

# In Search of an Ideal Christian Follower in Modern Organizations

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper offers fresh ways of thinking and perceiving the importance of effective followership in the context of modern organizations and Christian discipleship. It reviews the extant literature on the concept of followership to advance the importance of the follower role in modern organizations. Specifically, we examine the meaning of followership in modern organizations and the role and qualities of an ideal follower. We argue that followership is a self-conscious choice by the follower to actively partner with the leader to advance the organizational mission and objectives. We also discuss how Christian workers can blend biblical discipleship and organizational followership in the workplace to reflect their calling as true disciples and, in the process, benefit the organization. We propose a model for the authentic Christian follower, which can be further explored.

**KEYWORDS:** followership, discipleship, follower, organizations, follower roles

## INTRODUCTION

The concept of discipleship is well known in faith traditions such as Christianity. Most of the church's understanding of discipleship comes from the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles (McMahon, 2019). However, one of the most critical modern arenas for discipleship is the organization (Zigarelli, 2008). Hitt et al. (2018) describes an organization as a structured environment consisting of interpersonal relationships between leaders and followers, including reporting relationships, patterns of decision-making and communication, and other behavior patterns, both "official" and "unofficial." In recent years, more attention has been focused on what is known as "follower-centric" models that see interdependence, collaboration, and two-way learning embedded in the leader-follower relationship (Daft, 2023; Hitt et al., 2018; Northhouse, 2021).

The use of follower and followership is increasingly gaining prominence in organizational scholarship. The similarity in meaning between Christian discipleship and followership in the work context is striking. Discipleship implies followership. The term follower is defined as one in the service of another, one that follows the teachings and opinions of another, and perhaps most interestingly,

one that imitates another (Merriam-Webster, 2013; Rodgers & Bligh, 2014). According to Manning and Curtis (2015), the word follower is rooted in the old German word "follaziohan" (p. 40), which means to help, serve, and assist. A disciple generically means a follower or a learner.

Christian discipleship is described through several metaphors. For instance, the Christian who is a follower of Christ has been compared to a faithful child (2 Timothy 2:1-2), handmaid (Luke 1:38), faithful servant (Matt 25:21), and a branch of the vine (John 15:5). The biblical view of a disciple is one who follows Jesus Christ (Matt. 4:19). Thus, a Christian disciple willingly accepts Jesus's authority, obeys, and follows him (John 12: 26; 14:23-24; Matthew 28:20). Putman (2014) describes a Christian disciple as one who (1) follows Christ, (2) is changed by Christ, and (3) is committed to the mission of Christ and works of service. This gives the Christian disciple a higher purpose and a spiritual dimension in the workplace. Our attitude toward work and relationships is driven by our obedience to Christ and the mission. Christian disciples are not forced to obey. Rather, they subject themselves to the leader's influence because they believe and trust.

## THE CONCEPT OF FOLLOWERSHIP IN MODERN ORGANIZATIONS

In the work environment, the historical perception of followership depicts employees who unquestioningly and blindly comply with their leaders' dictates. Thus, followers are passive employees who do what they are told. They follow the rules and stay out of trouble. The modern perception of followership is somewhat different. Like a Christian disciple, a follower is an employee who willingly accepts a leader's goals and influence and actively participates in pursuing goals (Daft, 2023). Such followers also consciously develop mutual influencing relationships with their direct superior to obtain the best possible outcome for themselves, their boss, their colleagues, and the organization (Daft, 2023; Lussier & Achua, 2016). Zigarelli (2008) explains influence as the ability "to effect or to produce some sort of change in attitude, behavior, or circumstances." (p. 10). Even though leaders exert higher formal authority, a leader and a follower can influence each other in a non-coercive way (Cohen & Bradford, 2012; Daft, 2023). Hence, followership is a self-conscious choice by the follower to actively partner with the leader to advance the organizational mission and objectives.

Organizations today need followers who think through orders, evaluate possible consequences, and choose an appropriate course of action. Hence, followers work together, especially with a leader's vision, to achieve a common goal. Thus, for any group or organization to succeed, there must be people who effectively follow, just as there must be those who effectively lead. "Most followers have potentially much greater power than they think they do—and can therefore contribute more than they think they can without diminishing those in high-power positions" (Cohen & Bradford 2012, p. 8).

What about Christians who are followers in the organization? In what ways does their Christianity inform their followership? Most importantly, perhaps, what should be the motivation behind their actions? This paper explores the concept of followership from the perspective of the Christian disciple. Specifically, we examine the concept of followership in modern organizations, the distinct roles of the follower, and the qualities of an ideal follower. We also discuss how Christian workers can blend biblical discipleship and organizational followership in the workplace to reflect their calling as true disciples, and in the process, benefit the organization. The paper proposes a model that endeavors to explain how the Christian disciple can fulfill both their roles as followers of Christ as well as their earthly master.

Followership is not a new concept in historical or organizational scholarship. However, it is considered one of the least well-understood organizational roles (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). Although the follower role has historically been defined as passive obedience, deference, and unthinking submission (Carsten et al, 2014; Lussier & Achua, 2016; Rost, 2008), this perception does not fit modern organizational needs.

Three significant distinctions involved in the description of followers are rank, person, and role (Zoogah, 2014). From a rank perspective, a follower is a subordinate who has less power, authority, and influence in the organization (Kelly, 1988). Also, a follower is a person who generally agrees with the dictates and directions of the leader. Kellerman (2008) describes such followers by their behavior and characteristics: They do what others want them to do, particularly those in higher positions. In the community, they may comply to preserve collective stability and security. Hence, followers are perceived as individuals who do not have a mind of their own.

However, Chaleff (2009) argues that followers play a significant role other than blind submission and passivity. He views followership as a role that individuals assume to enact a set of behaviors, a role that defines the functions that a person is expected to perform. In an organizational setting, there are different roles that followers are expected to perform depending on the specific situation. These roles include supporting the leader to achieve organizational mission and goals, exercising courage, and raising issues of concern in the organization. Hence, the concept of role widens the meaning of followership.

Modern organizations require deeply committed followers who work with leaders to advance the mission of the organization. Successful leadership requires the support, engagement, and critical thinking of individuals who serve effectively in a follower role. Thus, followership is a process whereby followers assume specific roles through which the follower contributes value to the organization and other stakeholders.

Zoogah (2014) defines followership in a strategic sense: "Followership is the systematic process by which a follower, in enacting an impactful role, strategically discerns the value of his/her interaction with a leader and behaves in a way that yields short-term and/or long-term, meaningful outcomes for significant organizational constituents"

(p. 8). This definition suggests that followership is not a state but a process in which the follower contributes meaningfully to achieving organizational goals.

The scope of followership includes all levels of employees that have to relate with other people who are considered leaders by their position. This includes rank and file employees relating to supervisors, supervisors relating to middle managers, middle managers relating to top management, top managers relating to the board of directors, etc. According to Daft (2023), leaders and followers may sometimes be the same people, playing different roles at different times. Simply put, most of us are followers in some situations and leaders in others.

### Types of Followership Styles

Followership styles pertain to the behaviors of followers and how people follow an authority figure. Zoogah (2014) describes a style as a unique, distinctive, or characteristic way a follower submits to the influence of a leader. Several typologies of followership in the literature define the different types of followers in the organization.

In his seminal work on followership, Kelly (1988) identified two fundamental factors—the intellectual capacity to think critically and the level of involvement in organizational affairs—as key determinants of followers' behavior. A follower who exercises independent critical thinking can examine matters of significance in the organization. Such followers evaluate ideas and information objectively, question assumptions, and offer constructive criticism (Daft, 2023). The opposite of this person is the conventional follower who does not consider possibilities beyond what he or she is told and accepts the leader's ideas without evaluating them. According to Kelley (1988), the involvement dimension is the extent to which the follower takes an active role in organizational affairs. An active follower participates fully in organizational matters and demonstrates a sense of ownership and commitment. On the other hand, a passive follower does nothing that is not required and avoids added responsibility.

Based on his two-dimensional (independent critical thought and activity) model, Kelly (1988) classified followers into five types: alienated, passive, conformist, pragmatic, or effective follower. The *alienated* followers are independent critical thinkers but are passive in the organization. Dağlı and Averbek (2017) describe organizational alienation as an attitude in which an employee cares little about work, approaches work with little energy, and works primarily for extrinsic rewards. In

this case, although such followers are capable, they focus exclusively on the shortcomings of the organization and other people. Daft (2023) opined that alienated followers are often effective followers who have experienced setbacks and obstacles, perhaps promises broken by superiors, and therefore they become withdrawn.

According to Kelly (1988), the conventional follower is a *passive* type—the sheep. Sheep are passive and look up to the leader to do the thinking for them and to motivate them. Being passive and uncritical, these followers display neither initiative nor a sense of responsibility. Their activity is limited to what they are told to do. Interestingly, a major biblical metaphor for discipleship is sheep (Psalms 23; John 10:4). The Shepherd knows the way, and the sheep trustingly follow their shepherd's direction (Rost, 2008). The *conformist* followers are the yes-people of the organization who just follow orders. They participate actively in the organization but are not independent thinkers. Hence, they carry out orders without considering the repercussions of such orders. Such behavior erodes personal integrity, accountability, and responsibility. According to Kelly's (1988) typology, the *pragmatic* follower has no particular dominant followership style. This type of follower assesses the overall situation in the organization and uses whatever style best benefits his or her position. Such followers do what they must to survive in any situation.

Lastly, Kelly (1998) describes the *effective* follower as a critical thinker and actively involved in the organization. Such followers are keenly engaged in the organization and have their own minds. They carefully evaluate information and situations before taking a stand. For instance, they will support a leader's directives if they believe it is in the right direction. If they disagree, they challenge the leader, offering constructive alternatives to help the leader and organization get where they want to go.

According to Daft (2023), effective followers are essential for optimum organizational impact since they are capable and committed. Kelly (1998) tags such followers as “exemplary” followers who act with intelligence, independence, courage, and a strong sense of ethics.

Chaleff (2009), categorizes followers based on a matrix of two characteristics of courageous followership—the degree to which the follower supports the leader and the degree to which the follower courageously challenges the leader's behavior or policies if these are compromising the organization's purpose or undermining its values. Chaleff's (2009) two-dimensional matrix produces four followership styles: resource, individualist, implementer, and partner.

A follower who unwaveringly supports the leader but is willing to question the leader's doubtful behavior or policies is deemed a *partner*. Followers who fully support but do not challenge the leader are *implementers*. This followership style is the most common in organizations; leaders depend on them to get the work done (Kellerman, 2008; Zoogah 2014). However, implementers do not dare to challenge a leader's questionable actions or policies. The third type is the *individualist* follower. Individualists are usually confrontational, offering little support but often challenging the leader. Individualist followers can be a great asset in the organization since they often make leaders aware of concerns others might not be comfortable expressing. Furthermore, followers who provide low support and minimum challenge to leaders are *resources*. The resource follower usually complies with the leader's dictates and does the minimal amount to keep her or his job.

Kellerman (2008) offers another list of followership styles based on follower engagement with the leader and the organization. According to Kellerman's typology, followers may be isolates, bystanders, participants, activists, and diehards. *Isolates* are completely detached followers who are unaware of what's going on around them. They passively support the status quo and further strengthen leaders who already have the upper hand. Similarly, *bystanders* are deliberately disengaged and do not participate even though they are relatively active in terms of observation or awareness of the dynamics in the organization. They may go along passively when it is in their self-interest to do so, but they are not intrinsically motivated to engage actively. *Participant* followers either favor their leaders and organizations or oppose them. They seek to have an impact positively or negatively. *Activist* followers tend to be more eager, energetic, and engaged. However, the engagement can be to assist or undermine the leader because it is out of self-interest. The last type, *diehards*, are followers who are deeply devoted and willing to defend their cause—an idea, individual, or outcome. The *diehards* are the most engaged with leaders (Rainer, 2013) and are ready to sacrifice their position or authority or to die for the cause of the leader or organization if necessary. Conversely, *diehards* who oppose the leader would do anything to remove the leader.

Adair (2008) also proposed a 4-D followership model to help explain the types of followers in an organization. Using productivity and job satisfaction as two extremes of one dimension and turnover as a second dimension, four types of followers are identified: disciples, doers,

disengaged followers, and disgruntled followers (4-Ds). The *disciple* is a highly satisfied and highly productive follower and engaged in their work. This type of follower is emotionally attached and committed to the organizational mission. Such followers are willing to work extra hours for the good of the organization. *Doer* followers are generally considered go-getters, productive, even competitive. Like disciple followers, doers have a strong commitment. However, they focus on serving their own needs and interests. The typical attitude of a doer is the "grass always looks greener elsewhere." Hence, they quickly leave the organization. *Disengaged* followers are detached and will do the minimum to ensure continued employment. Such followers justify their behavior by questioning the organization's loyalty to them. The other type of follower is the *disgruntled* follower. These followers have typically experienced some adverse incident within the organization that has left them feeling aggrieved and detached. Both disengaged and disgruntled followers are on the low end of productivity and job satisfaction while disciples and doers are on the high end. More so, doer and disgruntled followers are on the high end of turnover. At the low end of turnover are disengaged followers and disciples.

In light of the various types of followership behavior indicated above, it is important to note that followers cannot be stereotyped as individuals who blindly follow the dictates of an authority figure in an organization. The style of a follower depends on her capacity and other situational factors. Since followership operates within organizations, it is affected by unique organizational characteristics. Zoogah (2014) contends that such unique features include organizational structure, culture, and strategy. An organizational structure that defines authority, power, and accountability within the organization can significantly impact how effectively followers exercise their roles.

Organizational culture influences followers' attitudes and behaviors. For example, organizations with egalitarian cultures are likely to emphasize equality in the relationship between followers and leaders because of the belief in shared responsibility and equal status. In addition, the third characteristic, strategy, directly affects followership behaviors. For instance, organizations emphasizing differentiation or innovation strategies will empower followers to contribute value by offering ideas and raising important questions.

A summary of the various follower typologies discussed in this review is presented in Table 1, highlighting the different ways followers are characterized in the

Table 1: Selected Typologies of Followers

Kelly (1988)	Chaleff (1995)	Kellerman (2008)	Adair (2008)
Alienated	Resource	Isolates	Disciples
Passive	Individualist	Bystanders	Doers
Conformist	Implementer	Participants	Disengaged
Pragmatist	Partner	Activists	Disgruntled
Exemplary		Diehards	

organization. “The major followership types are active–engaged, independent–assertive, submissive–compliant, supportive–conforming, . . . passive followers, antiauthoritarian followers, and proactive followers” (Northhouse, 2021, p. 361).

### Qualities of an Ideal Follower: A Construct for the Modern Organization

Based on the typologies highlighted in Table 1, an ideal follower is an authentic person capable of developing a genuine relationship with the authentic leader (Rodgers & Bligh, 2014). Characteristics of the ideal and exemplary followers include integrity, dependability, competence, courage, critical thinking, commitment, initiative, intelligence, persistence, responsibility, and self-reliance (Hinrichs & Hinrichs, 2014, Kelly, 1988).

Chaleff (2009) portrays an ideal follower as someone whose attitude and behavior are characterized with courage. Courageous followers have the courage to (1) serve the leader and organization, (2) participate in the organizational change process for the benefit of the organization, (3) accept responsibility for themselves and the organization, (4) constructively question the leader behaviors or policies if these threaten the common purpose, and, lastly, (5) take a moral stand when necessary. Hence, courageous followers value organizational

harmony and their relationship with the leader but not at the expense of the common purpose and integrity. Ideal followers are like partners in the leader-follower relationship who usually display the following qualities in the modern organization:

1. **Followers get the job done.** Even though leaders are often recognized as the primary drivers of positive organizational outcomes, it takes leaders’ and followers’ effort, working in unity, to advance organizational objectives. Ideal followers are competent and maintain the highest performance

standards (Latour & Rast, 2004). They draw on their knowledge, skills, abilities, and other competencies to actualize a leader’s plan or agenda (Carsten et al., 2010; Dvir & Shamir, 2003; Shamir, 2007). According to Lussier and Achua (2016), the ideal follower has a high self-efficacy, influencing how they function in the organization.

2. **Followers work in the best interest of the organization’s mission.** Although traditional conceptualizations of followers suggest that they are blindly deferent and obedient to the directives of the leader (Courpasson & Dany, 2003), emerging research on followership suggests that many followers have an underlying obligation to the mission of the organization, which may or may not align with the agenda of an individual leader (Carsten et al., 2010; McCallum, 2013). Loyalty to the organizational mission and goals is essential when the ideal follower is forced to choose. This type of commitment is important in cases where a leader may attempt to promote a self-serving agenda or ask followers to engage in unethical behaviors (Uhl-Bien & Carsten, 2007). In their qualitative research on follower role constructions, Carsten (2010) and colleagues show that proactive followers who take the initiative to solve problems and promote positive change say they align with the organizational mission. Followers who consider the best interests of the organization’s mission, and think about how a leader’s directive may advance or detract from the organization’s goals may help keep the organization on track and ensure that organizations thrive in difficult times.
3. **Followers challenge leaders.** When there are potential problems with a leader’s plan, a follower’s ability to bring these issues to light is critical (Lussier & Achua, 2016). Challenging leader-

ship implies expressing principled dissent against questionable practices or policies (Graham, 1983; Matt & Shahinpoor, 2011). Ideal followers are loyal individuals who are deeply committed to the organization and its mission and values. Therefore, they would voice inconsistencies in the behaviors or policies if they believe that the leader is off track. Chaleff (2009) argues that followers have a responsibility to their leaders and organizations by displaying courage and taking responsibility, acting with morality, transforming and challenging the status quo, listening actively, and serving others.

4. **Followers support the leader.** An ideal follower looks for ways to express support and encouragement to the leader who is effective and ethical (Kellerman, 2008). They support their leader's visionary agenda to ensure that the best course of action is being executed. Thus, good followers recognize the importance of nurturing a cordial interpersonal relationship with their leaders (Goffee & Jones, 2007).
5. **Followers learn from leaders.** Perhaps one of the greatest benefits of being an engaged and proactive follower is the opportunity to learn from effective leaders. Social learning theory asserts that people in organizations can learn through the interaction and observation of others (Atkisson et al., 2012). A follower can gain tacit knowledge by observing the behaviors and consequences of leadership.

Based on the qualities mentioned earlier, it is worthy to note that an ideal follower actively participates in organizational affairs, courageously defends the organization's mission, and supports the leader in achieving organizational goals. We postulate that ideal followership can be developed in any employee if training opportunities aim to build critical thinking and active followership.

## DISCIPLESHIP IN THE BIBLE

One setting where the ideal follower is in action is the workplace. In many parts of the world, some of the employees in business, or other organizations, are likely to be Christians, those who believe in Jesus Christ. They have accepted by faith that Jesus Christ came to die for them, thus giving them a second chance at life because they were doomed to eternal death. To accept Christ as Savior means

something much more than [our] trying to follow His teaching... In Christ a new kind of man appeared: and the new kind of life which began in Him is [to be] put into us... When the Christians speak of being "in Christ" or of Christ being "in them," this is not simply a way of saying that they are thinking about Christ or copying Him. They mean that Christ is actually operating through them; that the whole mass of Christians are the physical organism through which Christ acts—that we are. (Lewis, 1952/2015, pp. 34-36)

The lordship of Christ influences all aspects of the Christians' everyday life (Schnelle, 2009).

It leaves them accountable to Him about their behavior in any place they are, including the workplace. Even if they follow a leader in the organizations where they are employed, they are aware of the fact that, above and beyond this situation, they are first and foremost followers of Christ.

To be a Christian, also means to be called to discipleship by Jesus Christ (Tomlinson, 2010). The Christian does not dissociate the two; being a Christian means being a disciple of Christ (Boice, 1998). The concept of biblical discipleship has several implications.

First, the call is initiated by the Master. God who seeks man and this fact is a distinctive characteristic of Christianity (John 15:16). "Follow Me" is a command, not a call to a cause but to "life of communion with Christ" (Faraoanu, 2015, p. 68). In response, the disciples of the Gospels left everything to follow Christ. "Discipleship implies a definite answer: to leave everything and follow Christ. It is a free decision, the end of a lifestyle now belonging to the past" (Faraoanu, 2015, p. 70).

Second, biblical discipleship goes beyond the mere belief and appreciation of what Christ has done to redeem mankind. The disciples of Christ prove by their actions that they are, indeed, under the lordship of the Master. That means they live a life on His terms and to fulfill His expectations. According to Lewis (2015), feelings, interest in religion, and even insight cannot replace actual behavior. The test of discipleship is obedience to the laws and principles of the One who initiated the relationship (White, 2007).

Third, biblical discipleship is costly. When Jesus called His disciples, He asked them to count the cost because it is not an easy matter. The disciples must understand that they are on God's agenda (Mark 8:34), must be willing to suffer for Christ and even give their life for Him (Matt 5:11). Tanner (2013) pointed out that in

the Gospels, Jesus never gave the Apostles the impression that following Him was going to be a cheap endeavor. Tanner (2013) highlighted two elements that bring about the depth of the commitment the disciples are expected to show toward the Master. First, the disciple must deny his own will and do the will of Christ. Second, the disciple must daily carry his cross, implying a daily commitment to Jesus, lifting Him daily and acknowledging Him as Lord and Savior shamelessly (Tanner, 2013). Jesus alluded to this type of commitment when He invited His disciples to take His yoke (Mathew 11:29).

One part of the yoke is around us, and the other is on Jesus' shoulders. Jesus, like the lead ox in a team, determines our bearing, pace, and path, and we submit to his leadership. Through his yoke, we feel his pull, his guidance, his direction. By his yoke, he trains us to work effectively in his team. His yoke is what leads us, sensitizes us, and binds us to him. (Theology of Work Project, 2014)

#### THE CHRISTIAN DISCIPLE IN THE EMPLOYING ORGANIZATION

The Christian disciples, as human beings, live among other human beings and work in the organization. Their calling as a disciple does not mean they can escape their humanity. The disciples of Christ can only live within the context of their situation on earth (Roberts, 2004), including the fact that they work in organizations as employees. They believe that God has sent them to that particular place and are to represent Him right where they are (Borthwick, 2015). They may not have chosen that particular place, but they have the mindset of living as a sent person and that mindset shapes the way they look at their circumstances. The fact that they are Christians does not mean they are beyond the hierarchical structures of top administration. They are still expected to be followers of their human supervisor and manager (Ephesians 6:5). Drawing wisdom and strength from Christ, the disciples are committed to being the best they can be within the circumstances that surround their lives (Roberts, 2004). Thus, they have a dual allegiance of being a follower of Christ and, at the same time, a follower in the workplace. Such a responsibility implies an integration of faith and living as exemplified by Jesus Himself when he was on earth (John 17:4, 16). The workplace is a location where the Christians "are sent" (John 17:18) to witness about the kingdom of God. The Christians stand as representatives

of Christ and must boldly point out a different way of living (Barnett, n.d.). So how can they practically cope with this dual allegiance of being a follower of Christ and being a follower in the workplace?

#### A MODEL OF BEING AN IDEAL CHRISTIAN FOLLOWER IN THE MODERN ORGANIZATION

To answer the above question, a model is proposed that analyzes the issue through the perspective of three dimensions: the Christian disciple's purpose, relationship with others, and way of living. The model is based on Robertson's (2017) model, which dealt with heroic leadership from a theological perspective. Although Robertson's model focuses on the leader of the organization, the three dimensions are still relevant for the follower, too, and in particular for the follower who is a Christian disciple. The steps taken to develop the model are as follows: a) a definition of the constructs of the Christian follower in the workplace, b) an overview of the model, and c) a discussion of the processes involved in the model.

#### Definition of the constructs

*Purpose.* According to Frankl (1959) purpose is a key element of human functioning, the "why" of one's existence. A purpose is the starting point for everything that is accomplished. It represents "a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at once personally meaningful to the self and of consequence to the world beyond the self" (Damon et al., 2003, p. 121). A purpose is a broad, long-term goal that must have an intrinsic meaning rather than a utilitarian meaning. It must come from within, attached to one's own conviction; otherwise it would wane with time and circumstances. It must contribute to something that is beyond the self (John Templeton Foundation, 2018). For the Judeo-Christian faith, one's purpose is centered on God. In particular the Christian's purpose is anchored on God's grace. After the fall of man and the consequent penalty of eternal death, God through Jesus Christ brought salvation and the hope of eternal life. The Christian disciples' purpose consists in accepting and internalizing this good news, proclaiming it, and sharing it with others. The purpose is accomplished when one follows the will of God and demonstrates God's love to others in acts of generosity, benevolence, and kindness (John Templeton Foundation, 2018). By doing so, Christians give glory to God, who is the beginning of everything (Genesis 1:1).

**People.** In Robertson’s (2017) model, people are the object of the caring action of the leaders. They are those the leaders come in touch with and those they are expected to empower. For the Christian disciples, the “people” dimension is also other-oriented rather than self-oriented. Christian discipleship is a response to the unconditional love of God poured out for us in Christ through our own life of unconditional love towards God and our neighbor (Cosgrave, 2005). Firmly grounded in their identity in Christ as “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9), the disciples set out to minister to others. The ministry also involves inviting others to turn to God and find rest in Him.

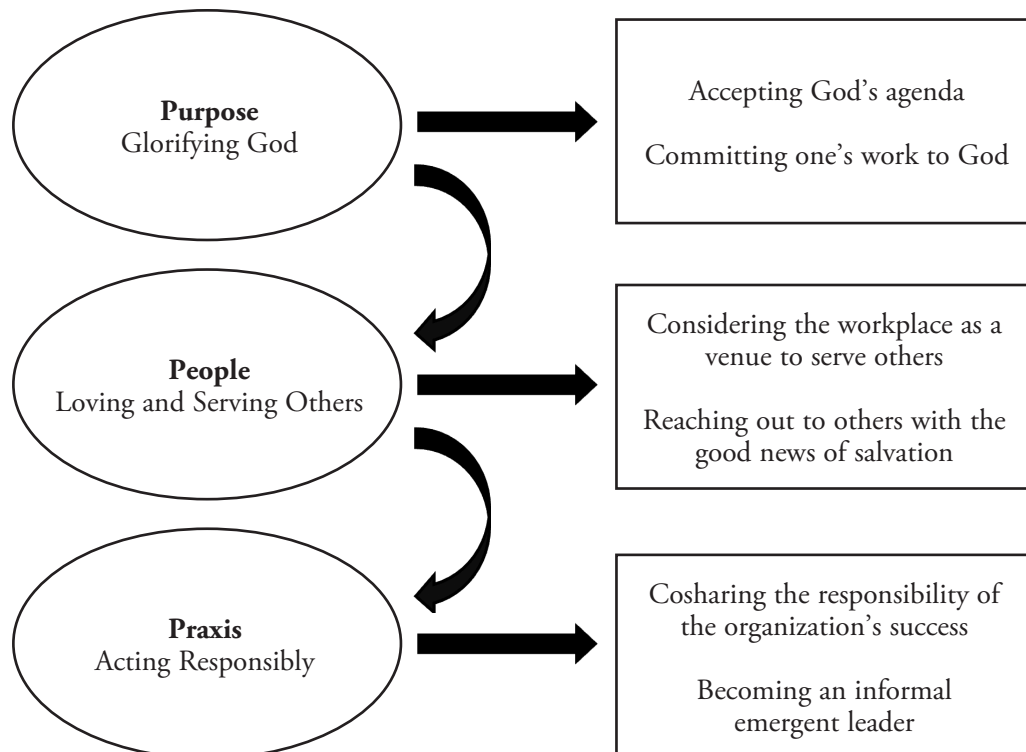
**Praxis.** Praxis is the exercise of an art, science, or skill (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). According to Penney and Warlow (1999) praxis is a combination of action and reflection and involves a relationship with oneself and the wider community. “Reflection then becomes pivotal to praxis... as it can be the key to further understanding (formalizing) practice” (p. 266). Ganzevoort and Roeland (2014) state that praxis focuses on the “action” aspect of religion, or even broader, the ways in which religion is lived by the ordinary people in their everyday setting.

In the context of heroic leadership, Robertson (2017) defined “praxis” as the construction of an organizational environment where everybody can grow and thrive.

In this paper, praxis is also seen as positive actions that lead to the creation of a better environment. Praxis actually grows out of the first two constructs. Striving to give glory to God and God alone and caring for others become a way of life for the Christian disciple. By integrating their faith and their work, they experience work as a more positive aspect of their lives, and they also contribute constructively to their workplace (Neubert & Dougherty, 2015).

The proposed model of how the Christian can be a follower of Christ while also a follower in the organization is depicted in Figure 1. The model posits that the Christians’ purpose is the antecedent for their ideal followership in the organization as they work for the good of the people and contribute through their praxis to the development of the organization. One purpose of Christians is to glorify God in all they do. To give glory implies that they accept God’s plan for their life and commit every aspect of their work to Him so that others can see His love and care revealed in their actions (Matthew 5:16).

**Figure 1: The Conceptualization of Being an Ideal Christian Follower in the Modern Organization**





The second component of the model is people. There are two key features associated with this component, including loving others and serving others. The first feature rests on the premise of relationships. Even though employees see the organization as a place for working and making a living, it is also a place where humans interact with each other and build community. Christians should aim to connect with each superior and co-worker and reach out to them. Within the atmosphere of mutual trust and love, Christians are able to serve others. This is the second feature of the model. The service to others is informed by Christians' love for them.

The call of the Christians necessitates a space where they are to serve. Just as the clergy has a parish or a congregation to serve, Christian workers consider the workplace a venue where they serve others. The workplace is also a place where Christians can share their faith in a non-confrontational way. "It requires a strong spiritual nerve to bring religion into the workshop and the business office, sanctifying the details of everyday life, and ordering every transaction according to the standard of God's word. But this is what the Lord requires" (White, 1943, p. 279).

The last component of the model reflects the way of life of the Christians in the workplace. The praxis implies that the positive actions and attitudes that the Christians exemplify can become a habit, borne out of a reflection of their identity and their relationship with God and others. Through such a commitment, Christians are able to invite others into actions that uphold the values of justice, fairness, and compassion. In that sense, they help create a culture that contributes to the success of the organization. Upholding such values demands a level of moral courage that can be observed by others and establishes the Christian follower as an informal emergent leader.

The model implies that the three components are a continuum and develop over time. It is a progression that parallels the walk of the Christian with Christ, the Ultimate Supervisor. Each of the components are explored in more detail below.

### **Purpose**

Every employee of an organization has a purpose that they are assigned to fulfill. Christian disciples' purpose is to give glory to God through their lives. "The first thing we must do is be sure of our purpose, and that is to glorify God..." (Austin, 1995, p. 54). Christ is the center of all their endeavors, the starting point and the guiding thread of their existence (Valdes, 2021). The Apostle

Paul admonished the Corinthians to give glory to God in every aspect of their lives, that is, to bring honor to Him by magnifying and praising Him (1 Corinthians 10:31).

The goal of the Christian life is that for more and more seconds of each day, we think and do and say is to God's glory, that each moment is worship of the true God" with "The goal of the Christian life is that for more and more seconds of each day, what we think and do and say is to God's glory, that each moment is worship of the true God. (Dawn, 2009, p. 17)

The implication is that, for Christian disciples, even their work is a means to give glory to God, an "act of service, and even worship to God" (Ryken, 2004). Austin (1995) states that the Christian must glorify God in their minds, speech, and life. "For our obedience, our service, our faith, our integrity, our purity, our interaction with the world, all that we do should glorify God" (p. 53). The Christian is instructed to bring glory to God from the Word of God (Deuteronomy 6:4, 5; Matthew 22:37-40).

The Christian employee's purpose to give glory to God in all things does not always go smoothly and is not without risk. The corporation's leaders may have their own goals that run counter to upholding God's character and His goodness. The dictates of the work commitment may require that the worker harm customers, manipulate regulatory authorities, or mislead fellow employees. In such a dilemma, the Christian disciples take the risk of disobeying orders to keep their purpose intact. "The more willing you are to suffer the consequences of saying 'no' when called upon to violate your beliefs, the tighter the relationship you can take on with unbelievers, yet still remain yoked to Jesus" (Theology of Work Project, 2014). At the same time, by taking that risk, Christians can enact the principle of the effective follower in the workplace. Their actions ultimately influence the creation of a positive climate within the organization where justice and compassion reign, resulting in a positive reputation for the organization.

### **People**

The followership concept implies an interaction between the leader and the follower. A lot of literature stresses that ethical, authentic leadership encourages a positive response from the followers (Ruiz et al., 2011; Schroeder, 2002), as if the responsibility of ensuring good interaction is on the leader's shoulder. But what about the followers? Are they supposed to passively receive good treatment without doing anything? In her study, de Zilwa (2014) posits that focusing entirely on the leader's contribution would be presenting an unbalanced perspective.

Indeed, the ideal followers contribute to the effectiveness of their leader (Daft, 2023). The relationship evolves into a collaboration with shared values and meanings.

Christian disciples are called to be ideal followers. Their role emanates from their personal conviction that they are “salt and light of the earth.” The position which they are called to occupy becomes “a means of service, instead of self-service” (Theology of Work Project, 2014). More than that, their role emanates from their identity as disciples of Christ.

For Christians, their first and primary ethical concern in or out of the workplace is their identity in Christ.... [T]hey answer two fundamental questions, “Who am I?” and “Where do I belong?” So, when they consider what actions are ethical in the workplace, they ask themselves these two questions, and behaviors that align with their identity will follow. (Ewest, 2015, p. 26)

Thus, the workplace is perceived as a venue for ministering to others (Beckwith, 2016).

By following the Master, the disciple, in turn, is enabled to “go and make disciples” through the power of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:18-20). According to Borthwick (2015), the text in the Gospel of Matthew is an imperative “make disciples,” surrounded by three participles—as you are going, as you are teaching, as you are baptizing. This means that making disciples is intertwined with one’s everyday life; as the disciples are on the way to work they are to make disciples. In the workplace context, this translates into the fact that the Christian disciple can be a source of positive influence in the organization. Christ’s command “Follow me” is more than just receiving His blessings and instructions. It demands being like Jesus and passing the Master’s teaching and way of life to others (Roy, 2004). Evangelization involves accepting others, listening to their story, connecting with them, and inviting them. According to Stevens, Christian disciples can integrate faith in the workplace by engaging in the ministry of responsible and competent service; working with Christian love, honesty, and justice; and engaging in the ministry of words (as cited in Cafferky, 2007). Also, McMahon (2019) noted that the virtues or practices that might be most valuable in exemplifying Christ in the workplace include service (Matthew 20:27-28), transparency (Matthew 23:25-27; 5:8), integrity (Matthew 5:37), humility (Matthew 11:29), and grace (Matthew 5:39). Such practices offer an opportunity for Christian followers to connect their normal work activities to discipling in the workplace.

## Praxis

In the traditional approach of leadership, the relationship between the leader and the follower was of a transactional nature. Leaders give orders and followers carry out the orders and in return get rewarded. Later on, however, the traditional approach was replaced by the relational approach where both the leader and the follower are able to exchange information and knowledge (Ruiz et al., 2011). Further, Chaleff (2009) explained that followers and their leaders are partners in the organization. He believed that both followers and leaders bear responsibility for the organization’s wellbeing and its success and should be mindful of this responsibility through their actions and attitudes. In her study, de Zilwa (2014) pointed out that followers can destroy the organization by choosing *not* to act when they should.

The Christian disciples embrace their responsibility to collaborate with their supervisors. They adhere to the Christian work ethic and consider diligence as a virtue (Ryken, 2004), thus contributing to the success of the organization. Their “beliefs about honoring God in work seem to contribute to creative and collaborative behavior at work” (Neubert & Dougherty, 2015, p. 69). Their faith informs the way they work and influences their motivation to succeed at work. Their daily activities are an outgrowth of the purpose they have set and the call to minister to others. In a practical way, Christian disciples will tend to be diligent in their work and shun laziness and carelessness. By doing so, they obey the 4th commandment: “Six days you shall labor, and do all your work (Exodus 20:9). In that manner, they are authentic followers of their organizational leader as well as true disciples of Christ.

Several studies have focused on the concept of informal emergent leadership, where the followers lead in an everyday context and thus contribute to creating a work environment conducive to progress (Bullington, 2016). These informal leaders are not there to challenge the authority of the nominated leader, but they can act as leaders when the situation requires them to do so. Lynch and Friedman (2013) argue that it is not enough for leaders to defend and protect the interests of the employees (their salaries and wellbeing) and the net worth of the organization (shareholders’ value). In as much as these are important considerations for the organization’s success, the Bible demonstrates that moral values such as integrity, honesty, and accountability bring prosperity and sustainability (Deuteronomy 6:18). Interestingly, even in the business world, the moral dimension of leadership (and by extension, followership) is gaining prominence (Kouzes

& Poner, 2002; Daft, 2023; Johnson, 2022 ). Christian disciples are in a position to defend these moral values and lead the way in shaping the organization's culture based on these tenets. They are aware of their duty to stand for such values as truth, transparency, and accountability and thus influence the organization in a positive direction. They discern the appropriate time to intervene, like Esther in the Bible, and boldly come forward to influence the actions and opinions of their leaders and co-workers. This boldness requires a capacity to think independently. White (1902) states that "every human being, created in the image of God, is endowed with a power akin to that of the Creator—individuality, power to think and to do" (p. 17). She goes on to say that individuals need to be "thinkers and not mere reflectors of other men's thought" (p. 17). Christ expects His disciples to follow Him in an informed and intelligent manner and not blindly follow His commands (Bunch, 2012). For Christian disciples, this endeavor is an outgrowth of their God-given identity of "having been with Christ" (Acts 4:13). This characteristic qualifies Christian disciples as ideal followers.

Many examples and instructions of such integration of faith in the workplace are given in the Scriptures. Joseph in the house of Potiphar was recognized as being an effective and efficient worker (Genesis 39:3-4). Further, he refused the advances of Potiphar's wife and stated that his allegiance was first and foremost to God (Genesis 39:9). Daniel and his friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, in the courts of Babylon walked with God and at the same time were faithful and diligent workers (Daniel 1:8; 3:18; 6:4). The Apostle Paul admonishes the Christians to work not so as to please man but to accomplish the will of God (Ephesians 6:6-7).

Following the perspective of biblical discipleship, we argue that Christian followers draw their motivation to be authentic followers not from the organization itself but from God, who called them to be disciples. They bring to the organization their "personal history" and "trigger events," which, in our context, may mean their encounter with Christ, the source of their lifestyle within the workplace (Gardner et al., 2005). Like the Apostle Paul who met Jesus on the road of Damascus, they respond to His call of love, accept His will and His agenda, and consecrate themselves to Him (Acts 26:19). Their purpose is not organization-centered but God-centered. Their concern is caring for others, carrying others' burdens, and sharing their hope with others. Through their diligence in their work, they are the agents of change and accept the responsibility for the organization's success. They take the lead when necessary and display the moral values that help

the organization move ahead and become prosperous. The model implies that the Christian follower's role in the workplace is not a one-time achievement, but a continuous process. As the disciples of Christ grow in their relationship with the Master, they are able to understand their purpose more clearly, they are made more conscious of their responsibility towards their fellow human beings, and they are more able to practice an authentic walk (Gardner, et al., 2005).

## CONCLUSION

This paper aims at describing the concept of followership from the perspective of the Christian disciple. Our literature review demonstrates that followers play distinct roles in the organizational setting. It suggests that in the modern organization followers are not merely silent workers with little to offer. They can be proactive partners, collaborating with leaders to make the best organizational decisions. We also highlighted the various characteristics and behaviors that followers display in organizations.

We established that the drive of Christian followers is the love of God that compels them to follow Him and do what He bids them do, including following their earthly masters (Ephesians 6:5-8). The paper proposed a model that endeavors to explain how the Christian disciple can fulfill both their roles as followers of Christ as well as followers of their earthly supervisors.

Several opportunities exist for empirical studies of effective followership and discipleship in organizations. For example, there is a need to explore how organizational systems and personal traits influence followership. These elements are important considerations because they can offer different perspectives of the practice of followership by Christians given the different contexts where they are called to minister. The focus of another study could be to examine how the spirituality of an individual impacts his followership. Given the fact that a Christian's life is a pilgrimage, a process of sanctification, this type of study will help readers understand what to look for in their relationship with the Master to ensure they are being authentic followers in their field of work. Still, another study would be to look into the challenges of the Christian follower in the workplace and address them. The insights gained from this type of study would enable the readers to consider the realities on the ground, making them more informed, thus equipping them to be more relevant in the communities where they are called to work.

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