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NOBODY IS INDISPENSABLE!

Today's text: Numbers Chaps. 26-27; Ps. 75: 1-10

Extracts:

1. **“And the Lord said unto Moses, Get thee up into this mount Abarim, and see the land which I have given unto the children of Israel. And when thou hast seen it, thou also shalt be gathered unto thy people [i.e., die], as Aaron thy brother was gathered. And Moses said unto the Lord, saying, Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation... that the congregation be not as sheep which have no shepherd. And the Lord said unto Moses, Take thee Joshua the son of Nun...”** [Num. 27: 12-13, 15-16, 17(b), 18(a)]
2. **“Lift not up your horn on high: speak not with a stiff neck. For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge: He putteth down one and setteth up another”** [Ps. 75: 5-7]

*Can you imagine Iraq without Saddam Hussein or Al Qaeda without Osama Bin Laden? It sounds unthinkable but it is inevitable. One of these days, either by accident or illness, they could die and their followers would have to face the human reality that **nobody is indispensable**. Sooner or later, we reach our retirement age in the places where we work and we then have to pass the baton to our successors. We may be running our businesses and there comes a time when we have to allow other people to take over. If we are political leaders, we face retirement either of our own volition or by electoral defeat. Sometimes, even in the prime of our careers, death or illness may strike to render us unable to continue. As parents, a time comes when we have to accept that our children have grown up and that they have to move on.*

Unfortunately, many of us behave as if the sun will not rise or set without our permission. We behave as if we will never give up the positions that we currently hold. We do not groom our possible successors. Instead, we do everything to destroy any one who poses a threat to our tenure. When we are away from the office (on vacation or business), nothing gets approved until we return! Well, we hardly have control because God determines that!

In today's lesson, we shall study the transfer of power from Moses to Joshua, and learn some useful lessons for our management succession planning.

1. Who can replace Moses?

Moses was the one who led the children of Israel out of bondage in Egypt. In the wilderness years, he stood in the gap for his habitually complaining and disobedient people. It was through him that God revealed the Ten Commandments to us. At the Transfiguration of Jesus, it was Moses along with Elijah that came from heaven to hold discussions with Jesus [**Matt. 17:3**]. When Miriam and Aaron envied Moses' spiritual preeminence, God told them: "if there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make Myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. *My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all Mine house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches*" [**Num. 12:6-8**]. Therefore, Moses was a man of stature. But was he indispensable?

Now, at the age of 120 years [**Deut. 34:7**], God told him to get ready to die. On account of his disobedience at the water of Meribah (when he struck the rock the second time instead of speaking to it as commanded), God would not allow him to enter the Promised Land [**Num. 27: 12-14**]. Moses was still thinking of the people and asked God to name his own successor "that the congregation of the Lord be not as sheep which have no shepherd" [v. 17]. God commanded Moses to choose Joshua the son of Nun [v. 18].

On what basis did God choose Joshua for the job? In God's words, Joshua was "a man in whom is the spirit" [18], "for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; *for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart*" [1 Sam. 16:7]. People who are led by the Spirit of God behave wisely in all their ways, God is always with them, and they are well loved by all [1 Sam. 18: 14-16]. Here is Joshua's profile up to the day he was appointed to succeed Moses:

- ✓ He came from the tribe of Ephraim, the second son of Joseph [**Gen. 41:52**]. When the blind and aged Jacob (Israel) gave his final blessings to Joseph's two sons, he set Ephraim before his elder brother, Manasseh, and prophesied, "truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations" [**Gen. 48: 17-20**].
- ✓ He was called Oshea ["God saves"] but Moses changed his name to Joshua, which is the same as Jehoshua ["Yahweh saves"] [**Num.14: 8, 16**].
- ✓ It was Joshua who led the battle against the Amalekites when Aaron and Hur used stones to hold up Moses' hands [**Ex. 18: 11-13**].
- ✓ When Moses went up to Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments, Joshua was his minister, that is, attendant [**Ex. 24:13**].
- ✓ He was one of the 12 spies sent by Moses to assess the Promised Land. Only he and Caleb brought a good [faith-based] report [**Num. 14: 6-9**].

In spite of such a strong profile, Moses did not nominate him by himself. Instead, he asked God to make His choice for the nation of Israel. Why did Moses do that? Let us examine the limitations of human approaches.

2. Limitations of human approaches to choosing a successor

If some incumbents (current position holders) had their way, they would not entertain the idea of possible successors! One way to do that is to eliminate competition by discrediting every subordinate with leadership potentials! Soon after David had killed the giant Goliath, the women danced, singing, “Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands.” The king was angry and he said, “they have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands: *and what can he have more but the kingdom?*” From that day on, the king viewed David with suspicion and malice [**1 Sam. 18:5-9**]. Thereafter, he made several attempts to kill David and the young man had to escape and hide in the wilderness for the better of 12 years!

On the other hand, we may have crown princes (designated successors) or potential successors who cannot wait to take over. They are always scheming to discredit the incumbents so that they can get them removed! David was on his dying bed when one of his sons, Adonijah, “exalted himself, saying, I will be king: and he prepared him chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him.” He got David’s army commander, Joab, and one of the priests, Abiathar, to go and anoint him David’s successor. He would have succeeded if David had not been alerted to anoint Solomon in accordance with the word of God [**1 Kgs 1:5-34**]. But for the personal intervention of Jesus Christ, the ambition of the sons of Zebedee to occupy a special place in His coming kingdom almost broke the sense of community among the Apostles [**Matt. 20: 20-28**]!

Barring those extreme cases, a majority of incumbents are desirous to have successors. However, their nominations are in general influenced by the following factors:

a) *Culture/tradition*

Birth order, royalty, ownership structure, the constitution of the country, etc., are among the factors to consider when choosing a successor. For example, Prince Charles is regarded as the crown prince of the United Kingdom simply because he is the first-born of the reigning monarch, Queen Elizabeth II. In a family business, the chances of a son/daughter succeeding the father/mother are very obvious. In a country like Switzerland with a constitutional arrangement to rotate the Presidency among the cantons, you can almost predict who will be the President ten years from now! In most Pentecostal ministries in America, the children tend to succeed their fathers!

Joseph wanted his father to anoint Manasseh to the headship role of Joseph's lineage simply because he was his firstborn [**Gen. 48: 13-19**]. Even though the brothers of Jesus were not among His apostles, one of them, James, became one of the three pillars of the early church in Jerusalem [**Gal. 2: 9**].

b) *Physical features*

Ordinarily, we would look for measurable qualities, such as age, gender, qualification, experience/record of performance, psychological profile, etc. However, no matter how well we have done, we may still not be able to scratch the surface.

I recently came across a funny piece in the *NECA Newsflash* [Vol. 3, No. 3, July 2002], a quarterly newsletter of the Nigeria Employers' Consultative Association. It was in the form of a confidential report dated 22 May 30 A.D. to Jesus Christ by the "Jordan Management Consultants" on a staff aptitude test administered to His 12 Apostles. Eleven of them had unfavourable recommendations. However, on Judas Iscariot, the report said, "He is a man of ability and resourcefulness, meets people well, has a keen business mind and has contacts in high places. He is highly motivated, ambitious and innovative. We recommend Judas Iscariot as your controller and right hand man." He was the one who betrayed Jesus Christ!

You can see why God does not choose as we do! Out of Jesse's 8 sons, God chose the youngest, the little shepherd boy, David, who was not yet qualified to enter the army. While the whole army of Israel (which had 3 of David's brothers) was scared and hiding, it took David to confront and kill the giant Goliath "in the name of the Lord" [**1 Sam. 17:12-50**]. The kingdom of Israel was ultimately established under David, the man after God's own heart [**1 Sam. 13; 14**].

c) *Favouritism*

We sometimes show open bias in favour of those we love or prefer, such as our children or family members (spouse, siblings, etc), friends or people of our ethnic or racial groups or gender. The bias need not be explicit but it is there! For example, in Kenya, there is currently a revolt within the ruling KANU party that has ruled that country since independence because the outgoing President Arap Moi has selected Uhuru Kenyatta, the son of the founding Prime Minister, Jomo Kenyatta, as his successor. In doing so, he bypassed several people who had been waiting these past 20 years or so to succeed him!

If it was Isaac's choice, he was going to pass the blessing of Abraham to Esau, his favourite son, instead of to Jacob that God had anointed for it [**Gen. 25: 28; 27: 1-4**]. Compare that with what Jesus did when He selected His Apostles. Even though He named 4 from only 2 families [Peter and his brother Andrew, and James and John, the sons of Zebedee] [**Matt. 10:2-4**], He did not appoint any of His own brothers, James, Joses, Simon and Judas [**Matt. 13: 55**].

d) *Intrigue*

This is most vivid when an incumbent leaves office without naming a successor. The potential successors then battle one another with any weapons that they can lay hands on. Gideon was the person that the angel of God called "mighty man of valour" [**Judg. 6: 12**]. Through him, the children of Israel were delivered from the Midianites. Following his destruction of the altar of Baal, his name was changed to Jerubbaal ["let Baal plead his case"] [**vv 25-32**]. When Gideon died, he left behind 70 children. One of them, Abimelech, ran to his mother's people in Shechem to seek their help to succeed his father because "I am your bone and flesh." They came and killed all of them except the youngest, Jotham, who escaped [**Judg. 9: 1-18**].

e) *The people's choice*

In a democracy, the outgoing leader may not have a say in choosing his/her successor. The people take the decision through elections. Usually, such choices may not necessarily be the best candidates but those with the most votes. After the children of Israel had received the evil report from ten of the twelve spies sent by Moses to the Promised Land, they revolted against his leadership and "they said one to another, let us make a captain, and let us return to Egypt" [**Num. 14: 1-4**]. Remember also the story of how the people rejected the sons of Samuel, Joel and Abiah, as judges in succession to Samuel, on grounds that they were corrupt. Instead, the people voted to have a king like the nations around them, thereby rejecting God as their King. That was what led to the appointment of Saul as the first king of Israel [**1 Sam. 8: 1-9**].

3. Lessons for succession planning

We now know that even if we may want to keep our positions in our respective organizations, it is just not possible. Sooner than later, we may resign or retire or be retired by sickness, death, declining productivity, or something else. Therefore, it is necessary to plan for our succession. Why? We need to institutionalize our achievements by putting in our places those who will continue or improve upon our record. Moses took the people out of bondage in Egypt and Joshua, his successor, brought them into the Promised Land and settled them there. David put

together the building plans and materials for the temple, and his successor, Solomon, built the temple. Jesus Christ began the salvation plan and His disciples led by Peter advanced it. Paul planted and Apollos watered [**1 Cor. 3:6**].

Therefore, we can learn a great deal by copying what Moses did. Here are the highlights:

- ✓ Keep an eye on and mentor young people that are working under you. Give them strong spiritual leadership so that they will not depart from it when they reach your level [**Prov. 22:6**].
- ✓ As soon as you spot people with good leadership potentials, give them the opportunity to take risks for which you will hold them responsible for results. Joshua had the chance to go to Mount Sinai with Moses as a minister, fight against the Amalekites as a soldier, and go to the Promised Land as a spy.
- ✓ As you approach your retirement, place before God your list of potential successors for Him to choose for you. In choosing a replacement for Judas Iscariot, Peter placed two nominees before God who had met the Apostles' requirements and placed them before God. Matthias was selected [**Acts 1:23-26**]. Moses did not nominate anybody but simply asked for God's choice. God Himself selected Joshua.
- ✓ Make the transition smooth. Put down your thoughts and vision for the organization in written form and give to your successor. Then, take him/her round to meet the stakeholders that he/she would need to know. Moses brought Joshua to Eleazar the priest and, in the presence of all the people, he laid hands on him and gave him charge [**Num. 27:22-23**]. He took great pains to teach him everything that he himself knew. That is why the book of Deuteronomy is like a repeat of Genesis-Numbers. He counseled him to "be strong and of a good courage." He wrote everything he knew into a book [**Deut. 31: 22-24**] and handed it over to his successor.
- ✓ Thereafter, go home and spend the rest of your days working for the Lord! Moses went into Mount Nebo in the land of Moab. There he died and he is today resting with the Lord in heaven [**Deut. 32: 48-52; 34: 5-6**].

Nobody is indispensable. Only God is. So, let go and let God.