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## EMPOWERED BY JESUS: A RESEARCH PROPOSAL FOR AN EXPLORATION OF JESUS' EMPOWERMENT APPROACH IN JOHN 21: 1-25

The person of Jesus has been under heavy investigation in both theological studies and leadership studies. While the literature about Jesus is extensive, it fails to address Jesus' amazing abilities to empower others. A comprehensive review of the literature about Jesus yields only one article that discusses Jesus' ability to empower others (Pickett, 2005). Even this one article does not directly discuss Jesus' skills of empowerment, but rather addresses the empowering nature of the account of his resurrection (Pickett, 2005). This void in the research concerning Jesus' empowerment approach demands attention from contemporary research concerning empowerment theory and from a theological and exegetical perspective. Therefore, the current research investigation seeks to explore Jesus' empowerment approach through an exegetical analysis of John 21:1-25. The goal of such research is to paint a clearer picture of Jesus and to enhance the applicability of his empowerment strategies for the leaders of today. The following discussion addresses contemporary empowerment theory, the scope of analysis and the exegetical methodology for the current research effort, and the inner textural analysis of John 21:1-25. Inner textural analysis examines the patterns of language that occur in a given text, such as repetition or dialogue, for the purpose of providing insights into the events, meaning, and application of the text (Robbins, 1996).

This analysis subsequently reveals Jesus' model of empowerment. For today's leaders, following Jesus' model of empowerment provides a positive means of engaging followers and motivating them toward higher levels of purpose and action.

### **EMPOWERMENT THEORY**

Empowerment theory has received a great deal of attention in the contemporary leadership literature (Thorlakson & Murray, 1996). According to Thorlakson and Murray (1996), past empowerment research identifies empowerment as a motivational process that can influence employee perceptions of power relations, leadership styles, and motivation in the workplace. The process of positively developing these follower perceptions poses a challenge to many leaders (Pigg, 2002). Contemporary research efforts have described the empowerment process as focusing on three areas of follower development, including confidence and self-efficacy, values and beliefs, and work-related skills. In terms of follower confidence and self-efficacy, empowerment can improve follower perceptions of self-efficacy (Choi, 2006). Specific leader strategies for strength-

ening follower self-efficacy include placing employees in work settings that are conducive to success (Choi, 2006; Pigg, 2002; Zhu, May, & Avolio, 2004), encouraging information sharing, resource sharing, and participative management (Kizilos, 1990; Pigg, 2002), and removing obstacles that create powerlessness (Zhu, May, & Avolio, 2004). Concerning follower values and beliefs, empowerment researchers note that empowering leaders challenge their followers' thinking about work-related issues such as autonomy and their self-confidence on the job (Choi, 2006; Pigg, 2002; Kizilos, 1990). Finally, empowering leaders assist followers in developing work-related skills that may be weak or nonexistent (Choi, 2006; Pigg, 2002; Kizilos, 1990; Zhu, May, & Avolio, 2004).

### **SCOPE OF TEXTUAL ANALYSIS**

As mentioned above, the lack of research about Jesus as an empowering influence demands exegetical attention. Therefore, to analyze Jesus' empowerment approach, his empowering actions should be reviewed. Of the four Gospels, the Gospel of John most profoundly portrays the leadership of Jesus (deSilva, 2004). According to deSilva, John is divided into two primary sections as well as an introduction and epilogue. The two primary sections include the book of signs, which depicts Jesus' active ministry and leadership to the world, and the book of glory, which reveals Jesus' instructions to his followers (deSilva, 2004). Thus, the Book of John consistently addresses the leadership actions of Jesus. deSilva points out additional features of the Book of John:

*The Fourth Gospel begins to contribute to the formation of ministers and counselors and others who reach out to bring the light of Christ to people in need by presenting the model of the good Shepherd, Christ, the minister par excellence. (2004, p. 445)*

The fact that the Gospel of John so thoroughly addresses Jesus as a leader in his time and to the ministers of today makes this Gospel an excellent source for leadership and empowerment studies.

Within the Book of John, the text contained in John 21:1-25 serves as an excellent example of Jesus' empowering influence over Peter and the disciples, and will be used as the basis for analysis in this research effort. Oladipo (1997) refers to this portion of Scripture as an epilogue to the Gospel of John that depicts Jesus' rehabilitation of Peter after his denial of Jesus and Jesus' subsequent challenge to Peter's life and ministry. According to deSilva (2004), "John 21 preserves something of a counseling session arranged by Jesus for Peter. . . . Jesus gives Peter the opportunity to confess his love for Jesus three times and empowers him with a commission three times to look after Jesus' followers" (p. 445). Additionally, Wiarda (1992) notes that John 21 focuses on "Jesus as the one who confronts Peter at every stage in the narrative, upsetting his equilibrium and challenging him to make decisions and take new action" (p. 53). Given these descriptions of John 21 and that empowerment theory builds its foundation on the actions of developing follower confidence and self-efficacy, challenging values and beliefs, and developing work-related skills, the text of John 21:1-25 is well-suited to a study of Jesus' empowerment.

1	Appeared					Jesus
2						Two oth2e(Jesus)TJLord9T8.1667 TD0 Tc002G368.504 6035pt7I2.88.1667bu
3	Going	Told				
	Go	Said				
	Went					
4				Realize		Jesus
						Jesus
5		Called				
6						
7		Said	Loved			Jesus
		Say				Lord
8	followed					
9				Saw		
10						Jesus
11		Said				
12	Come	Said		Knew		Jesus
		Ask				Lord
13	Came					Jesus
14	appeared					Jesus
15		Said	Truly	Know	Feed	Jesus
		Said	love			Lord
			Love			Jesus
16		Said	Truly	Know	Take care	Jesus
		Answered	love			Lord
		Said	Love			Jesus
17		Said	Love	Know	Feed	Jesus
		Said	Love	Know		Lord
18		Tell				
19	Follow	Said				Jesus
		Indicate				God
		Said				
20	Following	Said				Jesus
						Lord
21		Asked				Lord
22	follow	Answered				Jesus
23						Jesus
24						

sible and contextually sound reading of this Gospel and our understanding of the leadership of Jesus” (p. 8). In chapter 21 of John’s Gospel, Jesus makes another appearance to his disciples following his resurrection from the dead, and demonstrates effective empowerment skills in preparing them for the time after his ascension into heaven. Therefore, it is important to explore an inner texture analysis of this chapter of John in order to develop a model of Jesus’ empowerment.

According to Robbins (1996), “The inner texture of a text resides in features

and pattern reveals the nature and development of the disciples' relationship with Jesus.

The second progression is that of the names of Jesus and Peter throughout their interactions. This progression is outlined in Table 3.

In addressing the progressive texture and pattern of the names of Jesus and Peter, several aspects of their relationship become apparent. Whenever the disciples refer to or address Jesus, they use the name Lord. In verse 12, which states that the disciples "knew it was the Lord," the disciples call Jesus Lord even in their mental references to him. Such references indicate that the disciples had great respect for Jesus. It also indicates that they viewed him as their personal Savior, not just the man named Jesus. However, in John's narration of the events, he refers to Jesus as the main character. Verse 19 is the only occurrence of the name God, as Jesus is referring to the fact that Peter would glorify God through his death.

Peter's name also has a progressive texture and pattern in John 21. With one exception in verse 7, Peter is more formally referred to as Simon Peter throughout the fishing event in verses 1-14. According to John, Jesus gave this name to Peter in John 1:42, which says that "Jesus looked at him and said, 'You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas' (which, when translated, is Peter)." Jesus returns to calling Peter his former name, Simon son of John, in verses 15-17. Jesus does this three times, symbolic of the fact that Peter denied Jesus three times before Jesus died on the cross. After the third reference is completed, Peter is referred to by the name given him when Jesus called him to be a disciple, Peter.

The final progressive pattern of note is the interplay of food and animal throughout the text. This interaction is outlined in Table 4.

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The connection between love for Jesus and the desired responsive action is evident in this chapter of John, particularly in verses 15-17. Table 5 represents the conversation between Jesus and Peter concerning Peter's love for Jesus. Three times, symbolic of Peter's denial, Jesus asks Peter if he truly loves him. With each of Peter's affirmative responses, Jesus gives Peter a command to feed his lambs, take care of his sheep, or feed his sheep. Each of these phrases demonstrates that Jesus expects Peter's love for him to be shown by sharing Jesus, the Bread of Life, with others.

The repetitive-progressive texture and pattern of John 21:1-25 offers many important insights into the relationship between Jesus and Peter and the other disciples. It illustrates this relationship in terms of the disciples' directive action, the interaction between the names of Jesus and Peter, the food and animal concepts, and the disciples' love for Jesus and its implications for action.

### **Opening-Middle-Closing Texture**

Robbins (1996) writes that "opening-middle-closing texture resides in the nature of the beginning, body, and conclusion of a section of discourse" (p. 19). However, Robbins goes on to say that interpreters tend to have differing opinions concerning the exact place where each section begins and ends. Still, this method of studying Scripture is a valuable tool for analyzing the opening, middle, and closing sections of John 21:1-25.

The opening section of this

John, do you truly love me more than these?" Though Peter was hurt by the fact that Jesus asked him this question three times, Jesus had a purpose. Peter had denied Jesus three times before Jesus' death, so Jesus used this question once for each of the times Peter had denied him.

response is affirmative. This question and answer exchange occurs two more times. Jesus then predicts Peter's martyrdom, and commands him to "Follow me!" (verse 19). Peter, seemingly distracted by the presence of John behind them, asks Jesus about John. Jesus responds by reminding Peter of the command he had just given. The narrator concludes this section of Scripture by discussing what happens immediately after the conversation between Jesus and Peter, that his testimony is true, and that he was selective in presenting Jesus' life and ministry.

The sequence of the narrative in John 21:1-25 moves quickly. There are no long sermons or speeches in this text, but rather a fast-paced interplay among the voices of the narrator, Jesus, Simon Peter, and the disciples. The fact that the main dialogue occurs between Jesus and Peter demonstrates that Jesus is the main character, and that his purpose in this interaction is to influence Peter. Throughout the sequence of this section, John as narrator moves from one event or interaction to the next, without much analysis or discussion of what happened. His tone is concise, which also lends to the quick pace of this text.

Finally, the plot of John 21:1-25 centers on the disciples' catch of fish after Jesus' command, and the interaction between Jesus and Peter after the group has eaten some of the fish. The plot begins by highlighting another of Jesus' appearances to the disciples as he works a miracle among them which results in the capture of 153 fish. The plot continues as the interactions



**Table 9. Zone of Emotion-fused Thought in John 21:1-25**

Verse	Key Words
4	Realize
7	Loved
9	Saw
12	Dared Knew
15	Truly love Know Love
16	Truly love Know Love
17	Hurt Love Know Know Love
18	Wanted Want
19	Indicate Glorify
20	Saw Loved
21	Saw
22	Want
24	Know
25	Suppose

fishing trip is successful. With Jesus, the Bread of Life, the disciples are fed and nourished.

In the second scene, the question-answer-command argumentative pattern continues as Jesus confronts Peter. Jesus asks Peter about the extent of his love for Jesus, and Peter willingly answers by saying, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you” (verses 15-17). Upon hearing Peter’s response, Jesus commands Peter to “feed my lambs,” “take care of my sheep,” and “feed my sheep” in each of the three verses. Jesus’ line of argumentation is that love for him must be demonstrated by obedience to his commands. Therefore, as Peter indicates that he loves Jesus, Jesus tells Peter that he should live out this love by heeding the commands in verses 15-17. Jesus’ use of questions in this scene serves as a test for Peter. Once Peter “passes” this examination, Jesus concludes this scene by making a prophetic statement about Peter’s death. Jesus offers Peter this prophetic statement with the understanding that Peter will love him and obey these commands until his death. Out of encouragement, Jesus concludes the prophetic statement by commanding Peter to follow him. The second scene takes a small detour as Peter becomes distracted by John’s presence in verse 20. As a result of his distraction, Peter initiates another question-answer-command sequence. He sees John and says to Jesus, “Lord, what about him?” in verse 21. Rather than giving in to the tangential question, Jesus re-directs Peter’s attention with a rhetorical question and repeats his command that Peter should follow him.

The third scene, John 21:23-25, is the narrator’s line of argumentation concerning the result of Jesus and Peter’s discussion and the truthfulness of everything recorded in the book of John. First, John gives his analysis of the conversation between Jesus and Peter, and points out that there was no truth to the rumor that had been spreading among the disciples about him. In the last two verses, the

argumentative texture and pattern illustrates that John’s statements as narrator were the truth, and that he had been selective in what he included in his writings about Jesus’ life and ministry.

**Sensory-Aesthetic Texture**

The final element of exegesis is the sensory-aesthetic texture and pattern of a text. According to Robbins (1996), “The sensory-aesthetic texture of a text resides prominently in the range of senses the text evokes or embodies (thought, emotion, sight, sound, touch, smell)” (pp. 29-30). He goes on to say that this type of analysis also includes “the manner in which the text evokes or embodies them (reason, intuition, imagination, humor, etc.)” (p. 30). There are three zones of analysis in the sensory-aesthetic texture and pattern, the zone of emotion-fused thought, the zone of self-expressive speech, and the zone of purposeful action.

The zone of emotion-fused thought includes “the areas we refer to as intellect, will, judgment, conscience, personality thrust, core personality, affection, and so forth” (Robbins, 1996, p. 31). The zone of emotion-fused thought occurs in John 21:1-25 as illustrated in Table 9.

The most notable conclusion illustrated in the zone of emotion-fused thought is in John 21:15-19. In this section, there is a strong emphasis on love, particularly Peter’s love for Jesus. After the nature of Peter’s love is determined, the result of that love is captured by the word *glorify*. This

word refers to Peter's martyrdom, the ultimate form of his love for Jesus. Through



responds affirmatively, Jesus challenges Peter to step up to the next level of operation by ministering to the people on earth. Jesus also commands Peter to follow him out of love and obedience. It is clear that Jesus challenged the disciples' values and beliefs in John 21:1-25 with the intent of empowering them for service in God's kingdom. In today's organizations, challenging followers' values, beliefs, and work practices can help overcome the obstacle of complacency and lead to increased innovation, creativity, and productivity.

Jesus also equipped the disciples for the ministries they would carry out after his ascension. The above exegetical analysis reveals that Jesus' loving relationship with the disciples served as the disciples' motivation for carrying out the desired actions that Jesus communicated to them. In addition, Jesus provides the disciples with everything that they need to persevere in sharing God's promise after Jesus' ascension into heaven. Jesus uses the miraculous catch of fish in verses 1-14 to show the disciples that they need to rely on him for success. He also feeds the disciples, a symbolic act that represents the disciples' mission to feed the world with the Gospel. In the next section, Jesus reinstates Peter, a process that asks Peter to demonstrate his love for the Lord. Jesus then issues the prophetic statement about Peter's death to remind Peter that his mission of love for God is to be carried out to the point of death. Jesus' final words of encouragement to Peter are "Follow me!" Such a command tells Peter to rely on Jesus, follow his will, and persevere in the mission of spreading the Gospel. Similarly, today's followers need to be equipped for their roles and ministries. As suggested by Jesus' example in John 21, Jesus based this equipping process on a well-developed relationship with his disciples. Contemporary leaders should follow suit and use the interpersonal knowledge gained through solid relationships as a foundation for equipping each follower in a manner that is tailored to his or her unique situation. Then, just as Jesus demonstrates, followers need to feel encouraged and supported in their roles and ministries. Jesus offered his disciples the ultimate support system by offering himself in the command, "Follow me!" Today's leaders can certainly implement Jesus' example to equip, encourage, and support their followers. However, leaders should not forget that the best resource their followers can turn to is the person of Jesus Christ!

## **SUMMARY**

Current research concerning Jesus' earthly existence is certainly extensive, but it does not specifically acknowledge the role that empowerment played in his relationships with his disciples. Through the exegetical analysis tool of inner textural analysis, Jesus' empowerment approach was analyzed with respect to John 21:1-25. In this section of Scripture, Jesus' actions offer insights into his empowerment strategies with Peter and the disciples. Much like current empowerment strategies set forth in the leadership literature, Jesus' empowerment approach consists of developing his disciples' confidence and self-efficacy, challenging their values and beliefs, and equipping them with the skills needed for their ministries. Future research should address this topic with the intent to offer additional practical empowerment strategies to today's leaders.

## **REFERENCES**

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