# Leading with faith and wisdom from the Bible

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the integration of biblical wisdom with contemporary leadership theories to inform leadership practices. Drawing upon four key biblical themes – the call of God, the character of God, the covenant of God, and the kingdom of God – we propose a synthesis of biblical insights and contemporary leadership approaches, focusing particularly on authentic, contingent, servant, shared, spiritual, transformational and visionary leadership theories. By examining classical foundations of leadership, engaging with relevant literature from the fields of biblical studies and theology, and contemporary leadership, we develop a conceptual framework and hypothesise ways of assessing possible links between biblical themes and theorised leadership behaviours and styles. We outline potential research directions and methodological approaches to investigate these relationships empirically, emphasising the value of mixed methods designs that combine quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. We discuss the challenges and limitations of integrating biblical wisdom and contemporary leadership theories to provide a nuanced and critical analysis. The paper concludes by highlighting the potential benefits and practical implications of the proposed synthesis for leadership development, organisational practice, and social impact. Timeless insights and enduring values of the Bible may enable leaders to develop a deeper sense of purpose, character, and indeed calling to exercise authority, and contribute to the flourishing of individuals, organisations, and communities. We invite scholars and practitioners to engage in further dialogue, research, and application at the intersection of biblical studies and leadership studies.

**Keywords:** Authority, Biblical Wisdom, Faith, Leadership Theory, Vocation

# INTRODUCTION

Leadership is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that has been the subject of extensive research and theorising across various disciplines, including psychology, sociology, management, and theology. While there is no universally accepted definition of leadership, it is generally understood as a process of influencing and guiding others towards the achievement of a common goal (Bass, 1990; Northouse, 2019). As such, leadership involves the exercise of authority, which can be defined as the legitimate power to influence others and make decisions on their behalf (Price, 2020).

The concept of authority is central to the study of leadership, as it underpins the leader's ability to direct, motivate, and shape the behaviour of followers. However, the nature and sources of authority can vary significantly across different contexts and traditions. In the Judaeo-Christian tradition, for example, authority is often understood as a divine gift and sacred responsibility, rooted in the call and character of God (Banks & Ledbetter, 2004; Clarke, 2004). From this perspective, leadership is not merely a human invention or a product of social dynamics, but a spiritual vocation and a means of advancing God's purposes in the world (Ott, 2023).

The purpose of this paper is to explore the integration of biblical wisdom with contemporary leadership theories, drawing on key themes and principles from the Bible to inform and enrich our understanding of effective leadership practices. Specifically, we focus on four biblical themes that have significant implications for leadership: the call of God, the character of God, the covenant of God, and the kingdom of God. We then propose a synthesis of these biblical themes with selected leadership theories. Our goal is to contribute to the development of a theologically grounded and empirically usable approach to leadership that draws on both biblical scholarship and leadership studies. By bringing these two fields into dialogue, we aim to shed new light on the nature and practice of leadership, and to provide practical guidance for leaders who seek to integrate their faith with their professional responsibilities (Finegan, 2000; Klapper et al., 2020; Roof et al., 1993).

# EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP: DEFINITIONS AND DIMENSIONS

Leadership is a multidimensional concept. Scholarly agreement from extensive research and theorising across various disciplines suggests that, to be effective, leadership involves the ability to influence others, achieve desired outcomes, and adapt to changing situations (Bass, 1990; Northouse, 2019). An influential framework for understanding leadership effectiveness is the transformational-transactional model attributed to Bruce Avolio and Bernard Bass in the 1990s (Macit, 2003). Transformational leadership focuses on inspiring and motivating followers to transcend self-interests and work towards a higher purpose. It stands in contrast to transactional leadership which emphasises rewards and punishments to achieve desired outcomes (Riggio, 2011; Cantrell, 2015; Northouse, 2019).

Another prominent approach in the scholarly management literature is servant leadership, which stresses the leader's role as a servant to followers and the organisation (Greenleaf, 1977; Linden et al., 2008). Servant leaders prioritise listening, empathy, stewardship, and the growth and well-being of their followers, seeking to create a positive and empowering work environment (Koenig et al., 2015; Van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2015). Authentic leadership focuses on leaders exhibiting self-awareness, transparency, and ethical behaviour, building trust and inspiring followers through their genuine and consistent actions (Avolio & Gardner,

2005; Banks et al., 2016; Walumbwa et al., 2014). Another approach, beyond mainstream management commentary, is spiritual leadership. Sometimes integrated with notions of visionary leadership, this argues for the importance of vision, hope, faith, and altruistic love in fostering intrinsic motivation, organisational commitment, and positive outcomes (Fry, 2003; Fry & Cohen, 2009; Jeon & Choi, 2020).

Two additional leadership approaches warrant consideration in this context: contingent leadership and shared leadership. Contingent leadership theory posits that effective leadership is contingent upon the interplay between the leader's style and the situational demands (Fiedler, 1964). This approach emphasises the leader's ability to adapt their style based on follower characteristics and environmental factors (House, 1971). Shared leadership, on the other hand, represents a shift from traditional hierarchical models to a more collaborative approach. Pearce and Conger (2003) define shared leadership as a dynamic, interactive influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group (or organisational) goals. This model recognises leadership as a collective phenomenon, distributed across multiple team members rather than concentrated in a single individual (Carson et al., 2007).

## BIBLICAL THEMES AND PRINCIPLES FOR LEADERSHIP

The Bible offers various principles that, arranged thematically, have the potential to inform and inspire leadership practices. Drawing from both the Old and New Testaments, scholars have identified several perspectives that have significant implications for leadership (Agosto, 2005; Clarke, 2004; Winston, 2018). We summarise the literature here using a four-part thematic rubric: the call of God; the character of God; God's covenant; and God's kingdom. The call of God positions leadership as a divine calling and sacred responsibility (Exodus 3:1-10; 1 Samuel 16:1-13; Isaiah 6:1-13). Leaders are chosen by God's grace and sovereignty, accountable to His will, and reliant on His power (Banks & Ledbetter, 2004; Laniak, 2006; Ott, 2023). This theme is evident in the stories of Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3), Moses (Exodus 3:1-10), Samuel (1 Samuel 3:1-21), and others. This concept of divine calling is particularly prominent in the Pauline epistles, where leadership is framed as a response to God's initiative (Agosto, 2005). This perspective aligns with contemporary theories of servant leadership and authentic leadership, which emphasise the leader's sense of purpose and calling (Banks & Ledbetter, 2004).

The character of God calls upon leaders to reflect and emulate God's attributes, such as holiness, justice, mercy, faithfulness, wisdom, love, and grace (Leviticus 19:2; Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 103:8; James 1:5; 1 John 4:8). Leaders are expected to seek God's guidance, honour Him in their actions, and model Christ-like characteristics (Ayers, 2006; Huizing, 2011). Biblical leadership is intrinsically tied to the character of God. Traits, deeply rooted in Christian values such as integrity, stewardship, empathy, forgiveness, humility, and faithfulness, set effective biblical leaders apart (Richards, 2024). This emphasis on character formation is evident in passages like Leviticus 19:2, "Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy". This focus on moral character in biblical leadership has been positioned as a crucial counterpoint to purely skills-based or results-oriented leadership models (Ayers, 2006). It resonates with contemporary emphasis on ethical leadership and the importance of leader integrity in building trust and fostering organisational culture (Banks & Ledbetter, 2004).

The covenant of God, another significant theme, emphasises the relational and covenantal nature of leadership (Genesis 12:1-3; Genesis 15:1-21; Exodus 19:3-6; 2 Samuel 7:8-16).

Leaders are called to a committed and accountable relationship with God and His people, serving His purposes and seeking the well-being of the community (Kessler & Kretzschmar, 2015; Trent et al., 2016). Biblical leadership is often framed within the context of covenant relationships. Leadership in the Bible has been positioned not as a unilateral or purely contractual arrangement, but as a relational and covenantal commitment (Laniak, 2006). This is exemplified in God's covenants with Noah (Genesis 9:8-17), Abraham (Genesis 15:1-21), and Israel (Exodus 19:3-6). This covenantal model of leadership emphasises mutual obligation, loyalty, and shared purpose (Agosto, 2005). It aligns with modern leadership theories that stress the importance of leader-follower relationships, such as leader-member-exchange theory and relational leadership models (Banks & Ledbetter, 2004).

The kingdom of God is a central theme in the New Testament, highlighting leadership as a means of advancing God's reign and purposes in the world (Matthew 13; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:43). Leaders are called to be stewards and servants of God's kingdom, working towards the transformation of individuals, communities, and systems (Okesson, 2019). Scholars have also distilled insights from Jesus's life and teachings for contemporary leadership practices but acknowledged the potential risks of anachronism (Fawcett et al., 2005; Saunders, 2018; Van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2015). Biblical leadership is often portrayed as participation in God's larger purpose of establishing His kingdom. Leaders are seen as stewards and servants of God's kingdom, called to transform and reform the world according to divine principles (Richards, 2024). This theme is particularly prominent in Jesus' teachings about the kingdom of God (e.g., Matthew 13, Mark 1:14-15) and in the apostolic writings (e.g., Colossians 1:13). Ayers (2006) suggests that this kingdom perspective provides a compelling vision for leadership that goes beyond mere organisational success to societal transformation. This resonates with contemporary leadership theories that emphasise vision, purpose, and social responsibility (Banks & Ledbetter, 2004). Jesus Christ is presented in the New Testament as the ultimate model of leadership. Agosto (2005) argues that Jesus embodies and exemplifies all aspects of effective leadership: He is called and appointed by God (Luke 4:16-21), reflects God's character (John 14:9), fulfils God's covenant (Matthew 26:28), models servant leadership (Mark 10:42-45), and invites all to follow Him (John 10:27). Laniak (2006) emphasises that Jesus' leadership style, characterised by sacrificial service and empowerment of followers, has profoundly influenced Christian conceptions of leadership. This Christocentric model of leadership aligns closely with modern theories of servant leadership and transformational leadership (Banks & Ledbetter, 2004).

While drawing connections between biblical themes and contemporary leadership theories offers a useful source for theory development, it is crucial to approach this integration with hermeneutical sensitivity. Caution is needed to avoid oversimplifying or misapplying biblical concepts to modern leadership contexts (Rugwiji, 2019): careful interpretation and contextual understanding is required. Similarly, Mabey et al. (2007) highlight the importance of critically examining how biblical leadership principles are understood and applied in diverse organisational settings, acknowledging the potential for both ethical insights and interpretative challenges. These may be understood as noted above as a feature of God's character, citing Christ-like behaviours. For example, Jesus may be interpreted as modelling servant leadership, highlighting humility, sacrifice, empowerment, and the pursuit of God's will (Mark 10:42-45; John 13:1-17; Philippians 2:5-11). The Hebrew Bible presents diverse models of leadership that offer rich insights for contemporary practice. Moses, for instance, exemplifies a leader who combines divine calling with practical governance. As Laniak (2006) notes, Moses' leadership journey from reluctant prophet to national deliverer illustrates the complex interplay between divine empowerment and human development in leadership roles. David's kingship,

explored by Goldingay (2016), provides a model of leadership that encompasses both charismatic authority and ethical accountability. Shifting to the New Testament, the Pauline epistles, as analysed by Barentsen (2011), offer yet another perspective, showcasing a leadership style that balances apostolic authority with communal empowerment. These biblical models, while rooted in specific historical contexts, provide enduring principles that may inform modern leadership theories and practices. However, simplistic applications of biblical principles need to be challenged in favour of a deeper engagement with theological concepts in leadership studies. For example, Huizing (2011) argues for a more critical, theologically nuanced perspective on the application of Christ-like characteristics to leadership, to go beyond mere imitation to consider the unique role of Christ in Christian theology.

## SYNTHESISING BIBLICAL THEMES AND LEADERSHIP THEORY

Scholarship exploring the connections between biblical themes and contemporary leadership theories, has sought to develop a theologically grounded and empirically informed approach to leadership (Bekker & Phil, 2006; Huizing, 2011; Kessler, 2013). The call of God has been linked to authentic, servant, spiritual and transformational leadership theories, prioritising vision, purpose, and intrinsic motivation (Barentsen, 2011; Cooper & Blair, 2022; Fry et al., 2011). The character of God has been connected to the ethical and moral dimensions of leadership, highlighting the importance of integrity, humility, and consistency (Ayers, 2006; Trent et al., 2016). Here we may note the embodiment of Jesus within various leadership theories, including authentic, servant, spiritual and transformational leadership, deriving from these theories a means to model sacrificial and empowering leadership (Barentsen, 2011). The covenant of God has been related to contingent, servant and shared leadership theories, emphasising the relational and contextual nature of leadership (Huizing, 2011; Kessler & Kretzschmar, 2015). The kingdom of God has been linked to servant, spiritual, transformational and visionary leadership theories, highlighting the importance of purpose, service, and the pursuit of a higher calling (Agosto, 2005; Cooper & Blair, 2022; Fry, 2003; Laniak, 2006).

Contingent leadership theory aligns with biblical narratives that demonstrate leadership adaptability and authenticity (Banks & Ledbetter, 2004). For instance, Moses' leadership style evolved from direct confrontation with Pharaoh to collaborative governance with the elders (Exodus 18:13-26). This exemplifies how biblical leaders adjusted their approaches based on situational demands, resonating with contingent leadership principles (Kessler, 2013). Shared leadership finds parallels in biblical accounts of collaborative leadership, such as the apostolic leadership in the early church (Acts 15:1-35). This model of distributed authority and collective decision-making aligns with the biblical emphasis on community and mutual accountability (Huizing, 2011). Both contingent and shared leadership approaches can be seen as manifestations of the covenant of God theme, emphasising adaptability, mutual responsibility, and communal participation in leadership processes.

Critical perspectives from biblical scholarship caution against overly simplistic applications of biblical principles to leadership. Agosto (2005) argues that while the servant leadership model often attributed to Jesus has valuable insights, it must be understood within the broader context of Jesus' eschatological mission, not merely as a set of leadership techniques. Similarly, Guthrie's (2017) analysis of Paul's leadership in 2 Corinthians highlights the apostle's complex negotiation of authority and vulnerability, challenging one-dimensional views of biblical leadership. Witherington (2018) further emphasises the need to understand New

Testament leadership concepts within their Greco-Roman and Jewish contexts, warning against anachronistic impositions of modern leadership theories onto biblical texts. This more nuanced approach serves to situate the historical and cultural context of biblical narratives alongside contemporary leadership challenges (Kessler, 2013).

# POTENTIAL RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Several potential research directions emerge from synthesising biblical and contemporary leadership thinking that may pave the way for researchers to validate the proposed connections empirically and contribute to the development of a theologically grounded and empirically informed approach to leadership (Baumgartner, 2011; Hanna, 2006; Kessler & Kretzschmar, 2015). One promising avenue is to investigate the relationship between leaders' perceptions of divine calling and their leadership behaviours and effectiveness (Fry et al., 2011; Pawar, 2014). Researchers could explore how leaders' sense of divine calling influences their motivation, decision-making, and interactions with followers, and how these factors, in turn, impact individual and organisational outcomes (Cooper & Blair, 2022; Dik & Duffy, 2012; Zablah et al., 2016). They could also evaluate the extent to which leaders embrace the principles and practices of servant leadership, such as humility, empathy, stewardship, and empowerment, and how these practices impact follower well-being, organisational climate, and societal outcomes (Huizing, 2011; Saunders, 2018). One might hypothesise that:

> H1: Leaders who demonstrate a strong sense of divine calling (measured by scales of spiritual calling) will exhibit higher levels of transformational leadership behaviours (measured using a multifactor leadership questionnaire) compared to leaders who report a weaker sense of divine calling.

To measure leaders' perceptions and applications of biblical themes in their leadership, researchers could adapt existing scales such as those developed by Dik et al. (2012) for measuring calling and vocation. These could be combined with established leadership scales to create a comprehensive instrument for assessing biblically informed leadership practices.

Another area of interest is the examination of the role of character and virtues in leadership, drawing from both biblical and philosophical perspectives. Researchers could investigate how specific virtues, such as humility, integrity, wisdom, and compassion, influence leadership behaviours and outcomes, and how these virtues may be cultivated through spiritual practices and leadership development programmes. One might hypothesise that:

> H2: Leaders who prioritise the emulation of God's character (as assessed through virtue-based leadership scales) will demonstrate higher levels of authentic leadership behaviours (as measured by an authentic leadership questionnaire) compared to leaders who place less emphasis on emulating divine attributes.

Building on the work of Fry et al. (2011) on spiritual leadership and unit performance, researchers could use structural equation modelling to examine the relationships between biblical leadership principles, leadership behaviours, and organisational outcomes.

The relational and covenantal aspects of leadership, as emphasised in the biblical theme of the covenant of God, offer another promising research direction (Kessler & Kretzschmar, 2015). Researchers could explore how leaders' commitment to serving and empowering their followers, fostering trust and accountability, and promoting a sense of shared purpose and identity affect organisational culture, employee engagement, and collective

performance (Barentsen, 2011; Van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2015). One might hypothesise that:

> H3: Leaders who emphasise the relational and covenantal aspects of leadership (as measured by scales assessing leader-follower relationship quality) will more frequently engage in servant leadership practices (as measured by servant leadership assessment instruments) compared to leaders who place less emphasis on relational aspects.

The eschatological and transformative dimensions of leadership, as highlighted in the biblical theme of the kingdom of God, provide another avenue for research (Agosto, 2005; Baumgartner, 2011; Cooper & Blair, 2022). Researchers could investigate how leaders' vision, values, and actions contribute to the transformation of individuals, organisations, and communities, and how these transformative processes align with the biblical vision of God's reign and purposes in the world (Fry, 2003; Kessler, 2013; Okesson, 2019). One might hypothesise that:

> H4: Leaders who view their leadership as an extension of God's kingdom purposes (as assessed through scales measuring spiritual leadership and sense of calling) will exhibit higher levels of visionary leadership behaviours (as measured by visionary leadership scales) compared to leaders who do not strongly associate their leadership with divine purposes.

Finally, manifesting the covenant of God theme that prioritises adaptability, mutual responsibility, and communal participation in leadership processes, researchers could investigate observable leadership behaviours that appear to be expressly rooted in covenantal principles. One might hypothesise that:

> H5: Leaders who emphasise the covenantal aspects of leadership (as measured by scales assessing leader-follower relationship quality and shared decision-making practices) will more frequently adopt contingent leadership styles and promote shared leadership practices (measured using team leadership and shared leadership scales) compared to leaders who place less emphasis on covenantal leadership.

Drawing threads together at this point, our review of leadership commentary and relevant biblical sources has explored the integration of biblical themes and principles with contemporary leadership theories. Proposed connections, as summarised in Figure 1, focus on four key biblical themes – the call of God, the character of God, the covenant of God, and the kingdom of God – and their connections to authentic, contingent, servant, shared, spiritual, transformational and visionary leadership theories. We have articulated several potential research directions contributing to the development of a more holistic and integrative understanding of leadership, one that acknowledges the spiritual and moral dimensions of leadership alongside the organisational and psychological dimensions (Kessler, 2013; Winston, 2018). Our five hypotheses are designed to examine the relationships between specific biblical themes and leadership behaviours empirically. By operationalising these concepts through established measurement scales, researchers may investigate the extent to which biblical principles inform and shape leadership practices in various organisational contexts, bridging the gap between theological principles and practical leadership applications. Doing so not only paves the way for theoretical development and research, it may also generate evidence-based insights to inform leadership development programmes, organisational practices, and societal initiatives (Barentsen, 2011; Cooper & Blair, 2022; Kessler & Kretzschmar, 2015).

**Figure 1***: Visual representation synthesising biblical themes and principles and contemporary leadership theories, highlighting the potential for biblical wisdom to inform and enrich modern leadership practices*
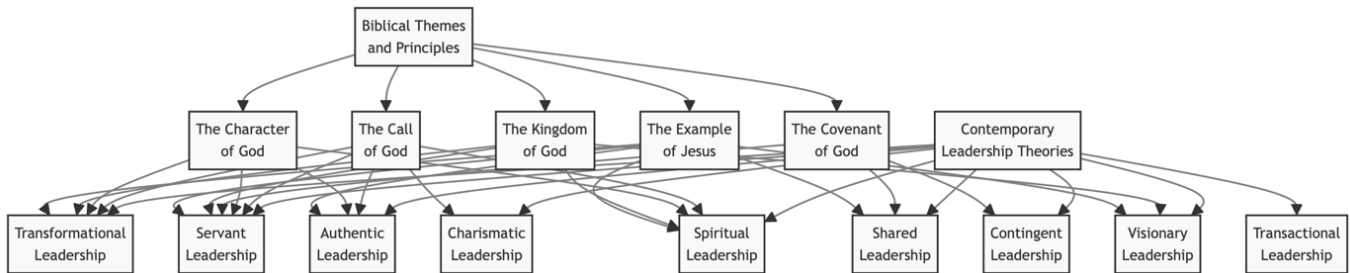


However, we recognise several challenges and limitations that must be acknowledged and addressed. These include the diversity and complexity of biblical texts and their interpretation, the potential risks of anachronism and reductionism in applying biblical principles to contemporary contexts, and the need for cultural sensitivity and contextual relevance in leadership practices (Huizing, 2011; Okesson, 2019; Van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2015). Despite these reservations, it is our contention that the potential benefits of integrating biblical wisdom and contemporary leadership theories are significant. Scholars may be able to refine and validate a theologically grounded and practically relevant approach to leadership to inform its impact in a complex and fast-changing world (Baumgartner, 2011; Cooper & Blair, 2022; Kessler & Kretzschmar, 2015). In turn, having access to insights and enduring values of the Bible, leaders may develop a deeper sense of purpose, character, and calling, and contribute to the flourishing of individuals, organisations, and communities (Fry, 2003; Kessler, 2013; Winston, 2018).

## METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Christian leadership is a trans-disciplinary field of study (Kessler and Kretzschmar, 2015). Therefore, this research can usefully draw on methods and insights from theology, biblical studies, leadership theory, and organisational psychology to provide a comprehensive understanding of biblically informed leadership. To investigate the synthesis and test the hypotheses derived from it empirically, employing a mixed-methods research design that combines quantitative and qualitative approaches seems appropriate (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). This approach would facilitate a suitably nuanced exploration of the relationships between biblical principles and leadership practices, while also providing opportunities for triangulation and complementarity between different data sources and analytical strategies (Greene, 2007; Johnson et al., 2007). In respect to the quantitative methods, researchers may develop and administer survey instruments designed to measure leaders' perceptions and applications of biblical themes in their leadership, as well as their self-reported leadership behaviours and styles (Tsang & McCullough, 2003). These surveys could be constructed based on existing measures of spirituality, religiosity, and leadership (e.g., Benefiel et al., 2014; Dik et al., 2012; Fry et al., 2005), as well as newly developed items tailored to the specific biblical themes and leadership theories of interest.

Qualitatively, researchers could undertake semi-structured interviews with Christian leaders to explore their personal narratives, experiences, and reflections on integrating biblical principles in their leadership practices (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Following the approach of Benefiel et al. (2014) in their study of spirituality and religion in the workplace, researchers could conduct in-depth interviews with leaders who exemplify biblical leadership principles to gain rich insights into how these principles are applied in practice. Such interviews may serve as the source of contextualised insights into the experiences of faith-based leaders and offer practical guidance for other leaders seeking to develop a biblically informed leadership approach. Adding to this, longitudinal studies could be particularly valuable in examining how leaders' understanding and application of biblical themes evolve over time, similar to how Fry et al. (2011) examined the impact of spiritual leadership on unit performance over time, and how this impacts on their leadership effectiveness. Cross-cultural studies could also investigate how these relationships vary across different cultural and organisational contexts, providing a more nuanced understanding of the interplay between faith, culture, and leadership. Evidence from such inquiry could provide valuable insights into how leaders integrate biblical principles into their leadership style as they grow and develop in their roles across a range of settings.

In terms of sampling and data collection, researchers should aim to recruit diverse samples of Christian leaders from various denominations, organisational contexts, and cultural backgrounds. To ensure a range of perspectives and experiences is captured, purposive and snowball sampling strategies may be suitable (Patton, 2015; Robinson, 2014). As with all empirical inquiry, attention should of course be paid to ethical considerations: securing informed consent, respecting confidentiality, and interacting mindful of the need for cultural sensitivity (American Psychological Association, 2017; World Medical Association, 2013). Remaining self-critical, researchers should be mindful of the potential biases and limitations involved in studying faith-based leadership (Berger, 2015), such as social desirability bias, self-selection bias, and the influence of theological and ideological differences among participants and researchers (Cantrell, 2015; Egel & Fry, 2017; Tsang & McCullough, 2003). Strategies for mitigating these biases, such as reflexivity, transparency, and cultural sensitivity, should be employed (Berger, 2015; Trent et al., 2016). For quantitative data analysis, researchers might adopt structural equation modelling (SEM) techniques (Hair et al., 2017; Kline, 2016) to test the hypothesised relationships between biblical themes and leadership behaviours and styles. For qualitative data, thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Guest et al., 2012) could be used to identify common patterns, challenges, and best practices among faith-based leaders.

## DISCUSSION

In terms of the development of leadership theory, by drawing upon the theological and ethical foundations of the Bible, researchers may expand the conceptual horizons of leadership studies and infuse them with a deeper sense of meaning, purpose, and values. The proposed synthesis of biblical themes and leadership theories may contribute to the emergence of a more holistic and integrative framework that acknowledges the spiritual dimensions of leadership alongside the organisational, psychological and socio-economic dimensions. In this way the underlying mechanisms, boundary conditions, and outcomes of faith-based leadership may be examined, as well as its similarities and differences with other forms of leadership. Furthermore, the empirical investigation of the links between biblical principles and leadership practices may help refine and validate existing leadership and management theories, as well as generate new theories that are both theologically and empirically grounded. Such research

might also foster a more inclusive and diverse approach to leadership theory-building, one that recognises the importance of religious and cultural contexts in shaping leadership behaviours and outcomes. All-in-all, the integration of biblical wisdom with contemporary leadership theories may enrich and advance the field of leadership studies, providing a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the nature, sources, and consequences of effective leadership.

The proposed synthesis of biblical themes and contemporary leadership theories presents several challenges and limitations that warrant further examination. From a hermeneutical perspective, the integration of biblical principles and modern leadership concepts requires careful interpretation and contextualisation to avoid anachronistic or reductionistic applications (Mabey et al., 2007; Rugwiji, 2019). Researchers must be sensitive to theological diversity within the Judaeo-Christian tradition and the potential for conflicting interpretations of biblical texts and their relevance to leadership (Fawcett et al., 2005; Kessler, 2013). Applying ancient biblical texts to modern leadership contexts presents significant hermeneutical challenges. Osborne (2006) emphasises the importance of understanding the historical and cultural gap between the biblical world and our own. This hermeneutical spiral requires constant movement between the ancient text and contemporary application, ensuring that leadership principles derived from Scripture are both faithful to the original context and relevant to modern situations. Köstenberger and Patterson (2011) further argue for what they term a hermeneutical triad approach, which integrates historical, literary, and theological analysis in interpreting biblical leadership narratives. This approach helps mitigate the risk of anachronistic or simplistic applications of biblical leadership models to contemporary contexts. Responsible hermeneutics in leadership studies must navigate between the poles of uncritical biblicism and reductive modernism, seeking instead a dialogical engagement between biblical wisdom and contemporary leadership challenges (Thiselton, 2009).

From a methodological perspective, the empirical investigation of faith-based leadership poses challenges related to measurement, sampling, and generalisability (Koenig et al., 2015; Roof et al., 1993). Researchers need valid and reliable measures of biblical leadership principles that can be applied across diverse organisational and cultural contexts. Sampling strategies must account for the potential self-selection bias among faith-based leaders and the need for representativeness and diversity (Benefiel et al., 2014; Egel & Fry, 2017). Additionally, the study of faith-based leadership raises ethical and political considerations, as it involves the intersection of personal beliefs, organisational values, and societal norms (Klapper et al., 2020). Researchers have to navigate potential tensions between religious freedom, organisational diversity, and the separation of church and state, while also being mindful of the power dynamics and cultural sensitivities involved in studying faith at work (Finegan, 2000).

Despite these challenges and limitations, the proposed synthesis of biblical themes and contemporary leadership theories offers valuable insights and applications for leadership theory and practice. From a theoretical perspective, it contributes to the development of a more holistic and integrative understanding of leadership: one that acknowledges the spiritual and moral dimensions of leadership alongside the psychological and organisational dimensions (Fry et al., 2005). The material presented in this paper offers a conceptual framework for future research on the intersection of faith and leadership: scholars are invited to investigate the relationships between specific biblical themes and leadership behaviours and styles empirically. Such research may help refine and validate the proposed synthesis, while also generating new insights and theories on the nature and effectiveness of faith-based leadership (Fry & Cohen, 2009; Kessler & Kretzschmar, 2015).

From a practical perspective, the integration of biblical principles and contemporary leadership theories could be applied to inform the development of leadership training, organisational practices, and personal leadership philosophies. Faith-based organisations may use this synthesis better to articulate and align their values, mission, and leadership practices, while also promoting a culture of spiritual growth and ethical conduct (Egel & Fry, 2017). Individual leaders may draw upon the biblical themes and leadership principles discussed in this paper to reflect on their own leadership style, motivations, and effectiveness (Whittington et al., 2005; Winston, 2018). By cultivating a deeper understanding of their spiritual identity and calling, leaders may develop a more authentic and purposeful approach to leadership, one that is grounded in faith and oriented towards service and the common good (Cooper & Blair, 2022). In short, by adopting a more holistic and integrative approach to leadership, scholars and practitioners may recognise its inherent spirituality, in turn, releasing transformative potential for individuals, organisations, and society (Fry, 2003).

# CONCLUSION

By focusing on four key biblical themes – the call of God, the character of God, the covenant of God, and the kingdom of God – and their connections to authentic, contingent, servant, shared, spiritual, transformational, and visionary leadership theories, we have laid the groundwork for a theologically grounded and empirically informed approach to leadership. The framework and hypotheses presented in this paper are intended to help conceptualise future research on the intersection of faith and leadership, and to evaluate hypothesised relationships between relevant biblical themes and leadership behaviours and styles. We have outlined how potential research directions and methodological approaches could contribute to the development of a more holistic and integrative understanding of leadership; one that, in spite of potential challenges and limitations, acknowledges the spiritual and moral dimensions of leadership alongside the organisational and psychological dimensions.

In summary, the paper provides a foundation for further research and practice at the intersection of biblical studies and leadership studies. This holds the promise of a more holistic and integrative understanding of leadership, rooted in faith, informed by scholarship, and oriented towards the service of God and the well-being of others. As scholars and practitioners continue to explore the rich and complex relationships between faith and leadership, we believe that this paper will serve as a catalyst for ongoing dialogue, discovery, and transformation.

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