



FOLLOWERSHIP

THE MISSING LINK TO STRENGTHENING
PASTORS, LEADERS, AND CHURCHES.



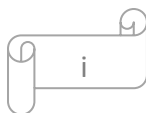
ROBERT ROSALES

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All Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV), New International Version, and the New King James Version (NKJV), unless otherwise noted.

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DEDICATION

To my wife, Yolanda, for walking faithfully
beside me, and to the pastors, leaders, and team
members who faithfully serve the Lord in the
local church.

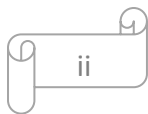


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INTRODUCTION THE MISSING LINK

For decades, the church has invested enormous energy in developing leaders. We attend conferences, read books, and build ministries around leadership development. But what if strong leadership is not the problem? What if the real missing link in the church is not stronger leaders...but better followers?

I have pursued leadership development for well over 20 years, yet I was never trained in how to follow. In all my years serving in the local church, I had never even heard the word followership. Have you? Most pastors and ministry leaders I know have not heard it either. Could it be that we have been missing something essential?

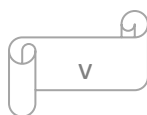
I gave my life to Christ thirty-four years ago. I remember looking up to pastors and leaders and thinking, *"One day, I want to be a leader like them."* That desire is both natural and biblical.

Scripture encourages us to imitate faithful examples: “Imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (Heb. 6:12 NKJV). After all, leaders are called to model Christlikeness and guide others.

Yet after more than twenty years in full-time ministry, I came to a realization: ministries do not flourish because of leadership alone. They flourish through the partnership of strong leaders and strong followers.

Throughout my journey, I was consistently encouraged to pursue leadership. But when I discovered followership, something shifted. It became clear: leaders need strong followers.

The roles of leaders and followers are distinct, yet deeply complementary. Leaders provide direction, cast vision, and make decisions that advance the mission. Followers bring that vision to life through initiative, ownership, and wise support.



While leaders may hold formal authority, followers shape outcomes through their engagement, attitude, and faithfulness.

The difference between leadership and followership is not one of value but of function.

It is time for the church to recognize this: leadership casts vision, but followership carries it forward.

Rethinking What Comes First

During my graduate studies in strategic leadership, one statement captured my attention:

“It is dangerous to talk about leadership without first addressing how to be a faithful follower first.”¹

I had never considered the idea that following well, first, is foundational to leading well.

Leadership studies rightly focus on the qualities and behaviors of leaders. We need strong leaders in the church. But a crucial question remains: is a leader not only as effective as the people they lead?

Leadership success is deeply shaped by the quality of its followers. This makes it essential not only to develop leaders but to intentionally cultivate cultures of exemplary followership.

Jesus: The Model of Followership

Jesus, our ultimate leader, perfectly modeled what it means to follow.

Scripture tells us: *“who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation”* (Phil. 2:6–7, NKJV).

This is the foundation of kenosis from the Greek *kenoō*, meaning “to empty.”

Jesus voluntarily set aside the independent use of His divine privileges and took on the nature of a servant.

He did not come to dominate, but to serve.

He said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner” (Jn. 5:19).

His ministry was not self-directed; it was responsive, obedient, and fully aligned with the Father’s will.

For Jesus, kingdom leadership began with kingdom followership.

The Missing Conversation

Leadership research has historically focused on leaders, often giving minimal attention to followers. But ignoring followership comes at a cost to churches, teams, and ministries.

That unfamiliar word ***followership*** points to a missing link.

It is essential for:

- Healthy teams
- Strong leadership
- Thriving church culture

What This Book Will Explore

In the pages ahead, we will explore:

- Why leadership alone is not enough
- What exemplary followership looks like
- Why discipleship alone is not enough
- Why leaders often do not get the followers they need
- Why churches overlook followership
- How to shift from leader-focused thinking to whole-team effectiveness

You will also find practical steps to help you and your church cultivate a culture of healthy followership.

Let's explore this together.

Reflective Questions for Personal Growth

1. How have I personally viewed following versus leading in my life or ministry?
 - Have I undervalued the role of a follower?

2. In what ways might my focus on leadership alone have limited my effectiveness or the growth of others?

- Where might this need to change?

3. Who has God placed in my life for me to follow well?

- What is one intentional step I can take this week to grow as a follower?

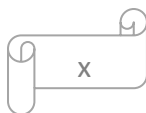
Walking Worthy In Unity

As we begin exploring followership, we must start not with theory or strategy, but with Scripture.

The Holy Spirit has highlighted a foundational truth: the relational health of any ministry begins with how we walk together in Christ.

In Ephesians 1–3, Paul reminds believers of their identity in Christ. Then, in chapter 4, he calls them to live in alignment with that identity:

“I urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling...bearing with one another in love, eager



to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace..." (Ephesians 4:1–6,ESV).

Notice this phrase: *maintain the unity of the Spirit.*

We are not striving to create unity, we have already been placed into it.

Positionally, the church operates from spiritual unity. Leaders, followers, and teams serve from a shared foundation established by God's grace.

Paul reinforces this unity:

- One body
- One Spirit
- One hope
- One Lord
- One faith
- One baptism
- One God and Father

From this foundation, each person, leader, and follower alike can faithfully walk out their calling.

The Character of Healthy Followership
Paul then outlines the character required for life together:

- Walk worthy — live in alignment with your calling
- Humility — do not elevate yourself
- Gentleness — treat others with care
- Patience — demonstrate strength under control
- Bearing with one another — sustain love in imperfect relationships

He does not start with leadership strategy or organizational structure.

He begins with relational maturity.

Humility, patience, love, and unity form the foundation of a healthy ministry. In other words, the strength of a church is not determined solely by its leadership but by how its people function together.

That is the heart of followership.

It is a relational dynamic marked by respect, alignment, and faithful collaboration between leaders and followers.

CHAPTER 1 ~ WHY
LEADERSHIP
ALONE IS NOT
ENOUGH

With Scripture as our foundation, we must understand that leadership is essential but not enough. Its effectiveness is deeply relational. How a leader succeeds, or stumbles, depends as much on those following as on those leading.

So, what really determines whether leadership flourishes or falters? Surprisingly, the answer is often hidden in plain sight: the role of followers. Their attitudes, decisions, and actions quietly shape the outcome of every leader's effort.

The Leader-Centric Assumption

Why isn't leadership alone enough? Because leadership effectiveness does not reside solely in the leader.

We often assume that when things go right, it is because of strong leadership. The opposite assumption follows just as quickly when things go wrong. Imagine stepping into a ministry where the leader has cast vision, is praying faithfully, and is giving their very best, yet something still feels off.

When things go wrong, we rarely look at the team first. Our instinct is to look to the leader for answers:

- If the pastor would just...
- If the vision were clearer...
- If the leader would...

However, the story is never that simple.

Please do not misunderstand me, I fully recognize that the leader is ultimately responsible. But leadership does not operate in a vacuum. Something less visible is at work, something that can either strengthen or undermine a leader's effectiveness.

Leader-centric thinking, by itself, misses a crucial truth: followers shape outcomes in ways leaders cannot fully control or always see. Leaders cast vision and set direction, but followers carry that vision into reality.

What Research Reveals About Followers

During my capstone research, I discovered something significant: as intentional relational engagement deepens between leaders and followers, something powerful emerges. Engaged followers begin to empower their leaders.²

Pastors interviewed were asked to describe how followers' engagement with the church's mission affects leadership effectiveness. One recurring theme stood out: a follower's heart posture, follow-through, and ability to work well with others directly strengthen a leader's effectiveness.

This aligns with a growing body of leadership research. Over time, scholars and practitioners have come to recognize followers as active participants in the leadership process. Rather than merely executing instructions, followers influence decisions, shape culture, and contribute directly to outcomes.

Followers have far more influence than we often realize.

Leadership as a Shared Process

Leadership effectiveness is not a solo performance; it is, at minimum, a duet between leaders and followers.

Healthy ministry happens when leaders and followers build strong relationships and learn to work well together. My capstone research supports this: when leaders and followers prioritize intentional relationships, trust and unity increase, strengthening overall leadership effectiveness.

This reinforces a central truth: leadership alone is not enough. Strong leadership must be supported by strong followership to form strong teams.

Implications for the Church

Most leaders would agree that teams are essential to accomplishing mission and vision. Likewise, team members would affirm the need for strong leadership.

But what could happen if both leaders and team members fully embraced this truth: strong leadership alone is not enough?

What if followership were intentionally understood, developed, and practiced in our churches?

I believe the result would be greater effectiveness and healthier outcomes. Followership could even become the leadership pipeline we have been missing. Great followers often become great leaders.

A Broader Shift in Leadership Thinking

Beginning in the late 1980s and continuing into the 1990s, leadership research highlighted the critical role of followers.

These studies emphasized that leadership is not one-directional; leaders influence followers, but followers also influence leaders in powerful ways.

Scholars such as James H. Schindler describe followers as active contributors who help shape an organization's direction and effectiveness.³ Strong leaders, in turn, intentionally empower followers, creating space for initiative, responsibility, and cultural influence.

This perspective is reinforced in broader leadership studies, which describe leadership as a collaborative process rather than a purely hierarchical one. Followers help co-create culture, solve problems, and strengthen leadership outcomes.⁴

Leadership, therefore, is shared and relational, not merely positional.

The Bottom Line

Effective leaders adapt to the people they lead, fostering environments where followers take ownership and initiative.

Once again, leadership effectiveness depends not only on the leader but also on the quality and engagement of followers.

Strong leaders can fail with underdeveloped followers. Conversely, strong followers strengthen leaders and teams.

Developing strong leaders is necessary, but so is developing strong followers.

Old Testament Biblical Followership: Moses and Joshua

Scripture provides powerful examples of how faithful followers strengthen leadership and advance God's mission. One of the clearest is the relationship between Moses and Joshua.

Long before Joshua led Israel into the Promised Land, he spent years faithfully serving alongside Moses. His leadership did not emerge suddenly it was formed through consistent, humble followership.

Joshua stayed close to Moses, learning through observation and service. When Moses ascended Mount Sinai, Joshua accompanied him partway (Exodus 24:13). Later, when Moses met with God at the tent of meeting, Joshua remained even after Moses departed (Exodus 33:11).

Joshua also demonstrated loyalty. When others began prophesying in the camp, he sought to protect Moses' leadership (Numbers 11). Though Moses responded differently, Joshua's reaction revealed his commitment and alignment.

Over time, this faithful followership prepared Joshua for leadership. Eventually, God instructed Moses to commission him publicly (Numbers 27:18-23).

Joshua's journey reveals key qualities of strong followership:

- Proximity to leadership
- Loyalty to the mission
- Spiritual hunger
- Patient preparation

Joshua did not become a leader overnight he was formed through years of faithful service.

A Needed Correction

Many today desire leadership without first embracing followership.

There is nothing wrong with the desire to lead. God often places that desire within us. However, when people step into leadership without first learning to follow, they often miss essential formation.

Joshua gained something profound in the Lord's presence while serving Moses. He would not have received that formation apart from followership.

Before leading Israel, Joshua learned to support, observe, and strengthen God's appointed leader. That process prepared him for God's assignment.

What Makes an Effective Follower

Leadership expert *Robert Kelley* helped shift the conversation by asking a different question: What makes a great follower?⁵

Research shows that effective followers:

- Practice self-management
- Take ownership of responsibilities
- Work well with others
- Adapt to change
- Offer and receive constructive feedback

They do not wait passively for direction. Instead, they think critically, take initiative, and actively contribute to the mission.

Healthy organizations intentionally develop followers, not just leaders.

The Strength of Quiet Faithfulness

In 2010, our church stepped out in faith to launch a satellite campus. It was exciting and, honestly, a bit overwhelming. We had vision, but little experience in how to make it work.

That is where Larry comes in.

“Walk in love,” that is how Larry signs his messages. Over time, I realized that Larry embodied biblical followership in a way that strengthened leadership, teams, and the church.

Larry was not the one in front. He was not seeking recognition. But he was always present, serving faithfully.

Whether setting up, cleaning, helping with the food pantry, or stepping into facilities' needs, Larry showed up consistently. Week after week. Year after year.

For over 15 years, he has served with quiet faithfulness.

Larry strengthened me as a leader. His consistency, support, and heart made a lasting impact not just on me, but on our entire church.

Looking back, I can say this with confidence: I could not have accomplished what I did without him.

Leadership alone is not enough.

Larry may never stand behind a pulpit, but his life reflects the truth of Hebrews 6:10: God does not forget the labor of love shown in serving others.

His faithfulness helped grow a campus from a small group into a thriving ministry. His influence reached far beyond what was visible.

This is the power of biblical followership: quiet, consistent, and deeply impactful.

Reflective Questions for Personal Growth

1. How do I evaluate leadership effectiveness by my performance, or by the health of my team?

- Do I unintentionally overvalue leadership and undervalue followership?

2. Can I identify a time when followers (including myself) strengthened or weakened a leadership outcome?

- What does that reveal about leadership as a shared process?

3. What would change if I intentionally developed people as followers, not just leaders?

- What is one step I can take this week?

CHAPTER 2 ~ WHAT
EXEMPLARY
FOLLOWERS LOOK
LIKE

If leadership effectiveness depends on the quality of followership, then the next question becomes unavoidable: **What does effective followership look like?**

Not all followers engage in the same way, nor do they contribute equally to organizational health. Understanding the different ways people follow helps leaders and followers alike identify areas for growth. In addition, this intentionally moves toward a healthier, more effective culture.

The Mirror of Self-Awareness

I want you to **imagine** walking into a locker room after a hard game. The coach is not handing out plays or scolding the team for what went wrong. Instead, he places a full-length mirror in the center of the room and says:

“Before we talk about what is next, I want each of you to take a long, honest look in the mirror. How did you show up today? Not just your stats—your attitude, your hustle, your teamwork. That is where our next win starts.”

Just like that coach, I want to invite you to pause and take a hard, honest look at something crucial **your role as a follower.**

Self-awareness is the mirror that reveals your impact as a follower; it is about discovering how your choices, attitudes, and engagement directly shape your team's health and success and even your leadership.

Kelley's Five Follower Types

This brings us to **Robert Kelley's** framework, which provides a practical lens for recognizing and developing exemplary followers.⁴ Robert Kelley's five follower types show that followership is not passive or one-size-fits-all.

Understanding these types helps explain why strong leadership alone is never enough effective leadership always depends on healthy followership. When a follower can identify which type they tend to lean towards, they can make the necessary shifts toward exemplary followership. In addition, leadership can better prepare to foster a culture in which exemplary followers can flourish.

Kelley identifies five common follower types: alienated, conformists, pragmatists, passive, and exemplary. What distinguishes these types is not personality, gifting, or even spiritual maturity alone, but how followers function along two key dimensions: **critical thinking** and **level of engagement**.

Critical thinking refers to a follower's willingness and ability to think independently, evaluate ideas, and offer constructive input rather than simply accepting direction at face value.

Level of engagement reflects the degree of energy, ownership, and initiative a follower brings to their role whether they actively contribute to the mission or passively observe from the sidelines.

Understanding the Five Follower Types

When these two dimensions intersect, they form a helpful framework for understanding the five types: **Alienated followers** tend to think critically but are disengaged, often because of past hurt, disappointment, or broken trust. They have decided that it is safer not to engage.

They stay on the team, show up, say the prayer, but are alienated in their hearts and in practice.

Pastor, have you ever had anyone on your team who fit this description? I have. Many times, these followers do not contribute to a healthy team culture.

Their journey toward becoming exemplary followers requires moving past negativity and re-engaging in meaningful ways. If you lead a follower like this, they will likely need your help to re-engage.

Conformist followers, on the other hand, are highly engaged but lack critical thinking. They depend heavily on leaders for direction and affirmation, preferring agreement over discernment. Quick to comply and slow to question, they often remain silent even when they sense misalignment or potential issues. Their loyalty and enthusiasm may seem supportive, but their unwillingness to speak up can inadvertently reinforce poor decisions. Over time, this pattern weakens accountability and restricts organizational growth.

Pragmatist followers fall somewhere in the middle, demonstrating moderate engagement and limited critical thinking while intentionally avoiding strong positions or risk. They value stability and self-preservation, often choosing what feels safe rather than what is most effective or necessary.

Taking a “wait and see” approach, they adjust their level of support based on circumstances rather than conviction. While this posture can reduce conflict, it also slows momentum and weakens decisive leadership when clarity and courage are required.

Passive followers display both minimal engagement and critical thinking, relying almost entirely on leaders for direction. They fulfill assigned tasks but rarely go beyond what is explicitly required.

Seldom offering ideas or feedback, they avoid responsibility and wait for others to take the lead. When problems arise, they distance themselves from ownership, often responding with indifference or the mindset of “that’s not my job.”

This posture limits growth, creativity, and shared responsibility within a team.

Finally, there are **exemplary followers**. They are both deeply engaged and thoughtful, taking responsibility for their roles, supporting leaders and others. They consistently go above and beyond expectations to advance the church's mission.

According to Kelley (1992), the best followers are strong, independent partners with leaders. Exemplary followers take responsibility, think critically, and know when to lead and when to follow. Healthy, exemplary followers bring joy to their leaders, not frustration.

Two Frameworks for Understanding Followership

Robert Kelley and Ira Chaleff offer two of the most helpful frameworks for understanding followership, and while they approach the subject from different angles, they ultimately point to the same ideal.

Kelley focuses on the **internal dynamics** of a follower—specifically, the ability to think independently and engage actively.

His model evaluates whether a follower is both mentally invested and personally responsible in carrying out the mission.

In contrast, Chaleff emphasizes the **relational and moral dimensions** of followership. His framework centers on the courage to support a leader and to challenge one when necessary.⁶

Where Kelley asks, “Is this person thinking and contributing?” Chaleff asks, “Is this person faithfully supporting and, when needed, willing to speak up?”

Together, these models provide a more complete picture of what healthy followership looks like (see Figure3).

Kelley helps us understand the *capacity* of a follower their competence, initiative, and engagement while Chaleff highlights the *character* of a follower their integrity, courage, and responsibility in relationship to leadership.

Both frameworks reject passive or compliant stereotypes and instead call for followers who are fully engaged partners in the mission.

The strongest, most effective followers are not only active and thoughtful contributors, but also courageous teammates who know when to stand with their leaders and when to lovingly challenge them for the good of the organization.

When combined, Kelley and Chaleff remind us that followership is not a weak role it is a vital, dynamic force that strengthens leadership, builds healthy teams, and ultimately drives mission success.

Ira Chaleff's Framework of Followers

Chaleff emphasizes that effective followership involves both supporting and challenging leadership. Building on his work, this framework identifies four types of followers? based on two key dimensions: support for the leader and willingness to challenge the leader.

These categories help us understand not only how followers behave, but also how their behavior impacts the health of a team or organization.

The *Resource* follower demonstrates **low support and low challenge**. This individual does the bare minimum required to keep their position—showing up, completing assigned tasks, and little more.

Their primary motivation is transactional: receiving a paycheck. While not overtly disruptive, this type of follower contributes little to growth, innovation, or team health. They are present but not engaged.

The *Individualist* follower exhibits **low support but high challenge**. This person is willing to speak up, question decisions, and challenge the direction being taken. In this sense, they can add value by offering an honest critique.

However, because their challenge is not balanced with strong support, they are often perceived as resistant, critical, or even disruptive. As a result, they may be marginalized or overlooked, even when their insights are valid.

The *Implementer* demonstrates **high support but low challenge**. This is the “can-do” follower who aligns quickly with leadership decisions and works diligently to carry them out. Leaders often appreciate this type of follower because of their loyalty and dependability.

However, the implementer's weakness is their reluctance to speak up. When something is off or misaligned with the mission, they remain silent. This lack of courage can allow poor decisions to go unchallenged and uncorrected.

The ***Partner*** represents the ideal follower type, which Chaleff calls the **courageous follower**. This individual demonstrates **high support and high challenge**. Partners are fully committed to the vision and mission, giving their best in support of the leader.

At the same time, they are willing to speak the truth when necessary, even when it is uncomfortable. They take responsibility not only for their own actions but also for contributing to the health of the leader and the organization. This balance of loyalty and courage makes the partner an invaluable asset to any team.

What This Looks Like in the Local Church

Consider a ministry leader serving on a church staff or volunteer team.

Over time, they begin to notice that Sunday services feel rushed and somewhat disconnected. Transitions are unclear, and people seem less engaged than before.

They have several options:

- They could complain privately to others
- They could withdraw emotionally and disengage
- Or they could simply go along with things and say nothing

But instead, they choose to act as courageous followers.

They remain fully committed. They continue to serve with excellence, publicly support leadership, and invest in the mission. But they also recognize that silence will not help the team grow.

At the right time, in the right spirit, they approach the leader and say:

“Hey, I wanted to share something I’ve been noticing. It feels like our services have been a little rushed lately, and I wonder if it’s affecting how people are engaging. I’d love to help think through how we can create a more intentional flow.”

This is not criticism—it is contribution.

It is not confrontation—it is care.

Why This Matters

Courageous followers strengthen leadership because they are willing to engage both relationally and truthfully.

They do not:

- sit on the sidelines and criticize
- remain silent to avoid tension

Instead, they step into the tension for the sake of the mission.

They bring both:

- **support** (commitment, loyalty, engagement)
- **challenge** (honesty, discernment, constructive feedback)

This combination builds trust, sharpens leadership, and ultimately strengthens the entire ministry.

David's Mighty Men: Biblical Examples of Exemplary Followers

When we talk about exemplary followers, it's easy to think in terms of qualities and concepts such as critical thinking, initiative, loyalty, and engagement.

The Bible, however, gives us vivid, real-life examples of followers who lived out these qualities. Some of the most powerful illustrations come from the lives of David's Mighty Men.

This was a group of warriors whose loyalty, courage, and initiative supported and strengthened David in his leadership and God's purposes.

Who They Were

David's Mighty Men were not merely skilled fighters; they functioned as trusted partners who strengthened and supported his leadership. Scripture records their extraordinary acts of courage, loyalty, and initiative in both crisis and opportunity⁷ (2 Samuel 23:8–39; 1 Chronicles 11:10–47).

These warriors consistently demonstrated bravery in the face of overwhelming odds, steadfast commitment to David's kingship, and creative action that brought victory in impossible situations. Together, they formed a loyal band of leaders whose strength did not compete with David's leadership but complemented and advanced it.

A few examples stand out:

- **Josheb-Basshebeth the Tachmonite** – renowned for striking down 800 men at one battle (2 Samuel 23:8). His courage and effectiveness under pressure exemplify decisive action and responsibility.
- **Eleazar, son of Dodai** – he stood his ground when others fled and defended the field of battle until his hand grew tired and froze to the sword (2 Samuel 23:9–10). This illustrates perseverance and a refusal to abandon his role, even when physically and mentally exhausted.

- **Shammah son of Agee** – he defended a field of lentils against overwhelming opposition, refusing to yield despite danger (2 Samuel 23:11–12). His initiative and commitment prevented potential chaos, showing how one follower can impact the broader mission.
- **Benaiah, son of Jehoiada** – noted for his daring exploits, including killing two Moabite warriors and a lion in a pit on a snowy day (2 Samuel 23:20–21). His boldness, loyalty, and willingness to take calculated risks demonstrate courage, paired with strategic initiative.

Qualities of Exemplary followers

From these mighty men and their stories, we can see a pattern of traits that mirror what we now call exemplary followership:

- **Courage under pressure** – they did not shrink back when the stakes were high.
- **Independent judgment** – they acted decisively, not merely following orders, but doing what the situation required.

- **Loyalty to the mission and leader** – their commitment was to God’s purposes and to David’s leadership, even when personal risk was involved.
- **Ownership and initiative** – they took responsibility for critical tasks and defended their roles actively, not passively.

Reflective Questions

1. **Which qualities of David’s Mighty Men resonate most with you as a follower?**
2. **In your current ministry, where could you take initiative like Eleazar or Shammah to support your team?**
3. **How can loyalty and courage in your followership help your leader and mission thrive?**
4. **Are there moments when you are holding back when the mission calls for decisive action?**

Lessons for Today

David's Mighty Men remind us that strong leadership flourishes when followers are strong: disciplined, loyal, courageous, and wise. Exemplary followers create space for leaders to lead effectively, carry the mission forward, and multiply impact.

By studying these biblical examples, followers today can see that exemplary followership is neither passive nor secondary. Like David's Mighty Men, followers who act faithfully, courageously, and thoughtfully strengthen both leaders and the mission.

However, even when followers are gifted or spiritually mature, many still challenge or frustrate their leaders. God has a calling on someone's life; they can preach, pray, know their Bible, and be highly impactful. However, without followership skills, this impactful leader, who is also a follower, frustrates their leaders.

Exemplary followers, like David's Mighty Men, bring joy to their leaders, instill strength and courage, and provide substantial support without heartache or frustration. Followers are called to support their leaders so leaders can lead with freedom and focus, rather than carrying unnecessary burdens.

Personal Reflection: Learning to Follow Well

At the risk of being vulnerable, let me use myself as an example. I have lived this out personally. After more than thirty years in ministry, I can honestly say I have not always been an exemplary follower. I learned how to pray, preach, and teach God's Word effectively. I pursued spiritual formation and discipleship faithfully.

However, I eventually discovered something unsettling: spiritual maturity and ministry competence are not the same as functional organizational followership.

Please do not misunderstand me, I was not a rebellious or careless team member. My heart has always been to honor God and to serve my leaders and church well.

However, I struggled, at times, to submit my attitudes, responses, and actions in ways that genuinely strengthened the leaders God had placed over me. I did not realize it then, but I could occasionally be difficult to lead challenging, confrontational, or resistant when I believed I was helping.

When I began studying organizational followership, the Holy Spirit quietly exposed a missing piece in my own life. I suddenly saw the connection: leadership alone is not enough. Followership was the *missing link* in my ministry development.

Looking back, I can see how pride, insecurity, territorial thinking, and simple misunderstanding all played a role. I had never consciously connected learning to follow well with becoming a healthy leader. Before anyone becomes a great leader, they must first become a faithful follower.

There were seasons when I frustrated my leaders. That was never my intention, and by God's grace, I would find my way back to repentance and alignment.

I can remember being in meetings and saying things that would challenge my leader in front of others, or planting seeds of division rather than unity.

I remain deeply grateful for leaders who showed patience and refused to give up on me. I often wonder how different some ministry relationships might have been if I had learned about followership earlier in my walk with Christ.

Through this growing understanding, God has been transforming me not merely educating me. Earning a degree in strategic leadership mattered, but the greater work was who God was shaping me to become through the process.

Today, my relationships with leaders are healthier and stronger than ever. Learning the strangely unfamiliar word "*followership*" changed not only how I lead but also how I serve.

That is why I am so passionate about this subject. Followership may be one of the most overlooked spiritual dynamics in the life and health of the church.

Misunderstandings About Followership

While these follower types provide a working understanding of followership, it is important to recognize that followership is often misunderstood. For many, the word “follower” itself evokes negative assumptions rooted in bad experiences, cultural values, or unhealthy leadership models.

Taking time to address these misconceptions is necessary because when followership is misunderstood, it is often undervalued or avoided altogether. On the other hand, if we can get over these misunderstandings, followership can flourish. Let me share two common stigmas that can distort both followers' perceptions and practices. First, some say that followership is *passive* and *submissive*. Followers are viewed as mindless, compliant, and simply doing what they are told.⁸ Chaleff, a leading expert on followership, directly challenges this misconception.

His concept of *courageous followership* argues that effective followers support their leaders while also being willing to speak up, ask hard questions, and push back when something is wrong. Courageous followership calls for moral strength, loyalty rooted in a shared purpose, and the courage to act in the mission's best interests even when it is uncomfortable. Being a follower is not passive: it is active, intentional, and relationally influential.

Others say that followership is *inferior* to leadership. This stigma assumes that leadership is more important or influential, while followership is secondary or lesser. Barbara Kellerman, a leadership expert, challenges this idea.

She noted that followers especially those who are active and engaged- often wield significant influence. She argues that followers shape the culture, reinforce values, and ultimately determine whether leadership succeeds or fails.⁹ Leadership does not operate in a vacuum; it is influenced, shaped, strengthened, or weakened by the people who choose how to follow.

In most organizational contexts, the general assumption is that people aspire to leadership rather than followership.

Sandra Slager, a Forbes Council member, notes, “Today, everyone wants to give you tips and tricks to improve your leadership skills. If you search for ‘leadership’ as a keyword in Google Scholar, you will see 139,000 articles from 2018 alone” (Slager, 2019).

However, she observes that “compared to the 139,000 articles on ‘leadership,’ there are fewer than 3,000 articles on ‘followership’ in 2018. Perhaps it is that skill leaders expect their staff to own innately” (Slager, 2019).¹⁰

While these common stigmas distort the true value of followership, research and, more importantly, Scripture paints a very different picture.

Far from being passive or inferior, faithful followership is active, influential, and essential to God’s design for leadership and community.

Consider some exemplary followers in Scripture. Figures such as Joshua, Elisha, Ruth, Timothy, and Barnabas model how to combine deep commitment with thoughtful obedience. We certainly must not forget the original disciples of Christ. They didn't merely comply with authority; they partnered in God's purposes.

Each (although not perfectly) demonstrated initiative, discernment, and faithfulness within their assigned roles, showing that exemplary followership is not passive submission but active participation in the mission of God.

Given the crucial role of exemplary followers, learning to embody the characteristics of a great follower is essential to becoming an effective, usable leader in the kingdom of God.

If churches aim to raise strong, effective leaders and teams, they must emphasize and integrate the principles of effective followership into their volunteer development. This has long been unrecognized or underemphasized.¹¹

Followership In Action: Supporting Vision with Courage

Earlier, I shared that in 2010, our church, Lakeshore Christian Fellowship, launched a satellite campus in Catawba, S.C. After four to five years as campus pastors, my wife and I finally began to hit our stride and see real fruitfulness. We were grateful and excited! After much door-knocking, sharing Jesus, and picking up kids from the community on the bus, campus attendance was growing.

Early in 2015, our senior pastor, who also served as a district overseer for our denomination, was tasked with finding another pastor or church to assume responsibility for a church property in Gastonia, N.C. He shared the vision with our staff and told us the property would remain vacant until someone stepped in.

When my wife and I heard this, something stirred in us. She was righteously angry at the Devil for the state of that church property. Even though we were settled in Catawba, something rose within her.

It bothered her that God's house, right in the middle of a neighborhood, was not being used for His purposes. Then, on February 26th, 2015, I had a dream.

I remember it vividly. I received something in the mail. Someone was with me, though I didn't know who. When I opened it, I discovered an invitation to enter a gardening contest!

Along with the letter was a half-sheet flyer showing a sample garden, with different groupings of plants illustrating what a fully planted, mature garden could look like. The contest required submitting a sample garden and then identifying your plot at the contest location. The whole experience felt exciting, full of possibility a wonderful opportunity waiting to be embraced.

At first, I decided not to enter. I thought, "Oh, I can't do this I'm no good at gardening. Pastor Gil could do this. He's good at this!" Yet I felt encouraged to give it a shot, as if the Lord were nudging me.

The second part of the dream involved our senior pastor's wife, Debbie. I saw her sitting in a restaurant, enjoying a meal. She explained that she had arrived early because she had somewhere to go later, and that the food was excellent, partly from Pastor Gil's garden.

Then I found myself in a hallway where Pastor Gil was heading out to get more food to prepare. He seemed unsure what to get. I asked, "You got it?" clear as mud, right? He replied, "Yep, clear as mud." Yet he seemed fine with it, as if uncertainty was just part of the process. Then the dream ended.

The next morning, I woke, grabbed my Bible, and poured a cup of coffee. I asked the Lord about the dream, and here's the interpretation I received: God was encouraging me to expect opportunities to increase in His Kingdom possibly in a pastoral role. He didn't want me to disqualify myself just because I felt I couldn't do it the way Pastor Gil did. Even he doesn't have it all figured out.

God had uniquely gifted and equipped me to feed people and cultivate a spiritual garden where others could grow and mature in their faith.

That morning, I went into the church office, shared the dream with Pastor Gil, and told him I sensed the Lord wanted Yolanda and me to step out in faith and support Him in taking over the NC location to start another satellite campus.

In March of 2016, we had a soft launch. With Pastor Gil's blessing and help, we stepped away from our Catawba campus assignment and have been in Gastonia, NC, ever since. It has not been easy, but we know we are where God wants us supporting the vision He placed in our leader's heart.

I remember Pastor Gil saying in a meeting, "Rob, I'm so glad you came to me and shared this because in our council meetings, your and your wife's names came up. But I couldn't quit seeing how we could ask you to leave the Catawba congregation."

Sometimes, strong exemplary followership shows itself in bold steps of faithful courage stepping out into new territory to support what God has placed in your leader's heart.

Reflective Questions for Personal Growth

- 1. Which of Kelley's five follower types most honestly describes my current posture in leadership—and why?**
 - What evidence in my behavior supports that assessment?
- 2. Where am I currently limiting my effectiveness as a follower—through disengagement, over-compliance, passivity, or hesitation to think critically?**
 - What is one specific situation that reveals this?
- 3. What would change in my leadership, ministry, or team relationships if I intentionally moved toward exemplary followership?**
 - What is one concrete step I can take this week to move in that direction?
- 4. Who has God placed around me that I influence as a follower—and am I helping them become stronger or weaker in their followership?**
 - What does that say about my leadership impact today?

CHAPTER 3 ~
DISCIPLESHIP IS
NOT
FOLLOWERSHIP

As we begin to identify the traits and behaviors of exemplary followers, a potential source of confusion emerges, especially within church contexts. Many assume that if a person is being discipled, they will naturally become an effective follower.

It seems logical. After all, if someone is growing spiritually, deepening in their faith, and becoming more like Christ, shouldn't that translate into how they function within a team or under leadership? However, experience and observation suggest otherwise.

Spiritual maturity does not automatically translate into functional followership. While discipleship and followership are deeply connected, they are not the same. To develop healthy teams and strong leaders, churches must understand the distinction between spiritual formation and organizational engagement. Clarifying this difference helps explain why followership is often underdeveloped, even in environments where discipleship is strong.

The Assumptions about Discipleship and Followership

Understanding the importance of followership raises an unavoidable question:

If effective followership is so critical to healthy leadership and organizational culture, why is it so often underdeveloped in churches?

One key reason is this: followership is frequently assumed to be synonymous with discipleship.

After all, we are commanded by Christ Himself to make disciples (Matthew 28:19-20). The mission is clear. So, it is natural to believe that as we disciple people teaching them Scripture, forming spiritual habits, and helping them grow in Christ they will also become effective followers in every other sense.

However, while discipleship and followership are closely related, they are not interchangeable. Blurring the distinction has unintentionally created a gap in how churches prepare people to function within teams, align with leadership, and carry responsibility in the mission.

Discipleship is essential but it is not sufficient on its own to produce healthy followership.

What the Church is Actually Developing

In both pastoral experience and research among church leaders, a consistent pattern emerges. When asked how churches cultivate exemplary followers, the overwhelming response points to discipleship practices.

Leaders describe:

- **Bible reading**
- **Prayer**
- **Journaling**
- **Discipleship programs**
- **Releasing people into their gifts**

One leader described discipleship as “the most effective way” to form followers.¹² Others emphasized spiritual habits and ministry opportunities as the primary tools for development. These practices are essential. They are non-negotiable for Christian maturity.

However, they also reveal a deeply embedded assumption: that spiritual growth alone will naturally produce effective followership. Furthermore, this is where the gap begins.

The Difference Between Discipleship and Followership

This assumption, while understandable, overlooks a crucial distinction:

Discipleship forms the heart.

Followership trains the hands, feet, and mind to act faithfully in community.

Discipleship focuses on who we are becoming in Christ.

Followership focuses on how we function within His mission.

Discipleship is primarily:

- **Internal**
- **Formational**
- **Vertical (our relationship with God)**

Followership is primarily:

- **External**
- **Functional**
- **Horizontal (our relationship within a team and under leadership)**

We might say it this way:

- **Discipleship shapes identity**
- **Followership shapes contribution**

Or even more simply:

Discipleship answers, “*Who am I becoming?*”

Followership answers, “*How am I showing up and contributing?*”

Both are necessary but they are not the same.

Biblical Evidence: Disciples Who Had to Learn Followership

The New Testament itself reveals this distinction. The disciples of Jesus were deeply committed. They left everything to follow Him. They listened to His teaching, observed His life, and were formed spiritually under His leadership.

However—they often struggled to follow well.

- They argued about who was the greatest (Luke 22:24)
- They resisted Jesus' direction (Mark 8:31–33)
- They lacked vigilance and initiative (Matthew 26:40)

They were disciples but they were still developing as followers.

Spiritual proximity to Jesus did not automatically produce functional alignment, initiative, or understanding.

In contrast, we see examples of strong followership in the early church:

- Timothy is described as one who genuinely cares, aligns with Paul's mission, and serves with proven character (Philippians 2:19–22)
- The builders in Nehemiah's day worked with clarity, coordination, and shared responsibility under leadership (Nehemiah 3–4)

The biblical witness is clear: spiritual devotion and effective followership, while connected, are not identical. Both must be developed.

Where The Breakdown Happens in the Church

This distinction becomes most visible in everyday church life.

Consider a few common scenarios:

A believer is deeply committed faithful in attendance, engaged in Bible study, consistent in prayer. They love the Lord and desire to serve. However, when placed on a team, they resist direction, struggle with feedback, or operate independently of leadership.

Another individual is gifted and willing but lacks initiative. They wait to be told every step of the way, avoid responsibility, and never take ownership of outcomes.

In both cases, discipleship is present but followership is underdeveloped. These are not issues of spiritual apathy, but of functional engagement. Moreover, they are far more common than many leaders realize.

Why This Distinction Matters

When churches equate discipleship with followership, they unintentionally create teams filled with spiritually mature individuals who are misaligned, passive, or difficult to lead.

The issue is not a lack of devotion—it is a lack of coordinated movement. A church can be full of disciples and still struggle to move forward effectively.

Because the mission of the church advances not through maturity alone, but through maturity expressed in aligned, active, and responsible followership.

Without intentional development of followership:

- Leaders carry unnecessary weight
- Teams lack cohesion
- Vision stalls in execution
- Frustration increases on all sides

However, when followership is cultivated alongside discipleship:

- Teams become aligned and proactive
- Leaders are supported rather than strained
- Responsibility is shared
- Mission accelerates

Clarifying the Relationship Between Discipleship and Followership

To recognize this distinction is not to diminish discipleship; it is to clarify it. Discipleship remains the foundation.

Without spiritual formation, followership becomes shallow, mechanical, or self-driven.

But without followership, discipleship often remains incomplete in its expression. Healthy churches do not choose between the two. They intentionally develop both.

The Question We Must Now Answer

If discipleship and followership are not the same, then the question becomes unavoidable:

How do we intentionally develop both?

The answer requires more than adding another program or class. It requires rethinking how we train people to function within teams, respond to leadership, take initiative, and carry responsibility in the mission of the church. Because the goal is not just to form people who love Jesus deeply, but to develop people who can move together effectively in what He has called them to do.

A Biblical Example: Peter's Struggle with Followership

A person can love Jesus deeply and still struggle to follow well within the leadership structures God uses to accomplish His mission. A helpful biblical example of this is the life of Simon Peter.

Few individuals in the New Testament demonstrate greater devotion to Jesus than Peter. He left his livelihood as a fisherman to follow Christ, walked closely with Him throughout His ministry, and boldly confessed that Jesus was the Messiah.

In many ways, Peter represents what most churches would describe as a successful, maturing disciple. He believed deeply and was passionate about Christ's mission. However, one specific moment in his story reveals that spiritual devotion does not automatically produce effective followership.

In Matthew 16:21–23, Jesus begins to prepare His disciples for what is to come. He explains that He must go to Jerusalem, suffer many things, be killed, and then be raised on the third day (Matt. 16:21–23).

This was not the kind of message the disciples expected to hear. Their understanding of the Messiah pointed to victory, power, and restoration for Israel—not defeat, suffering, and death. Peter, committed to Jesus and convinced that He is the Son of God, responds strongly.

Scripture tells us that Peter took Jesus aside and began to *rebuke* Him, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you” (Matt. 16:22).

The moment is striking. Peter is not rebuking Jesus out of rebellion or hatred; he is doing so out of sincere loyalty. From Peter’s perspective, he is defending his leader. However, Jesus responds with an unusually sharp correction: “Get behind me, Satan! You are an offense to me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men” (Matt. 16:23 NKJV).

The language Jesus uses reveals how serious the situation is. Peter’s intentions may have been sincere, but his response represented a failure of followership. What Jesus needed most from Peter in this moment was alignment and support.

Instead of aligning himself with the leader he followed, Peter attempted to redirect that leader to fit his own expectations.

This moment reveals an important insight. Peter was clearly a maturing disciple of Jesus, but in that moment, he was not functioning as an exemplary follower.

His heart was devoted, yet his thinking and responses were misaligned with his leader's mission and direction. Spiritual sincerity did not automatically translate into effective followership. For churches, this distinction is crucial. Discipleship rightly focuses on shaping the heart cultivating love for Christ, commitment to Scripture, prayer, and obedience to God.

These practices are foundational to Christian life and cannot be neglected. However, followership involves additional competencies that are often assumed rather than intentionally developed.

According to Kelley, effective followers learn how to align with leadership, support shared mission, think critically while remaining loyal, and contribute responsibly within a team.¹³ These are relational and organizational skills that complement spiritual formation but are not automatically produced by it.

When churches assume that discipleship alone will form effective followers, an important developmental gap can emerge. Individuals may grow spiritually yet still struggle to function well within teams or under leadership.

They may possess strong convictions and passion for ministry while simultaneously resisting direction, misunderstanding authority, or failing to take initiative.

The result is often frustrating for both leaders and followers, not because discipleship has failed, but because followership has never been intentionally taught.

Recognizing this distinction allows churches to strengthen both areas rather than confusing them. Discipleship forms the character and devotion of believers, while followership equips them to participate effectively within the mission and leadership structures God uses to accomplish His work.

When both are intentionally cultivated, churches not only develop mature Christians but also build healthy teams capable of sustaining meaningful ministry.

Practicing Followership in the Local Church

As we embrace the need for both discipleship and followership, how do we begin applying *followership principles in our local church context*?

As a team member, one of the first things one needs to do is “align my heart with leadership.”

Kelley defines followership as the active relational role of engaging, supporting, and contributing to leadership, teams, and the mission.

He further emphasizes that effective followers learn how to align with leadership, support a shared mission, think critically while remaining loyal, and contribute responsibly within a team.

Taking this first step in our followership toolbox helps one align with God's mission through the structures He has put in place in the local church.

Aligning with Leadership

How can I support my leaders? What can I do to move the mission forward? What initiative can I take in my ministry role to strengthen my team? These are questions exemplary followers ask themselves to maintain healthy followership.

In addition, other relational principles that enable one to live out followership include listening carefully before responding in ministry discussions. This is part of critical thinking, which also demonstrates engagement.

Critical thinking before responding can guard against followers attempting to redirect leaders to fit our personal preferences; instead, we can offer suggestions with humility, always trusting God with the outcomes.

Thinking Critically as a Follower

Critical thinking can be developed. This is a big part of following well. Following does not mean blind obedience; followers are responsible thinkers. As a team member, one needs to learn to ask clarifying questions, such as “Can you help me understand the goal?”

This type of question will enable one to weigh discussions against biblical principles and help clarify next steps.

Sometimes, presenting suggestions is appropriate; sometimes, simply doing what our leadership asks is the right thing to do. When we consider the exchange between Jesus and Peter, in Matthew 16:21-23, we know Peter loved Jesus.

However, he needed to develop greater alignment and critical thinking to keep him from rebuking Jesus at a critical juncture in Jesus' life and mission.

Taking Initiative

Taking initiative on our ministry teams is part of effective followership. Developing the ability to do what we can without being asked is a strength to leadership and our teams. Passive followers wait to be told what to do, while exemplary followers ask themselves, “*What can I do to make this better?*”

Followers must learn to utilize their gifts and strengths in ways that go beyond what they have been asked to do, while maintaining a balance that avoids overstepping boundaries.

Noticing problems and offering solutions before they escalate. Mentoring, strengthening, and training others. Taking steps towards assisting team members without being asked.

These are all steps towards taking greater initiative, something effective followers learn to do. Faithfully initiating in small assignments prepares one for greater responsibility.

Protecting Unity

Another important practice for church members is developing a spirit of unity and protection over the mission and the team. Healthy followership understands that the success of the local church is not dependent on any one individual, but on a unified body working together under Christ.

This means choosing to speak well of leadership and others, guarding against gossip, and refusing to divide what God is building. When concerns arise, exemplary followers bring those concerns directly to the appropriate leader with humility and a desire for resolution, not division. This protects the health of the church and reflects a heart aligned with God's design for His people.

Serving Faithfully

Followership also involves a willingness to serve faithfully in seasons that may feel unseen or uncelebrated. Much of what strengthens a church happens behind the scenes faithful service, consistency, and quiet obedience.

Followers who embrace this reality understand that faithfulness in small and hidden places is not wasted but, in fact, shapes their character and prepares them for future responsibility.

In the kingdom of God, visibility is not the measure of value faithfulness is. Jesus Himself modeled this kind of leadership as He served, submitted to the Father, and consistently followed His mission even when it required humility and sacrifice.

Practicing Teachability

Another key aspect of followership is teachability. A teachable follower remains open to correction, willing to grow, and eager to receive feedback. Instead of resisting guidance, they lean into it, recognizing that correction is part of growth.

Proverbs 12:1 teaches that “whoever loves discipline loves knowledge” (Prov. 12:1). In the context of followership, this means being quick to listen, slow to defend, and willing to adjust. A teachable spirit strengthens both the individual and the entire team.

Living with Consistency

Finally, followership requires consistency and dependability. Churches thrive when followers are faithful to show up, follow through, and complete what has been entrusted to them. Reliability builds trust, and trust strengthens teams.

When followers are consistent in their attendance, their service, and their commitment to the mission, they create stability within the church. This kind of steady faithfulness reflects Christ's character and contributes to a healthy, thriving church environment.

Conclusion: Followership in Action

As we practice these principles alignment, critical thinking, initiative, unity, faithfulness, teachability, and consistency we begin to grow into the kind of followers who strengthen leaders, build healthy teams, and advance the mission of the local church. Followership is not about passivity; it is about active, intentional engagement in the work God is doing among His people.

Reflective Questions for Personal Growth

- 1. Where have I assumed that my spiritual maturity automatically makes me a good follower in teams or under leadership?**
 - Where has that assumption been challenged in real life?
- 2. In what specific areas of my ministry life do I see a gap between my personal discipleship and my functional followership?**
 - (Examples: responding to leadership, receiving feedback, initiative, unity, or alignment)
- 3. Which followership skill is most lacking in my current season—alignment, initiative, critical thinking, unity, teachability, or consistency?**
 - What is one practical step I can take this week to grow in that area?

CHAPTER 4 ~
LEADERS DON'T
GET THE
FOLLOWERS THEY
WANT

Recognizing that discipleship alone does not automatically produce effective followership leads to a critical reality: leaders rarely get the followers they prefer; they tend to receive the kind of followers their culture forms. As my capstone research argues, the behaviors leaders consistently model and the relational environments they cultivate are key forces in shaping that culture and, in turn, how people learn to follow.

If churches desire exemplary followers, leaders must understand how their own leadership practices either encourage or inhibit engagement, initiative, and alignment. What leaders model, our teams mirror.

Understanding what exemplary followership looks like and distinguishing it from discipleship are critical steps. Equally important is recognizing that followers do not develop in isolation; they are shaped, influenced, and empowered (or hindered) by the leaders they serve.

The quality of followership in any church, team, or organization is directly tied to how leaders model values, cultivate relationships, and invest in people. This section explores how leaders shape the followers they attract. Leaders, let us be intentional about fostering a culture in which exemplary followership can flourish.

Leadership Shapes Followership Culture

A powerful biblical example of how leadership shapes the culture of followership can be found in Nehemiah 4. In this chapter, Nehemiah is not only leading a rebuilding effort he is actively shaping how his people respond to pressure, opposition, and fear.

As the work of rebuilding the wall progresses, opposition intensifies. Sanballat, Tobiah, and others begin to mock, intimidate, and discourage the workers, attempting to derail the mission through fear and distraction.

In response, Nehemiah demonstrates a leadership posture that directly cultivates strong followership. First, he models dependence on God through prayer,

showing that the mission is not sustained by human strength alone.

Then, he addresses the people's fears with clarity and courage, reminding them of the Lord's greatness and calling them to stand firm: "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome" (Nehemiah 4:14). His leadership is not reactive it is intentional, faith-filled, and stabilizing.

Nehemiah also reshapes the team's culture by organizing the people for both work and protection. He places some to build while others stand guard, demonstrating that everyone has a role and that engagement is required from all.

He equips the people with both a tool and a weapon, symbolizing the balance between building and battling. This communicates a clear expectation: followers are not passive observers, but active participants in the mission.

Furthermore, Nehemiah reinforces a culture of unity and vigilance. When discouragement begins to spread among the workers, he responds by implementing strategic encouragement and accountability.

His leadership does not eliminate opposition, but it equips people to remain faithful in the face of it. As a result, the followers respond with increased resolve, and the work continues with renewed focus.

This passage reveals a critical truth: leaders not only influence what followers believe, but also how they respond under pressure. Nehemiah's leadership cultivated a culture of courage, resilience, and engagement.

His people did not merely follow instructions; they embraced the mission, stood together, and labored with both faith and diligence.

The implication is clear: when leaders lead with prayer, clarity, courage, and structure, followers rise to meet the moment.

When leaders set the tone, followers respond in kind. Nehemiah's example reinforces that the culture leaders create directly shapes the kind of followers they produce, especially in seasons of challenge.

Nehemiah's example highlights a broader leadership principle consistently affirmed throughout this book: followers are shaped not only by instruction but also by their leaders' character, presence, and example.

Leadership Presence and the Formation of Followers

Another significant theme to emerge from my research is that exemplary leaders inspire follower engagement through their character, presence, and example. Followership does not flourish simply because leaders hold authority or cast vision; it grows when leaders embody the values they hope to see reflected in others.

Participants consistently emphasized that leaders must first see themselves as followers humble learners who recognize, affirm, and release the gifts of those around them.

Leaders who are approachable, inclusive, and present create environments where followers feel seen and valued. Small behaviors such as approachability, warmth, attentiveness, and shared life communicate whether followers truly belong. When leaders fail to make relational space for people, engagement erodes. On the other hand, when leaders cultivate connection, foster belonging, and invite participation, followers are far more likely to invest themselves fully in the mission.

The research I conducted also revealed a strong emphasis on servant leadership. Leaders who are willing to serve alongside others, rather than above them, establish credibility and trust.

Followers are most engaged when leaders model humility, integrity, and a Christlike life worth imitating. As one participant noted, leaders should live in such a way that others see Jesus in them and desire the life they embody.

These findings highlight a clear truth: leaders shape culture, and culture shapes followers. Modeling humility, servanthood, and Christlike care inspires active, engaged followership.

Engagement is not demanded it is awakened by intentional leadership.

This influence is not limited to one-on-one relationships it flows throughout the team and the broader ministry context. Take a moment to reflect: *What kind of followers am I producing through the way I lead and model Christlike character?* As Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 11:1, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.” With intentional leadership, a team's culture can be transformed, paving the way for the next step: developing whole teams that embody exemplary followership.

Case Study: When Leadership Was Not the Problem

Riverside Church was not struggling because of poor leadership. In fact, most observers would have described the church as healthy. Attendance was steady, ministries were active, and the senior pastor was widely respected for his preaching, vision, and pastoral care.

However, beneath the surface, something felt off.

Staff meetings were tense.

Volunteer teams lacked momentum.

Ministry initiatives started strong but slowly lost energy.

Leaders began asking familiar questions:

- *Is the vision unclear?*
- *Do we need better leadership training?*
- *Should we restructure ministries again?*

The assumption was simple: if results were lagging, leadership must be the issue.

So, the church did what many churches do: they invested heavily in leadership development. Staff attended conferences. Leaders read new books. Strategic plans were rewritten. Expectations were clarified.

But nothing fundamentally changed.

The pastor later reflected, *“We kept trying to fix leadership, but leadership wasn’t actually broken.”*

Discovering the Real Issue

During a leadership retreat, one observation shifted the entire conversation.

A ministry director quietly said:

“We have strong leaders... but we’ve never taught anyone how to follow.”

That statement exposed an unseen reality.

Many team members loved the church and were spiritually mature. They prayed faithfully, served consistently, and believed in the mission. Yet followership expectations had never been defined or developed.

As leaders reflected honestly, they recognized several patterns:

- **Some volunteers waited passively for detailed instructions before acting.**
- **Others were highly gifted but frequently challenged decisions publicly, creating tension rather than unity.**
- **Some avoided responsibility altogether, assuming leadership would solve problems.**
- **Many equated faithfulness with attendance rather than ownership.**

The church had strong disciples but inconsistent followers.

Leadership had been emphasized for years; followership had been assumed.

Making the Shift to Intentional Followership

Rather than replacing leaders or restructuring ministries again, Riverside Church made a different decision: they would intentionally develop followership.

Over the next year, several changes were implemented:

1. Teaching Followership Explicitly

Staff meetings and volunteer trainings introduced the concept of followership. Leaders explained that following well was not passive but an active participation in the mission.

2. Clarifying Expectations

Teams began discussing responsibility, initiative, communication, and alignment. Volunteers learned that ownership was part of spiritual maturity.

3. Modeling from Leadership

Pastors openly demonstrated followership, submitting to accountability, receiving feedback, and serving alongside teams rather than above them.

4. Creating Safe Dialogue

Followers were encouraged to ask questions and offer ideas respectfully. Constructive feedback became welcomed rather than feared.

The Results of a Followership Culture

Within months, noticeable changes began to emerge. Meetings became collaborative rather than reactive. Ministry teams solved problems before they reached senior leadership.

Volunteers began initiating outreach ideas without waiting for permission.

Leaders reported renewed joy rather than fatigue.

Nothing about the church's theology changed.

The vision remained the same.

The leadership stayed largely unchanged.

What changed was the culture.

The pastor later summarized the experience this way:

“We didn’t need better leaders, we needed better followership. Once our people understood how to follow well, leadership suddenly became lighter, healthier, and more effective.”

Key Insight: Followership Drives Leadership Effectiveness

Riverside Church discovered a truth many ministries overlook:

Leadership effectiveness increased not when leadership improved, but when followership matured.

When followers moved from passive participation to exemplary engagement, leadership and mission advanced together.

Practical Ways to Cultivate Exemplary Followership

Now that we see how leadership without intentional followership can falter, the question becomes: ***What exactly can leaders do to cultivate the kind of followers who strengthen, rather than frustrate, their leadership?***

The following practices provide concrete ways to shape a culture of healthy, engaged, and exemplary followers. Each one models values that followers will mirror creating teams that thrive together in mission and unity.

To cultivate an exemplary culture of followership, leaders must first **model intellectual honesty**. Truth should matter more than hierarchy, and leaders set the tone by admitting when they are wrong. They publicly adjust their opinions when better information emerges, and reward team members who respectfully challenge assumptions.

When leaders demonstrate this, followers learn that critical thinking and honest feedback are not only safe but valued, creating more responsible and engaged team members.

Equally important is the need to **invite and protect constructive dissent**. Teams become passive when people fear speaking up, so leaders should actively ask for opposing views in meetings, respond calmly to disagreement, and shield those who raise concerns.

This approach mirrors the concept of “courageous followership” highlighted by Ira Chaleff and encourages followers to be active contributors rather than silent executors.

Leaders must also **demonstrate accountability first**. Followers will rarely accept responsibility that leaders themselves avoid. By publicly taking responsibility when decisions fail, avoiding blame of subordinates for systemic issues, and owning the consequences of leadership decisions, leaders foster a culture of shared ownership rather than mere compliance.

Another essential practice is to **show respect for expertise, not just authority**. Exemplary followers add value through knowledge and insight, not just obedience. Leaders can encourage this by deferring to subject-matter experts, giving public credit for good ideas, and seeking input before making decisions.

The result is followers who feel psychological ownership and intellectual responsibility for outcomes.

Finally, leaders must **consistently align words, decisions, and incentives**. Culture is shaped less by what leaders say than by what they reward. By promoting initiative, problem-solving, integrity, and collaboration and avoiding rewards for passive compliance leaders reinforce the behaviors that drive real success, as Edgar Schein describes.¹⁴

Culture Determines the Followers You Get

Ultimately, the followers we attract and develop reflect the leadership culture we create. When leaders model humility, accountability, openness, and respect for expertise, followers feel safe engaging. As a result, offering ideas and even disagreeing when necessary, strengthening both the team and the mission.

Recognizing this dynamic helps leaders see that followership is not about control, but about cultivating an environment where initiative, responsibility, and collaboration flourish.

Now it's time to pause and reflect: how does this play out in your own ministry context, and what small steps can you take to foster healthier, more engaged followers?

Reflective Questions for Personal Growth

- 1. What kind of followers is my current leadership culture actually producing—passive, dependent, or engaged—and what evidence supports that?**

- Where do I see this showing up in real team behavior?
2. **In what specific ways might my leadership habits unintentionally limit initiative, ownership, or honest feedback from others?**
- (Consider meetings, decision-making, or how I respond to disagreement.)
3. **If my team mirrors what I model, what do I consistently reinforce more: compliance or engagement?**
- What is one leadership behavior I need to adjust this week to shift that pattern?

CHAPTER 5 ~ WHY
CHURCHES
OVERLOOK
FOLLOWERSHIP

If followership is so essential and it is then why do so many churches overlook it?

Part of the answer is that we live in a culture shaped almost entirely by leader-centered thinking. Even in the church, leadership receives the most attention, the most language, and the most development.

We talk about leadership growth, leadership pipelines, leadership conferences, and leadership gifting. But far less attention is given to what it means to follow well.

In fact, how often have you ever heard someone in church say, “God is calling you to become a better follower”? Outside of being a follower of Christ in a general discipleship sense, followership itself is rarely defined, taught, or developed.

It is assumed more than it is formed. This raises an important question: if leadership is about influence, why have we spent so little time understanding the people we influence?

A Leader-Centered Culture That Misses Followership

The reality is that most of our leadership thinking both inside and outside the church has been shaped by a leader-centered worldview. In this framework, leaders are seen as the primary drivers of vision, change, and success.

Followers are often assumed to be the ones who simply receive direction and carry it out.

This is not only a modern church issue. It reflects a long history of leadership thought that has placed leaders at the center of attention while treating followers as secondary.

But this creates a subtle problem: if everything depends on leadership, then followers become invisible in the process. And when followers are invisible, they are rarely formed.

Yet every church already has followers. The question is not whether followership exists, but whether it is healthy, intentional, and biblically shaped.

Without that formation, followership becomes passive rather than active, reactive rather than engaged, and unclear rather than purposeful. And that gap has real consequences for the life of the church.

Kelley (1992) says leadership has been exalted for over 2,500 years. However, few people have studied followers, and when they have, they have asked them for their views about leaders.¹⁵

Kelley tells a story in his book, *The Power of Followership*: A drunk lost his house keys during a barroom brawl outside the bar. He was on his hands and knees, searching under a streetlight repeatedly. After a few minutes, he walked over to the next streetlight and resumed searching.

Someone asked him if he had lost his keys near the streetlight. The drunk said, “**No.**” “Then why do you keep searching under streetlights?” The person asked. “***Because that is where the light is,***” the drunk responded.

Friend, Kelley says we search under the *streetlight of leadership* while ignoring the shadows of followership. While not a precise measurement, he estimates that leadership contributes 10–20% to organizational success, whereas followership drives 80–90%.

A Deep Look at Why this Gap Exists

This imbalance did not happen overnight. It developed over time as leadership became the dominant lens through which we understand organizational health and success.

We naturally look for better leaders when things are not working. We search for stronger vision, better communication, and more effective leadership strategies. And while leadership matters deeply, this focus can unintentionally blind us to something equally important the role of followers in shaping outcomes.

Because the truth is, every church already has followers in place. What is often missing is not followership itself, but intentional formation in followership.

Without that formation, people are left to figure it out on their own. And when that happens, followership becomes inconsistent and unclear. Some people disengage. Others over-function. Others wait passively for direction. And still others try to lead without ever learning how to follow well first.

This creates confusion in the body of Christ not because people don't care, but because they were never taught how to follow in a healthy, biblical way.

The Knowledge Gap in the Church

Recently, I had the opportunity to speak with over 100 pastors, leaders, and ministry team members gathered from churches across the Eastern United States. As part of the session, I asked a simple question:

“How many of you have ever even heard the word followership?”

Of more than 100 church team members, only one person raised their hand.

That moment was both surprising and revealing.

It confirmed something I have increasingly seen in both ministry and research contexts: followership is not rejected it is largely unknown. Most churches are deeply committed to developing leadership.

But very few have been given the tools or language to develop followership with the same intentionality.

As a result, churches often default to a leadership-only model. The assumption becomes that if leadership is strong enough, everything else will fall into place. But ministry experience shows us that this is not always true.

Strong leadership without healthy followership still produces misalignment. Vision may be clear, but execution becomes inconsistent. Direction may be strong, but unity becomes fragile. Something important is missing from the formation process.

And most of the time, that missing piece is not more leadership it is more intentional followership.

Why this Matters More than We Realize

When followership is overlooked, it does not remain an abstract problem. It shows up in everyday church life. Leaders begin to feel as if they are constantly pushing the vision uphill.

Teams struggle with consistency. Volunteers drift in and out of engagement. Communication breaks down not always because of rebellion, but because of confusion.

At the same time, followers often feel just as frustrated. They may believe in the vision but feel unsure how to align with it. They want to contribute but do not know where they fit. They love the church but struggle to translate that love into meaningful participation.

The result is a quiet disconnect between leaders and followers. And over time, both sides can begin to misunderstand one another.

Leaders assume people are disengaged. Followers assume leadership is unclear. But often, the deeper issue is that followership itself has never been formed.

The Church's Discipleship Gap

This reveals something deeper than organizational structure it reveals a discipleship gap. The church has done well in many places, teaching people how to believe, worship, and serve. But far less attention has been given to teaching people how to follow well within the body of Christ.

And yet Scripture assumes that God's people will know how to walk together in unity under spiritual leadership. Healthy followership is not blind agreement or passive compliance.

It is the mature ability to align with vision, support leadership, engage mission, and participate in what God is doing through the local church. When this formation is missing, churches often feel the effects without being able to name the cause.

We may call it disengagement, lack of unity, or leadership strain. But underneath many of these issues is a simple reality: people were never taught how to follow well.

Followership as a Spiritual Formation Issue

Followership is not just an organizational skill it is a spiritual formation *issue*. At its core, followership is about learning how to faithfully respond to God's direction through godly leadership. In the church, followership requires humility, trust, discernment, and spiritual maturity.

This is why followership is not passive. It is active. It is not weak. It is intentional. And it is not secondary. It is foundational. In many ways, followership is where spiritual discipleship becomes visible in community life. It is where belief turns into alignment, and where individual faith becomes shared mission.

Without it, people may love God sincerely but still struggle to move in step with what God is doing in the body. But when followership is healthy, something powerful happens unity strengthens, mission becomes shared, and ministry becomes multiplied.

Followership As the Engine of Ministry Effectiveness

Robert Kelley's work helps clarify this reality. While leaders are often credited with shaping organizational success, followers carry much of the weight of implementation, momentum, and execution. Leaders may set direction, but followers determine movement.

This aligns with a biblical principle found in Hosea 4:6: *"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge."* Often, the issue is not unwillingness. It is unawareness. When something is not clearly taught, it is rarely consistently practiced. This is where many churches find themselves today.

Leaders are developed. Systems are built. Vision is communicated. But followership is assumed rather than formed. And when followership is weak, even strong leadership struggles to produce lasting fruit.

When God's People Refuse to Follow

We see this dynamic clearly in Numbers 13–14. God had already spoken. He had already promised the land. And He had already appointed Moses to lead His people forward. Twelve spies were sent into the land. All twelve saw the same terrain, but they did not interpret it the same way.

Ten returned with fear. They focused on giants, obstacles, and limitations. Their report shifted the entire atmosphere: the land devours its inhabitants, and the people are stronger than we are.

In essence, their conclusion was, “*We are not able...*” a perspective that revealed a shift from God's promise to human limitation.

Fear spread quickly. Doubt followed. Complaining grew. And eventually, rebellion took root. What began as fear in a few leaders became a national crisis of followership.

Joshua and Caleb: A Different Spirit

But in the middle of this moment stood two voices Joshua and Caleb. They saw the same land, but they trusted a different promise. “Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it” (Numbers 13:30). The difference was not what they saw. The difference was what they believed.

Joshua and Caleb demonstrate what faithful followership looks like. They did not reject leadership they aligned themselves with God’s promise under God’s appointed leadership.

And this reveals a foundational truth: When followership is shaped by fear, even strong leadership cannot lead people forward. But when followership is shaped by faith, God’s people move together into His promises.

Why Followership Cannot Be Ignored

This is why followership cannot remain an overlooked conversation in the church. When it is missing, churches struggle to understand why momentum stalls and unity weakens. But when it is present and healthy, everything changes.

Leaders are strengthened instead of strained. Teams become aligned instead of fragmented. Vision becomes shared instead of carried alone.

Because in God's design, leadership was never meant to function in isolation. The church is not built on a single point of influence it is built on a shared life of following Christ together.

And when both leaders and followers are formed well, the result is not just a better organization. It is a healthier transformation.

Reflective Questions for Personal Growth

- 1. Where in my current walk with God or involvement in church do I tend to hesitate, resist, or delay action instead of moving forward in faith like Joshua and Caleb?**

- What is usually driving that hesitation?

2. In what ways might my attitudes, words, or reactions be shaping the spiritual atmosphere of the people around me for better or worse?

- Do I tend to strengthen faith, or unintentionally reinforce doubt or discouragement?

3. If followership is active alignment with God's direction through leadership, what is one specific area where I need to realign my response this week?

- What practical step would “faithful followership” look like in that situation?

CHAPTER 6 ~ MAKING
THE SHIFT FROM
LEADERS TO
WHOLE TEAMS

Understanding how leaders influence individual followers is essential, but the work does not stop there. Healthy teams flourish when followers embrace responsibility, alignment, and mutual engagement.

To achieve lasting impact, churches must intentionally shift their focus from developing leaders and followers in isolation to cultivating whole teams that embody exemplary followership. Leadership effectiveness multiplies when entire teams operate as engaged, exemplary followers.

From Individual Followership to Team-Based Followership

Building on the foundation that leaders model and cultivate followership, the next step is expanding that effort beyond individuals. Healthy, effective teams develop when leadership intentionally fosters unified alignment, shared responsibility, and mutual engagement across all members.

Teams flourish when everyone understands and embraces the mission, values, and purpose, and sees how their individual effort supports the larger vision.¹⁶

Exemplary followership at the team level depends on clarity, coordination, and shared expectations. Investing in followership today yields exponential growth in team and mission effectiveness tomorrow.

Principles for Developing Followership in Teams

Key Practices to Build a Healthy Team Culture

- **Teach and Review the Five Followership Types by Kelley** – Help team members understand different styles of following and how each contributes to the team's effectiveness.
- **Clarify Roles and Expectations** – Ensure everyone knows their responsibilities and how their work supports the team's mission.
- **Encourage Open Communication** – Foster an environment where questions, feedback, and ideas are welcomed and valued.

- **Model and Reinforce Accountability** – Leaders and team members hold themselves and each other accountable to shared goals and standards.
- **Promote Collaboration and Mutual Support** – Create opportunities for team members to work together, share insights, and support one another's growth.
- **Celebrate Contribution and Progress** – Recognize both individual and collective efforts, highlighting how faithful followership drives the team forward.

How Leaders Shape Team Culture

This is important because leaders play a crucial role in shaping team culture. By training, modeling collaboration, accountability, and humility within the group, they shape relational norms that carry across the entire team.

Just as followers mirror their leaders' individual character, teams mirror the behaviors, priorities, and attitudes leaders consistently display.

Leaders who actively cultivate positive influence among followers create a healthy culture where initiative and engagement are expected, reinforced, and considered the norm.

Intentional team practices further strengthen this dynamic. Regular team check-ins, collective problem-solving, peer mentoring, and shared reflection opportunities build trust and unity.

These environments allow followers to practice responsibility, alignment, and supportive collaboration in tangible ways. They wove the team beyond theoretical instruction to lived experience. In this environment, followers learn from both leaders and peers, reinforcing a culture of growth, accountability, and active contribution.

Case Study: A Church that Shifted to Team Culture

A growing local church recognized a pattern that was limiting its long-term effectiveness.

While they had strong leadership and committed volunteers, much of the ministry depended on a few key individuals. If those individuals were unavailable, the ministry slowed or stalled.

For example:

- A small group of leaders handled most of the outreach events
- A handful of people carried most of the ministry responsibilities
- Many team members participated, but few truly took ownership

While the church was active, it lacked full engagement at the team level.

The leadership team made a strategic shift. Instead of focusing solely on recruiting volunteers, they began intentionally developing followership **across every team**.

They implemented several key changes:

- **Clarified the mission and expectations** for every ministry team
- Began teaching what it means to be an engaged follower, not just a participant
- Encouraged every team member to take ownership of both successes *and* challenges
- Created space for team members to contribute ideas, not just complete tasks
- Regularly gathered teams for discussion, feedback, and shared reflection

The Cultural Shift from Participation to Ownership

One of the most significant changes was cultural: People were no longer just “helping out”—they began to see themselves as **essential contributors to the mission.**

The Results of a Team-Based Followership Culture

As this shift took place:

- Engagement increased across all teams
- Initiative and creativity grew
- Responsibility was shared more broadly
- Team members began supporting one another instead of working in isolation

The church moved from a model of a few doing the work...

to a culture where **many were actively engaged in the mission together.**

The result was not just growth in numbers—but growth in **health, unity, and sustainability.** When a church shifts from recruiting helpers to developing followers, the entire team begins to carry the mission together.

The biblical example of the early church demonstrates this principle: believers supported one another, shared resources, and advanced the mission together (Acts 6:1–7).

Teams that intentionally cultivate both spiritual formation and mission ownership can reproduce this pattern in our churches today.

When leaders invest in the team, they transform followers into a community of exemplary contributors, creating momentum for shared mission, unity, and long-term impact.

Leading with a Team Mindset

As you lead, consider the team, not just individual followers. Ask yourself: *Am I cultivating a culture where people feel seen, valued, and empowered to contribute together?* Are my actions modeling what I want to see in my team: collaboration, humility, and accountability?

As Paul reminds us, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves” (Philippians 2:3).¹⁷ Intentional leadership at the team level transforms followers into a unified, engaged, and mission-driven community.

Reflective Questions for Personal Growth

- 1. Does my team or church culture encourage collaboration, accountability, and active followership? If not, what is missing?**
- 2. How do I currently integrate shared responsibility and relational alignment across the team?**
- 3. Which team practices (check-ins, problem-solving, mentoring) can I implement to foster a culture of exemplary followership?**
- 4. How will I measure whether these efforts are creating healthier, more engaged, and mission-focused teams?**

Conclusion: Shift the Focus Starting Now

When leaders intentionally cultivate followership at both the individual and team levels, something transformative begins to happen. Teams grow healthier, leaders are strengthened, and the mission moves forward with greater unity and joy.

The question now is not whether followership matters but whether churches are willing to act on what they know. With a clear fundamental understanding of followership's role in leadership effectiveness, the final step is taking intentional action shifting the focus, *starting now*.

Why Followership Matters Often More Than We Realize

Leadership development is vital but it is not enough. A leader's effectiveness is shaped and amplified by the followers they cultivate. Exemplary followership is not passive obedience; it is active engagement, critical thinking, initiative, and relational alignment.

Without it, even the strongest leader struggles to achieve lasting impact. The missing link in many churches is not leadership training it is intentional followership development.

Leaders who understand this reality can strengthen teams, foster unity, and advance God's mission more effectively.

How to Begin Shifting the Focus

So, how can churches and ministries begin to shift the focus now? ***First***, invest in followership as intentionally as you invest in leadership. As a pastor, leader, or team member, start by becoming a student of followership.

Read books and articles on the effectiveness of followership. You cannot lead where you have never been. Most of us in local church ministry do not really know what followership is, so how can we lead our churches in healthy followership?

Recommended Resources for Developing Followership

If we are serious about shifting the culture of our churches and ministries, we must invest in understanding and developing followership with the same intentionality we give to leadership. The following resources will help you begin that journey.

Foundational Books on Followership

- *The Art of Followership* — Robert E. Kelley and Ira Chaleff (Editors)

A foundational, research-based work that explores how followers shape leadership, culture, and organizational health.

- *The Power of Followership* — Robert E. Kelley

A classic resource that highlights the critical role followers play in determining the success of leadership and organizations.

- *In Praise of Followers* — James H. McGregor Burns
Challenges the overemphasis on leadership and highlights the importance of followers in shaping outcomes.
- *The Courageous Follower* — Ira Chaleff
Teaches how followers can support leadership while also having the courage to challenge when necessary.
- *Followership: How Followers Are Creating Change and Changing Leaders* — Ronald E. Riggio, Ira Chaleff, and Jean Lipman-Blumen
A practical and modern look at how followers influence leadership and drive organizational success.

- *Why We Follow* — James H. Fowler and colleagues

Explores the motivations behind why people follow and how influence is formed and sustained.

Key Voices in Followership Thought

- **Robert Kelley** — Developed one of the most widely used models of followership, emphasizing active, engaged, and independent thinking followers.
- **Barbara Kellerman** — A leading voice who highlights that followers are often the most influential yet overlooked part of leadership systems.
- **Ira Chaleff** — Known for promoting courageous followership, encouraging followers to both support and wisely challenge leadership.

Developing Skills and Rhythms for Healthy Followership

Let us decide to equip followers with practical skills, including critical thinking, initiative, accountability, collaboration, and constructive feedback. Encourage mentorship and apprenticeship opportunities that allow followers to learn from both exemplary leaders and peers.

Establish team rhythms regular check-ins, shared problem-solving, and reflective gatherings that reinforce relational alignment and healthy collaboration. Moreover, most importantly, model the behaviors you want to see: humility, servant leadership, integrity, preparedness, and alignment with God's Word.

Personal Reflection: Leading Yourself and Your Team

Second, reflect personally: Who in my team is flourishing as a follower? Who needs encouragement, guidance, or coaching to grow? Use Kelley's follower types as a guide to see where your team is.

What daily or weekly practices can I implement to help my people develop initiative, responsibility, and a Christlike approach to collaboration? Take time to pray, observe, and intentionally invest in these areas small steps now will yield exponential growth over time.

Following Christ as the Model for Leadership and Followership

Scripture reminds us to imitate Christ in all we do. Paul writes, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves” (Philippians 2:3, ESV), and Hebrews encourages us to imitate those who, through faith and patience, inherit God’s promises (Heb. 6:12, ESV).¹⁸

Following Christ’s example means developing both leaders and followers who are spiritually mature, relationally aligned, and mission-focused.

Ultimately, shift the focus today. Invest in followership as intentionally as you invest in leadership. Hold workshops for leadership and teams, review case studies, and guide your team with reflective questions and answers.

Create environments where individuals can grow in responsibility, collaboration, and influence. Train, mentor, and release your followers and watch ministry, teams, and leaders flourish.

Because healthy churches and ministries do not just develop strong leaders they develop faithful followers. In the kingdom of God, followership is not secondary to leadership it is essential to it. Leadership alone is not enough.

Reflective Questions for Personal Growth

1. What is one concrete action I will take in the next 7 days to intentionally develop followership in my church or team?

- (Be specific: teaching, conversation, training, or structural change)

2. Who on my team or in my ministry do I need to intentionally invest in this week to help them grow as a healthier follower—and what will I do specifically for them?

- (Not who in general—but who by name or role)

- 3. Where am I currently modeling leadership without also modeling Christlike followership—and what adjustment do I need to make publicly or privately?**
- 4. What habits or rhythms will I establish to ensure followership development becomes part of my ongoing leadership practice, not just a one-time insight?**

(How will I sustain this shift over time?)

Next Steps: Developing a Culture of Healthy Followership

Followership development does not happen by accident. Churches that desire healthy leadership, unified teams, and effective ministries must intentionally cultivate healthy followers. Use the checklist below to begin putting these principles into practice immediately.

Church Followership Action Checklist:

☐ Redefine Leadership Development

Expand your leadership pipeline to include intentional teaching on how to follow well, not just how to lead well.

☐ Teach Followership from Scripture

Highlight biblical examples of faithful followers (e.g., Joshua, Timothy, the disciples) and show how God often shapes leaders through seasons of faithful following.

☐ Assess Team Followership Health

Evaluate ministry teams not only by results, but by engagement, ownership, teachability, and relational trust.

☐ Normalize Constructive Challenge

Create safe environments where followers are encouraged to think critically, ask questions, and offer input without fear of being labeled “difficult.”

□ Model Healthy Followership at the Top

Senior leaders should openly demonstrate what it means to follow—whether that is submitting to Scripture, accountability structures, or shared leadership.

□ Train Leaders to Lead Followers Well

Equip leaders to recognize different follower types, respond appropriately, and cultivate growth rather than compliance.

□ Measure More Than Performance

Celebrate faithfulness, initiative, collaboration, and responsibility—not just outcomes and metrics.

Final Encouragement

Healthy churches are not built by strong leaders alone, but by strong leader–follower partnerships. When followership is valued, developed, and practiced, leadership effectiveness increases—and ministry flourishes.

AUTHOR BIO

Robert Rosales has been saved since 1992 and has served in pastoral ministry for 20 years. He currently serves as Campus Pastor of Lakeshore Christian Fellowship's Gastonia, North Carolina campus. He resides in Mt. Holly, North Carolina, just outside of Charlotte, where he continues to invest in the spiritual growth of individuals, leaders, and the local church.

Robert holds a Master of Arts in Strategic Leadership from Life Pacific University in San Dimas, California. His ministry is marked by a strong commitment to preaching and teaching God's Word, developing leaders, and building healthy, thriving teams.

He and his wife, Yolanda, have been married for 32 years and share a deep passion for serving Jesus and helping others grow in their faith.

BOOK DESCRIPTION

What if the reason many churches struggle isn't a lack of leadership but a missing culture of followership?

For years, the church has invested heavily in developing stronger leaders, yet many ministries still wrestle with disunity, burnout, and limited impact.

Followership offers a fresh perspective: healthy, thriving churches are built not only on strong leaders, but on faithful, engaged followers.

Drawing from over thirty years of ministry experience, pastor Robert Rosales challenges the leadership-only mindset and shows how followership is the often-overlooked key to ministry health and effectiveness.

Rooted in Scripture and leadership theory, this book points to Jesus Himself who modeled perfect followership of the Father as the foundation for every leader in the Kingdom.

Practical, biblical, and deeply needed, *Followership* equips pastors, leaders, and churches to build a culture where vision is not just cast, but carried through people who take ownership, walk in alignment, and help the church flourish from the inside out.

CONNECT WITH THE AUTHOR

Bring Followership to Your Church or Leadership Team

Thank you for reading Followership: The Missing Link to Strengthening Pastors, Leaders, and Churches.

This message is more than a concept it is a conversation meant to be lived out in churches, leadership teams, and ministries. If this book has challenged or strengthened you, I would welcome the opportunity to continue the conversation.

I provide Followership workshops, leadership training, and speaking engagements by invitation for churches, ministries, and leadership teams who desire to grow in healthy, biblical leadership culture.

Available Opportunities Include:

Followership Workshops for Churches and
Ministry Teams

Leadership Development Training

Conference or Event Speaking

Customized Training for Leadership Teams

If you would like to explore hosting a
Followership workshop or training in your
context, I would be glad to connect with you.

Connect:

Email: Robertr@followshift.com

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