

## THE HOUR OF HUMILITY: TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND SACRED TEXTURE IN JOHN 13 FOR CHURCH PLANTING IN HONOR-SHAME CULTURES

Matthew Hattabaugh

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This study analyzes John 13:1-17 through sacred texture analysis to explore how Jesus models transformational leadership (TL) in a culturally resonant way for church planting in honor-shame contexts. TL theory—defined by idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration—has seen wide application in ministry but remains underdeveloped in exegetical engagement with Gospel narratives. Using sacred texture and the socio-rhetorical framework developed by Robbins (1996) and Henson et al. (2020), the foot-washing passage is examined as a sacred leadership event.

The findings reveal that each TL trait aligns naturally with elements of sacred texture: divine action, holy personhood, sacred space, sacred time, and ethical instruction. Jesus' leadership emerges as morally grounded, relationally attentive, and strategically timed. This model provides a biblically faithful, culturally adaptive approach for training leaders in Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) church planting. This study offers an exegetically grounded integration of sacred texture analysis and transformational leadership theory to clarify how John 13:1–17 depicts leadership formation and cultural translation in honor–shame settings.

*Keywords:* transformational leadership, sacred texture, socio-rhetorical criticism, John 13, church planting, honor-shame culture, Middle East, biblical leadership, servant leadership, organizational theology.

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Transformational leadership (TL) theory, emphasizing moral authority, visionary influence, cognitive challenge, and relational care, has been widely applied in organizational and ministry settings to inspire change and develop followers (Avolio et al., 1999; Bass & Riggio, 2006). John 13:1–17 uniquely presents leadership not merely as a moral ideal but as an enacted, covenantal threshold “sign-act” that redefines authority through relational service and explicitly commands imitation as the community’s norm of leadership. Defined by four core components—idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration—TL has proven effective in diverse cultural contexts and has gained traction in Christian leadership literature. While numerous studies examine TL’s use in church leadership, few offer sustained exegetical engagement with Gospel narratives to explore how Jesus models these traits. Most biblical leadership studies focus on the Apostle Paul (Wolak, 2016), often overlooking the formative leadership moments found in Jesus’ ministry. Gregory (2023) emphasized transformational pastoral leadership as being rooted in theological vision and spiritual formation, aligning with the sacred leadership model exemplified by Jesus. This study addresses that gap by examining John 13:1-17, the foot-washing narrative, using sacred texture analysis to explore the theological, ethical, and leadership dimensions of Jesus’ actions. Jatau (2023) analyzes John 13:1-17 as a culturally resonant model of leadership in the Nigerian church context, showing how Jesus’ act of foot washing shapes servant leadership praxis.

Recent scholarship has expanded TL's relevance for spiritual formation and cross-cultural leadership. Whittington et al. (2005) and Prinz (2022) affirm TL's effectiveness in spiritual growth and church planting when leaders demonstrate integrity, vision, and relational attentiveness. Mutua et al. (2023) show strong correlations between TL traits and youth engagement and church vitality. Georges and Baker (2016), Elmer (2006), and Flanders and Mischke (2020) emphasize the importance of cultural intelligence and honor-shame sensitivity in cross-cultural ministry, particularly in Muslim-majority societies. Livermore (2015) and Trompenaars and Voerman (2010) further argue that effective leadership must align with local cultural frameworks—especially in collectivist and relationally complex environments like the Arab world.

Exegetically, this study builds on the sacred texture dimension of socio-rhetorical criticism, as developed by Robbins (1996), and expanded by Henson et al. (2020). Sacred texture explores how biblical texts communicate divine action, holy personhood, sacred space and time, and ethical instruction. These dimensions provide a theological lens for analyzing Jesus’ foot-washing as more than symbolic humility—it becomes a sacred leadership moment that reveals the nature of divine authority and redemptive mission. DeSilva (2018) further refines this methodology by illustrating how sacred

texture shapes the moral imagination and spiritual identity of faith communities through Scripture.

Despite these advances, three key deficiencies persist in the literature. First, there is a lack of direct exegetical integration between TL theory and the Gospel narratives. Second, Jesus' leadership is underutilized as a formative model, even though His actions carry profound theological and practical implications. Third, few leadership studies contextualize TL for honor-shame cultures, limiting their application for church planting across the Middle East and North Africa. While Dvir et al. (2002) empirically validated TL's effectiveness in follower development, their findings remain disconnected from biblical foundations and theological interpretation. Accordingly, sacred texture analysis addresses these deficiencies by supplying text-controlled categories for mapping leadership dynamics (deficiency one), keeping Jesus' identity and agency central as the interpretive anchor (deficiency two), and generating culturally portable yet biblically constrained implications for honor–shame contexts (deficiency three).

This study addresses those deficiencies by examining how the Four I's of transformational leadership are revealed through sacred texture in John 13. Jesus embodies idealized influence through humble authority, inspirational motivation through vocational modeling, intellectual stimulation through norm disruption, and individualized consideration through personal engagement. This study argues that Jesus models a transformational leadership paradigm through sacred action in John 13, offering a compelling and culturally adaptive template for church planting in honor-shame cultures. The project proceeds by reviewing key literature on transformational leadership and sacred texture analysis, outlining the methodological framework, presenting exegetical findings from John 13:1-17, and concluding with implications for leadership formation and church planting in honor-shame cultures.

## LITERATURE REVIEW OF TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Transformational leadership (TL) emerged as a moral-political concept in Burns's (1978) foundational work, which distinguished transactional leadership—based on exchange and compliance—from transformational leadership, which elevates followers through shared vision and ethical commitment. Burns proposed that transformational leaders prioritize the moral development of both themselves and their followers, thereby inspiring change that transcends personal interest. Longshore and Bass (1987) extended this idea into organizational theory by offering an empirically testable model that defined four core components: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. These components, often referred to as the "Four I's," have since become the foundation of transformational leadership theory.

The subsequent work of Bass and Avolio (1994) led to the development of the Full Range Leadership Model (FRLM) and the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), which established TL's effectiveness across corporate, nonprofit, and public-

sector environments. Judge and Piccolo (2004), through meta-analytic research, confirmed the positive correlations between TL behaviors and employee satisfaction, performance, and organizational commitment. Later research (Lowe et al., 1996; Wang et al., 2011) reaffirmed that TL fosters higher levels of motivation and organizational citizenship, particularly in mission-driven contexts. Rafferty and Griffin (2004) expanded the conceptual framework of TL by introducing empirically grounded dimensions such as vision and supportive leadership, which align well with Jesus' actions in John 13.

Each of the Four I's contributes uniquely to leadership effectiveness. Idealized influence refers to the leader's moral authority and ability to model integrity and purpose. Inspirational motivation centers on the articulation of a compelling vision that inspires collective pursuit. Intellectual stimulation involves encouraging innovation and critical thinking, even when it challenges the status quo. Individualized consideration focuses on recognizing and nurturing the unique strengths and developmental needs of followers (Bass & Riggio, 2006). These elements align closely with biblical themes, particularly as demonstrated in Jesus' ministry, where leadership is grounded in humility, relational attentiveness, and ethical disruption.

Despite widespread validation, TL theory has faced critique. While servant leadership foregrounds the moral posture of downward service, transformational leadership functions as an analytic vocabulary for influence and follower development, describing how Jesus' enacted service forms disciples without displacing the biblical servant model. Yukl (1999) argues that the model often overlaps with other leadership paradigms—particularly servant and charismatic leadership—making it conceptually vague. Gossmann (2020) explored TL traits in the interaction with the rich young ruler (Luke 18), offering a potential comparative framework to Jesus' sacred modeling in John 13. Piccolo and Colquitt (2006) found it difficult to isolate TL's distinct effects from other prosocial behaviors in leadership. Furthermore, TL's emphasis on visionary leadership can unintentionally reinforce top-down hierarchies unless balanced by servant leadership or contextual sensitivity.

In cross-cultural contexts, the effectiveness of TL is influenced by local values and leadership norms. Nguni et al. (2006) observed that TL traits were less effective in highly hierarchical cultures where conformity was expected. Yet others, including Weixler (n.d.) and Trompenaars and Voerman (2010), emphasize that when contextualized properly, TL offers powerful tools for adaptive leadership in collectivist societies. Hiebert (2009) emphasized the importance of contextualization in cross-cultural ministry, arguing that effective leadership must account for cultural frameworks to ensure the gospel's relevance and authenticity. Livermore (2015) further argues that cultural intelligence (CQ) is essential for leaders to interpret and apply TL behaviors across varying cultural scripts. In this light, Georges and Baker (2016) provide a particularly valuable lens by examining how biblical models of servanthood interact with the dynamics of honor and shame—suggesting that Jesus' leadership style, particularly in John 13, subverts status-based expectations and redefines greatness in relational terms. Şahin and Bilir (2024) identify that transformational leadership traits such as inspirational motivation and individualized consideration are most effective when aligned

with personal cultural values, including collectivism and power-distance. Their cross-cultural study reveals that TL contributes to learning organization development *only* when leaders attune themselves to specific cultural value dimensions.

In ministry and church planting contexts, transformational leadership has been recognized as an effective tool for fostering spiritual formation and team mobilization. Whittington et al. (2005) argue that TL reflects the legacy of the Apostle Paul, whose moral vision, relational influence, and adaptability exemplify the Four I's. Prinz (2022) identifies transformational competencies as key markers of effective church planting catalysts in Muslim-majority nations, especially when coupled with humility and contextual fluency. Irving and Strauss (2019) offer a model of Christian leadership that blends biblical fidelity with servant leadership practices, reinforcing the transformational potential found in humble, Christ-centered leadership. Mutua et al. (2023) link TL traits to stronger church performance and youth engagement, suggesting that leadership behaviors rooted in moral clarity and relationship-building are essential for sustainable ministry. However, most of these studies focus on Pauline literature or generalized leadership practice, without grounding TL theory in Gospel exegesis.

Thus, three notable gaps remain in the current literature. First, there is a lack of exegetical integration between TL theory and Gospel narratives—particularly in the person and actions of Jesus. Second, most models emphasize Paul as the primary NT leadership example, while underutilizing Jesus' teachings and actions in leadership formation. Third, few studies contextualize TL for honor-shame cultures in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), where leadership authority often relies on social hierarchy, family lineage, or religious status.

This study seeks to address those gaps by analyzing John 13:1-17 through the lens of sacred texture, aligning the theological and narrative dimensions of Jesus' foot washing with the Four I's of transformational leadership. In doing so, it offers a biblically faithful, theologically sound, and culturally adaptive leadership model for church planters serving in honor-shame contexts.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employs a socio-rhetorical exegetical framework to analyze John 13:1-17, focusing specifically on the sacred texture dimensions defined by Henson et al. (2020). This approach enables a rich theological reading of the text by examining how divine action, sacred space, moral authority, and relational dynamics are embedded in the narrative. By correlating these sacred elements with transformational leadership (TL) traits, the research aims to uncover how the Gospel text itself reveals a leadership model suited to culturally complex and honor-based contexts.

The socio-rhetorical method, first developed by Robbins (1996), views the biblical text as a multilayered discourse with rhetorical, cultural, and theological textures. Within this model, sacred texture explores how a passage communicates divine presence, holy behavior, covenantal purpose, and moral expectations. According to Henson et al.

(2020), sacred texture comprises five elements: (1) divine action, (2) holy person, (3) sacred space, (4) sacred time, and (5) ethical and moral judgment. These dimensions are not abstractions; they are rhetorical signals that shape how leadership, discipleship, and authority are to be understood within a covenantal community.

This research applies sacred texture not to extract timeless leadership principles, but to discern how the biblical narrative itself frames leadership through theological and relational actions. In doing so, the project avoids the eisegetical danger of imposing contemporary leadership theories onto Scripture. DeSilva (2018) emphasizes the necessity of guarding against such projection, advocating instead for hermeneutical models that allow ancient texts to speak from within their own theological frameworks. Sacred texture provides such a model—offering a theologically faithful way to observe how Jesus leads through action, embodiment, and covenantal reversal.

The passage chosen—John 13:1-17—meets Creswell and Poth’s (2018) criteria for qualitative research selection: it is bounded (a complete narrative unit), information-rich (with cultural, theological, and ethical layers), and tied to real-world applications. John’s Gospel uniquely emphasizes Jesus’ awareness of His divine mission and “hour,” linking His actions to sacred time and redemptive purpose (John 13:1-3). The foot washing is not a private moral act; it is a sacred demonstration of leadership that challenges social structures and reframes relational power. Therefore, this pericope serves as an ideal case for exegetical inquiry that connects sacred narrative with transformational praxis.

The research process follows a step-by-step sacred texture analysis, structured around the five sacred elements. In this study, the Four I’s operate as analytical lenses for describing leadership dynamics that emerge from the pericope’s sacred texture rather than as controlling categories imposed upon the text. Each section of the analysis will examine how John’s text reveals divine intent and relational interaction through these elements, followed by theological reflection on how those dynamics align with one of the Four I’s of transformational leadership:

- Idealized Influence (through divine action),
- Inspirational Motivation (through holy person and sacred time),
- Individualized Consideration (through sacred space),
- Intellectual Stimulation (through moral and ethical judgment).

Rather than applying the Four I’s as a prescriptive grid, the project treats them as diagnostic markers—emerging only where the text naturally reflects transformational leadership dynamics. This safeguards against distorting the meaning of the text while also providing a faithful bridge to real-world ministry leadership challenges, particularly in Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) contexts. The sacred texture method thus

functions both as an exegetical lens and as a theological filter for interpreting leadership action within Scripture.

By following this methodology, the study aims to answer the central research question: How are the core components of transformational leadership exemplified in Jesus' actions in John 13:1-17? It also seeks to uncover culturally meaningful insights that can inform leadership training and church planting strategies in honor-shame contexts, especially among emerging Pentecostal and evangelical communities.

## RESULTS OF DATA ANALYSIS

This section presents the results of a sacred texture analysis of John 13:1-17, demonstrating how each sacred dimension within the text aligns with the core components of transformational leadership. Rather than imposing modern leadership theory onto the biblical narrative, the analysis reveals that Jesus' actions organically embody the Four I's—idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Each subsection below explores one sacred texture element and shows how it naturally reflects a transformational trait. Together, these findings answer the central research question: *How are the core components of transformational leadership exemplified in Jesus' actions in John 13:1-17?* The Results section traces a coherent interpretive arc from divine initiative through identity-shaped influence to ethical disruption, showing how the narrative's sacred dynamics cumulatively produce transformational formation.

### *Divine Action: Idealized Influence*

The sacred texture element of divine action in John 13:1-17 is foundational to understanding Jesus' model of transformational leadership. The Gospel writer introduces the scene with theological gravity: "Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God..." (*New American Standard Bible*, 2020, John 13:3). This assertion of divine sovereignty sets the stage for an extraordinary inversion—Jesus, fully conscious of His divine authority, sets aside His garments, assumes the position of a servant, and begins to wash the feet of His disciples. This moment reveals a paradox: divine initiative expressed through radical humility.

In sacred texture analysis, divine action refers to how the text portrays God's self-revelation and redemptive involvement within the narrative. Jesus' actions in John 13 constitute not just ethical behavior, but a theophanic moment—a divine unveiling through sacred servanthood. According to DeSilva (2018), such acts in John's Gospel are designed to disclose divine character in ways that compel imitation and shape community identity. Henson et al. (2020) affirm that sacred actions often serve as a model for spiritual leadership, embedding divine values into the moral imagination of the faith community.

Lexical analysis reinforces this reading. The verb *νίπτω* (*níptō*, "to wash") in John 13:5 evokes Old Testament purification rites (cf. Ex. 30:18-21), suggesting that Jesus

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redefines ritual cleansing as relational humility. Moreover, His use of the word δούλος (doulos, “slave”) in verse 16 aligns leadership with the lowest social status, reframing authority as service. As Verbrugge (2000) and Brown (1978) note, doulos in Johannine usage does not imply dehumanizing subservience but rather identity-shaping voluntary submission. These terms ground divine action not in displays of dominance, but in actions that elevate others through sacrificial initiative.

This sacred inversion directly parallels idealized influence, the first of the Four I’s in transformational leadership theory. Idealized influence refers to the leader’s ability to model integrity, moral clarity, and self-sacrificing commitment that inspires trust and emulation (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Jesus’ deliberate choice to serve despite possessing ultimate authority exemplifies this principle. Avolio and Gardner (2005) argue that transformational leaders must embody their core values in moments of decision and visibility—precisely what Jesus does here. He does not merely teach about humility; He performs it in a way that challenges deeply held assumptions about greatness and power.

The sacred nature of Jesus’ actions also reorients the disciples’ understanding of God’s character. Carson (2020) writes that the foot washing is not just a lesson in humility, but a revelation of divine love enacted in service. By engaging in a socially scandalous act, Jesus simultaneously lowers Himself and elevates servanthood as the measure of divine greatness. Witherington (1998) emphasizes that such symbolic acts in John function as “sign-events,” offering embodied theology that shapes ethical practice. Here, the divine action becomes not only a leadership moment but a sacred blueprint for how Christian leaders are to exercise influence.

This theological model is particularly significant for church planting in honor-shame cultures. As Georges and Baker (2016) explain, status and dignity in Arab societies are often tied to social visibility, hierarchy, and public affirmation. Jesus subverts those norms by leveraging His divine status in private, not to demand honor, but to bestow it. This action invites leaders in honor-shame contexts to adopt a leadership style rooted in moral vision, humility, and identity-redefining influence. Far from weakening authority, such behavior deepens its moral foundation and fosters trust across cultural boundaries (Greenlee, 2009; Livermore, 2015).

In summary, the sacred texture of divine action in John 13:1-17 reveals Jesus as the ideal transformational leader—one whose influence is derived not from position but from sacrificial service. His actions embody divine initiative and ethical clarity, aligning fully with the transformational trait of idealized influence. For church planters in the Middle East and North Africa, this paradigm offers a culturally disruptive yet biblically faithful model of leadership—one that reshapes authority through humility and reframes greatness through sacred servanthood.

### *Holy Person: Inspirational Motivation*

The sacred texture element of holy person focuses on how a biblical narrative presents individuals as carriers of divine authority, spiritual purity, and theological purpose (Henson et al., 2020; Robbins, 1996). In John 13:1-17, Jesus is portrayed not only as the Son of God but as the consecrated agent of divine mission who leads through relational humility. The Gospel explicitly affirms His divine self-awareness: “Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God...” (John 13:3, NASB). His identity as the holy one is not detached from action—it is demonstrated through a shocking gesture of servanthood. In sacred terms, His holiness is made visible through ethical embodiment rather than ritual separation (DeSilva, 2018).

This portrayal of Jesus aligns with the transformational leadership trait of inspirational motivation, which involves articulating a compelling vision, demonstrating conviction, and mobilizing others through example (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Inspirational leaders foster hope and meaning, calling followers to a higher purpose. In this moment, Jesus does not deliver a sermon on humility—He enacts it. After washing His disciples’ feet, He proclaims: “For I gave you an example, so that you also would do just as I did for you” (John 13:15, NASB). This action-oriented declaration frames His leadership not as instruction alone, but as a vision to be embodied.

Jesus’ holy personhood is thus inseparable from His leadership. He models what He calls others to do—servant-heartedness, mutual honor, and covenantal love. As Whittington et al. (2005) explain, transformational leaders inspire others by living out the ideals they promote. Jesus’ moral clarity and sacrificial initiative motivate the disciples to reimagine what greatness means in the kingdom of God. Köstenberger (2004) affirms that the foot washing functions as a paradigm of community life—one in which leadership is measured by love rather than by hierarchy.

The relational dimension of holiness is further emphasized in Jesus’ treatment of Peter. Though Peter protests the act (John 13:6-8), Jesus responds patiently, reinforcing that true leadership requires both humility and vulnerability. His holy identity is not threatened by intimacy or discomfort. As Avolio and Luthans (2006) observe, transformational leaders leverage formative moments—especially those involving resistance—to cast vision with lasting impact. Jesus’ response to Peter invites reflection, not rejection, and thus models a style of leadership that is both inspiring and pastoral.

In honor-shame cultures, where leadership often reflects social dominance, Jesus’ holy personhood subverts expectations. Georges and Baker (2016) note that leaders in Arab societies are frequently evaluated based on status, distance, and command authority. Jesus reverses this model by making His holiness accessible through humble action. His authority is not diminished by servanthood—it is clarified. As Greenlee (2009) and Elmer (2006) argue, culturally intelligent leadership must confront hierarchical norms with incarnational presence. Jesus’ embodiment of holiness

becomes the very means by which He mobilizes His followers to adopt a radically different kind of greatness.

This model of inspirational motivation is particularly effective in cross-cultural church planting. Prinz (2022) notes that effective church planters among Muslim-majority peoples often lead not through charismatic speech alone, but by consistent modeling of the values they preach. Jesus' example in John 13 reinforces this principle. His holiness is not abstract—it is formative, initiating a new pattern of relational leadership that speaks powerfully to collectivist societies in which public action shapes communal identity.

In summary, Jesus is presented in John 13 as the holy person who inspires transformation through action and example. His leadership mobilizes others not through fear or power, but through a vision of humility rooted in divine mission. This sacred portrayal aligns fully with inspirational motivation, revealing how holiness, when embodied in love, becomes the catalyst for spiritual leadership. For emerging leaders in honor-shame cultures, Jesus' model provides an aspirational identity that fuses authority with intimacy and sanctity with service.

#### *Sacred Space: Individualized Consideration*

The sacred texture element of sacred space identifies how physical or symbolic locations within a biblical narrative carry spiritual significance and become the setting for divine-human interaction (Henson et al., 2020; Robbins, 1996). In John 13:1-17, the Upper Room functions as more than a geographical setting; it becomes a sacred environment where intimacy, covenantal preparation, and leadership transformation converge. Jesus does not choose a public forum or temple setting to deliver this lesson—He selects a private, trusted space among His disciples, reinforcing that transformational leadership often occurs in relationally safe and spiritually charged environments.

The Upper Room, in Johannine theology, is a setting for formation and transition. It is the location where Jesus institutes not only the foot washing, but also delivers His final teachings and intercessory prayer (John 13-17). As Beasley-Murray (1987) and Carson (2020) observe, this space is theologically charged—it marks the threshold between the old covenant and the new, between Jesus' earthly ministry and His glorification. The foot washing, set in this sacred space, becomes a covenantal act that redefines community identity around servanthood and love.

This sacred space dynamic corresponds to the transformational leadership trait of individualized consideration, which refers to a leader's attentiveness to the unique needs, growth trajectories, and relational dynamics of followers (Bass & Riggio, 2006). In this passage, Jesus interacts personally with His disciples—not as a mass audience, but as individuals. His exchange with Peter is especially revealing. Peter resists being washed, and Jesus responds not with rebuke, but with theological explanation and

relational grace (John 13:6-10). This is a moment of spiritual mentoring, not public correction.

Transformational leaders engage individuals within sacred or intentional environments to foster trust, identity, and developmental change. Avolio and Gardner (2005) argue that leaders must create conditions for personal transformation, often through context-rich, emotionally safe interactions. Jesus does precisely this. In the sacred space of the Upper Room, He initiates a moment of uncomfortable intimacy that challenges ego, pride, and fear—yet does so with pastoral care and relational intentionality. Peter’s discomfort is not ignored but becomes a teaching moment that deepens his understanding of both leadership and grace.

In collectivist and honor-shame cultures, personal interaction within trusted spaces carries amplified meaning. Georges and Baker (2016) explain that honor is often preserved or lost in highly relational settings. Public correction brings shame; private instruction preserves dignity. Jesus’ decision to wash the disciples’ feet in an intimate setting—away from public view—demonstrates culturally intelligent leadership. He upholds their honor even as He challenges their assumptions. This integration of care and challenge models individualized consideration at its highest level.

Theological interpretation of the sacred space also draws on covenantal imagery. Coloe (2004) argues that the foot washing scene parallels Old Testament covenant rituals of purification and commission (cf. Ex. 29:4; Lev. 8:6), suggesting that Jesus prepares His disciples for priestly mission. Within this space, each disciple receives direct engagement and commissioning. Jesus dignifies them not by exalting their status, but by lowering Himself to serve them personally—a leadership strategy that elevates the follower’s identity by demonstrating worth through relational investment.

Elmer (2006) emphasizes that culturally effective leadership in cross-cultural ministry requires humility, listening, and adaptability. Sacred space is not merely physical—it is relationally and theologically constructed. The Upper Room becomes such a space because of Jesus’ intentional presence and individualized care. As Livermore (2015) notes, culturally intelligent leaders understand when and how to engage followers personally, discerning the timing, tone, and setting of formative interactions.

In summary, the sacred texture of space in John 13 reveals a leadership moment grounded in personalized transformation. Jesus engages His disciples one-on-one within a spiritually charged environment that communicates safety, purpose, and love. This corresponds directly with individualized consideration, demonstrating that spiritual leadership flourishes in sacred spaces where relational trust, theological vision, and cultural sensitivity converge. For church planters and ministry leaders in honor-shame cultures, this model provides a vital template for discipling others through meaningful, relationally appropriate engagement.

### *Sacred Time: (Reinforced) Inspirational Motivation*

The sacred texture of sacred time refers to how a biblical text situates its narrative within moments of divine significance—events tied to covenant, redemption, or eschatological fulfillment (Henson et al., 2020; Robbins, 1996). Although inspirational motivation appears under holy personhood, John’s sacred time framing reinforces the same trait through a distinct mechanism, since narrative timing intensifies meaning and mobilizes discipleship resolve beyond identity claims alone. In John 13:1-17, time is not merely a chronological marker but a theologically loaded signal of divine intentionality. The narrative begins with a temporal declaration: “*Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus, knowing that His hour had come...*” (John 13:1, NASB). This phrase signals the arrival of Jesus’ “hour”—ὥρα (*hōra*)—a key Johannine motif that marks the transition from public ministry to redemptive suffering and glorification (cf. John 2:4; 7:30; 12:23).

Sacred time in this passage functions as *kairos*—a decisive moment in salvation history where Jesus initiates a leadership act that embodies the meaning of His mission. According to Beasley-Murray (1987) and Köstenberger (2004), the use of Passover imagery links this moment to Israel’s covenantal deliverance, suggesting that Jesus reinterprets that deliverance through servanthood and sacrifice. His foot washing is not random—it is embedded in God’s redemptive timetable and charged with eschatological weight. As DeSilva (2018) notes, sacred time in John’s Gospel often fuses past covenantal patterns with future-oriented mission.

This temporal setting reinforces the TL trait of inspirational motivation, already introduced in VI.B, by demonstrating Jesus’ awareness of divine timing and His strategic use of leadership acts to cast a vision for the disciples’ future. Jesus leads with purpose precisely *because* the time is urgent. He is not reacting—He is initiating. As Bass and Riggio (2006) explain, inspirational motivation involves articulating a compelling purpose that mobilizes others toward a shared destiny. Jesus’ foot washing becomes that moment: a symbolic act that both reflects and catalyzes the transformation of His disciples from followers to future leaders.

The phrase “*having loved His own... He loved them to the end*” (John 13:1) further amplifies the sacred nature of the moment. The Greek word τέλος (*telos*, “the end” or “completion”) underscores Jesus’ resolve to carry His mission to full consummation. His leadership here is not sentimental—it is covenantal. Avolio and Gardner (2005) emphasize that transformational leaders operate with long-range vision rooted in ethical resolve. Jesus’ act is grounded in divine love with eschatological foresight, not mere human compassion. This visionary intentionality motivates the disciples beyond the immediate moment and anchors their leadership identity in a larger narrative.

In honor-shame cultures, time-bound rituals often function as public markers of identity, hierarchy, and group values. Georges and Baker (2016) highlight how religious festivals and rites confer communal meaning and shape leadership transitions. Jesus

inserts His radical act of servanthood into precisely such a moment—the Passover festival—thereby redefining leadership at the very site of cultural and religious expectation. Rather than assert dominance, He transforms the meaning of leadership itself, inspiring His followers with a vision of greatness through humility.

Prinz (2022) underscores that effective leadership in Muslim-majority contexts often hinges on timely, symbolic acts that demonstrate moral clarity and communal commitment. By embedding His example within a sacred time frame, Jesus connects His leadership with covenantal memory and prophetic fulfillment—an approach deeply resonant in cultures where symbolic timing carries deep weight. Tennent (2010) similarly argues that missional leadership must recognize kairos moments when spiritual authority can be redefined in culturally transformative ways.

In summary, the foot-washing narrative is framed by sacred time that reflects divine purpose, covenantal continuity, and redemptive urgency. Jesus' action, situated on the eve of His crucifixion, reinforces the TL trait of inspirational motivation, not simply through vision casting but through timely embodiment of mission. For leaders in honor-shame societies, this reinforces the importance of recognizing God-appointed moments—kairos settings—where leadership must move from abstract teaching to embodied action that mobilizes transformational change.

#### *Ethical and Moral Judgment: Intellectual Stimulation*

The sacred texture element of ethical and moral judgment explores how a biblical text presents divine standards for human behavior, challenges societal norms, and communicates the moral implications of covenantal identity (Henson et al., 2020; Robbins, 1996). In John 13:1-17, the ethical weight of Jesus' foot washing is unmistakable. He performs a socially scandalous act that reverses conventional hierarchies of honor and shame, then commands His disciples: *“If I, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet”* (John 13:14, NASB). What might appear as simple hospitality or humility is, in fact, a radical moral instruction embedded within a sacred act.

In Greco-Roman and Jewish culture, foot washing was a task reserved for the lowest of slaves. According to Brown (1978), even Jewish servants were often exempt from this duty; it was considered beneath their dignity. Jesus' decision to adopt this role was not only countercultural but ethically provocative—it challenged both Roman honor codes and Jewish purity expectations. By assuming the lowest social position, He subverts every conventional measure of status and power. As DeSilva (2018) argues, such moments in the Gospels are not merely symbolic but confrontational, redefining what is honorable in God's kingdom.

This aligns directly with the transformational leadership trait of intellectual stimulation, which refers to the leader's ability to challenge assumptions, question cultural norms, and encourage followers to think differently (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Jesus uses this moment to reframe the disciples' understanding of authority, identity,

and leadership. He asks rhetorical questions: “*Do you know what I have done to you?*” (John 13:12)—not to seek affirmation but to prompt reflection and moral reorientation. His leadership is not passive; it is pedagogical. He draws the disciples into critical reflection through a lived parable of reversal.

Wolak (2016) notes that transformational leaders must foster environments where followers learn to question inherited patterns and imagine new paradigms of behavior. Jesus does this by embodying an ethic that simultaneously shocks and instructs. Avolio and Luthans (2006) emphasize that intellectual stimulation is most effective when paired with modeling, where the leader not only teaches but demonstrates a separate way forward. Jesus’ act invites the disciples to reconsider their assumptions about greatness, proximity to power, and spiritual maturity.

In honor-shame cultures, where maintaining face and rank are deeply embedded social values, such a reversal is even more significant. Georges and Baker (2016) explain that ethical instruction in such cultures must confront deeply held collective scripts around hierarchy, purity, and public image. Jesus’ foot washing dismantles these scripts—not through public humiliation but through private subversion. His actions redefine what is “clean,” who is worthy, and how leaders should behave. In doing so, He initiates a transformational moment that intellectually and morally reconfigures the disciples’ worldview. Jesus confronts status expectations through a dignity-preserving, relationally wise disruption that corrects hierarchy without resorting to public shaming, thereby modeling culturally intelligent transformation.

Greenlee (2009) adds that cross-cultural leaders must be willing to gently challenge local norms when Scripture offers a higher ethical vision. Jesus does exactly this—not by criticizing the culture, but by offering a new ethic through enacted truth. The disciples are not shamed; they are invited into a higher standard of mutual honor. Elmer (2006) affirms that culturally intelligent leadership must balance truth and grace, challenge and relationship. Jesus models this balance with precision—engaging His disciples in an act that requires them to rethink both theology and community practice.

Moreover, by embedding this moral inversion within a sacred act, Jesus ensures that the ethical vision is not negotiable. As Tennent (2010) argues, biblical leadership always involves the moral formation of both individuals and communities. The foot washing becomes a new standard—not an optional gesture of piety, but a non-negotiable expectation for Christian leadership: “*You also ought to wash one another’s feet*” is not a metaphor alone; it is a redefinition of authority through downward, redemptive action.

In sum, the sacred texture of ethical and moral judgment in John 13 reveals Jesus as a leader who does more than serve—He challenges, disrupts, and transforms. His foot washing is a moral manifesto enacted through self-lowering love. It fully reflects the TL trait of intellectual stimulation, inviting leaders to reconsider cultural assumptions and adopt a leadership model that subverts worldly power with divine humility. For ministry leaders working in culturally complex, hierarchical environments, this offers a

clear and courageous path forward: challenge convention with conviction, grounded in sacred example.

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The sacred texture analysis of John 13:1-17 reveals a multi-dimensional leadership paradigm that is both theologically grounded and culturally transformative. Each sacred texture element—divine action, holy person, sacred space, sacred time, and ethical and moral judgment—unfolds naturally within the narrative and aligns organically with the core components of transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation.

Jesus demonstrates idealized influence through divine initiative. Fully aware of His authority and divine origin, He voluntarily lowers Himself to wash the feet of His disciples, modeling moral clarity and humility (John 13:3-5). This sacred act redefines leadership as redemptive self-sacrifice rooted in divine identity, not positional status.

As the holy person, Jesus exemplifies inspirational motivation by casting a vision through example. His foot washing is not merely ethical—it is vocational: “For I gave you an example, so that you also would do just as I did for you” (John 13:15, NASB). He inspires His followers not with rhetoric, but with embodied theology that redefines what it means to be great in the kingdom of God.

The sacred space of the Upper Room facilitates individualized consideration as Jesus engages each disciple personally—especially Peter. Within this intimate and relationally safe environment, He mentors and challenges without shaming. This leadership environment reflects a transformational commitment to personal development and pastoral care.

The narrative’s sacred time—“knowing that His hour had come” (John 13:1)—reinforces inspirational motivation. Jesus’ action is anchored in kairos awareness, aligning His leadership with God’s redemptive timetable. This eschatological intentionality adds urgency and vision to His instruction, positioning servanthood as the interpretive key to the Cross and beyond.

Finally, Jesus’ foot washing communicates profound ethical and moral judgment, activating intellectual stimulation. He disrupts cultural norms surrounding status and cleanliness, provoking reflection and requiring moral reorientation. By challenging the disciples’ assumptions about leadership, honor, and spiritual maturity, Jesus fosters transformation through cognitive and ethical engagement.

Crucially, these transformational traits are not imported into the text—they emerge naturally through close reading using sacred texture analysis. The socio-rhetorical method (Henson et al., 2020; Robbins, 1996) has proven essential in revealing how John 13 functions not merely as a narrative of humility, but as a leadership manifesto rooted in divine action and moral revelation (see Table 1). Reed

(2023) supports this integrative approach through a recent case study that demonstrates how servant leadership in a local church context parallels transformational traits with measurable team development results.

**Table 1**

*Sacred Texture and Transformational Leadership*

Sacred Texture Element	Key Verse(s)	TL Trait	Leadership Insight
Divine Action	John 13:3-4	Idealized Influence	Authority expressed through voluntary humility
Holy Person	John 13:7, 13-15	Inspirational Motivation	Vision cast through embodied example
Sacred Space	John 13:5-11	Individualized Consideration	Mentorship in relationally secure environments
Sacred Time	John 13:1	Inspirational Motivation	Eschatological urgency and prophetic leadership timing
Ethical and Moral Judgment	John 13:12-17	Intellectual Stimulation	Challenging norms through redemptive inversion

*Note:* Table 1 synthesizes emergent patterns observed in the analysis and does not prescribe a fixed leadership formula or universal sequence for all leadership contexts.

This exegetical process confirms that transformational leadership, when grounded in Scripture, gains theological depth and cultural flexibility. Jesus' model does not depend on Western paradigms of leadership. Instead, it speaks powerfully to collectivist, honor-shame contexts by prioritizing character, community formation, and covenantal mission. As Georges and Baker (2016), Elmer (2006), and Livermore (2015) have shown, culturally adaptive leadership requires visible, relational expressions of humility and vision. John 13 exemplifies precisely this.

In conclusion, the findings affirm that the transformational leadership traits seen in John 13 are sacredly anchored, contextually appropriate, and missionally potent. Jesus models a leadership that dignifies others, initiates change through love, and aligns with divine purpose—all within a cultural frame that transcends time and place. This sacred leadership pattern offers a reproducible and biblically faithful foundation for church planting in honor-shame cultures and beyond.

## DISCUSSION

This study extends transformational leadership by grounding idealized influence in divine action and by demonstrating how sacred time and sacred space function as

narrative mechanisms that intensify motivation and shape follower development. The preceding analysis of John 13:1-17 through the lens of sacred texture reveals a multidimensional leadership model rooted in divine action, moral clarity, and relational intentionality. Each element of sacred texture—divine action, holy person, sacred space, sacred time, and ethical judgment—corresponds to the Four I's of transformational leadership in ways that are both exegetically grounded and contextually relevant. This section now integrates those findings with the broader framework of transformational leadership theory to answer the guiding research question: How are the core components of transformational leadership exemplified in Jesus' actions in John 13, and what implications arise for church planting in honor-shame cultures?

The sacred texture analysis of John 13:1-17 reveals a multilayered leadership model in which divine identity is expressed through radical humility and transformational intent. Rather than exercising power through hierarchical command, Jesus redefines leadership by engaging in an act of servanthood that integrates theological purpose, moral vision, and relational development. This discussion draws together the exegetical findings to reflect on how Jesus' sacred leadership reframes transformational leadership theory, offering a compelling model for church planting and leader development in honor-shame cultures. As Allen (2006) observed, missionary methods rooted in incarnational presence often resemble Jesus' approach in John 13, where authority emerges through embodied service rather than positional dominance. Tidball (2012) notes that effective spiritual leadership arises from the interplay of preaching, pastoring, and prophetic action—all of which are embodied by Jesus in the Upper Room context.

At the heart of John 13 is the paradox of divine authority expressed through self-lowering love. Jesus knew *“that the Father had given all things into His hands”* (v. 3) yet chose to kneel and wash the feet of His followers. This moment challenges any leadership model that equates greatness with control. While Bass and Riggio (2006) define idealized influence as moral credibility and vision-based trust, Jesus displays a more robust form—He leads not only by ethical consistency but by incarnating the very character of God (cf. Phil. 2:6-7). His divine action is not detached from human experience; it penetrates it. In doing so, He elevates service as the truest form of influence.

This sacred model enriches the TL trait of inspirational motivation. Jesus does not merely cast a compelling vision; He makes Himself the embodiment of it. *“For I gave you an example, so that you also would do just as I did for you”* (v. 15). In collectivist cultures, vision is not transferred through abstract goals but through visible example and relational proximity. Jesus speaks the future into existence by performing it in front of His disciples. The implication for church planting is profound: leaders must inspire not by position or charisma, but by visible, embodied faithfulness that creates covenantal identity within the community.

Jesus' actions also redefine individualized consideration. Peter's protest and Jesus' patient correction show how spiritual formation requires direct, relational

encounters that honor dignity while inviting growth. Within honor-shame dynamics, where public correction can destroy trust, Jesus models how leadership should preserve face while still challenging the follower toward deeper understanding. The sacred space of the Upper Room—where shame is shielded, and calling is conferred—becomes the blueprint for church planting environments that prioritize safety, trust, and spiritual intimacy. Leaders in Arab cultures must disciple not only with doctrinal clarity but with relational discernment.

In terms of intellectual stimulation, Jesus does not simply teach by explanation but provokes reflection through a morally disruptive act. His question—“*Do you know what I have done to you?*”—demands interpretation. It compels the disciples to reevaluate what they thought they knew about honor, status, and the messianic role. This is leadership as revelation. The foot washing is a “sacred puzzle” (Robbins, 1996), forcing reorientation through both discomfort and grace. In cultures that venerate tradition, transformational leaders must create space for theological surprise—acts or teachings that dislodge inherited patterns and reconfigure identity in Christ.

These findings reinforce the thesis that Jesus models a transformational leadership paradigm through sacred action that is both theologically rich and culturally subversive. Importantly, His model does not mimic Western leadership forms. Instead, it draws from kingdom values embedded in the narrative arc of Scripture and reshapes leadership according to divine example. This is particularly relevant in MENA church planting contexts, where authority structures are often inherited, gendered, or tribal. Jesus offers a third way—one that affirms moral clarity without reinforcing authoritarianism and fosters team development without diluting personal holiness.

This discussion also challenges TL theorists to revisit the Four I’s in light of Scripture. While transformational leadership values vision, care, challenge, and credibility, John 13 reveals that each of these traits must be cruciform—shaped by the Cross, not ambition. Idealized influence must include crucified authority. Inspirational motivation must emerge from covenantal vision. Intellectual stimulation must provoke moral repentance. Individualized consideration must be rooted in discipleship and love, not merely performance outcomes.

For leadership formation, this means programs must be structured around sacred practices, not only competencies. Church planters and emerging leaders should be developed in relational environments that reflect the sacred texture of John 13: spaces marked by theological intentionality, moral clarity, and practical servanthood. Sacred action—foot washing, shared meals, confession, healing prayer—becomes not only formative but missional. As Georges and Baker (2016) assert, in honor-shame cultures, transformation is most persuasive when it is incarnated, not argued. Tools like Elmore’s (2005) *Habitudes* can reinforce the visual and relational modeling Jesus employed when forming transformational leaders through sacred action.

In practical terms, transformational leadership modeled after Jesus in John 13 can be measured through observable outcomes in church-planting teams. Indicators

such as leader replication rates, retention of disciples over two years, and the multiplication of group-centered or micro-churches in high-shame contexts serve as empirical markers of success. As demonstrated by Mutua et al. (2023), TL traits like individualized consideration and inspirational motivation contribute to team cohesion and ministry sustainability—both critical for long-term impact in MENA contexts. A systematic review by Agazu et al. (2025) confirms that transformational leadership positively correlates with organizational performance across diverse global contexts, including innovation and team cohesion, though the strength of this relationship is mediated by cultural and structural variables—underscoring the need for contextually adaptive leadership models. These outcome indicators represent illustrative, practice-oriented implications derived from the exegetical-theoretical integration rather than empirically tested effects within the present study.

In summary, the discussion demonstrates that Jesus' leadership in John 13 is more than a historical moment of humility—it is a transformational template embedded in sacred space, sacred time, and divine mission. When viewed through sacred texture and TL theory, this narrative offers a cross-cultural leadership model capable of forming resilient, relational, Spirit-filled leaders for church planting in the most complex cultural environments of our time.

## CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore how the core components of transformational leadership are exemplified in Jesus' actions in John 13:1-17, using sacred texture analysis as outlined by Henson et al. (2020). Through a step-by-step examination of the sacred dimensions embedded in the narrative—divine action, holy person, sacred space, sacred time, and ethical and moral judgment—it became clear that Jesus embodies each of the Four I's of transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation. These traits do not appear artificially imposed onto the text. Instead, they arise organically from the Gospel's sacred narrative, shaped by divine purpose and covenantal love. In sum, this article offers an exegetically disciplined reading of John 13:1–17, advances transformational leadership by specifying text-grounded mechanisms of formative influence, and equips missional leaders to translate Christlike authority credibly within honor–shame cultures.

The thesis has been affirmed: Jesus models a transformational leadership paradigm through sacred action in John 13 that offers a compelling template for church planting in honor-shame cultures. Far from reflecting modern leadership constructs, Jesus' foot washing redefines leadership as theologically grounded, relationally engaged, and culturally subversive. His example challenges prevailing hierarchies not by rejecting leadership but by reconfiguring it around divine humility and moral clarity.

Sacred texture analysis has proven to be an effective exegetical method for uncovering leadership patterns in Scripture. Its strength lies in its ability to honor the theological and rhetorical dimensions of a passage while offering conceptual bridges to

contemporary leadership theory. It allows the text to speak from within its own sacred worldview, while still equipping leaders with practical insight for modern ministry.

For church planters and ministry leaders in Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) contexts, the implications are significant. Jesus' model demonstrates that transformational leadership is not culturally bound to Western assumptions about charisma, structure, or authority. Instead, it offers a contextually faithful, spiritually powerful alternative that elevates character over control, relational engagement over hierarchical distance, and covenantal purpose over self-promotion. In honor-shame cultures, where leadership is often tied to status and image, Jesus presents a pathway of redemptive inversion that dignifies others and strengthens community through sacred service.

This model is not only exegetically sound but missiologically urgent. As Arab churches grow amidst complexity, persecution, and rapid social change, they need leaders who are both theologically rooted and culturally responsive. The sacred leadership Jesus demonstrates in John 13 offers precisely that—a vision for discipleship-driven teams who lead through love, serve with strategy, and multiply through moral clarity.

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

To deepen and extend the insights of this project, several areas warrant further investigation:

- Comparative Gospel studies could examine similar leadership moments in texts like Mark 10:42-45 or Luke 22:24-27, to test the reproducibility of the sacred leadership model across diverse narratives.
- Empirical field studies could explore how this model functions within actual church planting teams in MENA, measuring its impact on team cohesion, follower development, and ministry outcomes.
- Theological integration projects could examine how transformational leadership traits intersect with Pentecostal theology, exploring Spirit-led leadership beyond the sociological frames of TL theory.

Ultimately, Jesus' actions in John 13 are not only exegetically sound but missiologically urgent. As churches grow in the Arab world amidst complexity, persecution, and rapid social change, they need leaders who are both theologically rooted and culturally responsive. The sacred leadership Jesus demonstrates in John 13 offers precisely that—a vision for discipleship-driven teams who lead through love, serve with strategy, and multiply through moral clarity. While this paper has offered a theological and exegetical foundation for this leadership model, future research should pursue empirical validation—especially within cross-cultural church planting teams—to evaluate how the Four I's function in field practice. Such studies would strengthen the model's credibility and broaden its applicability across ministry contexts. Future research should pursue interdisciplinary collaboration between biblical studies and

leadership research by testing these exegetically derived claims through qualitative or mixed-method studies in ministry training contexts, including honor–shame settings across the Middle East and North Africa.

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### About the Author

Matt Hattabaugh serves as a pastor, church planter, leadership developer, and author based in Beirut, Lebanon. Together with his wife Julie, he leads GoChurch Beirut and directs Go Middle East ([www.go-me.org](http://www.go-me.org)), a ministry dedicated to multiplying leaders and planting Christ-centered churches across the MENA region. In addition, he serves as the National Director for RHEMA Bible Training College in Lebanon and assists the Director for RHEMA in the Middle East and North Africa.

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