



Insights on Leadership Succession from the Bible: A Guide for Ghanaian Churches

Richard Osei Akoto¹ 

¹ Department of Religious Studies, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana.

ABSTRACT

This study explored the critical theme of leadership succession within Ghanaian Churches, drawing insights from the rich narratives of the Bible. The purpose of the study was to provide a comprehensive guide for Ghanaian Churches to navigate the complexities of leadership transition effectively, ensuring continuity and sustainability. Methodology-wise, the research employed a qualitative approach, delving deep into biblical narratives and extracting principles and lessons relevant to leadership succession. Findings revealed that the Bible offers a wealth of wisdom on leadership succession, emphasizing the importance of preparation, mentorship, and divine guidance. It underscored the significance of character, vision alignment, and the involvement of the wider community in the process. Based on these findings, the study offered several recommendations tailored to the Ghanaian Church context. These include the establishment of structured mentorship programmes, the cultivation of leadership pipelines, and the implementation of transparent and inclusive succession processes. This research highlights the relevance of biblical principles in addressing contemporary challenges facing leadership succession in Ghanaian Churches; it integrates timeless wisdom with modern insights. It underscores the importance of proactive planning, spiritual discernment, and communal participation in ensuring smooth leadership transitions for the long-term health and growth of Ghanaian Churches. The study contributes to the scholarship on leadership development and organizational sustainability within religious institutions.

Correspondence

Richard Osei-Akoto

Email: richiegodbless14@gmail.com

Publication History

Received 22nd February, 2024

Accepted 16th May, 2024

Published online 21st May, 2024

Keywords: *Traits, Leadership, Leadership crisis, Succession, Contemporary Churches, Lessons*

INTRODUCTION

Leadership succession within religious institutions, particularly within Ghanaian Churches, is a topic of paramount importance. As these churches play a central role in the spiritual, social, and cultural fabric of Ghanaian society, the effective transition of leadership holds significant implications for their continued growth and impact. Ghanaian Churches have a rich history rooted in faith, community, and tradition. Over the years, these churches have evolved into dynamic institutions, serving as centers of worship, education, and social welfare. Central to the success of these churches is the leadership provided by pastors, ministers, and elders who guide congregations in matters of faith and practice. However, the transition of leadership within these churches has often been a challenging and complex process, with implications for continuity, stability, and effectiveness.

Despite the significance of leadership succession within Ghanaian Churches, there exists a notable gap in knowledge regarding best practices, principles, and strategies for navigating this critical transition. While various resources and frameworks exist for leadership succession in secular organizations, there is a distinct lack of guidance tailored to the unique context of Ghanaian Churches. This gap hinders the ability of church leaders to effectively plan, prepare, and execute leadership transitions, leading to potential disruptions, conflicts, and inefficiencies within congregations.

The problem addressed by this study is the absence of a comprehensive and culturally relevant guide for Ghanaian Churches to navigate leadership succession using insights from the Bible. Without adequate guidance and support, church leaders may struggle to identify suitable successors, establish transparent processes, and ensure the seamless transfer of leadership responsibilities. This problem poses a significant challenge to the long-term sustainability and growth of Ghanaian Churches, impacting their ability to fulfill their mission and serve their communities effectively.

The primary objective of this study is to fill the gap in knowledge by providing Ghanaian Churches with practical insights and guidance drawn from the narratives of the Bible. Specifically, the research aims to: Identify biblical principles and lessons relevant to leadership succession within the Ghanaian Church context, explore contemporary challenges and opportunities related to leadership succession through the lens of biblical wisdom, provide recommendations and best practices for Ghanaian Churches to develop effective leadership succession plans and processes, and contribute to the scholarship on leadership development and organizational sustainability within religious institutions, with a focus on the Ghanaian context.

METHODOLOGY

This research is qualitative in nature. The qualitative approach was utilized to explore literature on the perceptions, experiences, and challenges related to leadership succession in Ghanaian churches. The qualitative data collected were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques. The thematic analysis technique is utilized to examine and elucidate the principal issues pertaining to the succession of leadership within the context of this study.

DISCUSSION

The focal areas of concern regarding leadership succession encompass the following:

Leadership

In answering the question “What is leadership” Ted W. Engstrom answers that there is no clear-cut definition of leadership but the closest definition that seems to come to a broadly acceptable definition of leadership is, what leaders do. He goes on to define who a leader is as anyone who leads.¹ Defining authentic leadership can be a complex task. However, one trait consistently shared by leaders is their capacity to effect change within their sphere of influence. This transformation occurs when each person working under their leadership feels motivated and inspired, enabling them to tap into their potential and make valuable contributions.

Lepeau, in citing Truman, elucidates the notion that a true leader possesses the capacity to motivate individuals to undertake tasks they might not naturally prefer and yet, develop an affinity for them. However, he acknowledges that this dynamic can sometimes evoke discomfort as it might appear that leaders' motivations are primarily self-serving. Lepeau juxtaposes Truman's observation with the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, who regarded perseverance as the quintessence of leadership: "Enduring misrepresentations and resolutely adhering to one's convictions despite adversities – this epitomizes leadership."

Lepeau, in his exploration of leadership, highlights diverse perspectives. Tacitus, an ancient Roman historian, views reason and a composed mindset as the essential characteristics of a leader. On the other hand, Napoleon, the renowned French emperor, asserts that a leader primarily serves as a purveyor of hope. Lao-tse, an ancient Chinese philosopher, offers a distinctive perspective by

¹ W. T. Engstrom, *The Making of a Christian Leader Grand Rapids* (Michigan: Zondervan, 1976), 19.

suggesting that a leader is most effective when their influence is subtle and barely perceptible. Lastly, Andrew Je Peau characterizes leadership as the ability of an individual to guide or influence a group to achieve its objectives, all for the sake of divine glorification.²

In this context, LePeau directs attention not to individual leaders but rather to the concept of leadership itself. In any given group, any member can demonstrate leadership by engaging in actions that contribute to the group's well-being and objectives, whether it be suggesting a plan of action or offering praise. The act of providing assistance and achieving goals is not solely confined to those holding formal leadership roles. While leadership may be tied to specific positions such as president, coordinator, parent, teacher, or pastor, its fundamental nature lies in the fulfillment of various functions, such as serving, initiating, planning, motivating, teaching, and the like. Although the concept of hierarchical positions cannot be disregarded, the central emphasis of this discussion is on the role that functions play. The critical questions that emerge are concerned with how needs are addressed and how objectives are realized.

It appears that Oswald Sanders concurs with Lepeau's understanding of leadership. Sanders defines leadership as the capacity to exert influence, the ability of one individual to sway others' opinions and behaviors. He supports this definition by citing notable figures who have demonstrated significant influence in their respective domains. For instance, Lord Montgomery characterizes leadership as the combination of having the will and ability to galvanize individuals toward a shared objective, along with possessing a character that instills confidence. Dr. John R. Mott, an influential figure within the student community on a global scale, defines leadership as the skill of guiding others, maintaining a lead, and motivating others to follow.³

In essence, these definitions converge to emphasize the centrality of influence in the understanding of leadership. A leader's capacity to compel others to pursue a particular objective is the essence of leadership, as acknowledged by the authors of these definitions. This assertion aligns with my understanding of leadership, as a leader necessarily requires followers, and the ability to persuade and motivate others to follow is a prerequisite to leadership.

Leighton Ford echoes the aforementioned view by raising two fundamental questions: "What motivates us to follow particular individuals?" and "What distinguishes someone as a leader?" In response, he identifies two key factors that underpin leadership: first, leaders demonstrate initiative by introducing ideas and strategies that others can adopt; and second, leaders inspire followership by showing empathy and regard for those under their guidance.⁴

Richard Chase delves into the essential traits of leadership, delineating them into three overarching categories: competency, personal character, and authentic concern for others. He argues that this tripartite framework can be traced back to Aristotle and is consistent with biblical principles. As an example, Chase refers to Apostle Paul's use of this structure in 1 Corinthians 9, where Paul first highlights his competency, then his genuine concern for others, and finally underscores his character. In his perspective, effective leadership is not just about making decisions and taking action; rather, it encompasses these key elements. If leaders demonstrate competence, exhibit authentic concern for others, and exhibit commendable character, they will naturally inspire followership, leading people to say, "I am inspired by this individual's actions and decisions. I choose to follow their example."⁵

Engstrom lists several characteristics that he believes are important for effective leadership. These include having a desire for achievement, being willing to accept authority, practicing self-discipline, being creative, delegating tasks, making decisions decisively, persisting in the face of obstacles, maintaining a balanced life, and having faith and engaging in prayer.⁶

The position of this paper is that, the most important quality for effective leadership is personal integrity. Although the traits outlined by both Richard Chase and Engstrom are not exhaustive, this

² A. T. Lepeau, *Paths of Leadership: Guiding Others towards Growth in Christ through Serving, Following, Teaching, Modeling and Envisioning* (USA: Intervarsity Press, 1983).

³ J. O. Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1967), 19.

⁴ Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, 19.

⁵ Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, 19.

⁶ W. T. Engstrom, *The Making of a Christian Leader*, 19.

study is of the view that a combination of these traits, as described by both individuals, is vital for achieving excellence in leadership. In the realm of secular or worldly leadership versus spiritual leadership, Chua Wee Hian argues that there is a distinct contrast between the two. He notes that while political leaders often wield significant power and expect obedience from their subjects, they also seek popularity and can be prone to using their authority in an assertive manner. However, he contends that spiritual leadership operates differently, emphasizing service and a servant-leadership model as demonstrated by Christ. To underline this new paradigm, Jesus posed a rhetorical question: "Which is more esteemed, the one seated at the table or the one serving? Isn't it the one at the table?" He did not require an answer as He immediately stated, "I am among you as one who serves." Jesus adopted the position of a servant, signifying that being a servant is not at odds with being Lord. He further articulated this perspective by saying, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."⁷

According to Chua Wee Hian, leadership as a concept is relatively recent. In the Bible, the term "leader" or "leaders" is infrequently used, yet its significance is pervasive. Nonetheless, leadership is now a prominent topic of discussion in contemporary discourse.⁸

Sanders posits that spiritual leadership is an amalgamation of inherent and divine qualities. Even those traits deemed "natural" are not inherently self-grown, but rather bestowed by God. As such, these traits are most effective when utilized in service to God and aligned with His Glory.⁹

Spiritual leadership shares some attributes with natural leadership, but it also includes other factors that are more vital and influential. In natural leadership, personality is a critical aspect. As Lord Montgomery asserted, a person's influence is shaped by their personality, the strength of their inner convictions, the passion that drives them, and the charisma that attracts others. On the other hand, a spiritual leader's influence goes beyond the mere force of their personality. They exert influence through a personality that is illuminated and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Spiritual leadership is about possessing a higher spiritual authority, which is never self-derived.¹⁰

Leadership Crisis

Contemporary society, both nationally and globally, confronts formidable challenges like the absence of effective security and defense measures. Particularly concerning is the condition of the youth, who represent the forthcoming generation of leaders; many are grappling with confusion, alienation, and a sense of disheartenment. Ethical principles have become increasingly scarce. The escalating national debt, insolvency of nations, fiscal difficulties within cities, and economic volatility instill mounting apprehension on a daily basis. The profound challenges confronting this generation can be traced back to the issue of a leadership crisis.¹¹

It is noteworthy that the problem of leadership crisis is not confined to the secular realm but also affects religious institutions, including the Church. This crisis, alongside several others, is rooted primarily in a deficiency of proactive, transformative, and innovative leadership. Karl Jaspers' words resonate ominously in today's context: "The authority of leadership seems to be diminishing universally; an increasing number of individuals we observe attaining prominence seem to be directionless and adrift".¹² He additionally asserts that this leads to a sense of powerlessness within a collective leadership structure that remains opaque to the public eye.

Considering the severe challenges facing society, there is a profound call for accountable leadership within the Christian community. Mere rationalization, such as relying on the belief that God will handle the world's affairs or that Christ's return is imminent, exacerbates the pressing issues and undermines the standing of the Christian community, which possesses the requisite qualities to elevate and guide a struggling generation. It is the divine will for the Church to possess competent and

⁷ Lepeau, *Paths of Leadership: Guiding Others towards Growth in Christ through Serving, Following, Teaching, Modeling and Envisioing*.

⁸ Hian Wee Chua, *The Making of a Leader: A Guide Book for Present and Future Leaders* (Illinois: Downers Grove, 1987).

⁹ Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, 146.

¹⁰ Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, 146.

¹¹ Engstrom, *The Making of a Christian Leader*.

¹² A. D Bruce, *The Training of Leadership* (New York: Vantage Press, 1972).

impactful leadership. Jesus Himself is described as one of the greatest leaders that ever walked on the surface of the earth. According to Engstrom, any study of Christian leadership is incomplete unless the life of Christ is studied. As a leader, Jesus brought a new meaning and dimension of leadership – that is servant leadership (Mark 10:42 – 44).

The essence of true greatness and leadership lies in dedicating oneself to serving others, rather than persuading or manipulating others to serve oneself. Jesus epitomized this leadership principle with his own words, "For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45, Luke 22:27). His exemplary service is demonstrated when he humbly washed his disciples' feet as a symbol of servant leadership. His flawless, sinless human existence culminated in the ultimate act of self-sacrifice at Calvary.¹³

Jesus was not only a remarkable leader but also demonstrated a deep concern for developing leaders who would continue his work in his absence – a concept known as succession. He was committed to ensuring that there would be no void in leadership after his departure, so he selected and trained the twelve disciples to care for those who had placed their faith in him. Jesus recognized the importance of succession in leadership and spent significant time with the disciples, aiming to impart lessons through his life examples. Chua Wee Hian notes that during this relatively brief period, Jesus devoted himself to preparing the twelve for the task of spreading his message worldwide.¹⁴¹⁵

One of the challenges facing the church is a crisis in leadership, often stemming from issues in succession planning. Before any strategies for leadership succession can be implemented, current leaders need to comprehend the "signs of the times" as outlined in 2 Timothy 4:1-4. One pertinent sign relevant to today's church is the imperative for maintaining "sound doctrines." The Apostle Paul's admonition serves as a reminder that the church risks losing its apostolic vision and mission when it becomes inundated with secular cultural philosophies. Conversely, it will require spiritually minded leadership within the church to effectively advocate for relevance to the culture and community in which it operates. George Barna's analogy of "The frog in the kettle" offers a vivid illustration of the potential trajectory of the church in the year 2000.¹³ Ten years ago, Barna posed the question: Will the Christian community resemble the frog that was cooked due to its failure to adapt to the changing environment?

Leadership Succession Issues/problems

One of the significant challenges that Ghanaian churches are grappling with is the issue of leadership succession. Extensive literature exists in the field of leadership studies. Chua Wee Hian posits that the concept of leadership is relatively recent. While the term "leader" or "leaders" is rarely mentioned in the Bible, its essence is prevalent.¹⁶ Nevertheless, in contemporary society, leadership has emerged as a crucial focus. Efforts in leadership development, the organization of leadership conferences, and the proliferation of leadership literature are abundant. Yet, comparatively less attention has been devoted to addressing leadership succession. The world finds itself at a pivotal juncture in history. Many of the pioneering leaders within the churches and Christian organizations are approaching the conclusion of their ministries.¹⁷ Hence the need to get the right leaders to succeed them. Unfortunately, most Churches in Ghana have entered the realm of conflict, division and power struggle, and even in some cases for example, the Church collapses all because of leadership succession problems. The consequences of this have seen some Churches washing their dirty linen in the law courts, on radio, and on television. In Churches with no clear- cut leadership succession plan, everything revolves around the charismatic leader or the founder. He controls and directs everything without putting in place any proper leadership structure. As a result, in his absence: a vacuum is created. In addition to this, even Churches with some sort of leadership succession plan are not exonerated from these challenges. After serving his tenure of office, a leader will want to hand over to his children, relatives

¹³ Engstrom, *The Making of a Christian Leader*, 37.

¹⁴ Chua, *The Making of a Leader: A Guide Book for Present and Future Leaders*, 123.

¹⁵ Chua, *The Making of a Leader: A Guide Book for Present and Future Leaders*, 123.

¹⁶ Chua, *The Making of a Leader: A Guide Book for Present and Future Leaders*, 123.

¹⁷ Chua, *The Making of a Leader: A Guide Book for Present and Future Leaders*, 124.

and favorites to ensure that leadership remains within his fold/family. It is obvious that most churches in Ghana are confronted with the problem of leadership succession.

Many of these churches lack a definitive leadership succession strategy. Upon the passing of the founder or current leader, these churches often encounter turmoil and power struggles. A recent example is the Jubilee Christian Center, led by Bishop Bob Hawkson, where the question of succession posed a challenge due to the absence of a well-defined succession plan. Conversely, traditional churches like the Methodist Church and the Presbyterian Church tend to fare better in terms of leadership succession. In the Methodist Church, for instance, when an individual is granted the honor of being a Diocese Bishop or even the Presiding Bishop after completing their term in office, they are expected to step down, allowing the church to elect a new leader. This practice was evident in 2009 when Rev. Prof. Emmanuel Asante succeeded Rev. Dr. Robert Aboagye Mensah as the new Presiding Bishop of the Methodist Church Ghana. Similarly, in the Catholic Church, Pope Benedict XVI resigned due to his advanced age, in accordance with the established succession plan. Subsequently, the cardinals promptly convened to elect a new Pope, Pope Francis. However, these churches still grapple with issues and complexities surrounding leadership succession.

Regarding leadership succession and transitions, a particular source, "The Elephant in the Board Room," provides a comprehensive view and strongly encourages pastors or elders to initiate discussions on this "significant topic" with individuals grappling with leadership succession.¹⁸ The researcher is likely to confront obstacles such as a firm adherence to traditions and resistance to change. Additionally, individuals may be hesitant to step out of their comfort zones and take the lead in addressing the ongoing changes in culture. The author's primary objective is to persuade pastors, elders, boards, and churches regarding the necessity of preparing for the potentiality of leadership succession. A successful transition in leadership is contingent upon various factors, including a meticulously planned transition process. The author's emphasis on this subject matter implies that effective leadership transitions do not occur randomly or instantaneously; rather, they require a premeditated and internal procedure developed by the Church.¹⁹

In "Leaders on Leadership," Barna advocates for a well-planned transition in leadership succession.²⁰ Barna highlights the significance of a smoothly executed transition, asserting that an organization's credibility can suffer if the transition is handled poorly, potentially draining energy and resources for an extended period.²¹ For any ministry, regardless of its scale or purpose, meticulous planning and execution of the leadership transition are crucial. Without a seamless succession, achieving long-term success is unlikely. Barna draws attention to the fact that although "succession" follows "success" in the dictionary, this is not always the case in reality.²² While numerous books have been published on achieving success, there is a notable dearth of literature on the subject of succession. Barna's examination of the essential components of a successful succession aligns with the perspectives expressed in "The Elephant in the Board Room."

In every instance of leadership transition, three primary participants are involved: the current leader, the governing board, and the incoming leader. For the transition to proceed smoothly, be productive, and achieve success, each participant must actively engage. Within each realm, a particular mindset must be cultivated, decisions must be made, tasks must be executed, and obstacles must be overcome. If all three participants are successful in their roles, they will be able to collectively celebrate the positive outcome.

Leadership Succession in the Old Testament (Moses to Joshua).

¹⁸ Adrian Furnham, *The Elephant in the Boardroom: The Causes of Leadership Derailment* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 89.

¹⁹ Furnham, *The Elephant in the Boardroom: The Causes of Leadership Derailment*, 89.

²⁰ Barna, *The Frog in the Kettle*, 21-22.

²¹ Barna, *The Frog in the Kettle*, 21-22.

²² Barna, George (1990). *The Frog in the kettle*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books. Pp. 21 – 22

Leadership succession in the Old Testament from Moses to Joshua is a significant event in the history of the Israelites. Moses, the great prophet and leader who brought the Israelites out of Egypt and led them through the wilderness, had appointed Joshua as his successor before his death. This succession is recorded in the book of Deuteronomy in the Old Testament. In the book of Genesis, chapter 12, God issued a covenant to Abraham, stipulating that salvation for humanity would originate through him. This promise encompassed the bestowment of Canaan to Abraham's progeny, a land wherein the future savior would be born. Subsequently, God tasked Moses with liberating the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, an essential precursor to their occupation of the Promised Land. Although Moses succeeded in leading his people out of Egypt, his personal disobedience precluded him from entering Canaan (Deuteronomy 32:48–52). Nonetheless, God's covenant with Abraham remained unaffected by Moses' death.²³

Moses was not allowed to enter the Promised Land because he had disobeyed God, so before his death, he transferred his authority to Joshua. Shortly before his death, Moses implored God to designate a successor to guide the Israelites after his passing, as recorded in the Book of Numbers (Numbers 27:16-17). God directed Moses to appoint Joshua, an individual who had already undergone extensive preparation over several years, as evidenced by the presence of God's spirit within him. God had initiated Joshua's training four decades earlier, evidently preparing him for the arduous task of leading the Israelites to claim their inheritance of the Promised Land. Thorough scrutiny of Joshua's maturation throughout the Pentateuch supports this assertion.²⁴ In Deuteronomy 31:7-8, Moses addressed the Israelites and said, "Be strong and courageous, for you must go with this people into the land that the Lord swore to their ancestors to give them, and you must divide it among them as their inheritance. The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged."

Joshua's initial appearance in the scriptural account occurs in Exodus 17:8–16, where Moses chooses Joshua to lead the Israelite army in a conflict against the Amalekites. This passage depicts Moses' discernment of Joshua's natural aptitude for leadership, and it suggests that God had been grooming Joshua to become a formidable warrior. Consequently, Joshua's development as both a leader and a warrior was crucial for his successful navigation of the Israelites into the Promised Land.²⁵

Joshua is also referenced in Exodus 24:13, as he ascends the mountain with Moses to receive the Ten Commandments. In this context, Joshua's role is defined as Moses' assistant, with Moses assuming the mantle of mentor to Joshua. During the episode of the golden calf, Joshua is noted to have been in close proximity to Moses when the latter shattered the two tablets (Exodus 32:19).²⁶

Joshua assumed the duty of protecting the tent of meeting, which served as the venue for Moses' encounters with God (Exodus 33:11). This responsibility not only advanced Joshua's military acumen but also exposed him to the divine communication between God and Moses, thereby fostering his spiritual growth. Joshua would often linger in the sacred space even after Moses departed to return to the camp.

Joshua bore witness to the occasion when the Lord endowed the spirit of leadership upon seventy individuals (Numbers 11:17). During an instance where two men were prophesying within the camp, which diverged from Moses' guidelines, Joshua sought Moses' counsel to address the situation (Numbers 11:28). However, Joshua displayed reluctance in condemning these men, considering them elders, and voiced his concern for Moses' authority (Numbers 11:29).²⁷

Moses selected Joshua as one of the 12 individuals commissioned to survey the land (Numbers 13:8). Among these 12, only Joshua and Caleb conveyed a positive account of their observations. Upon hearing the discouraging reports of the remaining 10, Joshua and Caleb expressed their dismay and implored the Israelites to desist from disobedience towards the Lord (Numbers 14:6–9). As a result of

²³ Frank E. Gaebelain, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: The Zondervan Corporation, 1984).

²⁴ John J. Davis, *Moses and the Gods of Egypt*, 2nd ed. (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1986).

²⁵ Davis, *Moses and the Gods of Egypt*.

²⁶ C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1996).

²⁷ Arthur W. Pink, *Gleanings in Joshua* (Chicago: Moody, 1981).

their steadfast faith in the Lord, only Caleb and Joshua were granted access to the Promised Land (Numbers 14:38).

After Joshua had demonstrated his character, proven himself in various leadership roles, and received direct revelations from God, the Lord decided to elevate him to even greater leadership responsibilities. This occurred just before Moses' death (Numbers 27:18–23) and was later reiterated and affirmed in Joshua 1:1–18 (following Moses' death).²⁸ God had infused Joshua with His Spirit, indicating God's choice and His provision for leadership. Moses had Joshua stand before the priest Eleazar and publicly commissioned him in the presence of the people. Moses then laid his hands on Joshua, transferring a portion of his own authority to him. Following this event, there was no doubt that Joshua was the chosen leader of Israel following Moses' passing.²⁹

Joshua as the new leader of Israel led them across the Jordan River and into the Promised Land, where he continued the work that Moses had started. Joshua's leadership was marked by his faithfulness to God and his commitment to following God's commands. Under his leadership, the Israelites conquered the land of Canaan and established themselves as a powerful nation in the region. The transition from Moses to Joshua was a crucial moment in Israelite history. It marked the passing of the torch from one great leader to another and demonstrated God's faithfulness to His promises. It also set the stage for the next chapter in the story of the Israelites as they settled in the Promised Land and established their kingdom.

Leadership Succession in the New Testament (Jesus to Peter)

The succession of leadership from Jesus to Peter is a significant aspect of early Christian history as recorded in the New Testament. The foundation of this leadership transition is depicted in the Gospels, particularly in Matthew 16:13-20, which recounts Jesus' declaration to Peter that he would be the rock upon which the Christian Church would be built:

"Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

This passage is often interpreted as Jesus appointing Peter as the foundation of the Christian Church and entrusting him with the authority to lead and guide the Church. The mention of "keys of the kingdom of heaven" has been interpreted as a reference to authority and leadership.³⁰ Additionally, in the Gospel of John, we see Jesus commissioning Peter to "feed my lambs" and "take care of my sheep," symbolizing Peter's role as a shepherd and leader among the early Christians (John 21:15-17). After Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, Peter played a prominent role in the early Christian community, as seen in the Book of Acts. He was one of the leading figures among the apostles, taking a central role in the establishment of the Church and preaching the message of Jesus to both Jews and Gentiles.³¹

The succession of leadership from Jesus to Peter is a pivotal moment in the Christian faith, signifying the passing of the mantle of leadership from the founder of the Christian faith to one of his closest disciples. This transition is particularly significant for several reasons:

Appointment of Peter as the Rock: Jesus appointed Simon Peter as the leader of the apostles and the Church. In Matthew 16:18-19, Jesus said to Peter, "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose

²⁸ Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament* .

²⁹ Pink, *Gleanings in Joshua*, 189.

³⁰ Walter A. Elwell, "Primacy of Peter," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Baker Academic, 2001), 34–35.

³¹ Elwell, "Primacy of Peter."

on earth shall be loosed in heaven." This declaration is traditionally understood as Jesus' commissioning of Peter as the leader of the early Christian community.³²

Leader among Equals: Although Peter was appointed as the leader, it's important to note that he was not the sole authority. The apostles worked together in a collegial manner, with Peter often taking a leading role. However, he was still subject to the collective authority of the apostles and elders in Jerusalem (Acts 15).³³

Foundation of Apostolic Succession: The Catholic Church and other denominations view Peter's leadership as the foundation of apostolic succession, which is the concept that the authority passed down from the apostles to their successors (bishops) is essential for the continuity and preservation of the Christian faith. The Pope, who is seen as the successor of Peter, holds a special place of authority in the Catholic Church.³⁴

Shepherd of the Flock: In John 21:15-17, Jesus instructs Peter to "Feed my lambs," "Tend my sheep," and "Feed my sheep." This metaphorical language illustrates Peter's role as a shepherd caring for the spiritual well-being of the faithful.³⁵

Crucial Role in Early Church: Throughout the book of Acts, Peter is depicted as a prominent figure in the early Christian community. He preached the first sermon on the Day of Pentecost, which led to the conversion of thousands (Acts 2:14-41). He also played a crucial role in the inclusion of Gentiles into the Church (Acts 10).³⁶

Martyrdom: Tradition holds that Peter was martyred in Rome under Emperor Nero. He was crucified upside down at his own request, as he deemed himself unworthy to die in the same manner as Jesus.

Key Insights for Contemporary Churches in Ghana

The lessons from the Bible on leadership succession are highly relevant to contemporary churches in Ghana. As these churches grapple with the challenge of transitioning to new leadership, they can draw inspiration and guidance from biblical examples. Incorporating mentorship programs, prayerful discernment, and a commitment to shared vision and values can enhance the success of leadership transitions. The following are the key lessons that contemporary churches in Ghana can use for leadership succession.

Identify and Train Emerging Leaders

Ghanaian churches must identify individuals with leadership potential and invest in their development through mentorship, training, and practical opportunities for growth. Identifying and training emerging leaders is a key aspect of effective leadership succession planning. This lesson underscores the importance of recognizing potential leaders within the organization and providing them with the necessary support and training to prepare them for future leadership roles. By identifying and training emerging leaders, Churches can ensure a pipeline of talent that is ready to step into leadership roles when the time comes. This approach helps to minimize disruptions during leadership transitions and ensures continuity and stability within the Church.³⁷

Promote Diversity in Leadership

The biblical narrative showcases diverse leaders with unique gifts and strengths. Ghanaian churches can benefit from diverse leadership teams that reflect the community's demographics and needs. Promoting diversity in leadership is one of the lessons of leadership succession in the church. This lesson underscores the importance of creating leadership teams that are diverse in terms of gender,

³² John Engler, "The Rock-Foundation of Matthew 16:17-20," 2016, [Archivewww.archive.org](http://www.archive.org).

³³ John Meyendorff, *The Primacy of Peter in the Orthodox Church* (Crestwood NY.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1963).

³⁴ Kesich Veselin, "Peter's Primacy in the New Testament and the Early Tradition," in *The Primacy of Peter* (Crestwood: NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1992), 67-90.

³⁵ Laurent Cleenewerck, *His Broken Body: Understanding and Healing the Schism Between the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches: An Orthodox Perspective* (Euclid University Press, 2007).

³⁶ E. Giles, *Documents Illustrating Papal Authority: A.D. 96-454*. (London: S.P.C.K., 1952).

³⁷ Victor M. Davis, "An Alternative Model for Pastoral Succession in the African American Baptist Church in Lieu of Congregational Voting" (United Theological Seminary, Minneapolis, 2006).

ethnicity, age, and other characteristics. By promoting diversity in leadership, churches can create more inclusive, effective, and innovative environments that are better equipped to meet the needs of their congregations.³⁸

Establish Clear Succession Plans

Leadership transitions should be carefully planned and communicated to the congregation. This includes the designation of successors, training and support for the new leader, and the establishment of transition processes.

Establishing clear succession plans is paramount in ensuring smooth leadership transitions within the church. A clear succession plan outlines the process for identifying, grooming, and transitioning new leaders into key roles within the church's leadership structure. Without such plans in place, the church risks facing uncertainty, confusion, and potential disruptions when leadership changes occur. Clear succession plans provide a roadmap for the orderly transfer of leadership responsibilities from one leader to the next. This involves identifying potential successors, providing them with the necessary training and mentorship, and gradually transitioning them into their new roles. By establishing clear expectations and timelines for leadership succession, the church can minimize disruptions and ensure continuity in its leadership.³⁹ Moreover, clear succession plans help to foster transparency and accountability within the church's leadership structure. When succession plans are openly communicated and understood by all stakeholders, there is greater confidence in the leadership transition process. This transparency helps to build trust among church members and minimizes concerns about favoritism or arbitrary decision-making. Additionally, clear succession plans demonstrate a commitment to the long-term health and stability of the church. By proactively planning for leadership changes, the church can mitigate risks associated with sudden departures or unexpected vacancies in key leadership positions. This proactive approach allows the church to maintain momentum and focus on its mission and goals, even during times of transition.

Overall, establishing clear succession plans is essential for ensuring effective leadership succession in the church. By providing a framework for identifying, developing, and transitioning new leaders, these plans help to minimize disruptions, foster transparency, and demonstrate a commitment to the church's long-term success and growth.⁴⁰

Cultivate a Culture of Servant Leadership

Biblical leaders, including Jesus, exemplified servant leadership. Ghanaian churches should prioritize humility, empathy, and a commitment to serving others in their leadership practices. Cultivating a culture of servant leadership is a foundational principle in leadership succession within the church. This lesson emphasizes the importance of leadership that prioritizes serving others and exemplifies the humility and sacrificial attitude of Jesus Christ.

By cultivating a culture of servant leadership, churches can create an environment that is characterized by humility, empathy, collaboration, and a commitment to the well-being of others. This approach to leadership succession ensures that the values and principles of servant leadership are passed down from one generation of leaders to the next, ensuring the continued growth and impact of the church.

By fostering a culture of servant leadership, churches can create an environment where the values of humility, empathy, and service are deeply ingrained in the church's leadership and organizational culture. This approach ensures a smooth transition of leadership from one generation to the next, preserving the values and principles of servant leadership for the long-term growth and impact of the church.⁴¹

³⁸ Dean Fink, *The Succession Challenge: Building and Sustaining Leadership Capacity through Succession Management* (London: SAGE Publications, 2010).

³⁹ Fink, *The Succession Challenge: Building and Sustaining Leadership Capacity through Succession Management*.

⁴⁰ Fink, *The Succession Challenge: Building and Sustaining Leadership Capacity through Succession Management*.

⁴¹ C. Andrew. Flowers, "Leading through Succession: Why Pastoral Leadership Is the Key to a Healthy Transition" (Western Seminary, Holland, 2015).

Embrace Innovation and Adaptation

While rooted in biblical principles, leadership succession should also be adaptable to changing contexts and challenges. Ghanaian churches must be open to innovative approaches to leadership succession that align with contemporary needs and realities.⁴²

Embrace innovation and adaptation" is a crucial aspect of leadership succession within the church. This key lesson highlights the importance of leaders being open to change, embracing new ideas, and adapting to the evolving needs and challenges of the church and its congregation. This is essential for the long-term vitality and growth of the church. By remaining open to change, fostering a culture of innovation, and adapting to the evolving needs of the congregation and community, church leaders can ensure that the church remains relevant and effective in fulfilling its mission for years to come.⁴³

CONCLUSION

The Bible provides a rich and comprehensive foundation for understanding and implementing effective leadership succession in various spheres, including business, politics, and the church. By studying the narratives, principles, and teachings within the Bible, contemporary leaders can glean valuable insights that are relevant to modern leadership challenges. In exploring leadership succession through the lens of the Bible, we encounter a wealth of wisdom that transcends time, culture, and context. The scriptures offer valuable lessons for contemporary leaders and organizations, irrespective of their field of endeavor. By examining the narratives, teachings, and principles in the Bible, we can discern a holistic framework for approaching leadership succession that emphasizes stewardship, integrity, and humility.⁴⁴

Leadership succession in the Bible often revolves around the principles of mentorship, training, and preparation. Examples of this can be seen in the Old Testament with Moses preparing Joshua to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land. The process involves the recognition of emerging talent, deliberate training, and the transfer of wisdom from the older generation to the younger.⁴⁵

Additionally, the Bible underscores the importance of humility in leadership succession. Leaders are encouraged to prioritize the interests of their followers and the greater good of the organization over personal ambition. This is seen in the New Testament with Jesus washing the feet of his disciples, illustrating servant leadership.⁴⁶

Moreover, the Bible emphasizes the role of divine guidance in leadership succession. Leaders are encouraged to seek wisdom and discernment from God in making decisions about succession planning and strategy. Proverbs 16:3 says, "Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans." The Bible offers a timeless and profound guide for leadership succession, emphasizing the importance of stewardship, integrity, humility, and wisdom. By studying and applying these biblical insights, contemporary leaders can navigate the complexities of leadership succession and build organizations that are grounded in biblical values and principles.⁴⁷

The Bible provides a comprehensive guide for Ghanaian churches in navigating the process of leadership succession. By embracing the principles of identifying and training emerging leaders, promoting diversity in leadership, establishing clear succession plans, and cultivating a culture of servant leadership, churches can ensure a smooth transition and continue to thrive in fulfilling their mission and purpose.

⁴² Rowland Forman et al., *The Leadership Baton: An Intentional Strategy for Developing Leaders in Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009).

⁴³ Hans C. Googer, "Senior Pastor Succession in Multisite Churches: A Mixed Methods Study" (Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018).

⁴⁴ J Mwenje, "Succession Plan among Pentecostal Churches in Zimbabwe: A Qualitative Approach Using the Hidden and Public Transcript Theory," *International Journal of Development Research* 6, no. 4 (2016): 7588–97.

⁴⁵ Loren B Mead, *A Change of Pastors... and How It Affects Change in the Congregation* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2012).

⁴⁶ Godwin Makaudze, "African Traditional Leadership and Succession in the Post-Colonial Shona Novel," *Journal of the African Literature Association* 11, no. 2 (May 4, 2017): 210–22, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21674736.2017.1375658>.

⁴⁷ A. Homer, *Leaders in Transition: A Guide to Leadership Succession in the Church and Other Faith-Based Organisations* (Westbow Press, A division of Thomas Nelson & Zondervan: Bloomington, IN., 2016).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Barna, George. *The Frog in the Kettle*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1990.
- Bruce, A. D. *The Training of Leadership*. New York: Vantage Press, 1972.
- Chua, Hian Wee. *The Making of a Leader: A Guide Book for Present and Future Leaders*. Illinois: Downers Grove, 1987.
- Cleenewerck, Laurent. *His Broken Body: Understanding and Healing the Schism Between the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches: An Orthodox Perspective*. Euclid University Press, 2007.
- Davis, John J. *Moses and the Gods of Egypt*. 2nd ed. Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1986.
- Davis, Victor M. "An Alternative Model for Pastoral Succession in the African American Baptist Church in Lieu of Congregational Voting." United Theological Seminary, Minneapolis, 2006.
- Elwell, Walter A. "Primacy of Peter ." In *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 34–35. Baker Academic, 2001.
- Engler, John. "The Rock-Foundation of Matthew 16:17-20," 2016. [Archivewww.archive.org](http://www.archive.org).
- Engstrom, W. T. *The Making of a Christian Leader*. Grand Rapids Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976.
- Fink, Dean. *The Succession Challenge: Building and Sustaining Leadership Capacity through Succession Management*. London: SAGE Publications, 2010.
- Flowers, C. Andrew. "Leading through Succession: Why Pastoral Leadership Is the Key to a Healthy Transition." Western Seminary, Holland, 2015.
- Forman, Rowland, Bruce Miller, Wayne Cordeiro, and Jeff Jones. *The Leadership Baton: An Intentional Strategy for Developing Leaders in Your Church*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009.
- Furnham, Adrian. *The Elephant In the Boardroom: The Causes of Leadership Derailment*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
- Gaebelein, Frank E. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. Vol. 3. Grand Rapids, MI: The Zondervan Corporation, 1984.
- Giles, E. *Documents Illustrating Papal Authority: A.D. 96-454*. London: S.P.C.K., 1952.
- Googer, Hans C. "Senior Pastor Succession in Multisite Churches: A Mixed Methods Study." Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018.
- Homer, A. *Leaders in Transition: A Guide to Leadership Succession in the Church and Other Faith-Based Organisations*. Westbow Press, A division of Thomas Nelson & Zondervan: Bloomington, IN., 2016.
- Keil, C.F., and F. Delitzsch. *Commentary on the Old Testament*. Vol. 2. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1996.
- Lepeau, A. T. *Paths of Leadership: Guiding Others towards Growth in Christ through Serving, Following, Teaching, Modeling and Envisioing*. USA: Intervarsity Press, 1983.
- Makaudze, Godwin. "African Traditional Leadership and Succession in the Post-Colonial Shona Novel." *Journal of the African Literature Association* 11, no. 2 (May 4, 2017): 210–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21674736.2017.1375658>.
- Mead, Loren B. *A Change of Pastors... and How It Affects Change in the Congregation*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2012.
- Meyendorff, John. *The Primacy of Peter in the Orthodox Church*. Crestwood NY.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1963.
- Mwenje, J. "Succession Plan among Pentecostal Churches in Zimbabwe: A Qualitative Approach Using the Hidden and Public Transcript Theory." *International Journal of Development Research* 6, no. 4 (2016): 7588–97.
- Pink, Arthur W. *Gleanings in Joshua*. Chicago: Moody, 1981.
- Sandars, J. O. *Spiritual Leadership*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1967.
- Veselin, Kesich. "Peter's Primacy in the New Testament and the Early Tradition ." In *The Primacy of Peter*. Crestwood: NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1992.

ABOUT AUTHOR

Richard Osei Akoto is currently a PhD candidate at the Department of Religious Studies, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi - Ghana. He lectures Old Testament, New Testament, Biblical Hebrew and New Testament Greek at the Christ Apostolic University Kumasi - Ghana. He is an Ordained Minister of the Gospel who founded and oversees the Gracelove Evangelistic Ministries, Ghana. His research focuses on Biblical Studies (Old Testament Hebrew, New Testament Greek), Church and Society and Leadership.