



The Christian Discipline of Leadership Selection

Are Organizations Choosing the Next Generation of Leaders Correctly?

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This essay explores the prevailing viewpoint on succession planning and then examines John 17 to determine if Jesus' methodology of succession planning suggests an alternate view. While John 17 is very rich, this essay limits itself to the texts that illuminate succession planning.

Succession Planning

Khurana reveals that most American organizations search exclusively for CEOs based on "leadership' and 'charismatic' qualities. Less emphasis is placed on the company's strategic situation and how appropriate the background of the candidate is in light of this."¹ He adds that the external search process is flawed² and often conducted under the media's eye.³ The result is organizations search for external characteristics to satisfy the public, rather than analyze the organization and potential leaders for fit.

Context of John 17

In contrast, the Gospel of John⁴ presents a different process and criteria used by Jesus. John 17 is the finale of chapters 13-17, often called the Final Discourse.⁵ Jesus is on an "organizational retreat"⁶ to prepare His disciples for the end of His leadership (death) and their ongoing leadership role.^{7,8} Jesus' focus switches from speaking directly to the disciples, to praying to the Father as the disciples listen in.⁹ Black quoting Cadier notes the Fourth Gospel is "a witness to the mind and heart of Jesus, including 'the hidden foundation of all his work, namely, his relationship with His Father'."¹⁰

Passing the Baton

John 17 is Jesus' Farewell Prayer.¹¹ Ridderbos states it is similar to other "testamentary" prayers that address the future of those left behind with John acting as witness and transmitter of Jesus' self-revelation testament.¹²

Malina¹³ and Neyrey¹⁴ propose Jesus opens by speaking to the Father as His *patron*, and acknowledging Jesus is His *broker*. Sheppard calls this *agency*.¹⁵ Malina notes Jesus was "sent" by the Father over 40 times in John, with six occurrences in chapter seventeen¹⁶ which emphasizes a purpose for the sending. John juxtaposes *sent* and *come*¹⁷ with the world (*kosmos*)¹⁸ creating a chiasmic structure.¹⁹ Jesus was *with* the Father *before* the world existed.²⁰ The Father sent Jesus *into* the world,²¹ but was *not of* the world.²² Jesus was *with* the disciples who came *out* of the world²³ while *in* the world,²⁴ but was *not of* the world.²⁵ Jesus is now returning to the Father²⁶ and *sending* the disciples *into* the world to continue the work,²⁷ but *not be of* the world.²⁸ Jesus' prayer is that the Father would first keep them from evil²⁹ because the world *will hate* them because they are *not of* or focused on the world³⁰ and second sanctify them by His truth/word.³¹ This process causes the world to believe the Father sent Jesus and loved the world.³² All this summarizes the work Jesus completed on the Father's behalf.³³

In addition, the future brokers (disciples) hear they are prepared to complete their future work.³⁴ Thus, Jesus' strategy prepared the disciples in character (sanctify), relationship (to God and each other), focus (in but not of the world), but most of all to know the source of Jesus and their mission. He accomplished this by showing the Father *sent* Him,³⁵ *gave* them the Father's words³⁶ and *joy in* the world³⁷ so that they might know Father now.³⁸ A theme exists that the Father *gave* to Jesus, who then *gave* to the disciples. But the overarching concept is the Father *gave* the disciples to Jesus who taught, kept, and glorified them while He was in the world. Now He is giving them back to the Father's care.³⁹ Thus, Jesus mentored and developed the potential leaders entrusted to Him, to become brokers like Him.⁴⁰

Keener notes the preparation creates a difference in values from the world, not physical separation.⁴¹ Malina describes it as anti-society,⁴² where people remain in society but are opposed to and in conflict with it.⁴³ Thus, the Father, through Jesus, presents a new culture and worldview, and asks to sustain the disciples⁴⁴ in it for long-term success. Jesus reminds the Father that Jesus honored (glorified) Him publicly⁴⁵ and now expects the

Father to honor⁴⁶ Jesus for finishing,⁴⁷ and their followers as they continue the work.⁴⁸ Thus, all who share the values⁴⁹ share the honor. Jesus does not appoint one leader, but the group to carry on. This strategy is different than current succession planning recommendations. First, He is selecting multiple insiders rather than appointing one heir from outside.⁵⁰

Why Prayer?

Jesus chooses intimate prayer⁵¹ as the communication mode of His final words. The prayer⁵² is in the presence of His disciples,⁵³ thus inviting them into His intimate communication and relationship with the Father, and to think His thoughts.⁵⁴ Jesus uses a systems worldview⁵⁵ to ensure all parties are on the same page and actively engage. He is transparent about the accomplishment of His mission and vision for the future.⁵⁶ Jesus implicitly states this succession is birthed in prayer.

Neyrey, building on Malina's work, analyzes the text for types of prayer. Malina states that John 17 is *interactional* in intent; prayers to maintain emotional ties and interpersonal relations.⁵⁷ Neyrey finds eleven *self-focused*, seven *petitionary*, and one *informative* prayer.⁵⁸ Thus, the nature of John 17 is to communicate to the Father what Jesus accomplished (informative), and then request help (petitionary) to complete the future vision, in the midst of their intimate relationship (self-focused). The text is filled with *You/I* stressing interrelationship.⁵⁹ *They* (the disciples) occur 18 times, mostly as an object. Thus, a secondary objective is to actively communicate to the disciples so they may be witnesses to Jesus and the Father's intentions. Thus, Jesus prepares them for their leadership by demonstrating the most important thing they will need to know and experience in the future.

Strategy

Analyzing the structure of the text⁶⁰ reveals the Father's strategy. Black states John 17 is "more complexly organized" than most discourses in the Christian scriptures.⁶¹ For example, Janzen quoting Brown⁶² identifies two Greek structures in 20-23 that consist of three *thats* (*hina*) and an *as* (*kathos*) separating the first and second *that*.⁶³ The author found four additional similar constructs⁶⁴ in the chapter. The final *that* indicates the effect of the previous clauses, which the author perceives as the strategy. A summary of the conclusions or *so thats* in John 17 follows:

- 1-3: the Son will glorify the Father, gave eternal life to those given to Him, *so that* they may know the Father and Jesus Christ.
- 11-12: They may be one, I kept those you gave me, *so that* scripture is fulfilled.
- 13-15: They may have joy, don't take them out of the world, *so that* you keep them from evil.
- 20-21: They may be one, they may be one in Us, *so that* the world may believe the Father sent Jesus.
- 22-23: They may be one, they may be made perfect in one, *so that* the world may believe the Father sent Jesus and loved them.
- 24-26: They may be with Jesus where He is, may behold His glory, *so that* the Father's love and Jesus are in them.

The *so thats* form the essence of the strategy and mission statement.

1. All things Jesus gave were to create an environment for the disciples to know the Father and Jesus. This is touched upon in the "Why Prayer?" section.
2. While *in this world* but *not of it* they will be kept from evil. This is treated in "Passing the Baton."
3. Their oneness and being made perfect in the Father and Son, fulfills scripture and causes the world to believe the Father sent Jesus and loved them. This is explicated next in "Oneness."
4. Being with Jesus and seeing His glory reveals the Father's love and Jesus are in them. This is a manifestation of the oneness, and is included in the "Oneness" section.

An analysis of the whole John 17 text⁶⁵ substantiates that these themes are present. Next, oneness is explored.

Oneness

Central to the development and keeping of the disciples is *oneness*. Louw and Nida define *one (hen)* as "that which is united as one in contrast with being divided or consisting of separate parts."⁶⁶ Thus, *one* refers to unity of relationship.⁶⁷ *One* occurs six times in 17:11, 21-23.⁶⁸ Closely aligned are the concepts of being *with* and *in* the Father, Jesus, and/or the disciples. The Father, Jesus, glory, and love are *one* and *with*.⁶⁹ The Father and Jesus are glorified *in* the disciples.⁷⁰ The disciples are to be *one* as the Father and Jesus are *one*⁷¹ and *one with* them.⁷² Keener notes that "Jesus' followers would experience God's presence in such a way that unity would be the necessary result."⁷³ Thus, the *oneness* is experiential.

The *oneness* combines *with keeping* the word and name⁷⁴ to protect them from evil and the world. Neyrey states that Jesus *keeps* attached to God and the disciples *keep* attached to the Father and Jesus.⁷⁵ Keener notes in Jewish tradition, sanctification⁷⁶ came from *keeping* the commandments (word), however, John’s idea of holiness is *keeping* different values from the world and being *one* with God.⁷⁷ Thus, John’s idea of holiness is an experiential belief system, not outward acts.

The purpose of the *oneness* is *so that* the world will know the Father sent Jesus and loves them as the Father loves Jesus.⁷⁸ Black adds the disciples’ *oneness* is the “convincing testimony” of God’s love manifested in His Son, current disciples, and future disciples based on “intimate knowledge and personal communion”⁷⁹ He adds that the *oneness* is not a “dormant attribute of God,” but “God’s power to unite and reconcile those hostile to him and each other.”⁸⁰ Thus, the unity will reveal the divine nature of God uniquely and within the disciples.⁸¹ He concludes that if the disciples cannot be *one* “in diversity, then they cannot attest to the *oneness* of God.”⁸² Ethnic diversity included Jews and Gentiles.⁸³ Jean Vanier suggests that the “mystical element” of *oneness* is not a *flight from* the world of pain and of matter, but a *mission into* it, to love people as Jesus loves them.”⁸⁴ Keener believes that the perfect tense of the participle indicates an established reality that exists and that the disciples only need to guard it.⁸⁵ Thus, the *oneness* empowers followers to be unified in spirit and mission to love those who hate them.⁸⁶

Oneness and unity extend beyond the current disciples to “those who will believe in Me through their word.”⁸⁷ Thus, it will extend for all generations. The long-term organizational strategy is ongoing connection and unity to the source of the mission. In most organizations, the founder retires or dies, but in this organization, the relationship is eternal and brings life⁸⁸ to every connected individual always. Thus, the conveying of the *I/you* relationship to *they* is central to longevity and effectiveness.⁸⁹

Glory is presented as a circle. The Father gives glory to Jesus,⁹⁰ He gives it to believers,⁹¹ and they glorify the Father.⁹² Essentially, Jesus shares everything He received (love, glory, authority) and knew (word) from the Father with the disciples.⁹³ Jesus desires the disciples to dwell with Him where He is,⁹⁴ there they will behold Jesus’ glory in the present and receive it.⁹⁵ Associated with glory are His name, love, and revelation of the word which are all synonyms for the Father or Jesus. Glory is available to all who are *one* with God, thus, it is a manifestation of *oneness*.

Conclusions

Jesus prepared and developed the next generation of leaders by being with them and sharing everything He had. He passed the baton while He was alive, by touching base with His patron and His followers together. Jesus lived the strategy experientially before the followers and developed the followers entrusted to Him to do the same. Thus, He concentrated on the fit of the followers to the strategy. The oneness with God and joy strengthen the followers to be actively involved in the world, but not receive direction or recharge their batteries from it. Like Jesus, Christians need to actively pray with expectation for answers through the whole process. This succession process is directly opposed to the prevailing pattern of choosing CEOs per Khurana. Thus, organizational leaders who wish to change their succession plans can follow Jesus' model to develop followers as in John 17.

About the Author

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NT:1520 (hen), *Louw and Nida Greek-English Lexicon Based on Semantic Domain*. New York: United Bible Societies, 1988. [electronic database]. Seattle: BibleSoft, 2003.

¹ Rakesh Khurana, *Searching for a Corporate Savior, The Irrational Quest for Charismatic CEOs* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 20.

² Khurana notes that many competent individual are not even “on the radar screen” to be CEO because of a closed search system. [Ibid., 187].

³ Ibid., 23.

⁴ John was written around 93-95C.E to assure Christians in the face of opposition and criticism,” especially from Jewish synagogues. [David A. deSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament, Contexts, Methods, and Ministry Formation*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 402].

⁵ David Alan Black, “On the Style and Significance of John 17,” *Criswell Theological Review* 3, no. 1 (1988), 143.

⁶ Organizational retreats are time away from the daily grind, thus away from the world. Jesus knows his death is imminent and so withdraws from the world with Father and His disciples. The prayer assumes an atemporal character as a result. [Ibid., 144].

⁷ Ibid, 143.

⁸ Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John, A Commentary, Volume II* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing, 2003), 1050.

⁹ John 17:13; Black, 144.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ According to Malina, Neyrey, Ridderbos, and others, chapter 17 has traditionally been known as the “high priestly prayer.” Authors such as Janzen support this view and others such as Malina, Neyrey, Ridderbos support calling it a “Farewell Prayer.”

¹² Ridderbos adds the prayer is a “portrayal of the sovereign way in which Jesus, as the one sent by the Father, returns to his Sender, asking to be discharged from the work he has completed, but also praying for its continuation by the Father himself.” [Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John, A Theological Commentary*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 547].

¹³ Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 244.

¹⁴ Jerome H. Neyrey, *The Gospel of John* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 276.

¹⁵ Beth M. Sheppard, “The Rise of Rome: The Emergence of a New Mode for Exploring the Fourth Gospel,” *American Theological Library Association Summary of Proceedings* (2003), 179.

¹⁶ John 17:3, 8, 18, 21, 23, 25. Malina, 244.

¹⁷ This sentense is equivalent to Neyrey’s “whence and wither” concept. Neyrey notes the importance of the theme throughout John (3:31; 6:41-42; 7:25-31, 41, 52) so that disciples and the world know Jesus comes from the Father and is eternal. [Neyrey, 283].

¹⁸ See Appendix A for further analysis on these themes.

¹⁹ A Chiastic structure according to James Gibbs of New Testament Research is a literary device used in the Hebrew or Christian scriptures that builds up to the main point and then backs off in reverse order forming an X which is the Greek letter Chi. [James M. Gibbs “Chiastic Structuring,” http://newtestamentresearch.com/NT%20Research-Mk%202/chiastic_structuring.htm#p2].

²⁰ John 17:5, 24.

²¹ John 17:18.

²² John 17:14, 16.

²³ John 17:6.

²⁴ John 17:12.

²⁵ John 17:14.

²⁶ John 17:11, 13.

²⁷ John 17:12,18.

²⁸ John 17:14, 16.

²⁹ John 17:15.

³⁰ John 17:14.

³¹ John 17:17.

- ³² John 17:21, 23.
- ³³ John 17:4.
- ³⁴ John 17:7-8, 16-19.
- ³⁵ John 17:8b.
- ³⁶ John 17:6, 7, 8, 14, 17.
- ³⁷ John 17:13.
- ³⁸ John 17:3.
- ³⁹ John 17:10, 17. See Appendix A for further analysis.
- ⁴⁰ Malina, 245.
- ⁴¹ Keener, 1060.
- ⁴² Malina, 245.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, 59.
- ⁴⁴ Keep them from the world and evil. [John 17:13-14].
- ⁴⁵ Malina, 120
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 244
- ⁴⁷ This is a restoration of the honor He had before the incarnation. John 17:4-5; Neyrey, 280.
- ⁴⁸ 17:10, 22. Neyrey, 280.
- ⁴⁹ Keener notes Jesus' honor will be bestowed by his going lower with the cross, which is the opposite of how honor is most often bestowed. [Keener, 1052].
- ⁵⁰ Khurana, 61.
- ⁵¹ Ryken defines prayer as conversation with the God who seeks relationship with His people. [Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III, gen. eds, *The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 659].
- ⁵² The word *pray* is used 4x (9, 15, 20). However, there are other references such as Jesus lifting up his eyes (17:1), which is a common posture of prayer. [Keener, 1052].
- ⁵³ Keener, 1050.
- ⁵⁴ Foster exhorts "In prayer, real prayer, we begin to think God's thoughts after Him: to desire the things He desires, to love the things He desires, to love the things He loves." [Richard J. Foster. *Celebration of Discipline, The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1978), 30].
- ⁵⁵ Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline, The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Currency Book, 2006), 348.
- ⁵⁶ Keener, 1050.
- ⁵⁷ Malina, 247.
- ⁵⁸ Neyrey, 278-9.
- ⁵⁹ The following words occur multiple time: I (31x), Me (24x), My (2x), mine (2x), myself (1x), Son (2), Jesus (1), Jesus Christ (1), You (37x), your (10x), yours (4x), Father (6x), reflecting a definite me/you focus in the text. See Appendix A for the verses that reflect the I-You relationship.
- ⁶⁰ See Appendix A for further analysis on these themes.
- ⁶¹ Black, 145.
- ⁶² J. Gerald Janzen, "The Scope of Jesus' High Priestly Prayer in John 17," *Encounter* 67, no. 1 (Winter 2006): 6-7.
- ⁶³ In 20-21 and 22-23, the first and second *that* clause depict the oneness of the disciples, and the third involves the effect on the world. The second *that* clause develops the first. The third *that* phrase does not connect to the first, but to the second. [*Ibid.*, 7].
- ⁶⁴ On closer examination in the Greek, verses 7-9 use *hoti* not *hina* for *that* and the *as* is missing. While the construction is different, the message is similar. They know all things from Jesus are from Father, Jesus came from Father, *so that* they know Father sent Jesus. This passage stands as the key that the disciples "got" the strategy from verses 1-3, which is probably why the structure is different.
- ⁶⁵ See Appendix A for more details.
- ⁶⁶ NT:1520 (*hen*), Louw and Nida Greek-English Lexicon Based on Semantic Domain. New York: United Bible Societies, 1988.). [electronic database]. Seattle: BibleSoft, 2003.
- ⁶⁷ Appold also adds, "Significantly the oneness of the church is not primarily an ecclesiological issue but a Christological one. It is the position maintained in relation to Jesus, which ultimately will account for either the church's oneness or its absence. Structural, organizational, traditional, and cultural considerations do not even enter the picture at this point." [Mark Appold. "Christ Alive! Church Alive! Reflection on the Prayer of Jesus in John 17," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 5, no. 6D (1978), 372-3].
- ⁶⁸ Three of the occurrences are "one as We," "We are One," and "one in Us" which sets the standard.
- ⁶⁹ John 17:5, 26.
- ⁷⁰ John 17:10.
- ⁷¹ John 17:11, 21, 22.

⁷² John 17: 21, 23, 24, 26.

⁷³ John 17:23.

⁷⁴ John 17:6, 11, 12, 15.

⁷⁵ Neyrey, 283.

⁷⁶ John 17:17, 19.

⁷⁷ Keener, 1060.

⁷⁸ John 17:22, 23. Black, 148.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 154-5.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 155.

⁸¹ Keener, 1062.

⁸² Black, 156.

⁸³ Keener, 1062.

⁸⁴ Jean Vanier, *Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John* (New York: Paulist Press, 2004), 13.

⁸⁵ Keener, 1063.

⁸⁶ Appold, 373.

⁸⁷ John 17:20.

⁸⁸ John 17:2.

⁸⁹ John 17:18, 26.

⁹⁰ John 17:22, 24.

⁹¹ John 17:22.

⁹² John 17:21, 23.

⁹³ 1 John 5:15; 17:7-8.

⁹⁴ John 17:24.

⁹⁵ Keener states God must be glorified (praised) in the present according to Jewish literature. [Keener, 1063].