

PARENT CONVERSATIONS

There is a natural tension between leading and following. Yet I believe the Christian needs to walk the tightrope of both. Figuring out how to translate that for our children can be difficult. Read the perspectives of these three Christians for more insights into this thorny topic.

—Nicole Balza

DO WE WANT OUR CHILDREN TO BE LEADERS OR FOLLOWERS?

OUR CHILDREN are sons and daughters of the King! Because of that identity, our children are leaders because they are Christ-followers. Living that out is a challenge. Here are three thoughts to consider:

- 1. Christian young people need to be counter-cultural—leaders who MUST NOT follow.** Perhaps you are of the generation in which Christianity was culturally salient or marginally a subculture. That is no longer true. Now, to be Christian is to be against culture. Christian young people face great challenges being in the world but not of it. They risk, endure, and persist against challenges that paint them as oppositional, even hateful. This next generation of Christians needs to pray the prayer Jesus spoke in John chapter 17—that the Lord would protect them, fill them with joy, and sanctify them with the truth.
- 2. Christian young people need to be humble—followers who DO NOT lead.** Psychology researchers claim that humility is the cardinal virtue from which all others emanate. In a culture that rewards individualism and bravado, being humble might fall flat. Philippians chapter 2 teaches otherwise: “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves” (v. 3). The next generation of Christians needs to be humble and show love so that God is glorified in their interactions.
- 3. Christian young people need to be themselves— influencers for the GOSPEL.** I don’t know if I am leading or following anymore. Most of the time, I’m attempting to influence others or I am being influenced—whether I know it or not. Reading about

the disciples always interests me. God used them, with all their different talents, to influence others. At the end of the book of Matthew, Jesus said, “Go and make disciples of all nations” (28:19). The next generation of Christians needs to influence others for Christ in whatever ways God gives them talents and opportunities.

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Let’s support the next generation of Christians to be leaders who are Christ-followers and who find opportunities to influence others through their talents, with humility, and through prayer.



Karen Fischer is a licensed professional counselor passionate about mental wellness. She serves people in outpatient settings and groups as well as through mentorship and education. Karen’s passion surrounds marrying the grace and truth of the gospel with understanding psychological stewardship.

“STOP SAYING THAT!” my youngest yelled after I once again told him that he was a leader. This time it was after the parent-teacher conferences I had just attended when he was 13. More than one teacher shared with me that he sets the tone of the classroom. If he comes in, sits down, and starts to work, so do the other students. If he comes in, makes jokes, and talks a lot, so do the other students. I am not the only one who

has shared with him that he has leadership qualities. People listen to him. People care about what he says. He has a presence about him. At age 13 he did not want that kind of responsibility. I couldn't blame him.

There is so much talk about leadership. Google "leadership," and you will find 5.8 billion hits. Search "followership," and it is under 5 million hits. That is a significantly lower number. And yet, I really do want my children to be good followers.

I don't mean blind followers. I want their eyes wide open as they follow. I want them to know, really know, whom they are following. I want them to understand why they are following. I want them to learn how best to follow. I want them to find other people who already follow. And when they follow well, my prayer is that others will join them in their followership because they represent how good it is to follow.

Of course, I am talking about following Jesus.

My son did not want the responsibility that being a leader holds. The truth is, being a good follower holds responsibility as well. In fact, when he leads well, he is following Jesus well. He is learning how to do that. So are my other children. So am I. Because Jesus is the one thing needful, and I want to follow him.



Jenni Schubring and her husband, Tad, are currently parenting their two youngest children and navigating their change of roles as their three adult children are now living on their own. Jenni is a certified life and team coach.



"I AM HIM! . . . Bro, I'm the GOAT. . . Like my recent! . . . I got mad rizz!"

Teens spend most of their time these days arguing and debating in person and online about how great they are, making wild boasts about their skills in anything from Fortnite to flirting. It's as if they subconsciously are battling to create an imaginary billboard to give themselves nonstop attention.

Okay, so maybe we recognize that's a bit much. But should our children be willing to step into the limelight? Should they be willing to take the reins and run, taking others along for the ride? Or should they be prim, proper, pious, and passive? Should we raise our children to be leaders or followers?

The answer? Both!

For confirmation we can look to our great leader, the head of the church, Jesus Christ. His actions and behav-

ior were wildly different than those of this world—and completely unexpected. Jesus led through humble love and service. Countless examples can be cited. Think of Jesus teaching about the greatest being the least or children with their simple faith as the greatest in the kingdom. Or how about Jesus washing the disciples' feet and teaching about how to love like him and not lord power over others? And how could we forget Jesus' profound statement that he both made and then fulfilled completely: "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28, Mark 10:45)?

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Jesus led with humble love and self-sacrificing service. And for that, not only do we gladly follow him as his disciples, but we also follow in his footsteps. The apostle Paul teaches in Philippians 2:5, "In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus."

As parents, our goal is to raise up children who have the same mindset as Jesus, to help them become selfless servants. In that sense, we are training our children to be followers of Christ and like Christ. Yet at the same time, a unique truth is in place. Those who love like Christ will also then be leaders like Christ.

Now while it's true that some in the world will not like or appreciate this, it is also true that many in this world, and certainly in the Christian church, will. Humility, hard work, respect, and kindness are hard to come by these days. People in the world will respect our children if they grow up to live with those attributes. But most important, children who grow into adults who lead like Christ will be incredible blessings to the church at large as God works through them to spread his gospel to all people.

So train those children to follow Christ, but then train them to lead in humble service like Christ too!



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