesus' Teaching

The teachings of Jesus also resonate with a follower-centric quality. Jesus' command is "Follow Me" (Matthew 4:19; 9:9, John 1:43; 21:19; 21:22). In each of these instances, the words "Follow Me" are in the imperative. Jesus is not offering invitations to these disciples. He is issuing commands. One might say that Jesus is assuming the role of a leader. Such a statement might have merit except that most definitions of leadership have some concept of a person influencing a group of persons to attain a common goal (Northouse 2016, p. 6). In these instances, Jesus is acting as one with divine authority. His commands are those of an authoritarian, not a leader. Additionally, from what has been previously stated regarding His purpose, Jesus is following the will of the Father by choosing this group of disciples. In John 15:16 Jesus states, "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that you should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever you shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you." Although an argument from silence, it is interesting to note that here and most notably in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18–20) Jesus does not charge these followers to lead others, but rather to "bring forth fruit" and "make disciples."

Just as Jesus' purpose was to follow the will of the Father, He taught His followers to follow. To those who doubted, Jesus reminded them, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow Me" (John 10:27). To those who desire to follow Him, Jesus instructs, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke 9:23). In preparing His followers for His death, burial, and resurrection and the subsequent coming of the Holy Spirit, Jesus states:

If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor know him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. . . "Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him. . . If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me. (John 14:21–24)

From these teachings, it is evident that those who claim to love and follow Jesus have one purpose: follow the commands of Jesus. By so doing, these followers will not only be following the commands of Jesus but the commands of God the Father who is the ultimate author of these commands. Thus, a God-honoring life for the follower of Jesus may be pictured in this way: Jesus follows the commands of the Father and aligns His life under the Father's will. Believers in Jesus follow the commands of

Jesus and align their lives with Jesus and in so doing align their lives with the will of God. All of this alignment is made possible through God the Holy Spirit.

In the Beginning

A rigorous examination of the theological significance of the creation story would require more space than this article could address. However, when considering the narrative of God's creation of the world, a general observation is that God created human beings with the overall role of being caretakers of creation (Genesis 1:26–28, 2:15) with the responsibility to follow His commands in a spirit of submission (Genesis 2:15–16). The creation narrative implies that this God and human relationship was intimate and fulfilling. From these texts, one might argue that human beings are most fulfilled when they are following and acting within the will of God. This ontological language indicates that being a follower is the greatest form of self-actualization. Being a follower is the ultimate realization of human worth. At the time of creation, human beings are living within their role, fulfilling their responsibilities, and doing so with a spirit of submission.

This relationship continued until “the fall” (Calvin 1960, p. 241). This was the day when the man and the woman decided not to follow the command of God and ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 3:6). Numerous consequences resulted from this breach of following, the most devastating of which was a severing of the intimate relationship between God and humans. However, the biblical record reveals God had a plan that would reestablish this relationship through the perfect obedience of the God-man, Jesus the Christ, the “second Adam” (1 Corinthians 15:45–49). Jesus perfectly followed the will of the Father, and as God in the flesh, He performed the will of the Father without sin (Hebrews 4:15, 1 Peter 2:22). Jesus' perfect life of submission to the will of the Father led Him to die as the perfect sacrifice for sin. As Paul states, “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. . .” (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). Jesus' death and resurrection restore the God and human relationship for all who believe in Him (John 1:12). Thus, it is Jesus' role as “perfect follower” that actually influences human history and gives hope to all.

In addition to severing the relational ties between humans and God, “the fall” established a new world operational culture. This “curse” essentially resulted in human beings no longer relating to one another with respectful and willing submission. Rather, a new self-awareness takes effect (Genesis 3:7) and a desire for power over others pervades the human race. Humans pit themselves against one another and become aggressive to the point of murder (Genesis 4:8). The Bible is replete with narratives regarding the desire for control and misuse of power. Consider the lives of Jacob (Genesis 25), Laban (Genesis 29), Absalom (2 Samuel 15), and David (2 Samuel 12:24), just to name a few. With every story, the lesson for the reader is that God is ultimately in control. He has all power, and human beings should humble

themselves before God and submissively follow His commands. Jesus even speaks to this by teaching His followers they were not to “Lord it over” (Matthew 20: 25–26) those whom they lead. This follower-centric perspective understands the Bible to be a book “written by followers, about followers, and for followers” (Ricketson 2014, p. 7).

When people embrace their God-given purpose of being a follower, they can understand that “being” a leader is an impossibility. Statements such as “I am a follower” replace the statements of “I am a leader.” Leader becomes a term for a specific role within an organization, not a state of being. The role of leader and the role of follower are essential within healthy organizations, and training should take place to make certain that persons in these positions are prepared to fulfill these roles. However, returning to the importance of following as the primary state of being and activity of believers may result in a new awareness of how followers of Christ influence their world regardless of their positions and titles within their organizations. These workers would understand that “wherever the Lord may place me within an organization or within a community of people, I am always first and foremost a follower” (Ricketson 2014, p. 7). Such an understanding resonates within the hearts of followers when they hear Jesus’ call, “Follow Me” (John 1:43, Matthew 4:21, 9:9, 16:24) or when they hear Paul’s encouragement, “follow me as I follow Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). Thus, although believers in Christ were first called Christians in Antioch (Acts 11:26), a more simple and accurate designation may be “followers of Christ.”

Follow in the Spirit

Those who follow the commands of Jesus have an additional benefit in that God provides for them His power, His Holy Spirit, to follow His commands (John 14:16–17). The Holy Spirit was present with God the Father and the Son in creation (Genesis 1:2), at Jesus’ birth (John 1:35), baptism (Luke 3:22), and temptation (Luke 4:1–2). This Holy Spirit is the same power that enabled Jesus to perfectly submit to and fulfill the will of the Father. As human beings, we do not have the capacity for perfection. However, what the follower of Christ can do is respond in relationship to others in ways that are consistent with the teachings of Jesus and simultaneously honoring to God. This “followerfirst perspective” (Ricketson 2014, p. 14) enables Christians to embrace being followers and then empowers them to accept the role of leader or follower within any organizational or relational setting without concern for status or position. Followers of Christ understand that in the process of leadership (Northouse 2016; Ricketson 2014) their influence is crucial to achieving the organizational goal. These followers are not passive but active in their understanding of leadership. Joseph Rost (1991) sums it well:

Most important, followers do not do followership, they do leadership. Both leaders and followers form one relationship that is leadership. There is no such thing as followership in the new school of leadership. Followership makes sense only in the industrial leadership

paradigm, where leadership is good management. . . . Followers and leaders develop a relationship wherein they influence one another as well as the organization and society, and that is leadership. They do not do the same things in the relationship, just as composers and musicians do not do the same thing in making music, but they are both essential to leadership. (p. 10)

Followers of Christ are able to live in the power of the Holy Spirit so that they may act in ways that benefit others (Galatians 5:16–24). This power enables the follower of Christ to submit to the will of the Father to “love your neighbor as you love yourself” (Mark 12:31). As Paul encourages the Galatians, “If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another” (Galatians 5:25–26).

Followers of Christ in the Workplace

Effective Followers of Christ

Robert Kelley (1988) introduces the concept of the effective follower by stating:

What distinguishes an effective from an ineffective follower is enthusiastic, intelligent, and self-reliant participation – without star billing – in the pursuit of an organizational goal. Effective followers differ in their motivations for following and in their perceptions of the role. Some choose followership as their primary role at work and serve as team players who take satisfaction in helping to further a cause, an idea, a product, a service, or, more rarely, a person. Others are leaders in some situations but choose the follower role in a particular context. Both these groups view the role of follower as legitimate, inherently valuable, even virtuous. (pp. 2–3)

Because of their unique motivation to want to honor Christ in all they do, followers of Christ can readily assume a position within the organization as an effective follower. Being able to understand their importance to the organization regardless of what role they play affords followers of Christ the opportunity to show themselves as persons who see and understand the big picture of the organizational goal.

Kelley (1988) suggests that effective followers have four qualities: (a) self-management, (b) commitment, (c) competence and focus, and (d) courage. The follower of Christ can evidence each of these qualities.

Self-management. Self-management requires a person who is able to think for oneself, to exercise control and independence, and to work without close supervision. The self-managed person is one to whom a leader can safely delegate responsibility (Kelley 1988, pp. 5–6).

For the follower of Christ, self-management requires not so much a focus on self as it does a focus on Christ. Christ followers recognize that “apart from [Christ] you can do nothing,” (John 15:5) while at the same time understanding that “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13). Christ followers humble themselves before God and depend upon the Holy Spirit to enable them to

perform whatever is necessary in order for God to be glorified. Speaking to the followers of Christ who at that time were slaves, Paul encourages them to “do your work heartily as to the Lord rather than to men. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve” (Colossians 3:23). This idea of doing exceptional work because of the reputation of Christ certainly applies to believers within today’s organizational structures. If an organizational leader is looking for a dependable person who can take on responsibility, then the follower of Christ appears to be that person. Followers of Christ understand that they perform their work with the reputation of Christ at stake. Therefore, they will seek to perform their very best at whatever responsibility they have been given. The need for close supervision is lessened because in the follower’s minds the ultimate judge of a job well done goes beyond their immediate leader or supervisor to pleasing God. This understanding insures that followers of Christ perform at their highest level at all times.

According to Kelley (1988), self-managed followers are unintimidated by organizational hierarchy and “see themselves to be – except in terms of line responsibility – as equals of the leaders they follow” (p. 6). For followers of Christ, this self-perception is not so much a function of ego as it is an understanding of the value they have as human beings created by God. In addition, believing that they are loved by God (John 3:16, 14:21), and having experienced that love through Christ, these followers are able to respect others and seek to meet the needs of others. This idea of “other-centeredness” is a hallmark of the follower of Christ.

Commitment. Kelley’s second quality of an effective follower is commitment. This commitment is to a cause, a product, an organization, or even an idea. Kelley suggests that this commitment extends to the follower’s own life and career.

For the follower of Christ, this particular quality is one of priority. The follower of Christ may be secondarily committed to a cause, an organization, or even an idea. However, the follower of Christ’s primary commitment is to the person of Christ and that to which Christ is committed. Thus, the focus of one’s thoughts and desires for each day revolves around how to bring glory to God the Father. This thought alone affects every action throughout the day. Because Christ is committed to His church, followers are aware they not only represent the person of Christ but also are a part of a larger group of committed followers around the world. They are aware that people will gain an impression of Christ and His church from their actions and will subsequently seek to respond to others in ways that demonstrate the love of Christ.

A commitment to an organization’s goals becomes a prime motivation for followers of Christ when the goal of the organization is congruent with their personal goals. It is this agreement with the “basic underlying assumptions” (Schein 2010, p. 27) of the organization that allows followers of Christ to pour their lives into the work in order to accomplish the mission. Thus, it is important for followers of Christ to investigate these organizational assumptions before accepting employment. If the goal of the organization changes, the follower of Christ might choose to try to stay in the organization in order to help change the culture, or they may decide the best course of action is to find other employment before they become a cause of conflict.

For followers of Christ, a commitment to one’s own life manifests itself by having disciplines in daily life. Eating healthfully, abstaining from unhealthy practices, and

getting a sufficient amount of rest and exercise are just a few of the many ways followers of Christ can evidence their awareness that the bodies they have are gifts from God (1 Corinthians 6:19–20). In addition, caring for family members, honoring spouses, maintaining fidelity, and guarding time with family all testify to the life of a follower of Christ who understands the necessity of commitment. One key thought for followers of Christ to remember is when living this type of committed life, only require yourself to meet these standards not others. When followers of Christ begin to set standards in other people's lives, they no longer become colleagues but judges. Paul's admonition to the Christians in Rome serves as a good reminder, "For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith" (Romans 12:3).

Competence and focus. Kelley (1988) states, "On the grounds that committed incompetence is still incompetence, effective followers master skills that will be useful to their organizations. They generally hold higher performance standards than the work environment requires, and continuing education is second nature to them, a staple in their professional development" (pp. 7–8). These competent followers initiate ways to learn more. They are proactive in seeking out seminars and learning opportunities that will aid them and their organization to reach their goals. They also are willing to address problems within the organization rather than waiting for the leader to initiate a process. It is this mixture of competence with commitment that makes the effective follower a vital part of the organization.

In light of Christ's example of serving others (Luke 22:27), followers of Christ seek to attain the highest standards of competence. With a heart of humility, they realize learning is a daily part of life. Preparing oneself to add value to others and the organization is the basis for the follower of Christ taking whatever steps are necessary to get the proper training or education in order to serve others. Keeping one's work standard high is based upon the biblical teaching that all work is done "unto the Lord" (Colossians 3:23). Attaining competence becomes a means of serving others and is never used for self-aggrandizement. Skills are used for the betterment of others.

Courage. Kelley (1988) describes this quality of effective followers as persons who are:

credible, honest, and courageous. They establish themselves as independent, critical thinkers whose knowledge and judgment can be trusted. They give credit where credit is due, admitting mistakes and sharing successes. They form their own views and ethical standards and stand up for what they believe in. Insightful, candid, and fearless, they can keep leaders and colleagues honest and informed. (pp. 8–9)

Kelley (1992) believes such qualities emanate from what he calls the courageous conscience. Kelley states, "I define the courageous conscience as the ability to judge right from wrong and the fortitude to take affirmative steps toward what one believes is right. It involves both conviction and action, often in the face of strong societal pressures for followers to abstain from acting on their beliefs" (p. 168).

Followers of Christ have the capacity to be the most courageous people in the workplace. With a genuine humility, followers of Christ are committed to the truth. Jesus describes Himself as being “the truth” (John 14:6). Paul commands followers of Christ to “speak truth to one another in love” (Ephesians 4:15). Followers also have the added encouragement that God’s Word, the Bible, is truth (John 17:17) and, thus, these teachings become the basis for all actions even when they might appear to be counterintuitive. Empowered by God’s Holy Spirit, based upon God’s teachings, and motivated by love, followers of Christ are positioned to humbly stand for what is right. Their moral compass follows the teachings of the Bible, and a love for others compels them to speak to matters of injustice, dishonesty, and lack of integrity. Personal integrity requires them to seek solutions to challenges by humbly appealing to leaders and other responsible people within the organization in a respectful but confident manner. They are people whose yes is yes and their no, is no (Matthew 5:37). This courageous commitment to the truth may go so far as having to remove themselves from an organization if conditions within the organization do not improve.

Courageous Followers of Christ

Ira Chaleff (2009) continues the conversation regarding follower qualities by stating that courageous followers “must accept responsibility for both our own roles and the roles of our leaders. Only by accepting this dual responsibility do we ultimately accept responsibility for our organizations and the people they serve” (p. 3). Chaleff lists three understandings that followers need to have if they are going to assume this responsibility:

First, we must understand our own power and how to use it. As followers we have far more power than we usually acknowledge. We must understand the sources of our power, whom we serve, and what tools we have to carry forward the group’s mission from our unique vantage point.

Second, we must appreciate the value of leaders and cherish the critical contribution they make to our endeavors. We must understand the forces that chisel away at their creativity, good humor, and resolve. We must learn how to minimize these forces and create a climate in which a leader’s strengths are magnified, so a leader can better serve the common purpose.

Third, we must understand the seductiveness and pitfalls of the power of leadership. We are all familiar with Lord Acton’s quote, “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” We are all witnesses to the many examples that support its assertion. Yet we are like the person who has never taken hard drugs: though we can intellectually understand that they are addictive, we cannot appreciate their force. We must learn how to counteract this dark tendency of power. (pp. 3–4)

These three understandings suggest it is the responsibility of followers to use their power to support their leaders and protect them and others from the dangers of a misuse of power. This other-centered perspective resonates well with the follower of Christ.

Chaleff further presents five dimensions in which courageous followers operate.

The courage to assume responsibility. Chaleff states that:

Courageous followers assume responsibility for themselves and the organization. They do not hold a paternalistic image of the leader or organization; they do not expect the leader or organization to provide for their security and growth, or to give them permission to act. . . They initiate values-based action to improve the organization's external activities and its internal processes. (p. 6)

Likewise, followers of Christ are not dependent upon the organization or the leader for their sense of security. Their security and ultimate wellbeing lay with Christ and His devotion to them. By focusing on God and His kingdom work, followers of Christ believe He will provide all they need in order to have a fulfilled life (Matthew 6:33). Thus, God, not the employer, becomes the source and provision for the follower of Christ. Speaking to those who worried regarding their own life, Jesus assured them that God was so personally involved with them that even their hairs were numbered (Matthew 10:30). There is great comfort and assurance to perform ethically when one believes in a God who will provide. Because of this great assurance, followers of Christ can be proactive in addressing challenges and problem areas within the organization. Motivated by love, followers of Christ move into the lives of others and seek to resolve issues.

The courage to serve. Chaleff presents followers as “not afraid of the hard work required to serve a leader. They assume new or additional responsibilities to unburden the leader and serve the organization. They stay alert for areas in which their strengths complement the leaders’ and assert themselves in these areas” (pp. 6–7).

Followers of Christ embrace the idea of service because of the teaching and example of the Lord Jesus. Jesus said, “I am among you as one who serves” (Luke 22:27). In another instance Jesus teaches that if a follower wants to be great, then that follower needs to take the position of a servant.

Patterson (2003) suggests that *agapao*, the Greek term for a moral love that seeks to do the right thing at the right time, is the initiating factor in a person's willingness to serve others. Followers of Christ understand this truth because, “the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Romans 5:5).

The courage to challenge. Chaleff suggests that courageous followers are willing to “give voice to the discomfort they feel when the behaviors or policies of the leader or group conflict with their sense of what is right” (p. 7). However, efforts to make certain the leader understands that the follower is acting in their best interest are essential before making any such challenge. Followers of Christ are in a good position to do this because of their consistent servant attitudes and other-centered behaviors. Such a challenge would be made with respect while communicating support for the leader.

As previously mentioned, because followers of Christ trust in the provision of God, they are confident they can address changes that need to be made with their leaders knowing that God will provide for them in the event that the leader does not receive their challenge.

The courage to participate in transformation. Chaleff further suggests that when needed changes are identified, it is the followers' responsibility to participate in those changes (p. 7). They are to engage in a way that targets the offending behavior rather than a personal attack on the leader (p. 113).

Because followers of Christ are keenly aware of their own shortcomings (1 Corinthians 6:9–11, 1 Timothy 1:15), there is little room for having a judgmental spirit toward others. Followers are to correct others with gentleness (2 Timothy 2:25). The Apostle Paul even describes himself in the role of a nurse while correcting other believers (1 Thessalonians 2:7). Taking the role of a fellow follower who needs to have a self-awareness of his or her own need for change allows those involved to exercise greater understanding and patience with those transformations that need to take place.

Courage to take moral action. Chaleff's final characteristic is necessary when "it is time to take a stand that is different than the leaders" (p. 7). If transformation is not possible and the behaviors that need to change violate the morals and values of the follower, there is no choice but to take a moral action. According to Chaleff, these actions may take the form of an appeal for reconsideration, a direct refusal to obey, a resignation, withdrawing support, or even becoming a whistleblower (pp. 147–172).

Followers of Christ base their entire lives on the reputation of Christ as they live out His love and commands among others. Jesus put it this way "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). At the beginning of his earthly ministry Jesus, Himself, was tempted to compromise His own values and those of God the Father (Matthew 4:1–11). Jesus' final and cumulative response was, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only" (Matthew 4:10). Taking a moral stand against wrongdoing and evil is sometimes necessary not only for the good of the follower but also for the good of those still working in these difficult situations. If followers are to "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39), they need to be prepared to act in ways that are consistent with the values expressed by the teachings of Christ and are performed in a way that glorifies God the Father. Taking moral action may be one way to show another love.

Following-Leaders

Followers of Christ have one true leader, Jesus (Matthew 23:10). Those who embrace this follower identity seek to carry out His commands regardless of what positional role they may have. By always seeking to influence those around them with the values of Christ, such followers may be considered as following-leaders (Ricketson 2014, p. 197). What at first might appear somewhat oxymoronic, the concept of being a following-leader is quite simple. Followers of Christ understand their role of being primarily loyal to the person of Jesus Christ. Then, in the course of performing their duties, they intentionally perform in such a way to first honor God but then secondarily to influence others to see the value in acting according to the teachings of the scripture. Through these activities, the following-leader may

actually evidence what Kouzes and Posner (2012) identify as the top four characteristics of those whom others would be willing to follow: honest, forward-looking, competent, and inspiring (p. 36). Regardless of organizational title or position, following-leaders maintain their personal integrity by remaining true to the values embedded within the teachings of Christ. By doing so, they act as courageous and exemplary followers to all.

Conclusion

Interpreting the life of Christ as being that of a follower and not a leader is crucial to an accurate understanding of His actions and teachings. Such an interpretation is also key to the followers of Christ's alignment of his/her life with the commands of Christ. This alignment with the will of God through Christ is what brings fulfillment to the soul of the follower. Because humans were created to be followers, being a faithful follower reflects life's ultimate purpose and most satisfying activity. Regardless of the context, the title, or the position, followers of Christ influence those around them. With a work ethic based upon honoring God, followers of Christ are growing, learning, and accomplishing the common goal(s) of the organization with integrity, credibility, and honesty. By their actions followers of Christ transform the meaning of "follower," from cloistered devotional ideas of love and devotion, and propel it into the functional universe of having a specific role, with specific responsibilities to be accomplished to the glory of God. This functional understanding describes the life of Christ. His love and devotion to the Father were unquestioned. However, love and devotion required action, and this action was manifested through the birth, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the perfect follower.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Emotional Intelligence, Performance, and Fulfillment](#)
- ▶ [From Success to Significance: Transforming Your Job into a Calling](#)
- ▶ [Jesus, the Kingdom of God, and the Workplace](#)
- ▶ [Servant Leadership in the Workplace](#)
- ▶ [Spirituality and Employee Engagement at Work](#)
- ▶ [Workplace Spirituality and Virtue Ethics](#)

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