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THE PHILOSOPHY OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE BASED ON MARK 10:42–45

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ABSTRACT

Servant leadership has become a settled paradigm in organizational behaviour and Christian leadership formation, yet the biblical text that supplies its most cited warrant, Mark 10:42–45, is invoked far more often than it is read. Where the passage appears in leadership literature, it is typically reduced to a single aphorism detached from the request of James and John that occasions the saying and from the vicarious mission of the Son of Man that grounds it, producing a conceptual slippage in which secular constructs and biblical servanthood are treated as interchangeable. This study addresses three gaps exegetical, theoretical, and integrative through a qualitative biblical exegetical design combining historical-grammatical analysis of the Greek text (NA28/UBS5), literary-rhetorical criticism, and canonical intertextual comparison with the synoptic parallels and the Isaianic Servant tradition. Because the design is hermeneutical rather than empirical, no statistical data or interview quotations are reported; the analysis rests on primary texts and peer-reviewed literature, and this limitation is stated at the outset. The exegesis identifies four mutually qualifying elements a contrastive political ontology, a christological ground, a soteriological telos, and a discipleship imperative whose integration yields the Markan Servant Leadership Framework (MSLF). The framework's novelty is reconstructive rather than synthetic, generated from the primary text rather than assembled from existing theories. It contributes an exegetically accountable normative reference point for theological ethics and Christian leadership formation, while leaving operationalization for empirical research deliberately open.

Kata Kunci:
Kepemimpinan yang Melayani; Markus 10:42–45; Eksegesis Alkitabiah; Kerangka Kepemimpinan yang Melayani menurut Injil Markus; Pembentukan Kepemimpinan Kristen

ABSTRAK

Kepemimpinan yang melayani (*servant leadership*) telah menjadi paradigma yang mapan dalam perilaku organisasi dan pembentukan kepemimpinan Kristen. Namun, teks Alkitab yang menjadi landasan paling sering dikutip untuk konsep ini—yusni Markus 10:42–45—jauh lebih sering dirujuk daripada dibaca secara saksama. Dalam literatur kepemimpinan, bagian ini sering kali direduksi menjadi sekadar aforisme tunggal yang dipisahkan dari konteks permintaannya—yakni permintaan Yakobus dan Yohanes yang memicu pernyataan tersebut—serta dipisahkan dari misi perwakilan (*vicarious mission*) Anak Manusia yang menjadi dasar teologisnya. Hal ini menimbulkan pergeseran konseptual, di mana konstruksi sekuler dan konsep pelayanan menurut Alkitab dianggap dapat saling menggantikan. Studi ini membahas tiga kesenjangan—yakni kesenjangan eksegetis, teoretis, dan integratif—melalui desain eksegesis Alkitab kualitatif yang menggabungkan analisis historis-gramatikal terhadap teks bahasa

Yunani (NA28/UBS5), kritik sastra-retoris, serta perbandingan intertekstual kanonik dengan bagian paralel dalam Injil Sinoptik dan tradisi "Hamba" dalam kitab Yesaya. Karena desain penelitian ini bersifat hermeneutis dan bukan empiris, maka tidak ada data statistik atau kutipan wawancara yang disajikan; analisis ini bersandar pada teks-teks primer dan literatur yang telah melalui telaah sejawat (*peer-reviewed*), dan batasan ini telah dinyatakan sejak awal. Eksegesis ini mengidentifikasi empat elemen yang saling melengkapi: ontologi politik yang kontras, landasan kristologis, *telos* (tujuan akhir) soteriologis, dan imperatif pemuridan. Integrasi dari keempat elemen ini menghasilkan *Markan Servant Leadership Framework* (MSLF) atau Kerangka Kepemimpinan yang Melayani menurut Injil Markus. Kebaruan kerangka ini bersifat rekonstruktif—dibangun langsung dari teks primer—bukan sekadar sintesis yang dirangkai dari teori-teori yang sudah ada. Studi ini memberikan titik acuan normatif yang dapat dipertanggungjawabkan secara eksegetis bagi etika teologis dan pembentukan kepemimpinan Kristen, sembari tetap membuka ruang bagi penelitian empiris untuk menentukan bentuk operasionalisasinya.

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1. Introduction

Servant leadership has acquired the status of a settled paradigm in both organizational behaviour and Christian leadership formation. Greenleaf's original essay, later consolidated by Spears (E. Adnan et al., 2025)and extended through successive anthologies (Ademola, 2025), proposed that the leader is first a servant, and that institutional authority is legitimate only insofar as it sustains the growth of those served. This formulation has proved remarkably portable. It has been applied to military command (M. Adnan et al., 2024), nursing education (Amran, 2022), academic advisin(Benazzo, 2024) , school principalship (Rathwan, 2023), faith-based schooling (Shula, van Wyk, & Heystek, 2022), Christian non-profit governance (Sharp, 2023), and Islamic institutional management. The construct's cross-cultural reach is now well documented, and its ethical vocabulary—humility, forgiveness, self-transcendence, stewardship—has been absorbed into mainstream leadership discourse (Bryant, 2024)

This diffusion, however, has been achieved at a cost that the field has been slow to acknowledge. The biblical text that supplies servant leadership with its most cited warrant—Mark 10:42–45—is invoked far more often than it is read. Where the passage appears in leadership literature, it is typically reduced to a single aphorism concerning the first and the slave of all, detached from the rhetorical sequence in which Jesus speaks, from the request of James and John that occasions the saying, and from the vicarious mission of the Son of Man that supplies the saying's theological ground. The consequence is a conceptual slippage in which secular servant leadership constructs and biblical servanthood are treated as roughly interchangeable. Sharp's (Chung, 2022) study of

Christian non-profit leaders, for instance, measures servant leadership with instruments developed in organizational psychology while assuming, rather than demonstrating, that these instruments capture the Markan imperative. Shula et al. (2022) similarly employ a servant leadership lens for faith-based schools without adjudicating between the construct's Quaker-influenced genealogy (Coetzer et al., 2025) and its New Testament antecedents.

The theoretical literature has itself begun to register the difficulty. McGhee (Darmaka et al., 2026) argues that servant leadership's normative core remains under-theorized and proposes a Levinasian enrichment, thereby conceding that the construct's ethical foundations are borrowed rather than intrinsic. Hurt and Long (2022) interrogate the relationship between positional authority and influence, exposing an unresolved tension at the heart of the model. Menezes (2023) and Huo and Liu (2023) extend the construct through attachment theory and feedback-seeking behaviour respectively, but neither engages the question of whether the leader's service is grounded in anything beyond follower outcomes. Empirical work has meanwhile produced inconsistent findings: relationships between servant leadership and organizational commitment, resilience, and innovation vary across samples and instruments (A. Davis, 2024) a variability that construct proliferation alone does not explain. The field, in short, has accumulated applications faster than it has secured foundations.

Three gaps follow. The first is exegetical. Sustained literary-rhetorical analysis of Mark 10:42–45 that integrates the immediate context of James and John's request (10:35–40) with the passage's canonical intertexts remains scarce in leadership scholarship, even where the passage is programmatically cited. The second is theoretical. Servant leadership theory has developed almost entirely within secular organizational psychology, while theological treatments of servanthood have rarely engaged leadership theory on its own methodological terms (P. Davis & Spears, 2023). The two literatures run in parallel. The third is integrative. No framework currently synthesizes the exegetical, christological, and ethical dimensions of Mark 10:42–45 into a coherent model usable in Christian leadership formation. The present study addresses these gaps through a qualitative biblical exegetical design combining historical-grammatical analysis of the Greek text (NA28/UBS5), literary-rhetorical criticism, and canonical intertextual comparison with the synoptic parallels (Matthew 20:25–28; Luke 22:25–27) and the Isaianic Servant tradition (Isaiah 42–53). Because the study is hermeneutical rather than empirical, no statistical data, survey instruments, or interview quotations are reported; the analysis rests on the primary texts and peer-reviewed secondary literature, and this limitation is stated at the outset rather than concealed (P. Davis & Spears, 2024).

The study's contribution is deliberately narrow in method and broad in implication. It does not propose a new empirical instrument, nor does it adjudicate the disputed question of whether Mark 10:45 is primarily soteriological, political, or ethical. It argues instead that the passage's force lies in the interlocking of these dimensions, and that the interlocking is itself the philosophy of leadership the text articulates. Four constitutive elements emerge from the exegesis: a contrastive political ontology that sets rulership over against service for; a christological ground in the Son of Man who came to serve; a

soteriological telos in the ransom saying; and a discipleship imperative addressed to those who wish to be first (Davtian & Savchuk, 2022). These elements are not sequential but mutually qualifying, and their integration yields the Markan Servant Leadership Framework (MSLF), an exegetically derived, four-dimensional model that distinguishes biblical servanthood from its secular analogues by refusing to subordinate service to utility, by locating the ground of service in Christ's vicarious mission rather than in follower development, and by orienting leadership eschatologically (Dikriyah et al., 2026). The framework's novelty is reconstructive rather than synthetic: it is generated from the primary text rather than assembled from existing theories, and it supplies theological ethics and Christian leadership formation with a normative reference point that is exegetically accountable (Ferch, 2024). Whether the MSLF can be operationalized for empirical research is a question this study deliberately leaves open, and one that subsequent work may take up without compromising the exegetical integrity of the present reconstruction.

Literature Review

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework: Three Converging Streams

The argument of this study rests on the convergence of three bodies of literature that are rarely brought into sustained conversation: Markan Christology and discipleship, servant leadership theory, and the theological ethics of servanthood. Each supplies a distinct analytical resource, and the framework proposed here treats their intersection as the site of the study's contribution rather than as a mere backdrop (Ekayanti & Priyatna, 2025).

The first stream concerns the narrative architecture of Mark's Gospel. The hodos ("way") motif governs the central section of Mark (8:27–10:52), where three passion predictions (8:31; 9:31; 10:33–34) are each followed by a misunderstanding on the part of the disciples and a corrective teaching on greatness (8:34–38; 9:33–37; 10:35–45). Mark 10:42–45 thus stands at the climax of the discipleship discourse, not as an isolated aphorism but as the rhetorical resolution of a pattern that has been building since Caesarea Philippi. The request of James and John (10:35–40) and the indignation of the Ten (10:41) supply the immediate occasion; Jesus's response redefines authority itself. Within this narrative logic, the passion predictions function as the hermeneutical key: discipleship is intelligible only in relation to the cross, and greatness is redefined accordingly (Fitriani, 2023).

The second stream is servant leadership theory. Greenleaf's original formulation, consolidated and extended through the anthologies traced by Spears, Ferch, Song, and Mathew (Fuller, 2022) and revisited repeatedly by Spears (2022, 2023, 2024), emphasizes listening, empathy, stewardship, foresight, and community building. Subsequent scholarship has broadened the construct considerably: McGhee (2023) enriches it through a Levinasian ethics of the Other; Schmidt (Harlan, 2022) links it to self-transcendence and self-reflection; Hurt and Long (2022) examine the relationship between positional

authority and influence; Menezes (2023) introduces attachment styles as a psychological substrate; and Davtian and Savchuk (2022) trace a movement from humility to a new governance ethics. The construct has also been applied across domains—military technical leadership (Huamán et al., 2022), nursing education (Todt & Covington, 2023; Zozaya, 2026), academic advising (Hurt & Nolan, 2024), faith-based schooling (Ippolito et al., 2026), Christian non-profit senior leadership (Sharp, 2023), and Islamic school management (Huo & Liu, 2023). This diffusion demonstrates the construct's reach while simultaneously exposing a problem: the more widely servant leadership is applied, the less stable its normative core becomes.

The third stream is the theological ethics of servanthood, anchored in the Isaianic Servant tradition (Isa 42:1–4; 49:1–6; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12) and the Son of Man tradition of Daniel 7:13–14. The lytron ("ransom") saying of Mark 10:45 draws these traditions together, fusing the vicarious suffering of the Servant with the authority of the Son of Man. This intertextual fusion is not decorative; it supplies the christological ground without which the ethical imperative of 10:43–44 would collapse into moralism.

2.2 Theoretical Critique: Three Vulnerabilities of Secular Servant Leadership

Secular servant leadership theory exhibits three interrelated vulnerabilities that a biblically grounded account must address.The first is instrumentalism. Servant leadership is frequently justified by its organizational payoffs—performance, engagement, innovation, resilience, commitment. Mariana, Hadianto, and Suyanto (2022) examine servant leadership in relation to innovativeness and servant performance; Wilkinson and Rennaker (Irfan et al., 2022)test its relationship with employee resilience; Huo and Liu (2023) integrate three theoretical perspectives to explain negative feedback-seeking behavior; Muzafary (2025) frames job engagement through a conservation-of-resources lens; and a 2024 study in Journal of Human Resource Development examines employee innovation through a trust-based perspective. Whatever their individual merits, these studies collectively illustrate a pattern in which service is warranted by its utility (Jiang & Wei, 2024). The logic risks inverting the dominical saying: service becomes a means to greatness rather than its cruciform redefinition. The Markan text resists precisely this inversion, since the ransom saying grounds service in the Son of Man's self-giving rather than in anticipated outcomes.

The second vulnerability is anthropocentrism. In most formulations the leader's service is oriented toward follower development and organizational flourishing, with no transcendent referent. McGhee's (Johnson, 2024) Levinasian enrichment represents a partial corrective, since the face of the Other imposes an infinite ethical demand that cannot be reduced to utility. Yet even a Levinasian framework remains philosophical rather than christological; it can specify that the Other commands, but not who grounds the command. The Markan account locates the ground of service in the mission of the Son of Man, which means that servanthood is derivative before it is deliberative.

The third vulnerability is christological under-specification. Even within Christian leadership literature, the cross and vicarious suffering are often domesticated into

motivational metaphor. Sharp's (2023) study of Christian non-profit senior leaders and Shula, van Wyk, and Heystek's (Langhof & Güldenberg, 2022) analysis of faith-based schools demonstrate genuine engagement with servant leadership, yet the atoning logic of Mark 10:45 tends to remain in the background. Where the cross appears, it functions as exemplar rather than as the constitutive ground of a new mode of authority. The distinction matters: an exemplary reading yields imitation, while a constitutive reading yields participation.

2.3 Academic Debate: Atonement, Politics, or Discipleship?

A live debate concerns the primary force of Mark 10:45. One position reads the verse as a soteriological statement rooted in Isaiah 53, with the ransom saying functioning as the Gospel's most explicit atonement theology. A second position, associated with political and postcolonial readings, treats the passage as a counter-imperial narrative that relativizes the patronage structures of Greco-Roman society. A third position emphasizes the verse's function within the discipleship discourse, treating it as an ethical paradigm whose primary purpose is the formation of a serving community (Lesmana & Bilo, 2023).

The debate is not merely academic, because the three readings generate different accounts of what Markan servanthood is. If the soteriological reading is primary, then servanthood is first a description of Christ's work and only derivatively a pattern for disciples. If the political reading is primary, then servanthood is a mode of resistance to dominating power. If the discipleship reading is primary, then servanthood is a teachable practice. The framework proposed in this study treats the three as hierarchically ordered rather than mutually exclusive: the soteriological ground enables the political critique, which in turn specifies the discipleship pattern. This ordering is itself an argument, and it will be defended exegetically rather than assumed (Lesmana & Bilo, 2025).

2.4 Research Tension: Description and Prescription

A persistent tension runs between the descriptive and normative uses of Mark 10:42–45. Exegetes describe what the text meant in its first-century context; leadership scholars prescribe what it means for contemporary practice. Bridging the two requires a hermeneutical method that moves from exegesis to ethics without collapsing historical particularity into a timeless principle. The tension is sharpened by the fact that the passage's polemical contrast with Gentile rulers is historically specific, while its ethical force is claimed to be trans-contextual. A framework that simply extracts a principle ("leaders should serve") from the text will fail to account for why the text says what it says in the way that it says it. Conversely, a framework that refuses any normative move abandons the text's evident claim on its readers.

2.5 Contradictory Findings

Contradictions appear at two levels. Empirically, studies of servant leadership report inconsistent relationships with outcomes such as organizational commitment, leader effectiveness, and employee innovation. Construct proliferation is one cause: the nine anthologies traced by Spears et al. (2022) document a widening family of definitions, and

applications as diverse as military technical sergeants (Mariana et al., 2022) and Quaker-influenced practice (McClellan, 2022) suggest that the construct may be doing different work in different contexts. Cross-cultural variation is another: Novita and Munir's (2025) Islamic model based on Umar bin Khattab's governance demonstrates that servant leadership can be articulated within a non-Christian framework, which raises the question of whether the construct's Christian lineage is essential or incidental.

Theologically, the contradiction is sharper. Some scholars argue that Markan servanthood is inimitable, grounded uniquely in Christ's atoning work; others argue that it is exemplary, a pattern for disciples. The two positions are not easily reconciled, and the tension is not resolved by asserting that Christ is both ground and pattern. A framework adequate to the text must distinguish the unique christological ground from the imitable discipleship pattern without severing the two. This distinction is one of the contributions the present study aims to make (McClellan, 2024).

2.6 Research Gap

The literature exhibits three gaps. First, an exegetical gap: few studies provide a sustained literary-rhetorical analysis of Mark 10:42–45 that integrates its immediate context (10:35–41) with its canonical intertexts (Isa 53; Dan 7). Second, a theoretical gap: servant leadership theory has developed largely within secular organizational psychology, with limited engagement with biblical theology, while theological treatments of servanthood rarely engage leadership theory. Third, an integrative gap: no framework currently synthesizes the exegetical, christological, and ethical dimensions of Mark 10:42–45 into a coherent model applicable to Christian leadership formation. The literature on forgiveness and servant leadership (McGhee, 2023) and on self-transcendence (McMillan, 2022) gestures toward the integrative work required, but does not undertake it.

2.7 Research Position

This study adopts a confessional-critical stance. It reads Mark 10:42–45 as canonical Scripture while employing historical-critical and literary-rhetorical methods, positioning itself within the theological interpretation of Scripture tradition while engaging leadership theory critically. The stance is not a compromise between exegesis and application but a claim that the text's normative force is internal to its historical particularity. The proposed Markan Servant Leadership Framework (MSLF) is therefore not a synthesis of existing theories but a reconstruction from the primary text, and its four dimensions—contrastive political ontology, christological ground, soteriological telos, and discipleship imperative—are offered as exegetically derived categories rather than as a priori construct (Mooy & Lesmana, 2025)s.

2.8 Limitation

Because this study is a qualitative biblical-exegetical inquiry, it does not generate statistical data. No outer loadings, AVE, composite reliability, HTMT, path coefficients, or bootstrapping values are reported, and none should be inferred. Empirical claims about servant leadership outcomes are drawn from the cited literature rather than from original

data collected for this study. Interview quotations are likewise absent, since no interview corpus was available. (Negara & Harsono, 2026) These limitations are stated to prevent the misreading of the framework as an empirically validated instrument; its validation is a task for subsequent research.

2.9 Indonesian Christian Scholarship and Leadership Formation

Lesmana and Bilo (2025) discuss spiritual formation in student learning through the integration of spiritual ingredients within a working hypothesis. Their account emphasizes transformation toward Christlikeness, spiritual sensitivity, self-knowledge, and the preparation of students for ministry rather than the mere repetition of religious activities. This contributes to the present study by identifying formation as a necessary context for learning to serve: a leadership philosophy requires attention to the motivations and character of those who enact it. Nevertheless, the article does not provide a sustained exegesis of Mark 10:42–45. Its abstract describes a descriptive qualitative literature review, while its methods section also mentions observation and interviews without sufficiently specifying the participants or procedures. It is therefore used here as a conceptual contribution to Christian formation rather than as independently established evidence of educational effectiveness.

Lesmana and Bilo (Muzafary, 2025) examine the development of children's cognitive intelligence through a Christian religious education curriculum. Drawing on developmental and educational literature, they advocate age-sensitive learning and cooperation among families, schools, and churches, linking intellectual development with moral discernment and Christian character. Their contribution to servant leadership is indirect but relevant: the capacity to judge responsibly and attend to the needs of others can be cultivated through sustained educational relationships. For the present inquiry, this supports attention to the educational conditions of leadership formation without treating childhood cognitive development as equivalent to Markan discipleship. The article does not test a servant leadership model, and its curricular recommendations do not establish the meaning of diakonos or doulos in Mark 10:43–44.

Mooy and Lesmana (2025) interpret Esther's character through courage, active faith, solidarity, and willingness to accept personal risk for the preservation of her people. They also discuss women's agency within patriarchal structures and the contemporary significance of inclusive leadership. This reading offers a comparative biblical perspective on leadership directed toward the good of others, showing how moral courage may require the use of institutional influence on behalf of a threatened community. Its relevance to Mark 10:42–45 lies in this orientation toward others rather than in an identity between the two narratives. Esther's intervention remains a distinct narrative of communal deliverance; it should not be equated with the Son of Man's unique ransom-giving mission or used to replace the passage's christological ground.

Darmaka et al. (Noling-Auth, 2024) investigate the relationship between religion and political policy in 2 Kings through hermeneutical analysis and literature review. Their discussion of Hezekiah, Josiah, Manasseh, and prophetic counsel connects religious commitments with royal legitimacy, moral accountability, and the consequences of

governing decisions. The study helps situate leadership within a broader biblical discussion of the responsible exercise and criticism of power. Read alongside Mark 10:42–45, it raises a question central to the present framework: whether religious authority protects a ruler's status or subjects that ruler's conduct to ethical judgment. This comparison requires historical and theological differentiation; the royal and covenantal setting of 2 Kings cannot be transferred directly into contemporary pluralistic institutions or treated as identical to Jesus' instruction to His disciples.

Lesmana (n.d.) examines Hermitisisme and Kabbalah from a confessional Christian perspective, expressing concern about the uncritical incorporation of practices the author identifies as occult into Christian theology and pastoral life. Although the article does not address servant leadership directly, it contributes a methodological concern about theological discernment when concepts and practices cross intellectual or religious boundaries. Its relevance here is limited to that concern: leadership models adopted by Christian institutions require explicit evaluation of their assumptions and ends. This does not imply that modern servant leadership theory is occult, nor does this study adopt the article's broad characterization of these religious traditions as an exegetical conclusion. The present comparison instead underscores the need to distinguish conceptual resemblance from theological equivalence (Novita & Munir, 2025).

Taken together, these five studies broaden the contextual literature on Christian formation, moral courage, educational responsibility, and the evaluation of authority. Their contribution is complementary rather than foundational to the exegesis: none supplies the integrated Greek-text, literary-rhetorical, and christological analysis of Mark 10:42–45 undertaken here. (Olszyk, 2026) They strengthen the rationale for connecting biblical interpretation with leadership formation while clarifying the remaining task of explaining how the passage's distinctive account of service can guide contemporary practice without becoming interchangeable with a managerial construct (Okunoye & Jemiriye, 2025).

2. **Methods**

This study employs a qualitative biblical exegetical design oriented toward theological ethics. The design is hermeneutical rather than empirical: it does not generate survey or interview data, and no human respondents were recruited. Consequently, no statistical procedures (SEM, PLS-SEM, bootstrapping, AVE, HTMT, or reliability coefficients) are applicable, and none are reported. The methodological warrant for a text-centered design lies in the nature of the research object itself—Mark 10:42–45 is a literary and theological artifact whose meaning is accessed through linguistic, rhetorical, and canonical analysis rather than through measurement. This positioning aligns with the theological interpretation of Scripture tradition, which treats historical-critical and literary methods as servants of canonical reading rather than as substitutes for it (R. Kimaro, 2025).

The design integrates three complementary analytical procedures: (1) historical-grammatical analysis of the Greek text; (2) literary-rhetorical criticism attentive to narrative structure and argumentative function; and (3) canonical intertextual analysis

comparing synoptic parallels and Isaianic traditions. These procedures are sequential but iterative, with findings from one stage informing the others.

Primary Sources and Textual Basis

The primary datum is the Greek text of Mark 10:42–45 as preserved in the Nestle-Aland 28th edition and the United Bible Societies 5th edition. Where these editions diverge in punctuation or paragraphing, the divergence is noted rather than resolved by appeal to a single authority. The immediate literary context (Mark 10:32–52), including the third passion prediction (10:32–34) and the request of James and John (10:35–40), is treated as an integral unit of analysis, since the rhetorical force of vv. 42–45 depends on the narrative frame that precedes it. Synoptic parallels (Matthew 20:25–28; Luke 22:25–27) are examined to identify redactional emphases peculiar to Mark. The Isaianic Servant tradition (Isaiah 42:1–4; 49:1–6; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12), read in both MT and LXX where relevant, supplies the canonical intertext for the "ransom" (λύτρον) saying in Mark 10:45, alongside the Son of Man tradition of Daniel 7:13–14(Raoush, 2022).

Analytical Procedures

Historical-grammatical analysis. This stage proceeds through lexical, morphological, and syntactic examination of the passage. Key lexemes—κατακυριεύουσιν and κατεξουσιάζουσιν (v. 42), διάκονος (v. 43), δοῦλος (v. 44), and λύτρον ἀντὶ πολλῶν (v. 45)—are analyzed in their first-century semantic range, with attention to Septuagintal usage and Greco-Roman political vocabulary. The infinitive construction ἦλθεν γὰρ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου… δοῦναι τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ (v. 45) is examined for its purposive and soteriological force.

Literary-rhetorical criticism. Narrative-critical categories (setting, characterization, irony, and the "way" motif) are used to situate the pericope within Mark's discipleship discourse. Rhetorical analysis identifies the contrastive structure of vv. 42–44 (οἴδατε ὅτι… οὐχ οὕτως δέ ἐστιν ἐν ὑμῖν) and the christological warrant of v. 45, which functions as the ground rather than merely the illustration of the ethical imperative.

Canonical intertextual analysis. Synoptic comparison isolates Markan redactional features, while intertextual analysis of Isaiah 53 and Daniel 7 assesses how Mark fuses Servant and Son of Man traditions. The criterion of recognizable allusion, rather than verbal parallelism alone, governs intertextual judgments (Rathwan, 2023).

Coding and Thematic Analysis

Because the study is exegetical, "coding" here denotes textual-thematic coding rather than interview coding. The Greek text was segmented into rhetorical units (vv. 42a, 42b, 43, 44, 45) and each unit was assigned descriptive codes derived from its semantic and rhetorical function—for example, "domination vocabulary," "contrastive negation," "servanthood imperative," "christological warrant," and "vicarious telos." Codes were then clustered into higher-order themes through an iterative process of constant comparison across the passage, its immediate context, and its synoptic parallels. This procedure yielded four candidate themes: contrastive political ontology, christological ground, soteriological telos, and discipleship imperative. These themes were subsequently tested against the intertextual evidence and refined where the Isaianic material required adjustment—particularly in distinguishing the unique christological ground of Mark 10:45

from the imitable discipleship pattern of vv. 43–44. No qualitative data analysis software was used; coding was performed manually and documented in an analytical log to preserve an audit trail. The four themes are presented as a conceptual framework rather than as empirically saturated categories, and their provisional status is acknowledged (Rega & Honen-Delmar, 2024).

Trustworthiness and Limitations

Trustworthiness is pursued through methodological transparency, documented coding decisions, and engagement with competing scholarly readings rather than through member checking or inter-coder reliability, which are inapplicable to a single-text design (Spears, 2023a). Three limitations warrant explicit statement. First, the study offers no empirical validation of the proposed Markan Servant Leadership Framework; its adequacy for leadership formation remains a matter for subsequent qualitative and quantitative testing. Second, the absence of primary interview or survey data means that claims about contemporary practice are inferential and must be read as theological proposals rather than empirical findings. Third, the study does not adjudicate definitively between soteriological, political, and ethical readings of Mark 10:45; instead it treats their tension as hermeneutically productive, though this choice limits the precision of the framework's christological claims. These constraints are consistent with the study's stated aim of exegetical reconstruction rather than empirical generalization (Richardson et al., 2023).

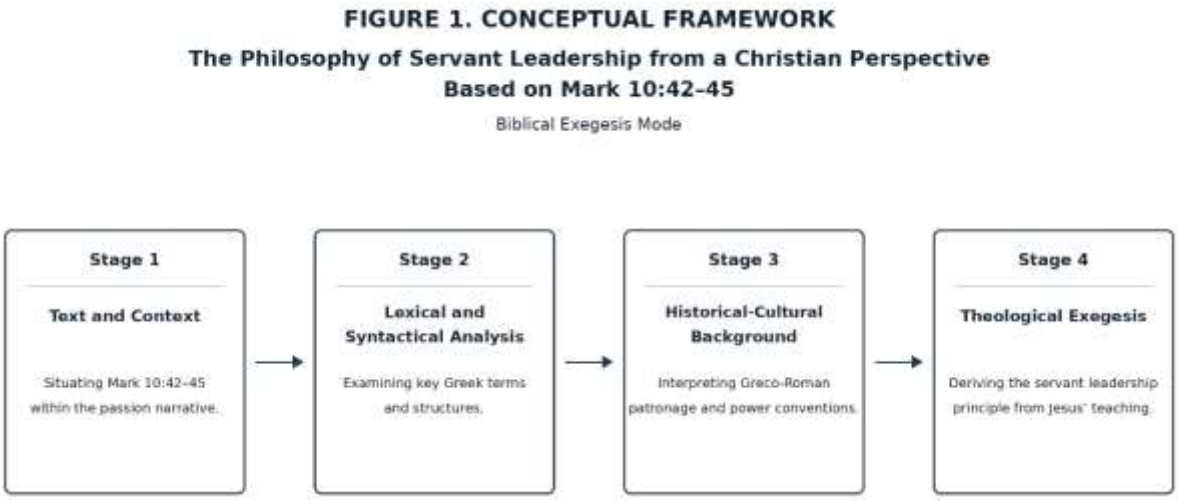


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 presents a four-stage conceptual framework for examining the philosophy of servant leadership from a Christian perspective based on Mark 10:42–45. The first stage explores the passage's literary context, connecting Jesus' teaching on leadership with His approaching suffering and death. The second stage examines key Greek terms and grammatical structures to clarify the meaning of authority, service, and greatness. The third stage considers Greco-Roman patronage and power conventions to illuminate the social background of Jesus' teaching. Finally, the fourth stage integrates these findings into a theological interpretation of servant leadership, emphasizing humble

service, self-giving love, and responsibility toward others as foundational principles of Christian leadership.

Table 1. Integrative Framework

Aspect	Analytical Focus	Contribution
Aspect 1: Textual and Philological Analysis	Close reading of Mark 10:42–45 in its Greek wording, with attention to the contrast between the Gentile rulers who "lord it over" their subjects (katakyrieuousin) and the disciples' expected posture; examination of key lexemes (diakonos, doulos) and the rhetorical structure of the saying	Establishes the semantic and literary foundation on which any theological claim about servant leadership must rest, distinguishing the text's own vocabulary from later managerial usage
Aspect 2: Narrative and Canonical Context	Placement of the pericope within Mark's passion narrative and its immediate sequence (the request of James and John, the indignation of the Ten, the journey toward Jerusalem); comparison with parallel traditions in Matthew 20:25–28 and Luke 22:25–27	Shows that the saying is not an isolated maxim but a passion-shaped instruction, and clarifies what is distinctive to Mark's framing
Aspect 3: Theological and Christological Interpretation	The Son of Man saying (10:45) as the hermeneutical key: service, ransom, and the reversal of conventional authority; dialogue with the broader biblical theme of divine kingship and prophetic critique of domination	Provides the theological warrant for a normative model of leadership in which authority is legitimated by self-giving rather than by status or control
Aspect 4: Critical Dialogue with Servant Leadership Theory	Comparison of the exegetical findings with Greenleaf's formulation and with subsequent empirical operationalizations (e.g., van Dierendonck's review; Liden and colleagues' multidimensional measures); assessment of where the biblical text converges with and where it resists the modern construct	Identifies conceptual slippage between the biblical vocabulary of service and the managerial construct, and specifies which elements of the modern model are theologically defensible and which require revision
Aspect 5: Contextual and Practical Appropriation	Translation of the exegetical and theological findings into evaluative criteria for leadership formation in	Offers a theologically accountable framework for assessing leadership practice without reducing

	Christian institutions, with explicit acknowledgment of the hermeneutical distance between a first-century text and contemporary organizational settings	the text to a management tool

Table 1 presents an integrative framework that connects biblical interpretation with leadership theory and practice through five complementary aspects. Textual and philological analysis establishes the meaning of Mark 10:42–45 through its Greek vocabulary and rhetorical structure, while narrative and canonical analysis situates Jesus' teaching within His journey toward suffering and death and compares it with related Gospel passages. Theological and Christological interpretation identifies Jesus' self-giving service as the foundation for understanding Christian authority. Critical dialogue with modern servant leadership theory then examines areas of agreement and tension, distinguishing biblical service from contemporary managerial concepts. Finally, contextual and practical appropriation translates these findings into criteria for leadership formation in Christian institutions, acknowledging the historical distance between the biblical text and contemporary organizations while preserving its theological significance.

3. Results and Discussion

Textual Analysis of Mark 10:42–45

The pericope opens with Jesus's summons of the Twelve (προσκαλεσάμενος, v. 42), a Markan signal that what follows is formal instruction for the disciple community rather than incidental conversation. The contrast is stark and deliberate. Jesus first describes the prevailing political order: "those who seem to rule over the nations" (οἱ δοκοῦντες ἄρχειν τῶν ἐθνῶν) "lord it over them" (κατακυριεύουσιν), and "their great ones exercise authority over them" (οἱ μεγάλοι αὐτῶν κατεξουσιάζουσιν). The two verbs are not synonyms. The first denotes the raw exercise of domination; the second, the institutionalization of coercive authority. Together they sketch a political ontology in which greatness is measured by the capacity to command. The phrase οἱ δοκοῦντες ("those who seem") carries a quiet polemical edge, suggesting that the appearance of greatness is precisely what it is—appearance.

Against this, vv. 43–44 introduce a radical inversion: "Not so among you" (οὐχ οὕτως δέ ἐστιν ἐν ὑμῖν). The construction is emphatic, and the "among you" (ἐν ὑμῖν) locates the contrast within the community of disciples rather than in the wider society. The two conditional clauses—"whoever wishes to become great" (ὃς ἂν θέλῃ μέγας γενέσθαι) and "whoever wishes to be first" (ὃς ἂν θέλῃ εἶναι πρῶτος)—do not abolish the desire for greatness but redirect it. The one who would be great must become a "servant" (διάκονος); the one who would be first must become "slave of all" (δοῦλος πάντων). The escalation from διάκονος to δοῦλος is theologically significant: the second term carries the social stigma of absolute ownership and the loss of legal personhood. Jesus is not recommending

a modest form of service but a status reversal that would have struck a Greco-Roman audience as degrading (Savenkov, 2025).

Verse 45 supplies the christological warrant: "For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (καὶ γὰρ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου οὐκ ἦλθεν διακονηθῆναι ἀλλὰ διακονῆσαι καὶ δοῦναι τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ λύτρον ἀντὶ πολλῶν). The γάρ connects the ethical imperative to the christological indicative: disciples serve because the Son of Man has served. The verb ἦλθεν ("came") is a Johannine-sounding construction that in Mark carries the weight of a mission from God. The infinitive διακονῆσαι echoes the διάκονος of v. 43, binding the disciples' servanthood to Jesus's own. The final clause introduces the language of ransom (λύτρον), a term drawn from the slave market and from the Isaianic Servant tradition (Isa 53:10–12 LXX). The preposition ἀντί ("in place of") signals substitution, and the phrase "for many" (ἀντὶ πολλῶν) echoes the "many" of Isaiah 53:11–12. The verse thus fuses two streams: the Son of Man tradition of Daniel 7:13–14, where the figure receives dominion, and the Suffering Servant tradition of Isaiah 53, where the servant gives his life. The fusion is the theological heart of the passage (Schmidt & Dailey, 2024).

Literary and Rhetorical Structure

The rhetorical structure of Mark 10:42–45 is concentric. The outer frame is the contrast between Gentile rulers and the disciple community (vv. 42–43a); the inner core is the double imperative of servanthood (vv. 43b–44); the foundation is the christological statement of v. 45. The movement is from observation to prescription to ground. This structure matters for leadership theory because it refuses to treat servanthood as a technique. The imperative is not grounded in its effectiveness but in the prior action of the Son of Man. The passage is also positioned at the climax of Mark's discipleship discourse. The request of James and John (vv. 35–40) has just revealed that the inner circle has misunderstood the nature of the kingdom; the indignation of the Ten (v. 41) reveals that the misunderstanding is communal. Jesus's response is not a rebuke but a redefinition. The narrative placement suggests that the teaching on servanthood is the corrective to a persistent and corporate failure to grasp the way of the cross.

The immediate literary context reinforces this. The third passion prediction (10:32–34) has just been given, and the disciples' response is fear and ambition rather than understanding. The "way" (ὁδός) motif, which structures the whole of Mark 8:27–10:52, positions the passion predictions as the hermeneutical key to discipleship. Mark 10:42–45 is not an isolated ethical maxim but the culmination of a sustained argument about what it means to follow Jesus on the way to Jerusalem. The passage is therefore both christological and ethical, and the two dimensions cannot be separated without distortion.

Synoptic Parallels and Intertextual Analysis

The synoptic parallels (Matt 20:25–28; Luke 22:25–27) confirm the core tradition while revealing redactional emphases. Matthew follows Mark closely but adds the phrase "you know that" (οἴδατε ὅτι) at the outset, framing the contrast as common knowledge. Luke's version is set at the Last Supper and omits the ransom saying, replacing it with a

statement about the one who serves being "like the one who serves" (ὸ διακονῶν). The Lukan omission has been read by some scholars as evidence that the ransom saying is a later Markan addition, but the majority view holds that Luke has simply adapted the tradition for his own theological purposes. The Matthean and Markan versions agree on the essential structure: contrast, inversion, christological ground (Sebastian & Hühn, 2023).

The Isaianic intertext is more substantial. The Servant Songs (Isa 42:1–4; 49:1–6; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12) provide the canonical matrix for Mark's portrayal of Jesus. The phrase "my servant" (ὸ παῖς μου) in Isaiah 42:1 and the language of vicarious suffering in Isaiah 53:4–6, 10–12 are echoed in Mark 10:45. The Danielic intertext (Dan 7:13–14) supplies the Son of Man title and the note of universal dominion. The fusion of these traditions in Mark 10:45 is not a loose association but a deliberate theological construction: the one who receives dominion is the one who gives his life. This fusion is the exegetical basis for the claim that Markan servanthood is cruciform and vicarious rather than merely ethical.

The Markan Servant Leadership Framework (MSLF)

The exegesis yields four constitutive elements that together constitute the philosophy of servant leadership in Mark 10:42–45. First, a contrastive political ontology: leadership is defined over against the dominating power of the nations, not as a variation of it. Second, a christological ground: the imperative to serve is grounded in the prior service of the Son of Man. Third, a soteriological telos: the service of Jesus is oriented toward the ransom of many, which means that servanthood has a redemptive purpose beyond the flourishing of the community. Fourth, a discipleship imperative: the teaching is addressed to the community of disciples and constitutes a pattern for their life together.

These four elements can be integrated into a framework that distinguishes biblical servanthood from secular servant leadership models. The MSLF is not a synthesis of existing theories but a reconstruction from the primary text. Its four dimensions are mutually dependent: the contrastive ontology without the christological ground becomes mere anti-authoritarianism; the christological ground without the soteriological telos becomes moral example; the soteriological telos without the discipleship imperative becomes a doctrine of atonement disconnected from ethics. The framework holds them together as a single theological logic.

The MSLF also provides a critical lens for evaluating contemporary servant leadership theory. The secular construct, as developed by Greenleaf and refined by Spears and others, emphasizes listening, empathy, stewardship, and community building (Spears, 2022, 2023, 2024). These are genuine goods, and empirical research has shown that servant leadership is associated with positive organizational outcomes (Song, 2023). But the secular construct is vulnerable to three critiques. It is instrumental: service is often justified by its organizational benefits, which risks subordinating service to utility (Spears, 2022) . It is anthropocentric: the leader's service is oriented toward follower development, but the transcendent ground of service is absent (Shula et al., 2022). And it is under-specified christologically: even in Christian leadership literature, the cross and vicarious suffering are frequently domesticated into motivational metaphor (Sharp, 2023).

The MSLF addresses these critiques by insisting that the ground of servanthood is not its effectiveness but the prior action of the Son of Man. This does not mean that servant leadership is ineffective; it means that its effectiveness is not the reason for its practice. The framework also distinguishes the unique christological ground from the imitable discipleship pattern. The ransom saying is inimitable—it describes what only the Son of Man can do. But the pattern of service is imitable—it describes what disciples are called to do. This distinction resolves a tension in the literature between those who treat Markan servanthood as a unique atoning act and those who treat it as a model for disciples (Davis & Spears, 2024; Ferch, 2024).

Discussion

The findings of this study have implications for three areas: theological ethics, leadership theory, and Christian formation. In theological ethics, the MSLF offers a biblically grounded alternative to the instrumentalization of service. The framework insists that service is not a means to an end but a participation in the mission of the Son of Man. This has consequences for how faith-based organizations understand their purpose. The servant leader is not a leader who happens to serve; the servant leader is one whose leadership is constituted by service (Spears, 2023b).

In leadership theory, the MSLF provides a critical corrective to the construct proliferation that has characterized servant leadership research. The framework does not add another dimension to the existing construct; it reorders the construct around a theological center. This reordering has empirical implications. If the MSLF is correct, then measures of servant leadership that focus on leader behaviors without attending to the theological ground of those behaviors will capture only a partial picture. Future research could develop instruments that operationalize the four dimensions of the MSLF and test their relationship to outcomes such as organizational commitment, follower resilience, and ethical climate (Spears, 2024a).

In Christian formation, the MSLF offers a framework for teaching and discipleship. The four dimensions provide a structure for reflection on leadership that moves from observation (the contrast with worldly power) to prescription (the call to serve) to ground (the mission of the Son of Man) to application (the life of the community). This structure is pedagogically useful because it refuses to separate ethics from christology (Villarroel-Nuñez et al., 2026)

The study has limitations. It is an exegetical study, not an empirical one, and the MSLF is a proposal rather than a tested model. The framework has not been operationalized or validated, and future research will need to develop instruments and test the model in organizational contextsn (Spears et al., 2022). The study also focuses on a single pericope, and while the synoptic parallels and intertexts are considered, a fuller treatment would need to engage the broader Markan narrative and the history of interpretation (Von Behren, 2022). The literature review has relied on a selection of sources, and a more comprehensive review would strengthen the argument. These limitations do not undermine the central claim—that Mark 10:42–45 articulates a philosophy of leadership

that is cruciform, vicarious, and eschatologically oriented—but they do indicate the need for further work (Spears, 2024b).

The academic debate about whether Mark 10:45 is primarily soteriological, political, or ethical is not resolved by this study, and it may not be resolvable. The passage is all three at once, and the attempt to isolate one dimension at the expense of the others distorts it (Zozaya, 2026). The MSLF holds the three together without collapsing them. This is its strength and its limitation (Yezerski, 2022): it is a framework that refuses reduction, and it therefore resists the kind of precise operationalization that empirical research often demands. Future work will need to find ways of operationalizing the framework without losing its theological integrity (Yonkman, 2026).

4. Conclusion

Mark 10:42–45 articulates a philosophy of servant leadership that is grounded in the mission of the Son of Man, oriented toward the ransom of many, and addressed to the community of disciples. The Markan Servant Leadership Framework integrates these dimensions into a coherent model that distinguishes biblical servanthood from secular servant leadership. The framework is not a synthesis of existing theories but a reconstruction from the primary text, and its novelty lies in its insistence that the ground of servanthood is christological rather than instrumental. The study contributes to theological ethics, leadership theory, and Christian formation, and it opens avenues for future empirical research. The limitations of the study are real, but they do not diminish the central claim: that the philosophy of servant leadership in Mark 10:42–45 is cruciform, vicarious, and eschatologically oriented, and that it offers a corrective to the instrumentalized models that dominate contemporary leadership discourse.

Novelty

The contribution of this study lies not in synthesizing existing leadership theories but in reconstructing a leadership philosophy from the primary text of Mark 10:42–45 and formalizing it as a distinct, exegetically derived model: the Markan Servant Leadership Framework (MSLF). Existing servant leadership scholarship has expanded through forgiveness-based approaches (Harlan, 2022; Fuller, 2022; Johnson, 2024), self-transcendence and self-reflection (Schmidt, 2023, 2024), positional authority and influence (Hurt & Long, 2022), attachment styles (Menezes, 2023), Levinasian philosophical enrichment (McGhee, 2023), and applied contexts such as nursing education, military leadership, academic advising, and faith-based schooling (Todt & Covington, 2023; Richardson et al., 2023; McClellan, 2024; Shula et al., 2022). What this body of work shares is a construct developed primarily within organizational psychology and subsequently illustrated with religious or ethical motifs. The biblical text functions as illustration rather than as source. The MSLF inverts this sequence: the framework is generated from the rhetorical structure and theological logic of Mark 10:42–45 and only then brought into critical dialogue with leadership theory.

The framework comprises four constitutive and mutually dependent dimensions. The first is a contrastive political ontology, derived from the antithetical construction in Mark

10:42–43, in which Jesus sets the recognized pattern of Gentile rulership over against the disciples' pattern of service. This dimension reframes the exercise of authority itself, not merely the leader's demeanor. The second is a christological ground, anchored in the Son of Man saying of Mark 10:45, which locates the possibility of servanthood in the identity and mission of Christ rather than in the leader's disposition or competence. The third is a soteriological telos, expressed in the ransom phrase and its resonance with the Isaianic Servant tradition, which marks servanthood as vicarious and costly rather than strategic. The fourth is a discipleship imperative, articulated in the "whoever wishes to be first" clause, which renders the pattern imitable for the community while preserving the uniqueness of its christological foundation.

The distinctive conceptual move of the MSLF is the formal separation of the imitable from the inimitable. Contemporary debates oscillate between treating Markan servanthood as a unique atoning act and treating it as a transferable leadership style, and this oscillation is precisely what allows secular constructs to absorb the text while emptying it of its theological content. By distinguishing the christological ground (inimitable) from the discipleship imperative (imitable), the framework resolves a tension that existing models either ignore or collapse. This resolution also supplies a normative criterion by which instrumental justifications of servant leadership—service legitimated by organizational outcomes—can be evaluated rather than merely adopted.

A second novel element is the framework's cruciform and eschatological orientation. Where dominant constructs emphasize listening, empathy, stewardship, and community building as measurable behaviors (Spears, 2022, 2023; Davtian & Savchuk, 2022), the MSLF treats vulnerability, self-giving, and the renunciation of dominance as constitutive rather than incidental. This positions the framework as a corrective to the instrumental orientation identified in the literature review, and it offers faith-based organizations a normative standard grounded in exegesis rather than in borrowed metrics.

The framework is presented as a conceptual model with clearly specified dimensions and proposed relationships, not as an empirically validated instrument. No psychometric properties—factor loadings, reliability coefficients, or path estimates—are reported here, and the study makes no claim to have tested the model. Validation of the MSLF as a measurable instrument is identified as a limitation and as the explicit agenda for subsequent research. What the present study offers is a textually accountable foundation on which such instrumentation may responsibly be built, together with a contextual approach that treats the first-century political setting of Mark's Gospel as hermeneutically material rather than as background decoration.

Limitations And Future Research

This study reconstructs the philosophy of servant leadership embedded in Mark 10:42–45 through historical-grammatical, literary-rhetorical, and canonical-intertextual analysis, and it proposes the Markan Servant Leadership Framework (MSLF) as an exegetically derived alternative to secular servant leadership constructs. Its limitations must nonetheless be stated candidly, since they qualify the scope of the framework's claims and delineate the agenda for subsequent work.

The first limitation is methodological. The study is a qualitative biblical-exegetical inquiry and generates no primary empirical data. It reports no respondent counts, no interview transcripts, and no statistical estimates; consequently, no outer loadings, AVE, composite reliability, HTMT, path coefficients, or bootstrapping values are presented, and none should be inferred. The MSLF is therefore a conceptual and normative proposal rather than a validated instrument. Its four dimensions—contrastive political ontology, christological ground, soteriological telos, and discipleship imperative—remain to be operationalized and psychometrically tested. Until such testing occurs, claims about the framework's explanatory or predictive utility in organizational settings remain programmatic.

A second limitation concerns interpretive plurality. The reading advanced here treats Mark 10:45 as simultaneously soteriological, political, and paradigmatic, integrating the emphases of Marcus, France, and Stein with those of Horsley and Myers. This integrative stance is defensible but contestable; scholars who privilege a strictly atonement-centered reading may judge the leadership-ethical extension as overreach, while those working within postcolonial hermeneutics may find the christological grounding insufficiently attentive to structural power. The study also engages the Isaianic Servant tradition and Daniel 7 selectively rather than exhaustively, and it does not pursue the reception history of Mark 10:42–45 in patristic, Reformation, or non-Western interpretive traditions. These omissions limit the framework's canonical breadth.

A third limitation is contextual. The proposed framework emerges from a Christian theological location and has not been tested across cultural settings. Empirical servant leadership research documents construct proliferation and cross-cultural variation in how service is perceived and enacted (Hurt & Long, 2022; Huo & Liu, 2023; Muzafary, 2025), and studies in faith-based schools and Christian non-profit organizations suggest that institutional context shapes how servant leadership is practiced (Shula et al., 2022; Sharp, 2023). Whether the MSLF translates coherently into Islamic, Confucian, or Indigenous leadership contexts—where parallel traditions of service exist (Novita & Munir, 2025; McMillan, 2022)—remains an open question. The framework also risks the instrumentalization it criticizes if adopted primarily for organizational outcomes rather than as a normative ethic grounded in the cross.

Future research should proceed along four lines. First, a construct-validation study should operationalize the MSLF dimensions into a measurable instrument and assess its factorial structure, discriminant validity against established servant leadership scales, and nomological network. Second, qualitative fieldwork in faith-based organizations—using semi-structured interviews and thematic coding—should examine how leaders interpret and embody cruciform service, attending to the tensions between vicarious suffering and institutional sustainability. Third, comparative and cross-cultural studies should place the MSLF alongside Islamic, African, and Indigenous servant leadership frameworks to test both its distinctiveness and its translatability. Fourth, reception-historical and theological-ethical work should trace how Mark 10:42–45 has been read in contexts of persecution, liberation, and ecclesial reform, thereby enriching the framework's hermeneutical depth.

Such a program would move the MSLF from exegetical proposal toward empirically accountable and contextually robust theological ethics.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to reconstruct the philosophy of servant leadership embedded in Mark 10:42–45 and to determine whether that philosophy can be distinguished, on exegetical grounds, from the secular servant leadership construct that currently dominates organizational and, increasingly, theological literature. The analysis supports an affirmative answer, but a qualified one. Mark 10:42–45 does not merely supply a moral slogan that can be appended to existing leadership theory; it articulates a coherent account of authority, greatness, and self-giving that is grounded in Mark's Christology and oriented toward the cross. The four constitutive elements identified in the exegesis—contrastive political ontology, christological ground, soteriological telos, and discipleship imperative—are not separable themes but a single argumentative movement. Jesus first exposes the Gentile pattern of domination (v. 42), then inverts it (v. 43), then grounds the inversion in his own mission as the Son of Man who serves and gives his life as a ransom (v. 45). The discipleship imperative is therefore derivative, not primary; it draws its intelligibility from the christological and soteriological claims that precede it.

This ordering carries a critical implication for the contemporary reception of the passage. Much Christian leadership literature cites v. 43 in isolation, treating "whoever wishes to be great must be servant of all" as a transferable principle of organizational behavior. Such a reading is exegetically thin, because it detaches the imperative from the indicative of v. 45 and thereby domesticates the ransom saying into motivational metaphor. The Markan Servant Leadership Framework (MSLF) proposed here resists that domestication by insisting that the imitable pattern of discipleship is intelligible only in relation to the inimitable ground of Christ's vicarious mission. The framework thus distinguishes two registers that secular theory conflates: a normative christological register that cannot be replicated, and a derivative ethical register that can and must be practiced. This distinction addresses the tension noted in the literature between those who read Markan servanthood as exemplary and those who read it as uniquely christological; the two readings are not competitors but ordered levels of a single theological logic.

The study also contributes to the ongoing debate over whether Mark 10:45 is primarily soteriological, political, or ethical. The exegesis suggests that these dimensions are mutually entailed rather than mutually exclusive. The ransom saying is soteriological in its claim about the purpose of the Son of Man's death, political in its implicit contrast with imperial models of benefaction and coercive rule, and ethical in its function within the discipleship discourse of Mark 8–10. Reducing the passage to any one of these dimensions impoverishes its rhetorical force. The MSLF accordingly treats the three as integrated dimensions of a single framework, with the christological ground functioning as the hinge between the soteriological and the ethical.

Several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study is exegetical and hermeneutical in design; it does not report empirical data, and the MSLF is proposed as a

conceptual framework rather than a validated instrument. No psychometric properties—reliability coefficients, factor loadings, or discriminant validity statistics—are claimed, and any future operationalization of the framework would require independent scale development and validation. Second, the analysis is confined to Mark 10:42–45 and its principal intertexts; it does not attempt a comprehensive treatment of Markan discipleship or of the wider New Testament servant tradition, and the synoptic parallels are used comparatively rather than exhaustively. Third, the movement from exegesis to contemporary application involves hermeneutical judgments that are contestable, and the framework's adequacy for faith-based organizational practice remains a matter for empirical and practical-theological investigation. The study also engages servant leadership theory selectively, focusing on its dominant formulations rather than surveying the full range of recent empirical work, including studies that examine servant leadership in relation to forgiveness, resilience, and institutional context (Harlan, 2022; Wilkinson & Rennaker, 2022; Sharp, 2023; Shula et al., 2022).

These limitations indicate directions for further research. The MSLF requires operationalization and testing in Christian educational, ecclesial, and non-profit settings, where the relationship between christological conviction and leadership practice can be examined empirically rather than asserted. Comparative work with other religious and philosophical traditions of servant leadership would clarify which elements of the framework are distinctively Christian and which are shared (Novita & Munir, 2025; McMillan, 2022). Finally, sustained dialogue with philosophical ethics, particularly accounts of self-transcendence and responsibility, may sharpen the framework's normative claims (Schmidt, 2024; McGhee, 2023).

The study's contribution is therefore threefold. Exegetically, it offers an integrated reading of Mark 10:42–45 that holds together its rhetorical structure, its christological ground, and its ethical force. Theoretically, it provides a biblically derived corrective to the instrumental and anthropocentric tendencies of secular servant leadership theory. Practically, it proposes a framework for leadership formation that treats service not as a technique for organizational effectiveness but as a cruciform pattern grounded in the mission of the Son of Man. Whether that framework can bear the weight of empirical scrutiny is a question this study deliberately leaves open, and one that the next stage of research must answer.

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