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AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP IN THE BIBLE: A STUDY OF ITS IMPACT ON CHURCH LEADERSHIP

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Abstract

Christian leadership in the 21st century faces the tension between managerial expectations and spiritual authenticity. Contemporary models often emphasize strategic planning, institutional hierarchy, and charismatic influence. In contrast, biblical leadership is portrayed as emerging through divine calling, spiritual formation, and character refinement. This paper explores the concept of authentic leadership through the lens of biblical narratives using a qualitative, descriptive-theological approach. By analyzing the lives of Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Saul, David, Solomon, and Jesus Christ, the study highlights how authentic leadership in the Bible is consistently associated with suffering, humility, obedience, and divine appointment. The analysis integrates contemporary authentic leadership theory with biblical theology to construct a framework of leadership grounded in spiritual integrity. The study argues that such a model is highly relevant for contemporary church leadership and proposes a renewed understanding of ecclesiastical authority rooted in servanthood, submission to God, and moral responsibility.

Keywords: *Authentic leadership, biblical leadership, character, church leadership*

Abstrak

Kepemimpinan Kristen pada abad ke-21 menghadapi ketegangan antara tuntutan manajerial dan keaslian spiritual. Model kepemimpinan kontemporer sering menekankan pada perencanaan strategis, hierarki institusional, dan pengaruh karismatik. Sebaliknya, kepemimpinan dalam Alkitab digambarkan sebagai sesuatu yang muncul melalui panggilan ilahi, pembentukan spiritual, dan pemurnian karakter. Tulisan ini mengeksplorasi konsep kepemimpinan autentik melalui lensa narasi Alkitab dengan pendekatan kualitatif-deskriptif teologis. Dengan menganalisis kehidupan tokoh-tokoh seperti Yusuf, Musa, Yosua, Saul, Daud, Salomo, dan Yesus Kristus, penelitian ini menyoroti bahwa kepemimpinan autentik dalam Alkitab secara konsisten terkait dengan penderitaan, kerendahan hati, ketaatan, dan penetapan ilahi. Analisis ini mengintegrasikan teori kepemimpinan autentik kontemporer dengan teologi biblika untuk membangun sebuah kerangka kepemimpinan yang berakar pada integritas spiritual. Studi ini berargumen bahwa model tersebut sangat relevan bagi kepemimpinan gereja masa kini dan mengusulkan pemahaman baru tentang otoritas gerejawi yang berlandaskan pada sikap melayani, penyerahan diri kepada Allah, dan tanggung jawab moral.

Kata kunci: Kepemimpinan autentik, kepemimpinan biblika, karakter, kepemimpinan gereja

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INTRODUCTION

In the modern age, Christian leadership finds itself at a crossroads between managerial competence and spiritual authenticity. Many church leaders are trained within frameworks borrowed from the corporate world, focusing on vision casting, strategic planning, institutional development, and charismatic communication (Samul, 2024). Although these qualities are helpful in running efficient organizations, they often fall short in addressing the spiritual needs of the church and in sustaining long-term, value-driven leadership. The tension between these two paradigms raises a critical question: what kind of leadership does the church need in order to remain faithful to its biblical foundations?

Modern leadership theories such as transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and charismatic leadership have greatly influenced how leadership is conceptualized within church contexts (Keita, 2019). These models emphasize effectiveness, performance outcomes, and influence. Yet, these frameworks often prioritize image over integrity and authority over accountability. In this regard, the church risks adopting leadership models that may be externally successful but internally disconnected from biblical values (Antakirana & Purwanto, 2025).

By contrast, the Bible offers a model of leadership rooted in divine calling, spiritual refinement, and moral integrity (Slater, 2020). Biblical leadership does not begin with self-assertion but with self-denial; it does not prioritize influence but obedience (McDonald, 2021). Leaders in Scripture such as Joseph, Moses, David, and ultimately Jesus Christ exemplify leadership that emerges from seasons of testing, wilderness experiences, and dependence on God. These figures were not self-appointed, but divinely chosen; they did not build their platforms through popularity, but through faithfulness and surrender. Their leadership was not defined by charisma but by character (Patterson, 2016).

The concept of "authentic leadership" in contemporary literature provides a useful bridge between modern leadership theory and biblical theology (Adepoju, 2020). Authentic leadership is characterized by self-awareness, relational transparency, internalized moral perspective, and balanced processing (Avolio & Bass, 2001). Walumbwa further validate these attributes through empirical study, asserting that authentic leaders foster trust, model ethical behavior, and remain consistent with their values even under pressure (Walumbwa et al., 2008). These core traits align closely with biblical accounts of leadership, especially when

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considering how figures like Moses wrestled with personal inadequacy, or how David demonstrated repentance and spiritual intimacy with God (Chandler, 2011).

The premise of this study is that authentic leadership as defined by Scripture offers a transformative alternative to contemporary leadership models that may lack spiritual depth. This study posits that biblical leadership is not merely inspirational, but instructional—it provides foundational principles that can inform and reform church leadership in every era. As modern congregations face challenges ranging from moral failure to institutional distrust, there is an urgent need to recover a model of leadership that prioritizes obedience to God, service to others, and integrity in life and doctrine (Charles, 2020).

Furthermore, the current crisis in global leadership—marked by scandals, abuse of power, and moral compromise—reinforces the relevance of returning to a biblical model of authentic leadership (Woodward, 2023). Leaders shaped by suffering, who demonstrate humility, faith, and dependence on God, are urgently needed in both church and society (Breedlove, 2016). Biblical leadership narratives affirm that the journey to authentic leadership is often forged in obscurity and trial, rather than spotlight and success (Lemoine et al., 2019) . Whether it is Joseph in prison, Moses in the wilderness, David fleeing Saul, or Jesus in Gethsemane, true leaders emerge not through entitlement but through endurance.

This study will analyze seven biblical figures—Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Saul, David, Solomon, and Jesus Christ—to trace patterns of leadership rooted in divine selection and spiritual formation. These narratives will be examined not simply for historical reflection but for theological insight, with the goal of proposing a biblically grounded framework of authentic leadership applicable to modern church contexts. By engaging both biblical texts and contemporary leadership literature, this research aims to demonstrate that the essence of Christian leadership is found not in administrative skill or strategic vision, but in a heart fully yielded to God.

Ultimately, this paper seeks to challenge, equip, and encourage church leaders to reorient their leadership paradigm—not around personal success or institutional loyalty, but around faithfulness to God's calling and a commitment to lead as stewards rather than owners. Leadership in the church is not a platform for prominence but a pathway to service, sacrifice, and sanctification. Authentic leadership is, at its core, spiritual leadership.

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METHODOLOGY

"The research methodology used is a descriptive qualitative method by analyzing biblical texts exegetically and paying attention to the historical, cultural and literary context. Primary data is drawn from Scripture, while secondary data includes academic commentaries, journal articles, and recent works on authentic leadership. The approach follows the inductive analysis of selected biblical leaders to identify patterns of divine calling, spiritual formation, and leadership responsibility (Randolph, 2021) .

The study begins with a systematic exegetical reading of biblical texts, emphasizing historical, cultural, and literary contexts (Miles, 2025). Primary data sources include the Old and New Testament Scriptures, with particular focus on the books of Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 1 Chronicles, Psalms, and the Gospels. These texts are examined not only for their historical content but also for their theological implications regarding leadership, obedience, calling, and divine-human interaction (Braganza, 2025).

The research process follows an inductive approach, identifying recurring patterns and thematic consistencies across the leadership narratives of Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Saul, David, Solomon, and Jesus. These patterns include stages of formation, divine selection, leadership crises, moral testing, failure and repentance, and legacy. Each case study is analyzed in terms of how these elements contribute to the leader's authenticity, spiritual maturity, and impact on the community (Gaulden, 2023) .

To ensure methodological rigor, triangulation is employed by integrating scriptural analysis, theological commentary, and contemporary leadership theory (Harrison et al., 2020). Commentaries and scholarly literature are selected from professional judgment, academic presses, and theological journals to support the exegesis. Furthermore, intertextual analysis is utilized to compare different biblical books and their perspectives on leadership, particularly when examining composite narratives like that of David or Jesus.

Data interpretation involves thematic coding and narrative synthesis, categorizing the various leadership traits and responses evident in the life events of each figure. This qualitative coding process enables the identification of cross-case similarities and distinctive features (Bingham, 2023). For instance, Joseph and Moses both exhibit endurance in suffering, yet their contexts and responses vary, offering nuanced insights into how authentic leadership manifests differently

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depending on personal, spiritual, and historical circumstances.

Additionally, the study is framed within a theological anthropology that views humans as image-bearers of God, capable of leadership only insofar as they submit to divine guidance. This theological lens informs the ethical evaluation of leadership behaviors in the biblical text and situates authentic leadership within a broader redemptive-historical narrative.

Finally, the study acknowledges its limitations by noting the challenges of applying ancient leadership models directly to contemporary settings. However, it argues that the underlying principles—divine calling, humility, repentance, and faithfulness—are timeless and universally applicable. The goal is not to replicate biblical leadership structures but to retrieve their spiritual essence for application in today's church leadership practices.

By integrating biblical theology with leadership studies, this methodological approach provides a holistic and multidimensional examination of authentic leadership. It seeks to bridge the gap between Scripture and practical ministry by offering a research model that is faithful to biblical witness and responsive to contemporary ecclesial needs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Joseph: The Leader Shaped in Captivity

Joseph's leadership journey exemplifies the transformative power of adversity and divine preparation. At just seventeen, Joseph received prophetic dreams indicating future leadership and influence (Gen. 37:2–9). However, his path was anything but immediate or conventional. Betrayed by his brothers, sold into slavery, and unjustly imprisoned (Gen. 39–41), Joseph faced prolonged seasons of suffering and isolation that tested and refined his character (Smith, 2019)

What distinguishes Joseph is not simply that he suffered, but how he responded to suffering (Moore, 2023). Despite the injustice, Joseph remained faithful to God and consistent in integrity. His refusal of Potiphar's wife's advances (Gen. 39:9), and his ability to interpret dreams with spiritual insight (Gen. 40–41), demonstrate a maturity rooted in personal holiness and divine trust. Joseph's elevation to become vizier of Egypt (Gen. 41:38–46) was not due to ambition or social maneuvering but a divine orchestration of events. His leadership emerged

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from the crucible of hardship, not the corridors of power (Vatican in Exile, 2024).

Contemporary leadership theory increasingly recognizes the formative value of suffering and failure. Avolio and Gardner argue that authentic leaders are forged through personal experiences, especially those involving hardship (Avolio & Bass, 2001). Similarly, Shamir and Eilam maintain that the life stories of leaders—particularly stories of adversity—play a central role in shaping their authenticity and sense of purpose. Joseph's trajectory aligns with this framework: he becomes an authentic leader precisely because his values, faith, and identity were tested and purified through suffering.(Shamir & Eilam-Shamir, 2018).

In terms of modern application, Joseph's story resonates with the concept of resilience in leadership. Luthans and Avolio emphasize psychological capital—hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism—as foundational for authentic leadership (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). Joseph embodied each of these. He maintained hope even in prison, displayed self-efficacy in managing Potiphar's household and the prison, and sustained optimism in God's sovereign plan (Gen. 45:7–8). His resilience was not merely emotional strength but theological conviction (Nasreen et al., 2024).

Moreover, Joseph's leadership reflects what Rego describe as morally grounded leadership (Rego et al., 2012). He chose integrity over personal gain, service over revenge, and forgiveness over bitterness. His famous declaration to his brothers, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (Gen. 50:20), reveals a profound spiritual awareness and a deeply integrated moral perspective. In organizational settings today, such moral clarity is essential, particularly amid pressures for expedient or self-serving leadership (Kleynhans et al., 2023).

Theologically, Joseph's story underscores a model of leadership that is providential rather than positional. As Liebscher notes, biblical leadership often emerges in hidden places, shaped by God's presence in the mundane and marginalized (Liebscher, 2016). Joseph did not need a platform to prepare for leadership—his preparation occurred in anonymity, where only God could see and shape him. This pattern challenges contemporary tendencies to equate visibility with significance. Authentic leadership begins in the hidden places of faithful stewardship, long before public recognition arrives (Cole, 2025).

Furthermore, Joseph's story offers insights into cross-cultural and political leadership. As an Israelite operating at the highest levels of Egyptian governance, Joseph demonstrates cultural adaptability without compromising spiritual identity (Bogard, 2024). He becomes a bridge between Egypt and Israel, famine and provision, judgment and mercy. His leadership is both prophetic and administrative,

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spiritual and strategic—a balance often lacking in modern ecclesial or corporate leaders (Schmid, 2021).

Finally, Joseph's reconciliation with his brothers offers a powerful model of emotional intelligence and relational healing, includes emotional self-regulation and empathy as critical components of effective leadership (Friedman, 2025). Joseph exemplifies both, weeping privately before revealing himself (Gen. 45:1–2), and offering reassurance to his guilt-stricken brothers (Gen. 50:21). His ability to lead Egypt while emotionally processing deep family trauma reflects a level of authenticity seldom seen in leaders driven by image or institutional expectations.

In sum, Joseph's journey affirms that authentic leadership is less about status and more about sanctification. His leadership was marked by internal formation, spiritual intimacy, moral courage, and relational depth (Smith, 2020). Contemporary Christian leaders can glean from Joseph the imperative to embrace suffering not as a detour but as divine preparation, trusting that God forms leaders not in comfort but in captivity, not in applause but in affliction (Baumgartner, 2023).

Moses: Divine Selection and Spiritual Legitimacy

The biblical narrative consistently emphasizes that spiritual leadership originates not from human ambition or institutional mechanisms but from divine initiative. Moses' encounter with God in the burning bush (Exodus 3), demonstrates a clear trajectory: authentic leadership is divinely sanctioned, spiritually discerned, and purpose-driven.

This motif of divine endorsement challenges modern ecclesial practices, where leadership selection often mirrors secular models, relying heavily on visible skills such as charisma, managerial aptitude, or social popularity. While these traits may be helpful for organizational effectiveness, they fall short of the biblical standard, which prioritizes spiritual legitimacy rooted in divine calling, community affirmation, and a proven godly character (Choi, 2021).

The leadership of Moses stands as one of the clearest and most comprehensive demonstrations of divine selection and spiritual legitimacy in Scripture. His call was not the result of personal ambition or institutional election, but a direct intervention by God, uniquely marked by a theophanic encounter at the burning bush (Exodus 3:1–12). Moses' journey from exile in Midian to the liberator of Israel illustrates that authentic spiritual leadership originates in God's sovereign initiative, not in human qualification or status.

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Moses' story challenges modern leadership paradigms by centering not on credentials or charisma, but on obedience, humility, and divine commissioning. As scholars have noted, Moses did not volunteer for leadership—in fact, he resisted the call multiple times (Exod. 4:1–17). His reluctance underscores that divine selection is not based on self-confidence but on God's sovereign plan (Daniel, 2025). God chooses whom He wills, often selecting the unlikely, the insecure, or the seemingly unqualified to fulfill divine purposes. This narrative sharply contrasts with contemporary trends in ecclesial leadership that often prioritize visibility, eloquence, and institutional validation.

Recent theological discourse emphasizes the transformative nature of Moses' calling. According to Larson (2022) the burning bush event was not just a vocational summons but a moment of ontological transformation in which Moses moved from being a fugitive to becoming a prophetic agent of liberation (Larson, 2022). The divine name revealed to him—"I AM WHO I AM" (Exod. 3:14)—reorients his leadership identity from a self-referential model to a God-centered mission. This redefinition of leadership identity remains a critical corrective in today's context, where leadership is often entangled with personal branding and platform-building.

Moses' leadership is also deeply rooted in divine authority rather than popular affirmation. Although he became a central figure for the Israelite people, his legitimacy was frequently contested (see Numbers 12, 16) (Theology of Work Project, 2024). Yet, God repeatedly reaffirmed Moses' authority through supernatural validation, such as the miracles before Pharaoh, the parting of the Red Sea, and the giving of the Law at Sinai. These events served as divine endorsements of Moses' leadership, indicating that true authority must be grounded in God's empowering presence rather than institutional backing alone.

An important dimension of Moses' divine legitimacy is his role as mediator between God and the people. He uniquely speaks "face to face" with God (Exod. 33:11), a phrase that signifies intimate access and divine trust. This priest-prophet dynamic further affirms his spiritual authority—not just to lead administratively, but to intercede spiritually. According to Hawley (2020), this mediatorial function illustrates the priestly aspect of biblical leadership, where proximity to God is the foundation for effective guidance of God's people (Hawley, 2020). Leaders today must reclaim this dimension, recognizing that spiritual intimacy, not managerial skill, is the heart of transformative leadership.

Moreover, Moses' leadership is characterized by radical humility. Numbers

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12:3 famously declares him "very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth." Humility, in this context, is not weakness but a posture of submission to God's will, even in the face of personal cost (Sherley, 2019). This virtue is central to spiritual legitimacy. As Sherley's theory of servant leadership has been adapted by Christian theologians, humility is now widely recognized as a non-negotiable trait for godly leadership (Sherley, 2019). Moses becomes a prototype for this model—not ruling over the people but standing between them and God's wrath, often pleading for their forgiveness (Exod. 32:11–14).

Contemporary applications of Moses' leadership narrative emphasize the importance of divine calling as the primary credential for ministry. In contrast to merit-based promotions or popularity-based appointments, Moses' example urges churches to rediscover processes of spiritual discernment in leadership selection. Studies in pastoral theology suggest that vocational clarity—knowing one is called by God—is one of the strongest predictors of resilience and long-term faithfulness in ministry (Christian Leaders Institute, 2023).

Additionally, Moses' forty years in the wilderness serve as a model for formative preparation. Before leading Israel, Moses was led by God into isolation, silence, and anonymity. This "desert season" is not wasted time but a period of spiritual formation. According to Ron Kelleher (2025), such wilderness experiences are often integral to the making of spiritual leaders, as they cultivate dependence on God, refine motives, and dismantle ego (Kelleher, 2025). Churches must, therefore, avoid premature promotions and instead allow time for deep formation.

In summary, Moses embodies the biblical paradigm of divine selection and spiritual legitimacy. His calling, resistance, transformation, and humility all underscore that true leadership in God's kingdom is not self-generated but God-initiated. In an era where leadership is often professionalized and politicized, Moses remains a compelling reminder that only those who are called, formed, and commissioned by God can rightly lead His people.

Joshua: Empowered Successor and Faithful Servant

Following the monumental leadership of Moses, Joshua emerges not as a charismatic reformer or revolutionary figure, but as a divinely appointed successor—one whose authority is rooted in obedience, faithful discipleship, and spiritual empowerment. His transition into leadership marks a significant theological moment in Scripture: the passing of divine mandate from one generation to the next, not through inheritance or election, but through mentoring,

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commissioning, and divine confirmation.

Joshua's legitimacy as a leader is established in multiple stages. First, he was a long-time servant of Moses (Exod. 24:13; Num. 11:28), demonstrating faithfulness in proximity and a learning posture over many years. Second, his divine commissioning in Deuteronomy 31:7–8 and reaffirmed in Joshua 1:1–9 explicitly ties his authority to God's promise and presence. God says, "As I was with Moses, so I will be with you" (Josh. 1:5), signaling a continuity of divine presence, not just of office. This continuity is essential to understanding Joshua's role as a successor: he is not Moses' replacement by virtue of competence, but God's chosen instrument for a new season in Israel's redemptive history.

Recent scholarship emphasizes the theological significance of Joshua's succession in the context of leadership continuity and spiritual legitimacy (Ajooni, 2023). As note, the appointment of Joshua reflects a divinely orchestrated model of leadership succession that prioritizes spiritual readiness and covenant loyalty over personal ambition (BGodInspired, 2025). This approach contrasts sharply with many contemporary church practices, where succession planning often focuses on charisma, administrative skills, or popularity rather than character and calling (O'Brien, 2024).

Joshua also exemplifies the crucial theme of obedience as the hallmark of godly leadership. In Joshua 1:8, the Lord commands him to "meditate on the Law day and night" and to act according to all that is written in it. This prescription is not merely personal but missional—it is through his faithfulness to God's word that he will lead the people into their promised inheritance. According to Roylston, Joshua's success is not military but theological; his victories are inseparable from his covenant faithfulness. This reframes leadership from being goal-driven to God-centered (Roylston, 2023).

Although Moses laid hands on Joshua in a public act of commissioning (Deut. 34:9), Scripture makes it clear that Joshua was not appointed by Moses' personal decision but chosen directly by God. In Numbers 27:18–23, the Lord explicitly commands Moses: "Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay your hand on him." This affirms that the authority for leadership transition came from God Himself. As noted by Drummond, "Joshua's appointment underscores divine prerogative rather than human preference," signaling a model where leadership legitimacy flows from divine selection rather than succession politics or mentorship alone (Drummond, 2019). This divine origin reinforces the theological

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principle that authentic spiritual leadership is grounded not in institutional inheritance, but in God's sovereign call.

Moreover, Joshua demonstrates a model of courage rooted in divine assurance. The repeated exhortation, "Be strong and courageous" (Josh. 1:6, 7, 9), is not a motivational slogan but a theological imperative grounded in God's promise. Courage in biblical leadership is not self-willed but Spirit-empowered. Leaders today often face the temptation to depend on strategy rather than Scripture, or on institutional power rather than divine presence (Piippo, 2019). Joshua's story rebukes such trends and calls leaders back to a dependence on God.

Finally, Joshua's role in covenant renewal—particularly in Joshua 24—demonstrates his commitment not merely to conquest but to the spiritual formation of the people. Joshua is as much a theologian as a commander, concluding his leadership by calling Israel to renew their commitment to the Lord. This reveals that authentic leadership must culminate not in personal legacy but in communal fidelity to God (Roylston, 2023).

Saul: Leadership Without Formation

King Saul, Israel's first monarch, exemplifies a tragic case of leadership that lacked spiritual formation and inner maturity. Although Saul was divinely chosen and publicly anointed by the prophet Samuel (1 Sam. 10:1), his leadership quickly unraveled due to character deficiencies and disobedience. His narrative reveals that being divinely appointed does not automatically equate to spiritual readiness (Ming, 2022). Saul possessed outward qualifications—he was tall, strong, and from a respected family (1 Sam. 9:1–2)—but lacked the inner transformation necessary to sustain godly leadership. As Bickersteth argues, Saul's kingship was marked by impulsive decision-making, insecurity, and a failure to submit to divine authority, indicating that spiritual formation is essential for leadership durability and fidelity (Bickersteth, 2023).

One of the clearest indicators of Saul's lack of formation is his repeated disobedience to God's commands. In 1 Samuel 13, he offers sacrifices unlawfully in place of Samuel, demonstrating impatience and a lack of reverence for God's timing and methods. Later, in 1 Samuel 15, he again disobeys by sparing King Agag and the best livestock, despite God's command for total destruction. This pattern of partial obedience exposes Saul's deeper problem—not merely a strategic failure,

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but a heart not fully surrendered to God (Ming, 2022). Saul's downfall is theological before it is political; it is a failure of formation, not merely administration." His inability to allow God's word to shape his priorities points to a leadership model grounded in pragmatism rather than spiritual depth.

Moreover, Saul's growing jealousy of David (1 Sam. 18–26) reveals a deeply insecure and unstable character. He frequently prioritized his personal status over God's broader purposes, attempting to kill David multiple times despite knowing David's divine calling. This insecurity reflects the danger of leadership without identity rooted in God. Spiritual formation includes the cultivation of self-awareness, humility, and emotional health—traits noticeably absent in Saul. Without these, leaders are easily threatened by others and governed by fear rather than faith (Wilson Teo, 2017).

Saul's trajectory also warns against confusing divine appointment with spiritual maturity. His anointing did not lead to transformation because it was not matched with a yielded heart. As Scazzero suggests, Saul's failure teaches that anointing must be followed by discipleship; leaders must be formed in hiddenness before being exalted publicly (Scazzero, 2014). The contrast with David—who spent years in obscurity before kingship—further reinforces this. David was shaped in solitude and suffering, while Saul ascended quickly without inner grounding.

In sum, Saul serves as a cautionary paradigm of leadership without formation. His story demonstrates that outward calling must be accompanied by inward cultivation through obedience, humility, and a receptive spirit. Without formation, leadership becomes fragile, reactive, and ultimately destructive—both for the leader and the people they serve.

David: A Leader After God's Heart

David stands as one of the most significant figures in biblical leadership, frequently upheld as a model of spiritual integrity, covenantal faithfulness, and divine favor. The phrase "a man after God's own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22) does not imply moral perfection but rather indicates a deep, consistent orientation toward God's will. Unlike Saul, whose leadership was marred by disobedience and insecurity, David's leadership exemplifies personal devotion, public justice, and relational humility, all grounded in divine calling and spiritual formation.

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David's leadership is characterized primarily by his intimate relationship with God. His psalms reveal a heart deeply attuned to divine presence—honest in lament, exuberant in praise, and humble in repentance(Chandler, 2011). According to Arthur W. Pink, David's prayers reflect not only theological depth but emotional authenticity, indicating that spiritual leadership begins with an honest, prayerful relationship with God (Pink, 2013). This intimacy shaped David's decisions, such as when he consistently sought God's guidance before going into battle (1 Sam. 23:2; 2 Sam. 5:19).

David also modeled the critical leadership trait of repentance. His response to moral failure—especially after his sin with Bathsheba—demonstrates a willingness to be corrected and restored by God (2 Sam. 12; Ps. 51). As Boaheng observes, "Among its most cherished gems is Psalm 51, which is unparalleled with regards to the subject of penitence." (Boaheng & Twumasi-Ankrah, 2024). This capacity distinguishes leaders who are merely effective from those who are spiritually aligned. Authentic leadership, therefore, includes vulnerability, accountability, and an openness to correction—values often absent in modern leadership culture.

In his public role, David embodied covenantal justice and servant leadership. Though he was anointed king, he repeatedly refused to seize power through violence, even sparing Saul's life twice (1 Sam. 24; 26). This restraint demonstrated his trust in God's timing and providence. As Chandler notes, David's leadership was "David's attitude toward Yahweh, in turn, is consistently depicted as one of trust and obedience." (Chandler, 2011). His rise to kingship was gradual, shaped by suffering, wilderness trials, and years of waiting—highlighting the principle that godly leadership matures in obscurity and adversity.

Furthermore, David's establishment of Jerusalem as both political and religious center shows his integration of spiritual and administrative leadership. He united the tribes, brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6), and desired to build a house for God. Even though God denied his request, David's motivation was theologically sound. David's desire reflected a king whose leadership identity was inseparable from divine worship (Chandler, 2011). This integration of political authority and spiritual responsibility is a model for holistic leadership today.

Importantly, David's leadership was not without flaws, but he maintained a consistent pattern of returning to God. The biblical narrative does not whitewash

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David's failures but instead presents them in the context of a larger story of divine grace and covenant. Leaders today can learn from David that godliness is not the absence of error, but the persistent reorientation toward God after failure (Gal\-Or, 2025).

David's legacy is not merely historical; it is messianic. Jesus is identified as the "Son of David," pointing to the enduring impact of David's heart-oriented leadership (Matt. 1:1; Luke 1:32). This theological linkage affirms that the character of a leader is as crucial as their accomplishments. As leadership scholar Victor Lonu Budha affirms, "David's story confirms that God's criteria for leadership are not charisma or conquest, but covenantal loyalty." (Budha, 2020)

Solomon: Wisdom and the Limits of Charisma

King Solomon's reign is often celebrated for his extraordinary wisdom, wealth, and architectural achievements, particularly the building of the Temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 6). He is frequently upheld as the epitome of divine wisdom in leadership, having received a discerning heart from God (1 Kings 3:9–12). However, Solomon's story also illustrates the inherent limitations of charisma and intellect when not anchored in ongoing covenantal faithfulness. His eventual moral and spiritual decline underscores the danger of over-relying on divine gifting without sustained spiritual formation and obedience.

Solomon's early leadership is exemplary in many ways. He sought wisdom over wealth and power (1 Kings 3:5–14), which God honored by granting him not only unmatched wisdom but also prosperity and international acclaim. Solomon's request for wisdom reflects a humility that is foundational for ethical governance and spiritual discernment. His leadership was marked by diplomatic savvy, architectural expansion, and legal innovation—all of which positioned Israel at the height of its geopolitical influence (Green, 2015). The Queen of Sheba's visit (1 Kings 10) affirms that Solomon's charisma and accomplishments were recognized globally.

However, Solomon's story takes a significant turn in his later years. Despite his divine wisdom, he failed to guard his heart against idolatry and political compromise. Scripture records that Solomon loved many foreign women and allowed their gods into Israel's religious life (1 Kings 11:1–8). This drift into syncretism and spiritual compromise illustrates the core limitation of charisma:

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it can attract admiration and success but cannot substitute for character and obedience. Solomon's failure lies not in a lack of intellect but in a divided heart, "a disintegration between his spiritual foundation and political ambition." (Friedman & Friedman, 2019).

Leadership studies increasingly affirm this biblical insight. Charisma, while powerful, is often overrated as a sustainable leadership trait (Nowak et al., 2017). Charisma can create dependency, foster isolation, and encourage a sense of invincibility—patterns evident in Solomon's unchecked accumulation of wealth, horses, and wives, all contrary to Deuteronomy 17:14–20. Solomon's deviation from Torah principles signifies that wisdom alone, even divinely imparted, cannot protect against the slow erosion caused by compromise. Authentic leadership requires not only insight but disciplined fidelity to God's covenant (Cavins, 2019).

Moreover, Solomon's centralization of power and excessive taxation contributed to the eventual fracturing of the kingdom under his son Rehoboam (1 Kings 12). Solomon's wisdom became a tool of imperial control rather than covenantal stewardship. His charisma enabled success, but without accountability, it laid the groundwork for division. Leadership longevity, therefore, is not maintained through gifting alone but through a sustained commitment to just and humble governance.

Solomon's narrative provides a crucial theological lesson: divine gifting must be matched by faithful obedience. Solomon's wisdom was compromised by a failure of the will, not the intellect (Sparks, 2013). This insight is echoed in contemporary leadership theories that emphasize the integration of emotional intelligence, spiritual maturity, and ethical consistency. Solomon's story warns against overestimating giftedness while underestimating the slow, daily disciplines that sustain godly leadership.

Unlike David, whose path to kingship was marked by years of hardship, rejection, and exile, Solomon ascended the throne in a context of relative stability and privilege. The biblical account reveals that Solomon did not endure prolonged suffering, persecution, or warfare prior to his anointing (1 Kings 1–2). Rather, his kingship was facilitated by his father David's influence and the political maneuvering of the prophet Nathan and Bathsheba.

Solomon's rise to power lacked the purifying trials of suffering that had shaped David's character in the wilderness." This absence of hardship arguably

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left Solomon less prepared for the spiritual weight of kingship. Similarly notes that Solomon inherited a consolidated kingdom and a functional administration, which shielded him from the crucible of leadership formation through adversity. This ease of transition may have contributed to Solomon's later moral failures, as he lacked the experiential depth of trust and dependency on God that suffering often cultivates in leaders. Thus, Solomon's ascension exemplifies how untested leadership—though divinely endorsed—can be spiritually vulnerable without a foundation of resilience formed through difficulty (Oster, 2016).

In summary, Solomon represents both the pinnacle of divinely gifted leadership and the peril of relying solely on charisma and wisdom. His rise and fall teach that spiritual leadership must be grounded not only in God's gifts but also in lifelong covenantal loyalty. True wisdom involves the continual alignment of the heart with God's purposes, not merely the ability to make impressive decisions or build lasting institutions.

Jesus Christ: The Ultimate Model of Servant Leadership

Jesus' leadership was initiated not by human acclaim but by divine appointment—a calling confirmed at His baptism, where the Father declares, "This is my beloved Son" (Luke 3:22). Almost immediately, Jesus is led by the Spirit into a forty-day wilderness of fasting and temptation (Luke 4:1–2). Sandler emphasize that this period was vital spiritual formation, functioning as Jesus' divine commissioning (Sandler, 2023). As in Moses' calling at Sinai or David's exile in the wilderness, the desert shapes identity, clarifies purpose, and confirms divine selection.

This parallels the lives of earlier biblical leaders: Joseph's incarceration molded his capacity to lead; Moses' Midianite exile yielded a prophet; Joshua emerged faithful after decades of training; David's shepherding and fleeing prepared him for kingship; and Solomon—though gifted—lacked the formation that emerges from hardship. His wilderness testing prepared Him to resist misuse of authority, unlike Solomon, whose lack of such formation led to compromise and idolatry.

The Father's agency in Jesus' call is underscored again in transfiguration accounts (e.g., Mark 9:7), testifying to divine appointment. Servant-leadership research reinforces this theological point: authority stems from divine initiative, not human endorsement (Du Plessis & Nkambule, 2020).

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In the wilderness, Jesus also embraces a posture of service. The foot washing at the Last Supper overturns imperial leadership hierarchies, echoing Joshua's humble obedience, David's restraint before Saul, and Solomon's initial humility before turning dry. This incarnational, low-ascent model carries forward through Jesus' life: He heals, forgives, and empowers followers, confirming servant leadership as the culmination of Old Testament leadership formation.

Jesus further draws a direct line to foundational leaders through the alignment of divine voice, wilderness formation, and service. His authority did not arise from lineage or conquest but from obedience to Father's will. Contemporary servant-leadership models, rooted in biblical studies, affirm that true leader authority arises when divine calling meets spiritual formation (Yengkopiong, 2023). The Father's selection of Jesus is unmistakable: at Jordan, divine affirmation; in the desert, divine empowerment; and through miracles, teaching, and ultimately, sacrificial death, divine endorsement. Servant leadership scholars assert that real authority is rooted in divine calling rather than human structures—Jesus embodies that truth (Wilkes, 1998).

In the wilderness, Jesus faces temptation to misuse His identity and bypass suffering. He refuses to leverage divine power for personal gain, reinforcing that obedience—not privilege—is God's path to true leadership. The desert thus becomes Jesus' school—much like Sinai prepared Moses, caves shaped David, and trials honed Joseph. Without this formative suffering, charismatic gifts risk collapse under pressure—Solomon's life warns us of that danger. Jesus' desert journey ensures He is anointed with humility and divine fidelity—unlike Saul, whose kingship faltered from a lack of inner formation (Folk, 2022).

Jesus' wilderness testing also refines His emotional intelligence, a crucial trait seen in His healing and relational ministry. Based leadership theories highlight that inner work enables leaders to empathize and connect—even when authority is heavenly (Smith, 2019). Jesus' sensitivity to sorrow, hunger, and doubt came from deeper self-awareness forged in isolation and temptation (McDonald, 2021). Moreover, the desert initiates Jesus into the servant-leadership posture He sustained throughout His ministry. Drawing from Luke's tradition, Jesus models servanthood rooted in inner resilience and divine dependence—not power or coercion . His willingness to serve, heal, forgive, and ultimately suffer reflects the Father's original call and commissioning.

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Ultimately, Jesus becomes the perfect exemplar: a leader chosen by Father, formed by suffering, and anchored in servant virtue. He resolves the pattern begun with Joseph, Moses, and others—unifying divine calling, transformative adversity, emotional maturity, and sacrificial service. For today's leaders, the red-thread across the biblical narrative offers a theological mandate: authentic leadership flows from divine calling verified by inner formation and Christlike humility (Yengkopiong, 2023).

CONCLUSION

This study set out to investigate the theological pattern of authentic leadership in Scripture, focusing on divine calling, spiritual formation through adversity, and servant leadership. Through the comparative examination of key biblical figures—Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Saul, David, Solomon—and culminating in the leadership of Jesus Christ, the findings consistently affirm that genuine leadership does not emerge from human ambition, institutional elevation, or charisma alone. Rather, it is divinely initiated, spiritually refined, and missionally embodied in service.

The evidence affirms that each major biblical leader was chosen not by popular consent or self-assertion but by divine appointment (Sugihyono, 2023). Joseph's leadership began with prophetic dreams (Gen. 37), Moses with a burning bush (Exod. 3), Joshua was empowered through divine commissioning (Deut. 31), and David was anointed by Samuel at God's command (1 Sam. 16). Even Solomon, though he lacked personal suffering, received wisdom from God in a unique encounter (1 Kgs. 3). These examples highlight a divine prerogative in choosing leaders, underscoring that leadership in the biblical tradition is never self-generated but God-ordained. Jesus Christ, confirmed at His baptism by the voice of the Father (Matt. 3:17), exemplifies the clearest affirmation of divine selection.

Moreover, the study emphasizes the indispensable role of formation through suffering. Joseph's captivity, Moses' years in Midian, David's exile, and Jesus' testing in the wilderness all reflect a consistent divine pedagogy: leadership is forged in hardship. This formation builds character, spiritual sensitivity, and emotional maturity, which charisma or formal training alone cannot provide. In contrast, Saul and Solomon—who lacked sustained seasons of suffering or spiritual testing—ultimately fell into insecurity, compromise, and disobedience.

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Contemporary servant-leadership literature supports this view, emphasizing that resilience, humility, and empathy often emerge from adversity rather than success (Sugihyono, 2025).

This theological model carries deep implications for modern ecclesial leadership. In a church culture often captivated by charisma, visibility, and executive competence, the biblical pattern urges a return to spiritual discernment, character formation, and servant-heartedness. Leadership selection must prioritize evidence of divine calling, spiritual maturity cultivated through hardship, and a demonstrated commitment to serving others rather than self (Roberts, 2025).

In conclusion, this study reaffirms that authentic leadership, as witnessed across Scripture, reaches its climax in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. He is not merely a role model but the consummation of divine leadership design. His example invites both the church and academic reflection to reimagine leadership—not as a pursuit of influence, but as a vocation of faithfulness, humility, and service, grounded in God's sovereign initiative and shaped through sacrificial love. Spiritual leadership in the biblical tradition is fundamentally about divine purpose and legitimacy. It cannot be manufactured or earned through human effort alone. The modern church must resist the temptation to substitute charisma for calling, popularity for piety, and technique for transformation. Instead, it must embrace a vision of leadership that is deeply spiritual, theologically grounded, and communally discerned (du Plessis & Nkambule, 2020). Only then can it reflect the pattern of divine leadership evident throughout Scripture.

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