



Kingdom Continuity Leadership Discontinuity

Biblical examples to inform and inspire during potentially stressful times of transitional change

BY RON BROWN

LEADERS COME AND GO BUT THE KINGDOM OF GOD CONTINUES

How would this church ever survive this leadership loss without a tremendous hemorrhage of people?

As things turned out, my beloved pastor went on to extremely fruitful ministry elsewhere. God healed the rifts, and today my church exhibits great spiritual health and vitality.

One Sunday morning, many years ago, my beloved pastor got up to speak. My mind filled with grief and dismay when I realized what he was saying—he was resigning.

What would happen to resolve some of the troubling events currently plaguing my church? Who could ever replace this man with his amazing expository gifts?

The fact is that discontinuity in leadership is inevitable in every church. How are we, as followers of Christ, to respond when we face these inevitable but sometimes stressful transitions in leadership?

The one sure way to emerge from these potentially turbulent times is to be informed and inspired by biblical examples of continuity and discontinuity in leadership. As we read Scripture, we can be reminded of one absolute certainty—leaders come and go, but the Kingdom of God continues.

Moses, Samuel, John the Baptist—each of these biblical leaders and many more—experienced the moment when their leadership was discontinued and another leader carried the baton forward in Kingdom continuity.

They each ended their tenure differently, and their followers found themselves in transition as they adjusted their expectations and learned to follow a new leader.

Think of Moses and his followers. Moses had always been there. For a generation, he was the only leader known to his tribe. When he died, his baton was passed to Joshua, a leader whose image must have paled in comparison to that of the giant Moses. It would be easy to imagine the insecurity Moses' followers could have felt.

Moses had been such a great leader—he had held his rod out over the Red Sea, he hit the rock for water, he brought tablets down from Mount Sinai, twice. Yet, despite all these successes, perhaps some of his followers were always aware that the Promised Land goal had not been achieved.

Moses did things Joshua could never do and Joshua did things Moses had never done. In fact, Joshua even succeeded where Moses had failed—Joshua led the tribe across the Jordan and achieved the Promised Land goal.

Long before that goal was achieved, the children of Israel could easily have thought, “God has so far always spoken through the great leader Moses. Would God speak through another?”

We see early in the book of Joshua that God did choose to speak through another, and tribal loyalty began to shift from Moses to Joshua as people witnessed a confirming miracle—crossing the Jordan took place under the new leader's direction.

A less amiable baton-passing event happened between Samuel, Saul and David. Each of these men was a compelling leader to be sure. And while there seemed to be an uneasy transition between Samuel and Saul, real hatred existed in Saul and David's transition. But despite this dysfunction, God's Kingdom prevailed, and it was the Son of David who became our Messiah.

John the Baptist and Jesus are two leaders who met in transition, but in terms of stature, they stood very different in influence. John the Baptist foretold and baptized while Jesus incarnated the very Gospel John proclaimed.

Expectations were high that Jesus would usher in a new political kingdom, but after three short, impactful ministry years, the continuity of the movement was put into the hands of the Twelve as the physical presence of Jesus was discontinued.

Jesus had closure in mind from the beginning. He prioritized. He didn't heal every sick person, he didn't visit every home. What he did was invest heavy allotments of time in the training of the Twelve, his chosen successors, who would carry on the leadership of the movement.

These biblical examples not only illustrate continuity and discontinuity in leadership, but also contain three nuances which deliver timeless counsel to those of us in

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leadership and to those of us who follow.

First, wilderness experiences often seem to be part of leadership continuity and even discontinuity. Different leadership purposes can be achieved in the desert. For Jesus, it was the place of a spiritual battle and preparing himself for his final triumph. For Moses, it was first a place of preparation for ministry. Later, for both Joshua and Moses, it was a place of proving God's faithfulness.

Second, we see that the call to leadership comes while these men were involved in the natural course of their occupations—Joshua as military leader, David as shepherd, Jesus as carpenter and some disciples as fishermen. Could this fact serve to remind us to place an equal value on the origins of all our

leaders? Should not affirmation be our swift

response when we see the non-traditional paths some people take to leadership positions?

Third, we note differences in length of leadership. John and Jesus have brief, high-impact ministries and then face discontinuity. Moses, Joshua, David, and most disciples served until old age. Although we rightly celebrate productive longevity in Christian leadership, let us value no less the leaders who faithfully serve for shorter periods of time.

Today's church faces continuity/discontinuity on a regular basis. Pastors and leaders come and go. We have examples of both brief, high-impact and longer-term leadership. Even wilderness or desert experiences can be seen to have a purpose and place in ministry and leadership formation. The Bible also shows God's sovereignty in calling leaders from non-traditional career paths.

In the light of Scripture's examples, it is abundantly clear that God's Kingdom continues to come, despite many and varied examples of continuity and discontinuity in church leadership.

In our 32-year history as The Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada, our Movement has been well-served by three leaders: Melvin Sylvester, Arnold Cook and Franklin Pyles.

As we assemble in Winnipeg, we will participate in another continuity/discontinuity event. One leader's role will be discontinued as we, the people, guided by God, will hand the leadership baton to another.

As we witness this leadership transition, we joyfully anticipate that the Movement we long to be will continue its transforming work in Canada and around the world. 🙏

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