

The Emergence of Transformational Leader: An Exegetical Study of Joshua 1:1-9 For Effective Church Leadership

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Abstract

The Church like any organization is in the era marked by societal shifts, cultural complexities, and a rapidly changing religious landscape which makes the need for effective leadership; transformational leadership paramount. This paper explores Joshua 1:1-9 as to the emergence of a transformational leader within the context of effective church leadership exegetically. The paper points out the divine commission, visionary direction, inner strength, and continuous learning demonstrated by Joshua. Moreover, the pericope is considered a timeless blueprint for inspiring, empowering, and guiding congregations toward transformative change. This study conclusively underscores the fact that effective church leadership is not merely about achieving goals but empowering others to live out their faith and make a difference in the world, guided by the principles of God's Word as it was demonstrated in the emergence of Joshua after Moses.

Key Words: *Effective Leadership, Transformational Leadership, Church Leadership, Visionary Leadership*

INTRODUCTION

In an era marked by societal shifts, cultural complexities, and a rapidly changing religious landscape, the church faces unique challenges and opportunities. Amidst this dynamic context, the need for effective leadership is paramount. As Greenman notes, human beings are endlessly fascinated with the lives of leadership; that is, leadership is an unavoidably central human-social phenomenon.¹ While various leadership styles exist, transformational leadership has emerged as a particularly relevant and impactful approach for guiding the church in fulfilling its mission and purpose. Church, which is defined as an institution and organization in our society, is made up of people of the same faith who gather together in person for fellowship, worship, education, prayer, and support of the faith (Hebrews 10:25).

Like any other organization, the church is on purpose, which could be summarized into two folds: firstly, coming together of the people and bringing each member into spiritual maturity (Ephesians 4:13), and secondly, reaching out (scatters) to share the gospel and the love of Christ with the world's unbelievers (Matthew 28:18-20), the Christ's ultimate purpose on earth. Since the

¹ Jeffrey P. Greenman, "Tales of Transformation: Leadership Paradigms in To Recent Films," *CRUX: Spring Vol 60*, No1, (2024):1-2.

church is the primary means by which God accomplishes his earthly goals, it is locally and universally significant. To have this done with different people of different backgrounds, upbringings, ethnicities, etc, there is a need for transformational leaders and leadership.

Hacker and Roberts highlight the necessity for transformational leadership, and he submits that transformational leadership fosters a Culture of Growth and Transformation, Embraces Vision and Purpose, Cultivates Servant Leadership, Develops Future Leaders, and Encourages Innovation and Adaptation.² This paper, through an exegetical study of Joshua 1:1-9, will explore the emergence of a transformational leader within the context of effective church leadership and later highlight the divine commission, visionary direction, inner strength, and continuous learning demonstrated by Joshua as the framework for contemporary church leaders by highlighting the importance of recognizing one's calling, establishing a clear vision, fostering resilience and faith, and prioritizing ongoing growth.

THE CONCEPTUAL DEFINITION OF TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

The concept of transformational leadership was first projected by James McGregor Burns in 1978.³ Because there is intellectual stimulation, transformational leaders encourage subordinates to build fresh viewpoints on leadership.⁴ Transform is rooted in the Latin word *transformare*, which means to "change the nature, function, or condition of, to convert."⁵ The transformational concept could be accommodated and applied in various human social lives: relationships, individuals, groups, teams, communities, or political systems.⁶ A leader, according to online vocabulary.com, is the person who convinces other people to follow. A great leader inspires confidence in other people and moves them to action.⁷

In its simplified version, leadership could be defined as leading a group of people or an organization.⁸ Therefore, transformational leadership is a leadership capacity with dedication,

² Stephen Hacker and Tammy Roberts, *Transformational Leadership: Creating Organizations of Meaning* (Wisconsin: ASQ Quality Press, 2004), 4-5.

³ Casimir, A. et.al. "Philosophical Expositions of Leadership and Human Values in Catholic Social Teachings: Resolving Nigeria's Leadership Deficit and Underdevelopment," *Open Journal of Philosophy*, (2013):391.

⁴ Steinmann, B., Klug, H. J. P., & Maier, G. W. "The Path Is the Goal: How transformational Leaders Enhance Followers' Job Attitudes and Proactive Behavior. *Frontiers in Psychology*," <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.0233>, Accessed on 27 February, 2025

⁵ Idalene F. Kesner, "Leadership Development: Perk or Priority?" *Harvard Business Review* 81, no. 5 (2003): 29.

⁶ Stephen, 6.

⁷ Vocabulary.com /[Leader - Definition, Meaning & Synonyms](#), assessed on 27th February, 2025.

⁸ Nikhil Pandey. What is Leadership? Definition, Meaning & Importance. <https://emeritus.org/in/learn/what-is-leadership>, accessed 27th February, 2025.

commitment, and a genuine desire required of individuals, groups, or organizations to produce transformation, as evidenced by step-functional improvement with dedication, commitment, and a genuine desire to serve others.

In the Church context, Transformational leadership is essential for guiding the church in fulfilling its mission and purpose. It helps create a dynamic and vibrant community that actively seeks to make a difference in the world. This leadership style also encourages spiritual growth and discipleship, empowering members to become more involved in the life and mission of the church. This is crucial in a rapidly changing world where individuals seek meaning and purpose. Therefore, the next step of this paper is to attempt an exegetical study of Joshua 1:1-9 to explore the emergence of a transformational leader within the context of effective church leadership. Examining the divine commission, visionary direction, inner strength, and continuous learning demonstrated by Joshua.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Lilya Wagne, in "Leading Up Transformational Leadership for Fundraisers," and James MacGregor Burn identifies five fundamental, key characteristics of Transformational leadership, which are:

- i. Visionary and Inspirational: Transformational leaders have a clear, compelling vision for the future. They communicate this vision in a way that inspires and motivates followers to buy into the shared purpose and goals. They paint a picture of a brighter future that motivates individuals to contribute their talents and energy.
- ii. Charismatic and Empowering: These leaders possess charisma that attracts and engages followers. They inspire trust and confidence, creating an atmosphere of empowerment where individuals feel valued and supported. This leads followers to believe in their own abilities and to strive for more incredible things.
- iii. Focused on Growth and Development: Transformational leaders prioritize the development of their followers. They challenge individuals to step outside their comfort zones, to learn new skills, and to grow spiritually, intellectually, and emotionally. This creates a sense of purpose and motivates individuals to contribute their best.
- iv. Servant-Oriented: Transformational leaders put the needs of their followers first. They act as mentors and guides, supporting and encouraging them to reach their full potential. This selfless attitude fosters a strong sense of connection and trust within the community.
- v. Ethical and Values-Driven: Transformational leaders are guided by strong ethical principles and values. They model integrity, honesty, and compassion, inspiring the same in their followers. This fosters a culture of trust and accountability, where individuals feel safe and secure.⁹

AN EXEGETICAL STUDY OF JOSHUA 1:1-9

⁹ Lilya Wagne, *Leading Up Transformational Leadership for Fundraisers*, (Canada, Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2015), 65-105

Introduction to the Book

The book of Joshua, a pivotal text in the Hebrew Bible, chronicles the transition from Moses' leadership to Joshua's, offering valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities of leading a people through a period of significant change. The death of Moses marks the end of an era and the beginning of a new chapter in the Israelites' journey. Moses, the revered leader who led them out of Egypt and through the wilderness, had guided them for 40 years. His passing is a watershed moment, creating a void in their lives and raising questions about the future.¹⁰

The focus shifts from Moses' leadership to Joshua's, highlighting the change in leadership and the new responsibilities that Joshua inherits. The Israelites are transitioning from a period of wilderness wandering to a new era of conquest and settlement in the Promised Land. This transition requires a new kind of leadership that can inspire courage, build unity, and guide the people toward a new future. The book of Joshua opens by emphasizing the importance of this transition and the divine appointment of Joshua to lead. This transition highlights the continuity of God's plan. God's presence and guidance remain constant, even as the leader changes, signifying that God's plan continues even through change. As Getz submits, this transition to Joshua's leadership is both a challenge and an opportunity. God chooses Joshua, Moses' trusted companion, to lead the people into the Promised Land. This transition is not simply about replacing one leader with another but about continuing God's plan and the commitment to fulfilling His promises.¹¹

Notably, the opening verses of the book (Joshua 1:1-9) provide a compelling case study for understanding the principles of transformational leadership, mainly as they apply to the church in the 21st century.¹² Joshua opens (1:1-9) with an explicit reference to Joshua's succession in language replicating that found at the end of Deuteronomy concerning this succession (Josh 1:6,7,9 *cf* Deut. 31:7; 32:23) and cast in the form of a divine assurance employing language that duplicates similar assurances given Moses at the outset of his career (Exodus 3:12,15).¹³ The passage marks the beginning of the book of Joshua following the death of Moses. It narrates the divine commissioning of Joshua to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land. This passage acts as a crucial transition point in the narrative, highlighting the responsibility of leadership during a time of significant change. The passage of Joshua 1:1-9, while situated within the context of ancient Israel, resonates powerfully with the challenges and opportunities faced by church leaders in the 21st century.

Textual Analysis

Joshua 1:1 וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי מוֹת מֹשֶׁה עֶבֶד יְהוָה וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן־נֹון מִשְׁרָת מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר:

¹⁰ F. A. Schaeffer, *Joshua and the flow of Biblical history*. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1975),

¹¹ G. A. Getz, *Joshua: Living as a Consistent Role Model*. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman. 1995).

¹² J. A. Soggin, *Joshua: A Commentary, Old Testament Library* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 38-39.

¹³ Mark E. Biddle. *Literary Structures in the Book of Joshua*, *Review and Expositor*, 95 (1998):190.

Joshua 1:2 מֹשֶׁה עַבְדִּי מָתָּה קִוִּים עָבַר אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן הַזֶּה אַתָּה וְכָל־הָעָם הַזֶּה אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי נָתַן לָהֶם לְבָנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

Joshua 1:1 After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' attendant:

Joshua 1:2 "My servant Moses is dead. Prepare to cross the Jordan, together with all this people, into the land that I am giving to them (Israelites).

Verses 1-2a: The passage emphasizes Moses' death (v.1) as a turning point, signifying the end of an era and the beginning of a new journey. This transition is not simply a change of leaders but a shift in focus – from wilderness wandering to conquering the Promised Land. Joshua, Moses' trusted assistant, inherits the leadership mantle, signifying a continuity of God's plan. The passage begins by noting the death of Moses and the inheritance of his role by Joshua. This emphasizes continuity and the importance of a successor to guide the people. The phrase אַחֲרֵי מוֹת מֹשֶׁה in verse 1 establishes a clear temporal link, signifying a change in leadership. "קִוִּים עָבַר אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן הַזֶּה אַתָּה וְכָל־הָעָם" and the Lord said...get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land" established that the divine appointment of Joshua is explicitly stated, highlighting God's direct involvement in the transition process. It signifies that God remains in control, guiding and directing the people even as they transition to a new leader.

In verse 2b, the Lord called Joshua and charged him with his first responsibility when he said "together with ALL these people." Therefore, in his leadership, he must be an influence-based leader who will create an environment where people feel valued, connected, and motivated to excel and should be able to enhance Innovation. Collaboration and open communication encourage creative problem-solving and innovative solutions.

Joshua 1:3 ^{WTT} כָּל־מָקוֹם אֲשֶׁר תֵּדְרֹךְ כִּי־דֹגְלָכֶם בּוֹ לָכֶם נִתְּנָיו כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתִּי אֶל־מֹשֶׁה:

Joshua 1:4 ^{WTT} מִהַמִּדְבָּר וְהַלְבָּנוֹן הַזֶּה וְעַד־הַנָּהָר הַגָּדוֹל נְהַר־פָּרָת כָּל אֶרֶץ הַחִתִּים וְעַד־הַיָּם הַגָּדוֹל מִבּוֹא הַשָּׁמֶשׁ יְהִיָּה גְבוּלְכֶם:

Joshua 1:3 Every spot on which your foot treads I give to you, as I promised Moses.

Joshua 1:4 Your territory shall extend from the wilderness and Lebanon to the Great River, the River Euphrates *on the east* -- the whole Hittite country -- and up to the Mediterranean Sea on the west.

Verses 3-4: God declares his backing intention to give Joshua "every place where you set your foot" (v.3), explicitly stating that he will be victorious and successful. This is a powerful promise, instilling confidence in Joshua and the people. God's repeated emphasis on "every place" (v.2,3) signifies a complete and comprehensive inheritance, promising abundant blessings for the people.

Joshua 1:5 לֹא־יִתְנַצֵּב אִישׁ לִפְנֵיךָ כֹּל יָמֵי חַיֶּיךָ כְּאֲשֶׁר הֵייתִי עִם־מֹשֶׁה אֲהִיָּה עִמָּךְ לֹא אֶרְפֹּךְ וְלֹא אֶעֱזֹבְךָ:

Joshua 1:6 חֲזַק וְאַמֵּץ כִּי אַתָּה תִּנְחִיל אֶת־הָעָם הַזֶּה אֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי לְאַבְרָהָם לָתֵת לָהֶם:

Joshua 1:7 רַק חֲזַק וְאַמֵּץ מְאֹד לִשְׁמֹר לַעֲשׂוֹת כְּכָל־הַתּוֹרָה אֲשֶׁר צִוָּךְ מֹשֶׁה עַבְדִּי אֶל־תִּסּוּר מִמֶּנּוּ יָמִין וּשְׂמָאוֹל לִמְעַן תִּשְׁכֹּל בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר תֵּלֵךְ:

Joshua 1:5 No one shall be able to resist you as long as you live. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you.

Joshua 1:6 "Be strong and resolute, for you shall apportion to this people the land that I swore to their fathers to assign to them.

Joshua 1:7 But you must be very strong and resolute to observe faithfully all the Teaching that My servant Moses enjoined upon you. Do not deviate from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go.

Verses 5-7: God's Commands and Encouragement. God instructs Joshua to "be strong and courageous" (v.6), emphasizing the importance of strength and courage in leadership. These qualities are vital for navigating challenges and overcoming obstacles. God further assures Joshua of his presence and guidance, emphasizing the importance of a strong spiritual foundation for leadership.

Joshua 1:8 לא־יִמּוּשׁ סֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה הַזֶּה מִפִּיךָ וְהִגִּיתָ בּוֹ יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה לְמַעַן תִּשְׁמֹר לַעֲשׂוֹת כְּכָל־הַכְּתוּב בּוֹ כִּי־אֲנִי תֹצֵלִים אֶת־דְּרָכֶיךָ וְאֲנִי תִשְׁקִיל:

Joshua 1:9 הָלוֹא צִוִּיתִיךָ חֲזַק וְאַמֵּץ אֶל־תַּעֲרֹץ וְאֶל־תַּחַת כִּי עִמָּךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר תֵּלֵךְ: פ

Joshua 1:8 Let not this Book of the Teaching cease from your lips, but recite it day and night, so that you may observe faithfully all that is written in it. Only then will you prosper in your undertakings, and only then will you be successful.

Joshua 1:9: "I charge you: Be strong and resolute; do not be terrified or dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

Verses 8-9: The Importance of the Law and God's Presence. The command to "study this Book of the Law Day and night" (v.8) highlights the importance of adhering to God's law, the foundation for ethical and moral leadership. This demonstrates that leadership is not merely based on power or charisma but on a commitment to God's word. The concluding verse reaffirms God's promise to be with Joshua "wherever you go" (v.9), underscoring the crucial role of divine presence and guidance in leadership.

Theological Implications

1. Divine Leadership and Succession: The passage underscores the importance of divine leadership and succession, emphasizing that leaders are chosen by God and given specific responsibilities. This reinforces the notion of God's sovereignty and active involvement in guiding his people.
2. Strength and Courage: The passage highlights the necessity of strength and courage in leadership. Leaders are entrusted with significant responsibilities and must possess the fortitude to navigate challenges and inspire their followers.
3. Obedience to God's Word: The emphasis on studying and obeying God's law underscores the ethical and moral foundation of leadership. Leaders are called to be role models of righteousness, guiding their followers towards a life of faith and integrity.

4. Trust in Divine Presence: The repeated affirmation of God's presence provides assurance and encouragement, emphasizing the importance of faith and trust in God's guidance.¹⁴

IDENTIFIED EMERGING TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES IN JOSHUA 1:1-9

1. Divine Commission and Vision: Joshua's leadership is not self-appointed but divinely ordained (v.1). This establishes the foundation for a leader's authority and legitimacy, emphasizing that authentic leadership is grounded in a higher purpose. Likewise, a well God's clear direction (v.2-4) to conquer the Promised Land provides a shared vision for the people. This clear destination unites them in purpose and motivates them to overcome challenges.

2. Strength, Courage, and Resilience: God commands Joshua to "be strong and courageous" in verses of the pericope, underscoring the importance of inner strength – emotional resilience, unwavering faith, and the ability to face adversity with determination. Also, the promise of God's presence (v.5,9) provides the bedrock of courage. It empowers leaders to face challenges head-on, knowing God is always by their side.

3. Wisdom and Knowledge: The command to "study this Book of the Law Day and night" (v.8) stresses the importance of wisdom, knowledge, and understanding of God's principles as the foundation for effective leadership, and the principle emphasizes the necessity of continuously learning and growing, seeking insights from God's Word and applying them to navigate complex situations.

4. Empowerment and Delegation: God emphasizes that Joshua "shall succeed Moses" (v.2), highlighting the importance of building upon the legacy of previous leadership, respecting their achievements, and learning from their experiences. In the same way, God's trust in Joshua and his delegation of specific responsibilities (v.2-4) empowers him to lead effectively, inspiring confidence in his abilities and fostering a sense of shared purpose.

5. Moral and Ethical Foundation: The passage emphasizes the importance of obedience to God's word, the foundation of a moral and ethical framework for leadership. God challenges Joshua to "study this Book of the Law Day and night" (Joshua 1:8 NIV), highlighting the significance of a life grounded in Scripture. Similarly, contemporary church leaders must demonstrate a commitment to living out their faith and demonstrating ethical behavior, inspiring their followers to do the same.

6. Community Building and Service: The theme of inheriting and possessing the Promised Land is about physical territory and building a strong, united community. This echoes the importance of fostering a sense of belonging and unity within the church. Today's leaders are called to build bridges, create a welcoming environment, and equip their followers to serve the community around them.

¹⁴ Greenleaf, R. K., & Spears, L. C. *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness*, (New York: Paulist Press, 2002)22-40

7. Adaptability and Resilience: The journey to the Promised Land was fraught with challenges. Joshua's leadership required resilience, adaptability, and a willingness to learn and grow. Similarly, church leaders must be adaptable in a rapidly changing world, willing to embrace new approaches to ministry and respond to a diverse population's needs.¹⁵

These principles combine to create a transformational leadership style. Joshua's leadership is more than just directing people; it is about inspiring, empowering, and guiding them to achieve a shared vision. It is about building trust, fostering resilience, and empowering others to become leaders in their own right, ultimately leading to a collective transformation.

CONCLUSION

This paper exegetically identified Joshua as a transformational leader with transformational leadership character and skill, which could be described as an urgent need for effective church leadership. In the text, Joshua is entrusted with a clear vision, a promise of land, signifying the need for leaders to articulate a compelling vision for the future of their communities. Furthermore, God empowers Joshua, granting him the authority and resources to lead, demonstrating the importance of empowering others and fostering a collaborative environment. Also, facing daunting challenges, Joshua is called to step out in faith, reflecting the courage required to lead through uncertainty and adversity. Joshua's success hinges on his obedience to God's directives, emphasizing leaders' need to prioritize ethical decision-making and unwavering commitment to God's will. The passage's message resonates with the needs of contemporary churches. It urges leaders to embrace transformation, not only within themselves but also in their communities. This calls for embracing a vision transcending the status quo, empowering others, fostering faith-filled action, and prioritizing obedience to a higher calling. By applying the principles gleaned from Joshua's leadership, churches can foster environments where individuals flourish, communities thrive, and where the transformative power of God continues to reshape the hearts and lives of its people.

¹⁵ D. McCarthy, "Theology of leadership In Joshua 1-9" *Biblica*, 52 no 2 (1971)165-175. https://poj.peeters-leuven.be/content.php?url=journal&journal_code=BIB, Accessed 27th Feb, 2025.

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