RESEARCH ROUNDTABLES

REGENT UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF BUSINESS & LEADERSHIP

Nurturing Flourishing Through Christ-Centered Leadership: A Biblical Case Study of Organizational Commitment and Support in 1 Thessalonians 2:1–12

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Abstract

This study examines the servant leadership model of the Apostle Paul in 1 Thessalonians 2:1–12 as a biblical framework for human flourishing in organizational contexts. Writing to a young and persecuted church, Paul presents a leadership philosophy defined by moral integrity, relational presence, and sacrificial investment. Using a socio-rhetorical exegetical approach, this paper analyzes the inner, intertextual, and cultural textures of the passage to show how Paul's covenantal leadership subverts Greco-Roman honor norms and exemplifies Christ-centered authority. His refusal to manipulate, his nurturing metaphors, and his willingness to share his life with the community cultivate conditions that mirror contemporary constructs such as perceived organizational support (POS), affective organizational commitment, and person-organization fit (P-O fit). By integrating Pauline exegesis with organizational leadership theory, this study argues that biblical servant leadership fosters trust, belonging, and missional resilience, particularly within cross-cultural and faith-based organizations. While findings indicate that Pauline leadership is both theologically grounded and organizationally practical, further empirical research is necessary to assess its measurable impact across diverse ministry settings. Accordingly, this study raises the following question: How do biblically grounded servant leadership models, such as Paul's in 1 Thessalonians 2:1–12, influence POS and employee flourishing in cross-cultural, faith-based organizations?

Keywords: servant leadership, organizational commitment, perceived organizational support, person-organization fit, human flourishing

The increasing emphasis on human flourishing in leadership literature invites Christian scholars and practitioners to revisit biblical models that ground organizational health in spiritual identity and moral integrity. Flourishing is often defined in terms of

psychological well-being, value congruence, and meaningful engagement (Cameron, 2012; Seligman, 2011). However, Scripture articulates a more theologically integrated vision, rooted in *shalom*, covenantal belonging, and Christ-centered transformation. In this study, the Apostle Paul's leadership in 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12 is examined as a biblical case study in servant leadership that cultivates flourishing through relational embodiment, moral consistency, and spiritual exhortation.

Using a socio-rhetorical exegetical approach (Robbins, 1996), this paper analyzes how Paul's leadership functions within its Greco-Roman context and how it anticipates key constructs in organizational theory, including perceived organizational support (POS), affective commitment, and person-organization fit (P-O fit). Paul's refusal to manipulate, his nurturing metaphors of mother and father, and his incarnational posture of "sharing our lives" (v. 8) demonstrate a leadership model grounded not in control or charisma, but in covenantal presence. This model holds particular relevance for faith-based organizations, church-planting efforts, and cross-cultural ministry contexts where trust, resilience, and vocational alignment are essential to sustained flourishing.

Theoretical Framework: Servant Leadership and Human Flourishing

Servant leadership has emerged as a distinct and influential paradigm within the broader field of organizational leadership studies, particularly in contexts that emphasize ethical responsibility, employee well-being, and transformational outcomes. Initially articulated by Greenleaf (1977), servant leadership reframes traditional power structures by centering the leader's role on serving others. Greenleaf's (1977) emphasis on listening, empathy, and stewardship has since been developed into measurable constructs by contemporary scholars (Eva et al., 2019; Liden et al., 2014). Recent research confirms this relationship empirically: a meta-analysis by Hernaus et al. (2021) demonstrated that servant leadership significantly increases organizational commitment by fostering follower well-being and ethical climates. Christian scholars have welcomed servant leadership as deeply congruent with biblical teaching, particularly the example of Jesus, who declared, "Whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant" (*New American Standard Bible* [NASB], 1971/2020, Mark 10:43). In particular, van Dierendonck (2011) notes that servant leadership fosters a favorable organizational climate by enhancing trust, authenticity, and personal development—conditions essential to human flourishing.

Human flourishing, as explored in organizational studies, encompasses more than productivity or job satisfaction. It reflects a holistic state in which individuals experience purpose, connection, growth, and well-being (Cameron, 2012; Seligman,

2011). Within Christian theology, this aligns with the biblical concept of *shalom*, a vision of peace and wholeness rooted in right relationship with God and others. When servant leadership is practiced in a Christ-centered manner, it can contribute to a flourishing organizational culture marked by justice, belonging, and spiritual maturity.

Furthermore, several constructs within organizational leadership theory reinforce this paradigm. POS, defined as the extent to which employees believe their organization values their contributions and cares for their well-being, has been shown to correlate with increased commitment and trust (Eisenberger et al., 2002). Similarly, P-O fit and person-job fit refer to the congruence between an individual's values and those of the organization, which research consistently links to higher job satisfaction, employee engagement, and long-term retention (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). These frameworks provide a theoretical foundation for examining Paul's leadership in 1 Thessalonians 2:1–12, where relational integrity, ethical conduct, and emotional investment are central to his leadership ethos. As this study will show, Paul's model anticipates and enriches these contemporary concepts, demonstrating how a Christ-centered approach to leadership fosters commitment, belonging, and holistic well-being in the organizational life of the church.

Exegetical Methodology

This study employs a historically grounded, socio-rhetorical exegetical method, combining the tools of historical-grammatical analysis with insights from socio-rhetorical criticism as outlined by Robbins (1996). The goal is to explore how Paul's leadership model in 1 Thessalonians 2:1–12 conveys and embodies theological and organizational significance within its first-century context and contemporary leadership discourse.

The historical-grammatical approach provides the foundation for lexical and syntactical study, particularly in examining the semantic range and function of terms such as ἤπιοι (*ēpioi*, gentle), ψυχάς (*psychas*, lives), and the triadic participles παρακαλοῦντες (*parakalountes*, exhorting), παραμυθούμενοι (*paramythoumenoi*, encouraging), and μαρτυρόμενοι (*martyromenoi*, imploring) (Danker et al., 2000). This method emphasizes authorial intent and situational context, helping frame Paul's pastoral tone and rhetorical strategy.

Socio-rhetorical criticism, as developed by Robbins (1996), supplements this base by exploring the inner texture (i.e., repetition, progression, and argumentative movement), intertexture (i.e., allusions to other texts and traditions), and cultural texture (i.e., how the language evokes and subverts Greco-Roman social expectations). For example, Paul's maternal and paternal metaphors (vv. 7, 11–12) challenge prevailing Roman

ideals of public masculinity and authoritative dominance, reframing leadership through a lens of nurturing service and covenantal loyalty (Malherbe, 2000; Witherington, 2006). This countercultural posture is further heightened when set against patron-client expectations, wherein spiritual leaders often received honor in exchange for benefits. Paul resists this convention by offering his very life (v. 8), not extracting status, thereby reorienting the leadership paradigm toward sacrificial presence. Contemporary studies validate that servant leadership behaviors, particularly empathy, stewardship, and empowerment, enhance POS. Aruoren and Erhuen (2023) demonstrated this effect in a public sector sample, noting that servant leadership produced measurable gains in employee trust and POS.

While socio-rhetorical criticism provides a robust framework for examining the multiple textures of 1 Thessalonians 2:1–12, it is not without scholarly critique. Kernaghan (2008) cautions that overemphasis on rhetorical structures can inadvertently impose Greco-Roman categories onto Pauline letters, potentially obscuring the Spirit-led spontaneity and pastoral immediacy inherent in the text. This study mitigates such risk by prioritizing contextual fidelity, anchoring interpretation in the historical, cultural, and theological realities of the Thessalonian church, while maintaining sensitivity to the pastoral and missionary intent of the letter. The analysis integrates rhetorical insights as one lens among several, balanced with theological exegesis, canonical intertextuality, and Pentecostal hermeneutics that recognize the Holy Spirit's role in both the inspiration and contemporary application of Scripture. This integrative approach safeguards against reducing Paul's leadership model to an abstract rhetorical construct, ensuring it remains a living paradigm for ministry formation and organizational leadership today.

Intertextually, this study also engages canonical echoes from the Hebrew Scriptures and the Gospels to demonstrate continuity between Paul's servant leadership and broader biblical patterns. Paul's language of exhortation and self-giving resonates with the shepherd motifs of Ezekiel 34 and with Jesus's description of the Good Shepherd in John 10, leaders who protect, nurture, and remain among their people. This thematic resonance reinforces Paul's imitation of Christ (1 Thessalonians 1:6) not only in message but in method.

Theologically, Paul's leadership ethic embodies an incarnational model, one that mirrors the kenotic movement of Christ described in Philippians 2:5–11 and the embodied proclamation of the Word in John 1:14. As Fee (2009) argues, Philippians 2:5–11 presents not only a Christological hymn, but a theological template for leadership shaped by downward mobility, self-emptying love, and voluntary servanthood. Paul's call to "have this attitude in yourselves" (Philippians 2:5, NASB) is both exhortational

and paradigmatic, providing a Christocentric framework for understanding leadership as a sacrifice rather than a pursuit of status. Thus, Paul's self-description in 1 Thessalonians 2 reflects not an isolated rhetorical posture but a consistent theological ethic rooted in his vision of the cruciform Messiah (Fee, 2009). In this light, servant leadership becomes a mode of theological expression—Christ made visible in the daily lives of leaders who walk "holy, righteous, and blameless" before others (1 Thessalonians 2:10, NASB).

This multi-textured exegetical approach allows for a layered reading of the passage, one that remains faithful to the text's original meaning while illuminating its relevance for contemporary organizational leadership. It also strengthens the alignment between biblical theology and empirical leadership constructs such as POS, affective commitment, and P-O fit, as explored in subsequent sections.

Exegetical Analysis of 1 Thessalonians 2:1–12

The Apostle Paul's self-description in 1 Thessalonians 2:1–12 forms a rich case study in Christ-centered leadership that integrates theological conviction, moral character, and relational investment. Written to a newly formed and persecuted church, this passage offers a unique window into Paul's pastoral ethos and apostolic praxis. Rather than asserting positional dominance, Paul roots his leadership in relational nearness, rhetorical sincerity, and sacrificial self-disclosure. His method of engagement invites the Thessalonians not simply into obedience, but into imitation, identity formation, and spiritual maturity.

A rhythm of rhetorical contrast and affirmation marks the inner texture of the passage. Paul repeatedly uses the phrase "you know" (vv. 1, 2, 5, 11) to invoke shared memory and testimony, drawing the readers into a communal narrative of credibility. He frames his leadership using contrastive rhetoric, "not with error or impurity" (v. 3), "not as pleasing men" (v. 4), "not with flattering speech" (v. 5), "nor seeking glory" (v. 6), culminating in the positive declaration, "But we proved to be gentle among you" (v. 7). This rhetorical movement intensifies in verses 11–12 through a triadic participle sequence: παρακαλοῦντες (*parakalountes*, exhorting), παραμυθούμενοι (*paramythoumenoi*, comforting), and μαρτυρόμενοι (*martyromenoi*, imploring). The sequence functions both as an emotional crescendo and a leadership map, guiding followers not only by precept but by presence.

Lexically, verse 7 anchors the relational tone with the term ἤπιοι (*ēpioi),* meaning gentle. Some manuscripts read νήπιοι (*nēpioi*, infants), which, though textually disputed, reveals the humility and vulnerability Paul was willing to associate with. Whether as a gentle caregiver or an infant among them, the image subverts Greco-

Roman models of leadership, which are based on dominance, honor, and rhetorical display, particularly as constructed within the hierarchies of the household codes that governed public and private behavior in the Roman world (Osiek & Balch, 1997). Paul's choice of ψυχάς (psychas, lives) in verse 8 reinforces this subversion. He did not merely share instruction, but his very being, evoking the Hebrew term *nephesh* and aligning with the Jewish view of leadership as covenantal and whole-person oriented.

The intertexture of this passage draws on both Old Testament and gospel imagery. Paul's parental metaphors recall the shepherd-leader model of Ezekiel 34, where leaders are rebuked for exploiting rather than nurturing the flock. In contrast, Paul offers himself as a mother nursing her child (v. 7) and a father guiding with encouragement and integrity (vv. 11–12). These familial images connect deeply with Jesus's leadership model in John 10, where the Good Shepherd "lays down His life for the sheep." Thus, Paul's leadership becomes an imitation not only of Christ's teachings, but of His incarnational mode of ministry, embodied presence, suffering love, and relational nearness.

The cultural texture reveals how Paul's approach would have challenged prevailing expectations of leadership in the first-century Greco-Roman world. In that context, public figures were often evaluated by their rhetorical prowess, patronage status, and accumulation of honor. Leaders were expected to receive honor in exchange for benefits, a pattern Paul explicitly rejects in verses 5–6. His refusal to flatter, deceive, or gain glory confronts these norms head-on. As Malherbe (2000) and Witherington (2006) argue Paul intentionally distances himself from the traveling rhetoricians and religious peddlers common in the Roman provinces. Instead, he models a leadership that prioritizes spiritual integrity over social capital.

Verses 10–12 bring the analysis full circle. Paul appeals to the Thessalonians' firsthand experience of his "devout and upright and blameless" conduct (v. 10), which serves not merely as a personal defense but also as a theological strategy. His moral consistency is the basis for his spiritual authority, not his title or position. The phrase "walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you" (v. 12) echoes covenantal language, casting leadership as vocational rather than positional, being called by God and confirmed through shared witness.

Taken together, these textures demonstrate that Paul's leadership was both relational and rhetorical, ethical and theological, emotionally tender and spiritually formative. He cultivated trust not through status or strategy but through shared life, personal vulnerability, and consistent holiness. His leadership anticipated the very conditions that contemporary organizational theory identifies as vital to flourishing: psychological

safety (Edmondson, 1999), organizational commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991), and value congruence (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). What Paul models in Thessalonica is not simply pastoral affection; it is a Spirit-led form of organizational leadership, grounded in Scripture and designed for transformation.

Integration with Organizational Leadership Constructs

Paul's leadership in 1 Thessalonians 2:1–12 offers more than a historical model; it anticipates and enriches contemporary organizational leadership frameworks in profound and practical ways. His apostolic ethos, grounded in integrity, emotional presence, and spiritual intentionality, aligns closely with three widely studied constructs in organizational research: POS, affective organizational commitment, and P-O fit. However, Paul's contribution is not merely analogous; it deepens and reframes these constructs within a biblically rooted understanding of human flourishing.

POS refers to the extent to which employees believe their organization values their contributions and cares for their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 2002). Paul's declaration that he shared "not only the gospel of God but also our own lives" (2:8) exemplifies this principle not in policy but in personhood. His willingness to emotionally and spiritually invest in the Thessalonian believers reflects a leader committed to the flourishing of the whole person, not merely their productivity or compliance. This depth of care, expressed through presence, affection, and moral example, cultivates an atmosphere of psychological safety and trust (Edmondson, 1999), both of which are critical to long-term organizational health. This affective orientation resonates with current findings linking POS to commitment. Recent empirical findings confirm this linkage in organizational settings. Pimenta et al. (2023) found that socially responsible HRM practices promote work engagement through a sequential mediation effect: first by increasing POS, which then heightens affective commitment, even during instability or organizational change. This finding validates Paul's leadership emphasis on relational investment and sacrifice (1 Thessalonians 2:8), showing that care and authenticity yield absolute relational loyalty and dedication.

Paul's choice of the adjective ἤπιοι (ēpioi, gentle) in 1 Thessalonians 2:7 conveys a nuanced picture of leadership marked by tenderness and restraint rather than dominance. As the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* notes, the term carries connotations of mildness and a disposition that avoids harshness, especially in contexts of authority. In Greco-Roman society, public leadership often emphasized strength through assertiveness and control; Paul's use of ēpioi subverts that norm, presenting a countercultural model of influence grounded in relational trust rather than coercion. This gentleness functions not as weakness but as disciplined strength,

leadership that is self-governed for the sake of another's flourishing. Likewise, his use of ψυχάς (*psychas*, souls or lives) in verse 8 deepens his commitment. The lexicon underscores that *psychē* encompasses the entirety of oneself —emotions, will, and vitality—not merely biological life. By declaring that he was pleased to share not only the gospel but also his psychas, Paul frames leadership as a whole-life investment. This imagery aligns with the kenotic pattern of Christ's own ministry (Philippians 2:5–8, NASB), in which self-giving love is the essence of authority. Together, ēpioi and psychas articulate a leadership posture where relational vulnerability and sacrificial engagement are inseparable from the exercise of influence, offering a biblically grounded corrective to models that prize efficiency or status over embodied presence.

Within a cultural-texture framework, this would have radically challenged Roman models of patronage, which were transactional and hierarchical. Paul reverses this dynamic, offering himself freely without seeking honor (v. 6) and refusing to manipulate (v. 5). His support is not earned by loyalty but extended from covenantal love, a distinctly Christian form of POS that arises not from institutional mandate but incarnational mission.

Affective organizational commitment, described by Meyer and Allen (1991) as the emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in an organization, is likewise modeled in Paul's leadership. His consistent moral conduct, as being "holy and righteous and blameless" (v. 10), and fatherly engagement (v. 11) produce a shared memory and moral solidarity between him and the Thessalonian believers. This bond, forged in tribulation and tested by time, reveals that commitment in Paul's context is not merely emotional warmth, but covenantal fidelity. Recent scholarship provides robust empirical support for the relational and affective nature of commitment modeled by Paul. Åkerlund (2017) found that servant leadership attributes, such as empowerment, authenticity, and stewardship, significantly predict affective and normative commitment to supervisors, accounting for up to 47% of the variance in commitment within the sample. These results affirm that Paul's exhortative style, centered in relational trust, mutual respect, and ethical consistency, translates into measurable organizational outcomes. Moreover, Allen and Meyer's (1996) construct validation study underscores that affective commitment emerges not merely from shared values but also from emotional attachment to leaders perceived as trustworthy and supportive. In ministry contexts, such findings strengthen the case for incarnational leadership models that emphasize presence, patience, and participatory care.

In addition, Fauzan and Sari (2024) contribute to the broader landscape of commitment studies through a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of leadership scholarship from 1990 to 2023. Their findings reveal that transformational and authentic leadership

theories have become dominant antecedents of organizational commitment, while servant leadership, though present, remains underrepresented in global research streams. This gap underscores the importance of integrating scriptural models, such as Paul's, into contemporary discourse, particularly in transnational ministry contexts where virtual teams, cultural diversity, and digital communication tools are reshaping leadership dynamics. Their call for future research on digital-era adaptations reinforces the need to revisit servant leadership through new modalities—an imperative for cross-border gospel teams working across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, who must foster commitment despite distance and risk.

The Apostle Paul's leadership establishes a relational covenant rooted in truth and trust, which Seligman (2011) identifies as a key component of personal well-being and Cameron (2012) considers foundational for organizational flourishing.

Through intertexture, Paul's affective leadership posture echoes Old Testament covenantal patterns where God's relational faithfulness fosters obedience (e.g., Deuteronomy 7:9). Likewise, Jesus's model of discipleship in the Gospels, where He "calls" followers to Himself before commissioning them, establishes the same order: belonging precedes responsibility. Paul follows suit, drawing believers into a gospel community where relational loyalty is shaped by shared purpose rather than enforced obligation.

This countercultural model of servant leadership finds a strong rhetorical parallel in the Lukan tradition. Etukumana (2024), in a socio-rhetorical study of Luke 22:23–27, argues that Jesus's instruction on servant leadership functions as subversive rhetoric within an honor-shame culture. By equating greatness with servanthood and rejecting hierarchical privilege, Jesus reframes communal leadership in terms of solidarity and self-giving. Paul's own leadership posture, particularly in 1 Thessalonians 2, echoes this Lukan motif, demonstrating that early Christian leadership was consistently formed around relational inversion and moral persuasion rather than status or control. Integrating Etukumana's findings enriches the cultural texture analysis of Paul's letter by showing how apostolic leadership both draws from and reinforces a broader canonical ethos that displaces worldly power structures.

P-O fit is a construct concerned with the alignment between an individual's values and the organizational culture (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Paul demonstrates this principle through cultural formation, not cultural accommodation. His use of exhortation, encouragement, and imploring (v. 11) is not coercive but formative, designed to shape the community into a people who "walk in a manner worthy of God" (v. 12). In doing so, he articulates not only a set of values but a lived culture into which others are

invited and empowered to belong. P-O fit, in this light, becomes more than compatibility; it becomes discipleship. Recent research by Saeed et al. (2025) confirms that P-O fit significantly increases both job satisfaction and organizational commitment, reinforcing the value of shared beliefs and cultural alignment in spiritual organizations.

Paul's servant leadership fosters a spiritual ecology that enables followers to internalize organizational values through imitation (1 Thessalonians 1:6, NASB) and relational experiences. He embodies what he proclaims, thereby establishing the organization's ethical atmosphere. In contemporary terms, this is not only a cultural alignment strategy but a leadership theology of incarnation, values enfleshed, not just stated.

Together, these constructs —POS, affective commitment, and P-O fit —map remarkably well onto Paul's leadership practice, but they also find their fullest expression when rooted in Christ-centered anthropology and ecclesiology. Paul's leadership, mediated through kenosis and integrity, challenges reductionist paradigms that define leadership in terms of charisma, control, or outcomes. Instead, he offers a relationally immersive, morally credible, and spiritually anchored vision that nurtures flourishing within gospel-shaped communities. Recent findings continue to validate the relevance of servant leadership in organizational contexts. For example, Choudhary et al. (2025) demonstrated that servant leadership significantly improves team engagement, enhances value congruence, and strengthens long-term commitment, further substantiating Paul's leadership example in contemporary organizational research, especially regarding the strengthening of team commitment and value alignment, which are core elements of P-O fit.

Implications for Christian Leaders and Organizations

The leadership model articulated by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 2:1–12 carries enduring and urgent implications for Christian leaders who seek to cultivate organizational cultures of spiritual vitality, ethical coherence, and holistic flourishing. In contrast to leadership paradigms that prioritize charisma, authority, or institutional control, Paul's servant leadership invites leaders into a cruciform posture, marked by proximity, moral clarity, and shared life. His apostolic method does not simply commend values; it embodies them.

First, Paul underscores that moral credibility is indispensable for spiritual authority. His emphasis on being "holy and righteous and blameless" (v. 10) reminds leaders that character is not an afterthought; it is foundational. In church and mission contexts, where trust is deeply relational and often fragile, the ethical integrity of the leader forms the bedrock for organizational trust and long-term faithfulness. Leaders who embody the gospel —not only in doctrine but also in conduct —nurture environments

where psychological safety and spiritual authenticity can flourish (Cameron, 2012; Edmondson, 1999).

Second, Paul demonstrates that relational availability is more formative than strategic visibility. His maternal and paternal metaphors (vv. 7, 11) indicate a leadership model that is emotionally present, developmentally engaged, and covenantally invested. He does not manage from a distance but lives among the people, investing his soul (psychas) into the community (v. 8). This incarnational posture mirrors the ministry of Christ, who "became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14, NASB) and calls leaders to prioritize relational proximity over institutional prominence.

Paul's emphasis on embodied gentleness and self-giving presence extends the theological foundation for Christian leadership practice. Instead of merely describing pastoral posture, Paul calls leaders to cultivate habits of emotional availability, moral steadiness, and vocational humility that shape the community's spiritual ecology. His ministry among the Thessalonians models leadership as a formative presence rather than a performative role, demonstrating that authority in the Christian tradition rests in integrity and shared life. This pattern aligns with the cruciform trajectory of Christ's ministry, where influence flows through self-emptying love and proximity (Philippians 2:5-8, NASB). When leaders adopt this posture, they create organizational environments in which trust, belonging, and transformation can take root. Such a model offers an alternative to efficiency-driven or image-driven forms of leadership, grounding Christian influence in character and covenantal commitment rather than technique.

This has particular significance in high-risk, cross-cultural, or pioneering environments, such as missions and church planting in unreached or spiritually resistant contexts. In such settings, authority is rarely granted by title; it must be earned through presence, suffering, and sacrificial love. Paul's method, characterized by gentleness, vulnerability, and shared suffering, provides a replicable template for contextual leadership that fosters credibility through incarnation, rather than imposition.

This incarnational model of leadership is not only biblical but also validated in recent qualitative studies. Roberts (2025), through interviews with pastoral leaders facing congregational mental health challenges, identifies servant leadership as a formative practice in spiritual care. These leaders emphasized traits such as emotional resilience, patience, and a continuum of presence-oriented ministry as essential for sustaining healthy ministry relationships. Roberts's findings align with Paul's pastoral posture, particularly his use of familial metaphors, and demonstrate that servant leadership fosters resilience, trust, and spiritual flourishing in ministry environments marked by vulnerability and long-term emotional demands. For gospel workers in the MENA

region, where ministry often occurs in fragile social contexts and amid personal sacrifice, this empirical affirmation strengthens the call for servant leadership grounded in presence and care.

Third, Paul's example calls for intentional cultural formation within faith-based organizations. His repeated exhortations, ethical modeling, and relational commitment form not merely a set of policies, but a lived culture. He shapes an environment in which values are not only taught but transferred through imitation, embodiment, and shared mission. In modern organizational terms, this is referred to as strategic culture-building. In theological terms, it is discipleship through leadership. Leaders must attend to the subtle formation of language, rituals, and expectations that either reinforce or contradict the gospel message. Culture will form, either by design or by drift, through Paul's models of design.

Ultimately, Paul's leadership suggests that flourishing is not solely an outcome of effective systems, but rather of spiritual communion. His goal is not compliance, but transformation, "so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you" (v. 12). This reorients Christian leadership around vocation and spiritual direction. Organizations become communities of calling, not factories of output. Leaders become shepherds and stewards of that calling, not simply vision-casters or systems designers.

For contemporary Christian leaders, especially those navigating the complexities of multi-ethnic, multi-generational, and transnational ministry contexts, Paul offers a theologically robust and practically transferable framework. It is a leadership of kenosis, not conquest; of presence, not platform; of moral gravity, not managerial gloss. When leaders embody the gospel they preach, they invite others into a flourishing that is both organizationally resilient and spiritually redemptive.

Future research might explore how leaders who embody Pauline servant leadership affect organizational trust, retention, and well-being across diverse cultural settings. Qualitative methods, such as ethnographic case studies or interviews within church planting networks, may provide insight into how these constructs manifest in real-time ministry contexts.

To extend the theoretical insights of this study, future research could employ an empirical design to examine the relationship between POS, affective organizational commitment, and flourishing in church planting networks across the MENA region. A mixed-methods approach would allow for both quantitative validation and qualitative depth. Empirical studies in ecclesial settings already possess a proven foundation. For example, Åkerlund (2017) found that POS significantly predicts affective commitment among church volunteers, reinforcing the relevance and feasibility of POS measures in

faith-based contexts. Quantitative measures would capture the statistical strength of relationships between leadership practices and follower outcomes, while qualitative interviews or ethnographic case studies could reveal contextual nuances, such as the impact of honor-shame dynamics or persecution pressures on organizational trust. This integrative methodology would not only test the applicability of Pauline servant leadership principles in diverse ministry settings but also generate actionable insights for training and sustaining leaders in high-risk environments.

Conclusion

The leadership portrait that emerges from 1 Thessalonians 2:1–12 presents a biblically grounded, theologically rich, and organizationally relevant framework for cultivating human flourishing through Christ-centered leadership. Paul's model, marked by moral integrity, emotional availability, covenantal self-giving, and cultural intentionality, resonates with and expands upon key constructs in contemporary leadership theory, including POS, affective organizational commitment, and P-O fit.

Rather than imposing authority, Paul evokes trust through a kenotic leadership posture: "gentle among you," "sharing our own lives," and exhorting "as a father would his children." His leadership is not managerial but incarnational, not merely positional but pastoral. This example reframes flourishing not as organizational output, but as vocational alignment, spiritual maturity, and relational cohesion within a gospel-formed community. His servant leadership embodies the character of Christ and provides a transferable model for leaders who aim to foster resilience, belonging, and purpose within faith-based organizations.

Furthermore, Paul's leadership presents a compelling case study for integrating Scripture and organizational science. His relational model anticipates the conditions modern researchers now identify as prerequisites for organizational flourishing: psychological safety, ethical leadership, and value congruence. However, his example transcends theory by rooting leadership identity in theological vocation: calling, not career; embodiment, not performance.

As Christian leaders navigate the shifting landscapes of globalization, secularization, and organizational complexity, Paul's leadership offers an anchoring vision: to lead with holiness and humility, to serve with presence and purpose, and to cultivate cultures of belonging and transformation in Christ. His model challenges both ecclesial and academic communities to reconsider the roots and fruits of leadership through a scriptural lens of servant-hearted formation.

Despite these strengths, further empirical and theological inquiry is warranted. Specifically, a gap remains in research exploring how biblically grounded servant leadership practices, particularly those shaped by Pauline models, impact long-term organizational commitment, employee flourishing, and missional effectiveness across cross-cultural and faith-based contexts. Future studies should investigate how such models perform in diverse organizational environments and whether their Christ-centered ethos measurably contributes to flourishing at individual, team, and institutional levels.

Accordingly, this study raises the following guiding research question:
How do biblically grounded servant leadership models, such as Paul's in 1 Thessalonians 2:1–12, influence POS and employee flourishing across cross-cultural, faith-based organizations?

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