The Christian Discipline of Leadership Selection

Are Organizations Choosing the Next Generation of Leaders Correctly?
Deborah F. Jenks

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.” He adds that the external search process is flawed and often conducted under the media’s eye. 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 John presents a different process and criteria used by Jesus. John 17 is the finale of chapters 13-17, often called the Final Discourse. Jesus is on an “organizational retreat” to prepare His disciples for the end of His leadership (death) and their ongoing leadership role. Jesus’ focus switches from speaking directly to the disciples, to praying to the Father as the disciples listen in. 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’.”

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Passing the Baton

John 17 is Jesus’ Farewell Prayer. 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.

Malina and Neyrey propose Jesus opens by speaking to the Father as His patron, and acknowledging Jesus is His broker. Sheppard calls this agency. Malina notes Jesus was “sent” by the Father over 40 times in John, with six occurrences in chapter seventeen which emphasizes a purpose for the sending. John juxtaposes sent and come with the world (kosmos) creating a chiastic structure. Jesus was with the Father before the world existed. The Father sent Jesus into the world, but was not of the world. Jesus was with the disciples who came out of the world while in the world, but was not of the world. Jesus is now returning to the Father and sending the disciples into the world to continue the work, but not be of the world. Jesus’ prayer is that the Father would first keep them from evil because the world will hate them because they are not of or focused on the world and second sanctify them by His truth/word. This process causes the world to believe the Father sent Jesus and loved the world. All this summarizes the work Jesus completed on the Father’s behalf.

In addition, the future brokers (disciples) hear they are prepared to complete their future work. 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, gave them the Father’s words and joy in the world so that they might know Father now. 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. Thus, Jesus mentored and developed the potential leaders entrusted to Him, to become brokers like Him.

Keener notes the preparation creates a difference in values from the world, not physical separation. Malina describes it as anti-society, where people remain in society but are opposed to and in conflict with it. Thus, the Father, through Jesus, presents a new culture and worldview, and asks to sustain the disciples in it for long-term success. Jesus reminds the Father that Jesus honored (glorified) Him publicly and now expects the
Father to honor Jesus for finishing, and their followers as they continue the work. Thus, all who share the values 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.

**Why Prayer?**

Jesus chooses intimate prayer as the communication mode of His final words. The prayer is in the presence of His disciples, thus inviting them into His intimate communication and relationship with the Father, and to think His thoughts. Jesus uses a systems worldview 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. 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. Neyrey finds eleven self-focused, seven petitionary, and one informative prayer. 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. 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 text reveals the Father’s strategy. Black states John 17 is “more complexly organized” than most discourses in the Christian scriptures. For example, Janzen quoting Brown identifies two Greek structures in 20-23 that consist of three thate (hina) and an as (kathos) separating the first and second that. The author found four additional similar constructs 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 thate 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 text 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.” Thus, one refers to unity of relationship. One occurs six times in 17:11, 21-23. 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. The Father and Jesus are glorified in the disciples. The disciples are to be one as the Father and Jesus are one and one with them. Keener notes that “Jesus’ followers would experience God’s presence in such a way that unity would be the necessary result. Thus, the oneness is experiential.
The oneness combines with keeping the word and name 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. Keener notes in Jewish tradition, sanctification came from keeping the commandments (word), however, John’s idea of holiness is keeping different values from the world and being one with God. 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. 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.” 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.” Thus, the unity will reveal the divine nature of God uniquely and within the disciples. He concludes that if the disciples cannot be one “in diversity, then they cannot attest to the oneness of God.” Ethnic diversity included Jews and Gentiles. 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. Keener believes that the perfect tense of the participle indicates an established reality that exists and that the disciples only need to guard it. Thus, the oneness empowers followers to be unified in spirit and mission to love those who hate them.

Oneness and unity extend beyond the current disciples to “those who will believe in Me through their word.” 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 life to every connected individual always. Thus, the conveying of the I/you relationship to they is central to longevity and effectiveness.

Glory is presented as a circle. The Father gives glory to Jesus, He gives it to believers, and they glorify the Father. Essentially, Jesus shares everything He received (love, glory, authority) and knew (word) from the Father with the disciples. Jesus desires the disciples to dwell with Him where He is, there they will behold Jesus’ glory in the present and receive it. 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

Deborah F. Jenks is president of Dynamic Journey Leadership Consulting. She provides consulting, training and resources in leader development, organizational design, and creativity to facilitate global clients to see and proactively respond to an emerging future. For churches and Christian organizations, she activates believers to be leaders who take hold of the substance of the heavenly realm to bring transformation on the earth. She earned her B.A. from Trinity College, CT and M.S. from Drexel University. Deborah is a third-year doctoral candidate in Strategic Leadership at Regent University. Her first book First Things First, Walking in God’s Ways: Passion was published in 2002. Her research interests include: the practical importance of biblical values in leaders and the process of transformation in individuals and organizations. She currently consults to government, non-profit, and private sector clients. She is an ordained minister and former missionary. Email: deborah220331@verizon.net.
Bibliography


Gibbs, James M. “Chiastic Structuring,” http://newtestamentresearch.com/NT%20Research-Mk%202/chiastic_structuring.htm#p2


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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 93-95 C.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].
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.
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.
16 John 17:3, 8, 18, 21, 23, 25. Malina, 244.
17 This sentness 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.
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.
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 loves.” [Richard J. Foster. Celebration of Discipline, The Path to Spiritual Growth (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1978), 30].
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.
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.
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. 
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].