

## Jesus as Agent of Change and Guiding

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### **Abstract**

The primary function of this paper is to examine the leadership style of Jesus, particularly as He interacts with Peter in the 21<sup>st</sup> chapter of the Gospel of John. This paper examines a narrative exposition through an inner texture analysis of John 21 as it relates to leadership and change. John 21 is the epilogue to this credendum. It concludes John's Gospel with further insights and never-ending revelations of Jesus Christ that provides four themes for its readers: Jesus' manifestation of Himself (1-8), Jesus' invitation to His disciples (9-14), Jesus' examination of Peter (15-23), and postscript (24-25). John 21 provides bounteous examples of leadership theories as Jesus communicates and dines with His disciples. The leadership philosophies found within this final chapter of John include: charismatic leadership, transformational leadership, servant leadership, and the leader-member exchange (LMX) theory. These leadership theories can be found in His actions, words, and mannerisms with His disciples as they provide a fuller meaning and sense of leadership quality.

*Keywords:* inner texture, John 21, Jesus Christ, disciples

## **Jesus as Agent of Change and Guiding**

The primary function of this paper is to examine the leadership style of Jesus, particularly as He interacts with Peter in the 21<sup>st</sup> chapter of the Gospel of John. This paper examines a narrative exposition through an inner texture analysis of John 21 as it relates to leadership and change. John 21 is the epilogue to this credendum. It concludes John's Gospel with further insights and never-ending revelations of Jesus Christ, which according to the King James Study Bible (1988), provides four themes for its readers: Jesus' manifestation of Himself (1-8), Jesus' invitation to His disciples (9-14), Jesus' examination of Peter (15-23), and postscript (24-25). Present-day leadership theories provide affluent consistency and quality as they drive the conversation and theoretical applications of modern day leadership practices. John 21 provides bounteous examples of leadership theories as Jesus communicates and dines with His disciples. The leadership philosophies found within this final chapter of John include: charismatic leadership, transformational leadership, servant leadership, and the leader-member exchange (LMX) theory.

Deschenes and Rogers (1981) admitted that Jesus Christ is the most effective agent of change in recorded history. Jesus presented Himself as the ever-present leader in John 21. Since He was not satisfied with leaving things the way they were, He sought to bring about change. If Jesus had never been an agent of change and He never revealed Himself to His disciples in the 21<sup>st</sup> chapter of John, the disciples could have ceased to be disciples and fishermen of men, and would have instead returned to their prior employment as regular fishermen, tax collectors, and tent makers. Their degree of uncertainty was left undisclosed to speculate as the author presents the concluding verses to this Gospel.

Jesus' vocabulary in Matthew 5:17 "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill" (New King James Version), explains that He was not here to conform to the law, but rather to transform it in a way that there would no longer be a need of sacrifice. Again in Matthew 10:34 He says, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword." There had never been up to and never will be another to think the way Jesus thought and move with such intricate detail as He did. He fulfilled the word of God, brought about change, and delivered what He promised He would deliver. Although God cannot change, He can bring about change so that while not all would agree with it, it would serve for the betterment of the human race.

### **Inner Texture Analysis**

The serious study of Scripture (Hermeneutics) remains one of the most important avenues for exploring leadership for the Christian scholar (Bekker, 2006). The investigation of Robbins' (1996) socio-rhetorical criticism presented five kinds of inner texture texts: (1) repetitive-progressive; (2) opening-middle-closing; (3) narrational; (4) argumentative; and (5) aesthetic. The hermeneutical approach (including an exegetical and expositional study) of John 21 provides methodical details in which readers are better able to find key moments of leadership emergence with Jesus' conversations and dealings with His disciples. This chapter provides a broader, more complete presentation of Jesus as an agent of change as He interacts and communicates with His disciples.

### **Repetitive-Progressive Texture**

Robbins (1996) acknowledged that it is important to understand the nature of the discourse within the inner features of the text. Rhetorical analysis of repetitive-progressive texture evokes the following questions:

1. What patterns emerge from the repetition of certain topics in the text?
2. What topics replace other topics in the progress of the text?
3. Is there continual repletion of the same word throughout the unit, or is there slight modification at almost every progress stage?
4. Does the progression bring certain kinds of words together but not others?
5. Is there repetition that occurs in steps that create a context for a new word in the progression?

If a word occurs more than once in a unit, it represents a repetitive feature (Robbins, 1996). The repetitive features (see Table 1) are displayed in vertical columns and provide a visual perception of the repetitive-progressive texture in John 21. The reader can easily see where the term disciples are consistently mentioned in the flow of conversation in the first half of the chapter. This is quite different from Jesus. He is mentioned continuously and evenly over 18 of the 25 verses although only He is not mentioned twice in these consecutive verses. He is mentioned in every verse with the exception of (2, 3, 8, 9, 11, 18, and 24). Simon Peter is frequently discussed in this chapter as well. He is mentioned in nine of the 25 verses. John, the beloved disciple, is mentioned twice in the first seven verses and then not again until the final six verses. John does play a viable role in the concluding chapter but as only as an agent of propagation.

There is a depiction of transformational leadership throughout the concluding chapter of John as both Christ and the disciples are positively influenced by one another. Yukl (2006) stated that followers feel trust, loyalty, admiration, and respect towards transformational leaders as they are motivated to do more. It is apparent within these seven disciples that they all felt Christ's loyalty and trust towards them and although it remains unspoken, they too had a

transformational leader in Jesus. A second prevalent leadership style in this chapter is the LMX theory. Schyns and Wolfman (2008) explained that the leader-member exchange methodology puts an emphasis on the tête-à-tête that takes place between a leader and a follower. The conversation between Jesus and Peter is the most notable confirmation of this theory.

Table 1

Narrative Agents in John 21: 1-25

Verse	Disciples	Jesus	Simon Peter	John
1	Disciples	Jesus/He/ <i>Himself</i> (2)		
2	Disciples		Simon Peter	<i>Sons of Zebedee</i>
3	Them/They/We		Simon Peter	
4	Disciples	Jesus		
5	Children/You/They	Jesus		
6	Them/You/They (2)	He		
7		Jesus/Lord	Simon Peter	Disciple
8	Disciples			
9	They (2)			
10	Them/You	Jesus		
11			Simon Peter	
12	Them/Disciples	Jesus/Him/Lord		
13	Them	Jesus		
14	Disciples	Jesus/Himself/He		
15		Jesus/Me/Him	Simon, Son of Jonah	
		You/He/My	Simon Peter	
16		He (3)/Me	Simon, Son of Jonah	
		You/My		
17		Jesus/Him	Peter	
		He (3)/Me (2)		
		You (3)		
18				
19		He (3)/Me		
20		Jesus/His/Lord	Peter	Disciple
21		Jesus/Lord	Peter	Him/This Man
22		Jesus/I (2)/Me		He
23		Jesus/I (2)		Disciple
24				Disciple/His
25		Jesus		I

The final chapter of John begins with referencing Christ's first two post-death revelations of Himself to the disciples in the twentieth chapter of John. The author then progresses with an introduction of the present disciples and their fishing trip (verses 2-3). Thereafter Jesus begins to reveal Himself as the one on the shore and commands them to cast their net on the right side of the ship (verses 4-6). Once they realize that it is Christ on the shore, they leave their ship, Peter excluded as he had already cast himself into the sea and swam, and travel to Him in a "little ship" (verses 7-8). "As soon as they were come to land," (verse 9) they dined with Jesus having fish and bread to eat (verses 9-13).

The author reveals in verse 14 that this is the third time that Jesus presents Himself to His disciples after His resurrection. Then in verses 15-17, Jesus has a conversation with Peter about Peter's love towards Him and his duties hereafter of feeding His lambs/sheep. Jesus tells Peter in verse 18 that he would grow old and would have to be carried where he would not take himself, and in verse 19 He spoke to Peter about his death and how that it would glorify God. In verses 20-23, Peter looks at John and asks about what John was going to do and he was reminded that this was none of his business. Peter's business, as Jesus plainly stated, was to feed the lambs/sheep of God. After this, there are the final two concluding verses in the Gospel of John.

The conversation between Jesus and Peter provide a continual repletion of the same words throughout the unit (see Table 2). As seen in Table 1, there is a separation of the Peter and disciples except for two verses. When Christ deals with His children, He deals with them individually within a collective group. In regards to how God calls His people, He places a name on His people as they are recognizable by Him. God often uses the vis-à-vis relationship to persuade the disciple to turn from their ways and follow Him.

Table 2

Conversation and Interaction between Jesus and Peter

Verse	Jesus	Simon Peter	Love	Sheep/Lambs
15	Jesus	Simon, Son of Jonah	Love (2)	Lambs
16	Jesus/He	Simon Peter Simon, Son of Jonah	Love (2)	Sheep
17	Jesus	Peter	Love (3)	Sheep

The repetition of steps in the units of the text is progressive from one unit to the next in John 21. These repetitious avenues lead into the subsequent verses as the author provides script for. There is a smooth transition from one unit to the next without an abrupt discharge of any one topic and/or character. There is an absence of the presence of the disciples in the format of the chapter from verse 14 to 23; however there is a sense that they are present as he brings verse 23 in by their remarks about the death of John.

**Opening-Middle-Closing Texture**

John 21 provides a fundamental open-middle-closing texture. Robbins (1996) lists five questions that the opening-middle-closure texture brings forth:

1. What is the nature of the opening of a unit in relation to its closure, whether the unit is an entire text or a subdivision in it?
2. What is the nature of the topics with which the text begins in relation to the topics with which it ends?
3. What is the nature of the topics that replace the topics at the beginning?
4. Is there repetition that interconnects the beginning, middle and end; or is repetition of a particular kind limited to one or two of the three regions of the discourse?
5. What is the function of the parts of a text in relation to the entire text?

The first three verses of John 21 set the stage as a soft introduction into the narrational theme as it depicts the disciples fishing prior to Jesus' first appearance in the chapter. John's concluding chapter is a relational theme between the disciples and Jesus. In 2010, Felfe and Schyns investigated the degree to which the evaluation of leadership is a result of followers' perceptions and attributions. The results of their study provided evidence that a follower's personality influences the perception of transformational leadership and commitment to the supervisor. The seven disciples in this chapter had developed such a connection and bond with Christ during His ministry, that once they realize that it is Christ on the shore; they depart the sea to get closer to Him once again.

The texture begins with the past and ends in a similar manner discussing the many other things which Jesus did. "After these things," refers to the first two times Jesus reveals Himself to His disciples. In John 21:14, the reader is notified that this is indeed the third time in which Jesus showed himself to His disciples after His death. The first time Jesus revealed Himself to His disciples was in John 20:19-23 when He showed them His hands and His side. His second revelation was in John 20:26-29 when He has a personal conversation with Thomas. As the author takes the reader's mind back to Christ's first two revelations post resurrection, he concludes with the notion that Jesus did so much that if written, the world could not contain the books of His works.

This chapter opens with Jesus' manifestation of Himself in the first eight verses. These eight verses present an array of thoughts for the reader. The author sets the stage by providing a timeframe of which the scene takes place (verse 1), the characters involved (verse 2), the disciples regressing back to their old ways of fishing (verse 3), their recognition of someone on the shore and their command to cast the net (verses 4-6), and their realization that this was Christ



and their departure from the ship back to the shore to be nearer Him (verses 7-8). As evident by the diverse introduction, the reader now has a better understanding of the scene, those involved, and the love that Christ has for His disciples.

Beginning with verse 9, the author provides the readers with a brief interlude of Christ's invitation to His disciples and the staging of breakfast which consisted of fish and bread. Jesus again modeled the servant leadership theory as He, their leader, served them. Servant leaders stand for what is good and right. They attend to their followers' needs. They help their followers become wiser and more willing to accept their responsibilities. Servant leaders listen. They learn about their needs and desires, and they are willing to share in their pain and frustration (Yukl, 2006). Jesus displayed all of these qualities in this concluding chapter of John.

As the author progresses in this final chapter from the opening to the middle, he begins to describe the conversation between Jesus and Peter where Jesus asked Peter three times did he love Him (verses 15-17). The conversation between these two continue through verse 22, but it is verses 15-17 that set the stage for Peter's progression and acceleration as a disciple. These few verses demonstrate Jesus' endeavor to build upon the relationship that He and Peter had developed over the past three years. Jesus is displaying characteristics of the leader-member exchange (LMX) theory with Peter in these verses. The LMX theory, as acknowledged by Yukl (2006), "describes how a leader develops an exchange relationship over time with each subordinate as the two parties influence each other and negotiate the subordinate's role in the organization" (p. 117). This is exactly what Christ was doing as He repeatedly told Peter to feed His lambs/sheep.

The transition into the closing of John 21 and subsequently the Gospel of John begins in verse 23. The author has, up until this point, provided valuable insight into this gospel's

conclusion. By this time, he has provided a thorough staging of the purpose of the concluding chapter, the characters involved, its location, and events that transpire within the chapter. The author moves fluently throughout the chapter providing a narrative scene in which the reader can gain a more personal example of Christ of His leadership qualities. There remains in the reader's mind a sense of "in the moment" as the author concludes.

Table 3

Repetition of Jesus and Peter

Verse	Jesus	Simon, Son of Jonah	Simon Peter	Peter
1	Jesus			
2			Simon Peter	
3			Simon Peter	
4	Jesus			
5	Jesus			
7	Jesus		Simon Peter	Peter
10	Jesus			
11			Simon Peter	
12	Jesus			
13	Jesus			
14	Jesus			
15	Jesus	Simon, Son of Jonah	Simon Peter	
16		Simon, Son of Jonah		
17	Jesus			Peter
20	Jesus			Peter
21	Jesus			Peter
22	Jesus			
23	Jesus			
25	Jesus			

The one premise (see Table 3) that is consistent throughout the opening-middle-closing text of this chapter is Jesus and Peter. Jesus acts as an agent of change in these texts and pays particular attention to Peter since Peter had just denied Him three times before Jesus was crucified. Peter had told Jesus prior to this that "even if all are made to stumble because of you, I

will never be made to stumble” (Matthew 26:33). He reiterated it again in Matthew 26:35 when he adds, “Even if I have to die with you, I will not deny you!” During this third appearance after His resurrection, Jesus approaches Peter intent on loving him and showing him that love.

The love that Jesus Christ shares with His disciples is unmatched. In Hebrews 13:5, Jesus explained that He would never leave them nor forsake them. It is easily understandable to look at the disciples’ attempt of going fishing in John 21:3 as an act of reverting to their former ways of life or habits because they could have possibly thought that their leader had left them and had forsaken them. By His return to the disciples this third time, He again proves that He would not leave them. He returns with the task of motivating them to take up where they had recently surrendered and go throughout the world preaching the Gospel. During this revelation, He behaved as a transformational leader by appealing to their common ideals and moral values (Ilies, Judge, & Wagner, 2006). There are times when followers are down and out that leaders must take the part of a motivator and lift their spirits when times and situations become difficult. This was a perfect time for Jesus to take this role upon Himself which He did.

Jesus’ presence and manifestation of Himself in the opening verses of this chapter provides an added sense of love and mentorship that draws His disciples closer to Him as evidenced by their quick departure from the sea back to the shore. He drew His disciples in and dined with them one last time before finally sending them back into the world. If He had not of completed His work and returned this final time, it would be hard to say where the disciples might have ended their journey. Perhaps they would not have finished their course, but nevertheless, Jesus once again invited them into His fold to dine with Him.

Throughout the chapter an assortment of themes come together with simplicity and power. The entire chapter is filled with love, portraits of leadership, guidance, and correction.

Christ examines Peter in such a way that not only does he feel the effects of it, but he also learns from his experiences and this conversation as he is able to go forward in his ministry and preach the gospel with boldness (see Acts 2-4). Peter is told three times by Jesus (John 21:15-17) to feed His lambs/sheep. He takes this to heart as he shows it in his writings in (1 Peter 5:2), “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you.” The final two verses of this gospel testify of the author’s work that it is true and that Christ is indeed worthy of all that He accomplished and the glory that is due Him for His works.

### **Narrational Texture**

Robbins (1996) stated that narrational texture distinguishes between real and implied author, narrator, characters, narratee, implied and real reader. Bloomberg (2009) stated that “narrationality weaves metaphor, nuance, allusivity, sensitivity and historic concreteness into a polychromatic, textured tapestry that reflects the fecundity of the creation God has called forth—societal structures and interpersonal relations as much as plants, animals and individual human beings” (p. 119). Narrationality heightens the reader’s perception of everyday experience rather than leading them to seek to escape from it into ideality (Blomberg, 1998; 2009). It reflects the temporal, dialogical character of life, contingency along with constancy, historical, and particularity as much as universality. Narrational texture brings the text into a superior focus that ultimately provides a better comprehension.

There are five books in the New Testament that the Apostle John is credited for writing, The Gospel According to John, The First, Second, and Third Epistles of John, and The Revelation of Jesus Christ. John does not identify himself in his gospel or the three epistles. However, these studies do suggest that they all came from the same hand. The Revelation of

Jesus Christ, John's final work and the concluding book in the Bible, does give an account that John is indeed the author.

According to The King James Study Bible (1988), John identifies himself at least four times in Revelation 1:1, 4, 9; 22:8; and perhaps in 21:2 also. It appears evident as John was often found leaning on Christ's breast that he lost his identity. His life was a living tribute to Paul's writing to the Philippians in 1:21, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain," and again to the Colossians in 3:3, "For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God." John's humility, self-denial, and love for Christ covered up his name in his own heart and mind for to have said, "The one whom Jesus loved," (John 13:23).

The beloved disciple (John 21:20-24) appears to be the author of this gospel (Belsterling, 2006) which is perhaps the most spiritual of the four gospels. It is clear that he writes his gospel after Mark, Matthew, and Luke as he relates to what they had omitted and gleans up what they passed by (The King James Study Bible, 1988). "The Fourth Gospel," as O'Brien (2005) commented, "Is not simply a report of others' experience, but it provides the possibility of a substitute experience for the reader" (p. 285). O'Brien continued by adding that the narrative strategies of the Gospel show the reader what believing is. This creates an experience for the reader that, although not authentic, it is still significant.

### **Argumentative Texture**

The agent of change looks for better work performance by challenging the current paradigms and encouraging improvement ideas from direct reports and external stakeholders (Howard, 1996; Hickman, 1998). Jesus, the ever-present agent of change, was always about His Father's business and in continual progression of those things that pleased His Father (John 8:29). Many that followed Jesus only followed Him to view the miracles He performed or

because He fed those that were hungry. Deschenes and Rogers (1981) commented that Christ's goal was to change people's way of thinking from an earthly mind set into a spiritual perspective. His aspiration was to bring sinners to repentance (Matthew 9:13; Mark 2:17; & Luke 5:32).

Robbins (1996) stated that "argumentative texture appears when interpreters use rhetorical resources of analysis in the context of repetitive-progressive, open-middle-closing and narrational texture" (pp. 58-59). Robbins (1996) added that the function of unstated premises identifies the aspects of argumentative texture in its social and cultural environment that the narrator may never state. When readers consider this gospel, they would be well advised to contemplate the times and cultures in which it was written. Biblical readers, in most all instances, should rely on the exegetical approach of studying the Scriptures to determine what they meant in the time and culture in which they were written.

One thing a reader should deliberate in studying this chapter is the fact that the calendar of ancient Israel does not align with the modern day calendar. There were more months, the days were not quite as long, and in fact, the new day did not begin at 12:00 A.M. (midnight) as we know it today. In the times of Christ, the day began at 6:00 P.M. In (Genesis 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, and 31), the evening and the morning were the first through sixth days. Unwritten erudition such as this can add an astonishing array of texture to the author's words if used within the cultural context.

Theological reflection becomes the context for the disciples' transformation and their ministerial settings and the world (O'Brien, 2007). The disciples were told previously to daily take up their crosses and follow Christ (Luke 9:23). It was never explained to them that their pursuit after Him would be easy. They did not know what it meant to live without persecution

for proclaiming the gospel. To them, it was the manner in which they accepted and moved forward.

Jesus never spoke of leadership theories or self-fulfilling agendas. His actions and words many times describe the roles and tasks for being Christ-like, but never about leadership in and of itself. He consistently and predominately sought to bring about change by obeying His Father's commands and doing those things which pleased His Father (John 8:29). Charismatic leaders incorporate their followers' dreams, aspirations, and hopes in their vision (Howell & Avolio, 1992; Hickman, 1998). And, while readers of John's concluding chapter will not see the words charisma or leadership, they are able to exegetically extract from the 25 verses and gain a more renowned display of Christ's leadership qualities and actions of change.

### **Sensory-Aesthetic Texture**

"Aesthetics", as Robbins (1996) stated, "Brings into the context of repetitive-progressive, open-middle-closing, narrational, and argumentative texture" (p. 64). He asks the following three questions concerning the images of the passage:

1. How do humans imagine new possibilities for their lives?
2. How do they imagine the present concrete realities of their lives?
3. How do they imagine the past and link their imagination of the past with their imagination of the present?

Although it is not written, perhaps the disciples have started to wonder what their future will hold since they no longer have a leader. Jesus had previously led and continuously guided them for three years and now he was no longer with them. Were they reverting back to their old nature and old habits of work before His appearance on the shore, or were they just trying to provide for their next meal? Perhaps their imaginations could not fathom life without Him and

were reverting to times of comfort. The possibilities of their new lives and discourse were not yet fully apparent and the third revelation from Christ to them provided all that they could ever hope for.

The disciples swiftly move to the shore once they realized that Christ is there. They then enjoy one last meal with Him. As the chapter unfolds their lives were, once again, brought back into the fold as the Great Shepherd always does with His followers. They had been laboring all night for food without much success and the physical hardships which this must have imposed on them were never discussed by the author. Although Christ, as the author presents, spends most of His conversation with Peter this day, the disciples are able to hear what transpires in the conversation between Jesus and Peter and learn from what they hear.

In John 21:23, the disciples start to gossip amongst themselves that John should not die even though Jesus clearly never said this. Within minutes the disciples had, if for a moment, lost their form of Godliness which is a gift from God. Jesus tells the disciples in Luke 18:1 in a parable, “That men always ought to pray and not lose heart.” The disciples show that not only is it easy to lose heart and revert back to old patterns and habits, but that it is in every one of us to easily look back after putting the hand on the plow. This is where the continual revelations of Christ in every believer’s heart prove that He is longsuffering with His people. Jesus had previously told His disciples in Mark 16:15 to, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.” These are strong words from their ever present agent of change leader.

### **Conclusion**

Over the course of the final chapter of the Gospel of John, Jesus Christ displayed and modeled several leadership methodologies and in doing so acted as the ever-present agent of change. God did not take on the form of man in the person of Jesus Christ to maintain the status



quo. He sent forth His son to redeem those that were under the law (Galatians 4:4-5). Jesus was given the task of leading this redeemed people and changing their mindset from serving the law to become more spiritual thinkers instead as they serve Him. The leadership theories of Jesus in John 21 are found in His actions, words, and mannerisms with His disciples as they provide a fuller meaning and sense of leadership quality.

Jesus acted with kindness, love, sincerity, and openness with His disciples. His vis-à-vis approach with Peter shows the use of the LMX theory. His service to them was an act of servant leadership as He encouraged them to finish their course and continue in their paths of following Him. The transformational leadership theory is displayed through the interactions between Jesus and His disciples as they feel security, loyalty, and trust within Jesus. And finally, Jesus portrayed acts of charismatic leadership as He indulged in their dreams, aspirations, and hopes. Jesus Christ is the embodiment of love, service, and the personification of a leader.

Contemporary modern day leaders would better enhance their understanding of leadership if they studied this passage and others to learn more of the archetype of leadership as Jesus has mastered and displays many diverse leadership theories in His everyday life.

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