

**The Development of the Biblical Followership Profile**

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## Abstract

This paper outlines the development of a Biblical Followership Profile utilizing constructs developed from the Bible. A word study the Hebrew and Greek languages for *follow* elicited five possible sub-constructs: (a) abandonment to the leader, (b) intimacy with the leader, (c) obedience, (d) faithfulness, and (e) persistence. Possible assessment statements were developed and examined by a pool of experts. Face validity was assessed through pilot-testing the instrument. Additional tests to assess construct validity were suggested and limitations to the development of the instrument proposed. Following any changes made to the instrument as a result of exploratory factor analysis, the Biblical Follower Profile has the potential of greatly aiding individual Christians and churches in assessing the level of followership.

## The Development of the Biblical Followership Profile

Leadership studies often concentrate on the traits of leaders rather than those of followers (Chaleff, 1997). This concentration has led to a neglect of the important role of followers and their impact upon leaders and organizations (Heller & Van Til, 1982; Thornborrow, 1994). Most of these studies imply that followers are merely the respondents to the actions of the leaders and have no inherent value except as they respond to the leader's influence. Such characterizations of followers have prompted some to refer to this leader bias as being paternalistic in nature (Blake, Mouton, Sloma, & Loftin, 1968). Others have taken a more positive approach and sought to determine the characteristics of followers as more than mere responders but as persons who have specific characteristics that allow the leader to lead more effectively (Kelley, 1991).

Although the term "followership" has been used for decades, the study of the characteristics of followers has been lacking until the last few years. Kelley (1991) describes effective followers in two dimensions. One dimension perceives followers on a scale that ranges from independent, critical thinking at one end of the scale to dependent, uncritical thinking at the other end of the scale. A second dimension perceives followers on a scale from active followers to passive followers. Chaleff (1995) posits five characteristics of followers specific to "courageous followers." Courageous followers are characterized by: (a) the courage to take responsibility, (b) the courage to serve, (c) the courage to confront leadership, (d) the courage to change, and (e) the courage to take moral responsibility. Dixon (2003) furthers Chaleff's research by developing the Courageous Follower Profile which measures the follower's degree of courageous followership. A review of the literature reveals no other follower-specific measurement tool available.

One area of literature that has yet to be investigated is the biblical literature related to followership. The concept of following is prevalent throughout the biblical text. This study

outlines the steps by which a questionnaire, the Biblical Followership Profile (BFP), was developed which measures five specific characteristics of followers of Christ as found in the biblical literature. Questionnaires offer a convenient methodology for acquiring a large sample response (Sims, 1979). The BFP instrument will allow the user to determine his or her level of specific follower traits based upon a biblical understanding of the concept of what it means to follow after Christ. Such an instrument would be beneficial to the individual in that he or she would be able to self-assess his or her level of followership toward Christ. Such self-assessment is valuable in the lives of Christians so that they may grow in their relationship to God and maturity in Christ, and make a greater impact on those around them (Willard, 1997).

Another benefit of such an instrument is for leaders in the church to give the assessment to groups within the church. By assessing the overall followership level of the group, the leader might then be able to identify areas of weakness and assist the followers in addressing these weaknesses which may lead to greater effectiveness and efficiency in doing the work of the ministry.

### *Biblical Literature*

The sixty-six books of the Bible compose the content of the authoritative literature. The authority of the biblical text is primarily recognized by those of the Christian faith (Bush, 1988). These sixty-six books are comprised of two different literatures: (a) The Old Testament, written in Hebrew, and (b) The New Testament, primarily written in Greek. Because of the bifurcation of the language in the biblical text, word studies require an understanding of Hebrew and Greek in order to attain a full-orbed understanding of the biblical meaning of a word.

From a biblical understanding, God is the leader and His creatures, all that is created including human beings, are in the universe for “His good pleasure” (Isaiah 46:8-10, NASB).

From a New Testament perspective, Jesus Christ is God in the flesh (John 1:1-12) and as such is the Lord before whom “every knee shall bow... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:11 ). During Jesus’ earthly ministry, He often confronted individuals with the command to “follow Me” (see Matthew 8:29; 9:9; 19:21; Luke 9:59). When interpreting the construct of “following”, the biblical view requires an understanding that the leader has the authority, as God, to direct the activities of the follower. Thus, followers of Christ are not merely following the suggestions of a human leader but are obeying the commands of God (Shorter Catechism, 1990).

In order to gain a greater understanding of followership in the biblical text, a word study of the word “follow” was conducted in the Old and New Testaments. The study produced two major categories of concepts: (a) relationship concepts, and (b) responsibility concepts. From these two major categories several subcategories of concepts were developed from an understanding of the biblical literature.

### Relationship

One of the unique qualities of Christianity is that the worship of God involves more than mere servitude. The biblical record teaches that God loves the world (John 3:16) and reconciles the world in relationship to Himself through the life, death, and resurrection of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:18; Romans 5:10). During Jesus’ earthly ministry, He emphasized this relational aspect of belief and worship by speaking of those who follow Him as “friends” (John 15:14). This relationship aspect is further emphasized when Jesus, speaking metaphorically of those who believe upon Him, said, “My sheep hear my voice and I know them, and they follow Me” (John 10:27).

*Abandonment to the leader*

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word, *achar*, is literally translated by the English word *after*. In Numbers 14:24, Caleb was acknowledged with these words, “But My servant Caleb, because he has had a different spirit and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land which he entered, and his descendants shall take possession of it.” The Hebrew phrase “followed Me fully,” can be literally translated “fulfilled after me” (ISBE, 1996). One biblical commentator understood this as, “Caleb abandoned himself completely to God” (Wycliffe, 1962).

In the New Testament, the primary word for *follow* is *akoloutheo* (akoluqe)w). This compound Greek word is formed from the prefix *a* which expresses union, or likeness, and the root word, *keleuthos*, which means *a way* (ISBE, 1996). Thus a possible reading of this term could yield the construct of someone going in the same way. The term is used 77 times in the Gospels and refers to following Christ. The term is used in the literal sense of actually following Christ (see Matthew 4:25) and metaphorically with the concept of discipleship (see Mark 8:34, 9:38, 10:21).

The New Testament concept of following as “abandonment to the leader” is demonstrated by the disciples, Peter and Andrew, when, at the command of Jesus to follow Him, they “immediately left their nets and followed [Jesus]” (Matthew 4:20). The following are potential assessment items which may measure this particular subcategory of following:

Item 1: I am willing to take a new job in order to serve Christ.

Item 2: I am willing to move anywhere as long as I can serve Christ.

Item 3: Following Christ means I am available to go wherever He leads.

Item 4: Following Christ is more important than my own personal plans.

*Intimacy with the leader*

The Hebrew word, *dabheq*, may be translated *to cause to cleave to* or *follow hard after* (ISBE, 1996) as in Psalm 63:8 when the psalmist wrote, “my soul clings to Thee.” The English word *to* may be literally translated *after*. This phraseology indicates that “between himself and God there subsists a reciprocal relationship of active love” (Keil & Delitzsch, 1996).

In the New Testament the disciples of Jesus were identified as those who were closely associated with Jesus. Upon one occasion, Peter and John, having been accused by the religious leaders and gave a strong defense of their activities, the Scriptures note that, “when [the religious leaders] saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13-14). Jesus emphasized this close proximity of relationship with His followers when before ascending into heaven he told His disciples “I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). The follower’s understanding of intimacy with Christ appears to engender a sense of oneness that Christ seeks to have with His followers. Thus, Christ can say to his followers, “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. After a little while the world will behold Me no more; but you will behold Me; because I live, you shall live also. In that day you shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you” (John 14:18-21). The following are potential assessment items which may measure this particular subcategory of following:

Item 5: Jesus gives me a purpose for living.

Item 6: I have a love relationship with Jesus.

Item 7: People can tell that I know Jesus.

Item 8: I spend quality time with Jesus every day.

## Responsibility

The category of relationship is complimented by the category of responsibility. From a biblical perspective, the idea of relationship naturally results in the follower having certain responsibilities toward the leader. This concept was emphasized when Jesus stated, “he who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me, and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him” (John 14:21). Additionally, Jesus made the connection between relationship and responsibility when He said, “You are My friends if you do what I command you (John 15:14).

### *Obedience*

The Old Testament, Hebrew word, *radhaph*, can be literally translated *to pursue, follow, or follow after* (ISBE, 1996). The word was given as a command when Joseph commanded his steward to “follow the men” (Genesis 44:4). The actual sense of the word is to be “dispatched” (Jamieson, Fausset, & Brown, 1997). The word is also used as the result of obedience when the psalmist writes, “goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life” (Psalms 23:6).

The Greek word, *epakoloutheo*, precedes the word *follow* with the prefix *epi*, meaning *upon* giving the idea of following after or close upon a person or a concept (ISBE, 1996). 1 Peter 2:21 expresses this concept when Peter writes, “For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps....” This concept of following after Christ is further clarified by Peter’s continuing statements describing the person and activities of Christ:

Who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting

Himself to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness for by his wounds you were healed (1 Peter 1:22).

A similar Greek word, *parakoloutheo*, uses the prefix *para* which signifies “to follow close up, or side by side, hence, to accompany or conform to” (ISBE, 1996). The word is used to describe signs that accompany believers who are sharing the gospel and following good doctrine so as to practice it. This idea is conveyed in 2 Timothy 3:10 when the apostle Paul proclaims, “you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance....” The following are potential assessment items which may measure this particular subcategory of following:

Item 9: I follow the commands of Christ.

Item 10: Christ is my example.

Item 11: I study the Bible so that I might learn how to obey Christ.

Item 12: My life conforms to the example of Christ.

### *Faithfulness*

In the Old Testament book of Numbers, Caleb is personally fulfilled in his relationship with God and it is this relationship that guides his obedience and stimulates his faith in following after the purpose of God. Caleb’s disposition is referred to as a “different spirit.” This “different spirit” is juxtaposed against “all the men who have seen My glory and My signs, which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have put Me to the test these ten times and have not listened to My voice” (Numbers 14:22). Caleb’s actions are described as “a spirit of obedience and believing trust ... so that [Caleb] followed Him with unwavering fidelity” (Keil & Delitzsch, 1996). This concept of “unwavering fidelity” is reiterated in Numbers 32:11-12, and

Deuteronomy 1:36 and carries the idea that a follower is a person who is able to hear the word of God and have no reservations in his attitudes or activities. This person is fully engaged in a relationship with God that allows the follower to seek the purpose of the one being followed through faithful obedience.

The New Testament has many references to faithfulness being a characteristic of those who follow Christ (see Ephesians 1:1; 6:21; Colossians 1:2; 4:9). Paul stated in 1 Corinthians 1:2 “it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful” (KJV). The Greek word *pistos* is often translated *faithful* but may also carry the meaning of trustworthiness (Strongs, 1992). The following are potential assessment items which may measure this particular subcategory of the concept of following:

Item 13: Jesus can trust me with His word.

Item 14: I am consistent in telling others of Christ.

Item 15: Jesus would consider me a good steward.

Item 16: I have no reservations about serving Christ.

### *Persistence*

*Exakoloutheo*, combines the Greek word, *ek*, meaning *out* with the word *follow* to present the idea of following out to the end certain teachings. Peter presents this concept in the negative by stating that the apostles did not “follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ...” (2 Peter 1:16).

The Greek word *dioko* has two meanings. The first denotes *driving away* in the sense of persecution. The second means “to pursue without hostility, to follow after” (ISBE, 1996). In this second sense the word describes the means by which followers of Christ are to pursue the character of Christ. To that end followers are directed to follow: (a) that which is good (1

Thessalonians 5:15), (b) righteousness (1 Timothy 6:11), (c) peace with all men and holiness (Hebrews 12:14), and (d) righteousness, faith, love, and peace (2 Timothy 2:22). The intensity of the verb is captured when the word, *dioko*, is translated “I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14). The following are potential assessment items which may measure this particular subcategory of following:

Item 17: I am not easily discouraged.

Item 18: I am consistent with my spiritual disciplines.

Item 19: My passion is to become more like Christ.

Item 20: I am determined to honor Christ with every area of my life.

Because the BFP is a self-report instrument, there is the possibility that “respondents may answer questions in such a way as to represent themselves favorably...[thus] the validity of self-reports becomes suspect as the amount of self-presentation increases relative to self-disclosure” (Hays, Hayashi, & Stewart, 1989, p. 629). To evaluate the respondent’s tendency to give socially desirable responses the BFP incorporated five questions which have been validated as a social desirable response set (Hays, et. al). The phrase, “as a Christian” was added to one of the questions to make certain that the respondent understands that the context of the question is post-conversion to Christianity. Such an addition does not appear to impact the validity of the question. The following questions represent the social desirable response set:

Item 21: I am always courteous even to people who are disagreeable.

Item 22: As a Christian, there have been occasions when I took advantage of someone.

Item 23: I sometime try to get even rather than forgive and forget.

Item 24: I sometimes feel resentful when I don’t get my way.

Item 25: No matter who I’m talking to, I’m always a good listener.

### Validity

The Biblical Followership Profile was developed to identify and measure behaviors identified in the biblical literature as belonging to persons who seek to follow after Christ. The BFP employs self-ratings using a forced-choice Likert response. Forced-choice items “do not include responses such as *other, no opinion, not sure, or not applicable* as choices but require respondents to select from among a fixed set of response alternatives” (Dixon, 2002, p. 50) This type of response is popular among researchers (Alreck & Settle, 1985), is easy to count, and allows for multiple sampling of any single factor.

The response options were worded so that positive responses meant a higher numerical value using a five-item response ordinal Likert scale. The terms used for the responses were, to little or no extent, to a slight extent, to a moderate extent, to a great extent, and to a very great extent, which relates to a numerical scale of 1 to 5 respectively. The lower the score would indicate a lower presence of biblical follower behavior and the higher scores would indicate a higher presence of biblical follower behavior. Each of the five characteristics has one reverse coded statement to determine respondent credibility and/or respondent fatigue.

To enhance the content validity of the instrument, a pool of experts was assembled to evaluate the potential assessment items as they related to the operationalized constructs. This pool consisted of a New Testament professor, a homiletics professor, an Old Testament professor, and a leadership professor. Each of these individuals holds a Ph. D. in his field. Each expert was given the literature review and biblical word studies as self-study background material before assessing the accuracy and appropriateness of the assessment items.

Their review of the potential assessment items resulted in several changes. One concern centered on the possibility that the word study of the Greek words could result in a “root

fallacy”. A root fallacy is described as a “notion that the real meaning of a word is found in its original root” (Duvall & Hays, 2005, p. 133). The point was made that the prefixes added to the original root meaning of the word *follow*, did not necessarily result in what would be a literal translation of the Greek word for all instances of the word in the New Testament. Issues of context have a major bearing on the actual translation of the word. It was suggested that the word study be changed to reflect that the Greek words *may* be translated in this manner rather than assert a definitive translation.

Another suggestion resulted in changing statements that reflected more of an attitudinal assessment to statements that assessed specific behavior. Because the BFP is a behavioral assessment tool, it is imperative that all of the statements reflect behaviors. Whereas these behaviors may be based upon certain beliefs and attitudes, there may be occasion when the individual’s behaviors are not congruent with the individual’s stated beliefs. Therefore, the assessment items were changed to reflect only behaviors. Additional statements were added so that each construct would be measured by at least six items. There is “widespread acceptance for a ratio of survey item to factors using five or more items per factor to achieve reliable estimates” (Dixon, 2003, p. 54). Additional questions regarding the construct of obedience were added to clarify the motive behind the activity of obedience. Other statements were changed to reflect greater clarity, and the profile items were randomly sorted in order to guard against respondent fatigue (see Table 1). The demographic questions were chosen to allow for cross-sectioning of the survey results from different respondent groups. This will allow for more understanding and value from the survey results (Custom Insight, 2006).

<b>Followership Behavior</b>	<b>Item Number</b>	<b>Reverse Order Items</b>
Abandonment to the leader	1, 10, 17, 26, 33	23
Intimacy with the leader	2, 9, 18, 27, 34	30
Obedience	3, 7, 12, 16, 22, 28, 35, 37	38
Faithfulness	5, 13, 20, 24, 36	15
Persistence	6, 14, 21, 29, 32	8
Social Desirability	4, 11, 19, 25, 31	

Table 1 – Survey Item Numbers

To assess the face validity of the instrument, the adjusted BFP was pilot-tested with a group of eighteen Christians composed of ministerial students, pastors, pastor’s wives, church members and church staff members. The testing showed that the instrument was simple, straightforward to complete, not time-consuming (approximately six minutes) and generally accepted by the participants. Many of the participants commented on the directness of the statements and how the way the phrasing of the statements did not allow for prevarication. Also, several of the participants commented on how the instrument would be a positive self-assessment tool.

The pilot test revealed that several of the questions needed greater specificity with regard to the subcategory being measured. Suggestions for more specific wording were offered and the changes made to the instrument. Also, the pilot-test suggested an additional demographic question regarding denominational and/or church affiliation would be helpful when making assessments of the findings. The group believed that the answers to some of the questions may be different depending on the theological bias within certain denominations and churches and such a demographic would allow the data to be assessed with regard to these various groups.

The pilot-test revealed that questions regarding the subcategory of *obedience* needed to include additional questions regarding the motive behind a person’s obedience. These additional questions were added to clarify the difference between a person’s obedience because of intimacy with Christ and a person’s duty because of perceived church obligation. The essence of the

additional statements is to try and differentiate between obedience with regard to the area of relationship and obedience with regard to legalistic duty. These changes were made to the BFP (see Appendix).

In order to assess the construct validity of the instrument, an exploratory factor analysis would need to be performed to determine if the constructs explained any significant variance in the instrument items. This exploratory analysis “defines the possible relationships in only the most general form and then allows the multivariate technique to estimate relationship(s)... and lets the method and the data define the nature of the relationships (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998).

There is no clear agreement on the sample size for exploratory factor analysis. The sample size for this study should be at least 100 based upon the rule of 100 that posits the sample size should be the larger of 5 times the number of variables or 100 (Hatcher, 1994). Following the exploratory factor analysis, instrument items that were found to be misleading or have no construct loading on them would need to be reworded or omitted.

#### Limitations

The primary limitation of the development of the BFP is that the instrument was developed and pilot-tested by Baptists. This single source for the development of the statements could possibly word items that may be misleading to those in other denominations because of the specificity with which certain words, theological assumptions, and concepts are used within the Baptist faith. To broaden the scope of the applicability of the instrument, Christians from other denominational perspectives should be asked to gauge the content and face validity of the instrument.

### Conclusion

The literature outlining the concept of followership is growing. This paper outlined the development of a Biblical Follower Profile utilizing constructs developed from the Bible. Utilizing the Hebrew and Greek languages, five constructs were identified: (a) abandonment to the leader, (b) intimacy with the leader, (c) obedience, (d) faithfulness, and (e) persistence. Possible assessment statements were developed and examined by a pool of experts. Changes were made to the instrument based upon their findings. Face validity was assessed through pilot-testing the instrument. The pilot-test indicated that the instrument was straightforward and not time-consuming to complete. Additional tests to assess construct validity were suggested and limitations to the development of the instrument proposed. Following any changes made to the instrument as a result of exploratory factor analysis, the Biblical Follower Profile has the potential of greatly aiding individual Christians and churches in assessing the level of followership. By understanding the level of followership, individuals and churches can develop strategies to strengthen weaknesses and have a greater influence on others.

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