

# Authentic Credible Leadership

## An Examination of Jesus's Leadership in the Farewell Discourses

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### ABSTRACT

This is a study of authentic credibility as demonstrated through John's description of Jesus' words and actions in the Farewell Discourses (John 13-17). Identifying the need for further research on the relationship between authentic leadership and credibility (Williams et al., 2018) and building from Kouzes and Posner's (2011) six disciplines of leader credibility — discover yourself, appreciate constituents, affirm shared values, develop capacity, serve a purpose, and sustain hope — and Hemby's (2007) on leader credibility, we espouse that moral foundations of authentic leadership promote leader credibility while not dimensioning the need for competence. After a thorough literature review on authentic leadership, the study explored how Jesus modeled authentic credibility in the Farewell Discourses of John 13-17. Reconfiguring Kouzes and Posner's six disciples through the biblical narrative, we identified six themes of authentic credibility modeled by Jesus: prioritizing Kingdom identity, balancing criticism and optimism, valuing truth, intentional follower development, purposeful posture, and sustainable, spiritual hope. The study applied a systematic approach to the Farewell Discourses so that each of the five chapters of the discourses was thoroughly reviewed to provide specific instances where Jesus modeled authentic credibility. The study provides a fresh perspective on authentic credibility by viewing the concept through a biblical, Christian worldview.

**Keywords:** Authentic leadership, credibility, farewell discourses, Gospel of John, leadership.

## INTRODUCTION

Recent events worldwide continue to have leaders, authors, and researchers occupied with the realities of post-pandemic organizational life. In 2021, Texas A&M professor Anthony Klotz coined the term *The Great Resignation*. Since then, it has become the colloquial term for the research conducted worldwide on the shift in the workforce as nations come out of the COVID-19 pandemic. Post-pandemic organizations deal with the consequences of social, economic, political, and environmental upheaval. While the world may be coming out of a pandemic, organizations are still navigating its long-term implications. Effective organizational adaptation requires established leader credibility (Baldwin, 2022) so organizational members navigate change with hope and promise. The need to navigate change comes when the current global context has created a debate regarding source credibility, misinformation, and influence (Shin et al., 2022; Sui & Zhang, 2021).

Whether in crisis or not, the ever-changing global economic and political climate creates the need for considering the “constantly reoccurring issue” of leader credibility or the lack thereof (Shin et al., 2022). Kouzes and Posner (2011) identified credibility as critical to creating a climate of trust, while Covey and Link (2012) pointed to it as essential to organizational effectiveness and productivity. Even though most would consider leader credibility a matter of significant concern, there is no consensus on its definition (Williams et al., 2018). Further, there is a need to understand how leaders build credibility, specifically how leaders emerge while deviating from the norm and establishing credit with followers (T. H. Stone & Cooper, 2009). Rego et al. (2013), in their work on authentic leaders in virtuous teams, concluded that leaders “must act in a respectful, honest, trustful, courteous, and compassionate way, cultivating their credibility” within the team such that these authentic behaviors have positive impacts on employee performance and well-being (p. 76).

Building on the work of Bass and Steidlmeier (1999), who found that basic moral issues are comprehended in the virtues of authenticity, integrity, truthfulness, and credibility, Bauman (2013) integrated ethics, authentic, transformational, and ethical leadership theories to define integrity as having and acting on moral principles, grounded in one’s true self reflected by core values, and embodied by spiritual values. Values such as integrity and credibility are foundational to authentic leadership. In the seminal works on authentic leadership, Gardner et al. (2005) framed heightened levels of self-awareness in authentic leadership development around self-concept (values), self-identities (personal, interpersonal, and social), emotional intelligence, self-verification, and self-improvement goals. Avolio et al. (2004) posited authentic leaders stimulate personal and social identification such that followers connect with their leaders’ values, beliefs, goals, and activities over time. Further, Williams et al. (2018) suggested exploring the relationship between credibility and authentic leadership. Given that self and social identities are essential to authentic leadership development and are grounded in core and spiritual values, further exploring these values from a Christian worldview is necessary. Wright (2021) asserted that Jesus exemplified building credibility and posed that credibility is an essential aspect of leadership. Key (2020) identified Jesus as an authentic leader who intrinsically motivated his followers through transformation and Christian ethics and values that guide believers to just and holy actions.

Given that the term leadership, specifically Christian leadership, is used interchangeably throughout, we recognize that the definition of leadership is complex and evolving (Bass & Bass, 2008). For this exploration of Jesus’ leadership, we view leadership as an amalgam of activities, behaviors, traits, relationships, and group processes that contribute to a leader’s ability to influence followers and motivate them to accomplish a common goal. Furthermore, we define Christian leadership as the combination of attributes, behaviors, traits, relationships,

and group processes shaped by a leader's Christian worldview. Echoing the assertions of Fry (2003), we assert that principles of workplace spirituality necessitate the interconnectedness of personal, cultural, and religious values with one's vocational calling, and, as such, we believe that Christian leaders, being shaped by their faith and worldview, exercise their faith in all contexts — the sacred space, workplace, and marketplace.

This paper offers a Christian perspective of the relationship between leader credibility and authentic leadership by exploring His words and behaviors amid His crisis, the hours leading up to His arrest in John 13-17. We will begin with an overview of the relevant literature on leader credibility and authentic leadership. We will then build on the integration of Kouzes and Posner's (2011) six disciplines of credibility and Hemby's (2017) subsequent integration of Jesus' leadership with the model. Using the six disciplines of credibility as a framework, we will explore the lessons from Jesus' *Farewell Discourses* in John 13-17. Further, we recognize that the study of Jesus provides new awareness, fresh perspectives, and additional depth to traditional leadership studies (Henson, 2021). While using Kouzes and Posner's six disciplines as a guide for leader credibility, we intend to engage the Scriptures such that we allow the lessons on the life and ministry of Jesus to reconfigure our understanding of authentic credibility through the lens of a biblical, Kingdom-focused, Christian worldview.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Leader Credibility

The definition of credibility can be traced back as far as 1957 as: "(1) the extent to which a communicator is perceived to be a source of valid assertions (his 'expertness') and (2) the degree of confidence in the communicator's intent to communicate the assertions he considers most valid (his 'trustworthiness')" (Hovland et al., 1957, p. 21, as cited in Williams et al., 2018, p. 516). Although there is no consensus on the definition of credibility, it is generally understood as having two common attributes: trust and competence (Williams et al., 2018). Leader credibility is foundational to effectiveness as it is essential to building trust and confidence in followers (Kouzes & Posner, 2011). Aronson (2001) asserted that establishing the confidence and loyalty of followers is necessary to maintain long-term success. The complexities of organizations create a climate in which leaders' judgment is valued and unimpeachable integrity is required (Oncken, 1997).

Further, in the challenges of fluctuating organizational environments, no matter how compelling the vision is, people need to trust the messenger to believe the message (Kinni, 1994). Not only does credibility influence commitment to the leader but also the organization (Verschoor, 2000). Leaders much recognize that their willingness to *be trusting* is central to their *being trusted* (Hemby, 2017). Kouzes and Posner (2011) wrote that "Trusting other people encourages them to trust us; distrusting others makes them lose confidence in us" (p. 107) — further, Stone (2009) connected leader credibility to leader competence. Followers must not only trust in the character of their leaders but also in their ability to lead effectively.

Asking the question, *what happens when competence and character are at odds?* Sturm et al. (2017) concluded that while competence and character can elevate one another, elevating one over the other can be problematic. Leaders can become so introspective that it can destabilize their ability effectively lead, while leaders who rely heavily on their competence can use it to mask underlying character issues. There must be a balance between character and competence. Leaders cannot say one thing and do another (Joullié et al., 2021). In reviewing the literature

on leadership development, Day et al. (2021) found that competence is a crucial part of leader effectiveness but not necessarily leader emergence. This is because, over time, competencies in one situation may not apply to another. Giannella et al. (2022) concluded that while leader competence is essential, concerns over leader morality carry more weight. Given the weight of morality in leadership development, we espouse that moral foundations of authentic leadership promote leader credibility while not dimensioning the need for competence.

### **Authentic Leadership**

The “believability,” or credibility, of leaders in organizational life, is one of the factors that has led to the expanded discussion of authentic leadership (Gardner et al., 2011). Avolio and Gardner (2005) listed several benefits of authentic leadership: positive psychological capital, leader self-awareness and self-regulation, balanced processing producing a value-rich moral perspective, and interpersonal benefits derived from transparent interactions. Further, they espoused that authentic leadership results in “high levels of respect, positive affect, and trust” in the leader-follower relationship (p. 326). Authenticity promotes follower perceptions of genuineness, reliability, trustworthiness, and honesty and is also essential to self-leadership through receiving and growing from feedback (Lewis & Harrison, 2016). However, one impediment to authentic leadership is that some leaders believe that they must create an aura of invulnerability such that some create a facade (Whittington, 2015). This facade can become problematic during times of crisis or as followers become more familiar with the leader over time. However, Whittington understood authentic engagement as part of authentic leadership, such that leadership is relational, up-close-and-personal, and is a process that emphasizes authenticity among followers. Thus, the intimacy of authentic leadership necessitates genuine character and trustworthiness.

Trustworthiness is at the core of authentic leadership. Caldwell et al. (2010) wrote, “In that global marketplace, the importance of understanding the relationships between leadership behavior, perceptions about leader’s trustworthiness, and the ethical duties implicit in the psychological contract have become increasingly important” (p. 497). With the recent global upheaval, this statement could not be more valid. Lyman and Adler (2011) asserted that trustworthy leaders are masters at guiding, directing, encouraging, and challenging others because they expect the same of themselves. Further, it is only within a climate of genuine leadership engagement and accessibility that the identification, nurturing, and utilization of the strengths of others finds traction (Hemby, 2017). George (2007) discussed character, competence, and caring as essential to trustworthiness, and leaders who “walk the talk” and demonstrate their commitment to their values help to create an environment that enables their followers to have high aspirations for the future (p 183). Values such as authenticity and integrity are essential aspects of ethical conduct and character emblematic of the Christian faith (Henson, 2015), and, as such, further exploring the ultimate exemplar of Christianity, Jesus Christ, may offer significant value to perceptions of leader credibility and authenticity from a Christian worldview.

### **Outcomes of Authentic Credibility**

Studies have shown considerable overlap between leader credibility and authentic leadership, as both are grounded in core values, character, integrity, morality, and trustworthiness. When followers perceive leader behaviors as trustworthy, leaders are likely to be viewed as ethical stewards of their organizations (Caldwell et al., 2010). Authentic credible leaders create an environment such that followers are “proud to tell others they are a part of the organization, feel a strong sense of team spirit, see their own personal values as consistent with those of the

organization, feel attached and committed to the organization, and have a sense of ownership for the organization” (Kouzes & Posner, 2011, p. 31). This environment is created by intentional transparency and credible communication that enhances teamwork (Lencioni, 2012), employee satisfaction (Hartford, 2000), cogent cross-cultural leadership (Hemby, 2017), and commitment (Hemby, 2007). The reciprocal nature of authentic credibility is essential to the leader-follower relationship, as credible leaders seek to be trusted and are willing to trust others (Kouzes & Posner, 2011). Therefore, authentic credible leaders create a trust, communication, and cooperation climate that actively strengthens a positive organizational culture, develops high-exchange relationships, and increases employee performance.

### **Ingredients of Authentic Credibility**

Continuing to integrate the work of Kouzes and Posner's (2011) six disciplines of a credible leader and Hemby's (2017) work on Jesus as a credible leader, it is necessary to summarize both works and to introduce the connection to authentic leadership. Kouzes and Posner (2011) identified six disciplines of leader credibility: discover yourself, appreciate constituents, affirm shared values, develop capacity, serve a purpose, and sustain hope. Hemby (2017) applied the leadership of Jesus of Nazareth to the six disciplines of leader credibility. After reviewing both works, the following working definitions are offered as a framework for continued exploration of the leadership of Jesus.

#### *Discover yourself*

The first discipline of a credible leader requires exploring one's inner man to identify and clarify one's values and standards of living (Kouzes & Posner, 2011). Jesus embodied the life of inner reflection in that much of His ministry activities were grounded upon His self-awareness, established in personal and operational standards, and served to confirm and inform the position and mission of Jesus (Hemby, 2017). Mark marked the baptism of Jesus — considered the official beginning of Jesus' ministry — as emphasizing the identity of Jesus Christ: “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased” (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, Mark 1:11). Identity is an essential theme in the Gospels as Matthew recorded Satan challenging Jesus' identity “If you are the Son of God” (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, Matthew 4:3) and Jesus affirming his identity as the Son of God in the I AM statements in the Gospel of John. Therefore, discovering yourself from a Christian worldview requires personal and spiritual reflection that identifies and defines core values informed by our spiritual identity in Jesus Christ.

#### *Appreciating constituents*

The second discipline of a credible leader requires establishing trust such that followers perceive that their leaders have their best interest at heart, and this is accomplished through appreciating diversity and communicating a sense of significance (Kouzes & Posner, 2011). Jesus reached a diverse group of followers, including twelve disciples from different vocational backgrounds, men and women, Jews and Gentiles, and those of varying social status, and, from the beginning of His ministry, He called his disciples to a greater purpose — a spiritual and eternal purpose — as fishers of men (Mark 1:16-20; Matthew 9:9; Hemby, 2017). Therefore, appreciating constituents from a Christian worldview recognizes the value of all people as God's children invites followers to discover their divine design (Ingle, 2013), and communicates an eternal, spiritual, and practical sense of significance.

### *Affirming shared values*

The third discipline of a credible leader involves unifying diverse constituents around a common cause and agreement on values (Kouzes & Posner, 2011). Jesus masterfully affirmed shared values throughout His ministry by purposeful prioritization of values through ministry activities and creating synergy around the message of the Kingdom of God — not their kingdoms — as being propelled, not by human will or ingenuity, but by the power of God (Hemby, 2017). Throughout the Gospels, Jesus affirmed values that were not temporal: “My kingdom is not of this world” (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, John 18:36) and challenged His disciples to “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness” (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, Matthew 6:33). Therefore, affirming shared values from a Christian worldview involves purposefully embodying core values and calling others to live them out under submission to the will and power God.

### *Developing capacity*

A credible leader's fourth discipline requires personal growth and empowering others through intentional communication, encouragement, and a climate of learning through mistakes (Kouzes & Posner, 2011). Jesus's entire ministry centered on developing His disciples for Kingdom ministry through activities of explanation, demonstration, delegation, evaluation, and relaxation that developed the capacity of His disciples while establishing His credibility (Hemby, 2017). Jesus spent a substantial amount of time, effort, and energy in developing His disciples through demonstration (Luke 8:1) and delegations (Mark 6:8-13; (Hemby, 2017). Therefore, developing capacity from a Christian worldview liberates followers to discover that their divine design can contribute to the plan of God and is accomplished by creating a social and spiritual climate that empowers, equips, evaluates, and encourages followers as they develop.

### *Serving a purpose*

The fifth discipline of a credible leader is serving a purpose through serving others by demonstrating their commitment through visible actions (Kouzes & Posner, 2011). Jesus exemplified serving a purpose by manifesting His love for God and His people through actionable, tangible behaviors and priorities, as ultimately demonstrated in His sacrifice and death on the Cross (Hemby, 2017). Jesus recognized and communicated prioritizing a higher calling: “For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me” (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, John 6:38). Therefore, serving a purpose from a Christian worldview requires that believers live out their God-given purpose through behaviors that are aligned His Will and Word.

### *Sustaining hope*

The sixth discipline of a credible leader involves maintaining a positive attitude, prioritizing personal availability, and demonstrating compassion and empowerment during times of trouble, struggle, or crisis (Kouzes & Posner, 2011). Jesus demonstrated hope by bathing his teachings in love, continually being present with His disciples, and increasing his relational intimacy, transparency, and discussions of eternity as His ministry grew closer to its conclusion (Hemby, 2017). Christian hope is grounded in faith: “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me” (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, John 14:1). Therefore, sustaining hope from a Christian worldview recognizes that suffering is a reality of human

existence and that love, relational intimacy and transparency, and an eternal promise provides hope for believers.

## AUTHENTIC CREDIBILITY AS MODELED BY THE LEADERSHIP OF JESUS

Hemby (2017) conducted an overview of the ministry of Jesus as presented in the Gospels and the book of Acts. Given the large scope of the biblical narratives in these letters, Hemby offered a cursory exploration of Jesus's ministry concerning the six disciplines of leader credibility. Further, one of the limitations of authentic leadership is that it focuses on who a leader is but not what a leader does (Einola & Alvesson, 2021). Further, Gardner et al. (2021) argued that humans are products of their contexts; however, the life of Jesus demonstrated that Divine transformation provides the potential for true consistency no matter the context. By delving more deeply into a narrower pericope, Jesus's Farewell Discourses in John 13-17, it is possible that richer data related to the leadership of Jesus and His behaviors will come forth. Each chapter offers insights into Jesus's thinking, communication, and actions.

### **Prioritizing Christian Identity**

From the earliest recordings of Jesus's life, it is clear that Jesus understood His identity and purpose. However, John chose to focus narrowly on the last days of Jesus's ministry as most of the Gospel of John shares the events and conversations that chronicled Jesus's final push toward the Cross. In John 13, Jesus was completely aware of the cost of His love and that the hour of His sacrifice was at hand (John 13:1; Burge, 2000). In His washing of the disciples' feet, Jesus demonstrates both His authority and service: "Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist" (*New International Version*, 1973/2011, John 13:3-4). He was fully aware of His authority, origin, and destiny (Kohlenberger III & Barker, 2017). John describes Jesus's self-awareness with the Greek word *oïda*, which refers to knowledge that is "grasped directly or intuitively, completely and finally" (Erickson, 1982, p. 110). This is essential to understanding Jesus's self-knowledge: He knew who He was — not because of the testimony of others or personal experience — but because it was part of His self-concept. In the Epistles of God, *oïda* is used in connection with the knowledge or certainty about God's gifts, an absolute knowledge that does not need to be continuously verified (Du Toit, 1981).

In this absolute knowledge, Jesus purposefully communicated and behaved Kingdom principles. This is exemplified at the Last Supper: "Jesus knew...so he got up" (*New International Version*, 1973/2011, John 13:3-4). Jesus's actions were connected to His identity. Jesus did not need to discover Himself as He had absolute knowledge of His identity and purpose. Does this apply to Christian leaders? Jesus interchanged *oïda* and *gnosis* when He said: "I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you" (*New International Version*, 1973/2011, John 15:15). The implications of this are that believers, as friends of Christ, are given an intuitive knowledge of Kingdom priorities; however, as we see in the lives of the disciples, our journey with Christ gives us a greater understanding as He communicates eternal spiritual truths through the Holy Spirit (John 14:26). While Kouzes and Posner (2011) called for leaders to explore the inner territory of their values and standards and Weischer et al. (2013) defined authenticity as being trust oneself, the posture of Jesus

teaches that authentic credibility from a Christian worldview requires that we align our self-identity with our Christian identity.

### **Balancing Criticism and Optimism**

While authenticity has been found to engender trust in followers, there are limits to its effectiveness. In highly political, unethical, or volatile situations, authenticity may limit a leader's ability to motivate followers (Munyon et al., 2021). Further, Gardner et al. (2009) found that emotional intelligence can moderate how authentic leaders respond to an event, leading to more positive responses from followers. While authentic leaders value relational transparency, Avolio et al. (2004) emphasized the need for "appropriateness" in self-disclosure. Diddams and Chang (2012) asserted that leaders must demonstrate their strengths and weaknesses in a way that shows their humanity. This is evidenced in the Farewell Discourses as John communicates a wide range of emotions and interactions between Jesus and His disciples.

The Farewell Discourses serve as a long, singular dialogue between Jesus and His disciples. Through this dialogue, Jesus communicated care and concern for His disciples through word and deed. He communicated eternal, spiritual, and relational truths that served as the foundation of the New Testament Church. One of the critical aspects of Jesus's leadership demonstrated in the Gospels is His balanced approach to care and compassion. In multiple instances, Jesus would encourage His followers in one breath and rebuke them in another (cf. Matthew 16:13-27). This is evidenced in the Farewell Discourses as Jesus demonstrates great care in washing the disciples' feet and breaking bread with them in John 13 while simultaneously challenging Peter (vv. 6-9), identifying His betrayer (vv. 18-30), and prophesying of Peter's denial (vv. 31-38). As the narrative of the discourses continues, Jesus immediately turns to: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me" (*New International Version*, 1973/2011, John 14:1). Recognizing the disciples' perplexity, Jesus shifted the conversation to that of psychological and spiritual safety: calling them to have faith (v. 1), assuring them of their place with Him (v. 3), pointing them to greater things (v. 12), and reminding them of the support and guidance of the Holy Spirit (v. 28). In doing so, Jesus connected His identity and purpose to that of His disciples. In the concerns and questions over "how," Jesus succinctly asserts His Divine identity as the linchpin for the disciples' future: "I am the way and the truth and the life" (*New International Version*, 1973/2011, John 14:6a). The essence of Jesus' message to the disciples was: "You can, because I am." This sense of empowerment amid troubling times propels the discourse forward.

Continuing with another "I AM" statement, Jesus uses the vine metaphor to communicate the necessity of connectivity and productivity. Jesus encourages His disciples that life and provision can only come through relational and spiritual intimacy, "remaining" in Him required a covenant with Him (John 15:4; Arnold, 2002/2019). The ultimate expression of this intimacy was love, friendship, loyalty, mutual sharing, and sacrifice (John 15:9-17, Arnold, 2002/2019). Jesus emphasized the disciples' value by stating, "I chose you and appointed you" (*New International Version*, 1973/2011, John 15:16a). The value of the disciples is best expressed in the investment that Jesus made in them.

The Gospels are littered with narratives of Jesus pouring into His disciples. The Apostle Paul wrote that Jesus "emptied Himself," taking the form of a servant (Philippians 2:7; Thielman, 1995). While speaking of His death, Jesus also reminded His disciples of the Spirit of truth who would guide them (John 16:13). Amid the persistent questions, Jesus reminded them that they were loved (John 16:27). Jesus's actions served to reinforce His words as He ended the Farewell Discourses with the High Priestly Prayer (John 17; Carson, 1991). The



words of the prayer, coupled with the physical gestures of looking to heaven and praying (Burge, 2000), served to undergird every point He made during the dialogue; however, the last portion of the prayer communicates a grand purpose for the disciples: “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message” (*New International Version*, 1973/2011, John 17:20). In His final words prior to being arrested, Jesus envisioned His disciples as fruitful, impactful Christian leaders. Jesus looked past their current struggles with faith and obedience and saw their potential. More importantly, not only did Jesus identify His disciples’ potential, but He also communicated it to them. Jesus exemplified authentic credibility through relational transparency. He expressed confidence in His identity as the Son of God while balancing challenging conversations with messages of hope. While credible leaders effectively express appreciation, authentic, credible Christian leaders value their followers such that they invest in their development through transparent, challenging dialogue.

### Valuing Truth

In response to Jesus’ proclamation that He came to bear witness to the truth, Pilate asked a simple yet profound question: “What is truth?” (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, John 18:39). This question was the culminating point to emphasis throughout the Gospel of John that to know Jesus is to know the truth, and the concept of truth fundamentally delineates believers from non-believers. From its foundations, authentic leadership theory was framed from a pragmatic lens of its truth-value. Chan (2005) and Gardner et al. (2005b) called for future research on an authentic leader’s willingness to tell the truth. Further, knowing one’s “true self” became a significant component of the theory (George, 2007; Ladkin & Taylor, 2010; Weischer et al., 2013). The idea of “true self” is problematic from a biblical worldview as Scripture teaches that humanities true self has been corrupted by sin (Romans 5:12-14), and, as a result, mankind is condemned (John 3:18). Therefore, the Christian faith calls for mankind to eschew their true-selves and pursue their transformed-selves through faith in Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit (Romans 12:2).

The linchpin of the Gospel of John is Jesus’ proclamation: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, John 14:6). In this statement, Jesus embodies the purpose of His sending (John 3), service (John 13), and sacrifice (John 19). As the incarnation of truth, every aspect of Jesus’ life, ministry, and message is saturated in God’s truth. The Apostle Paul wrote, “Let God be true though every one were a liar” (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, Romans 3:4) in His argument that no one is righteous but can righteousness imparted upon them through faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 3:22).

Jesus led from a foundation of truth; it is His essence, identity, and mission. Nevertheless, Jesus invites His disciples to be partakers of the Truth. Michaels (2010) wrote that Jesus’ “I AM” proclamation communicated that *truth* and *life* are benefits of *the way* of Christ. The *way* of Christ is a concept that has real-world implications for Christian leaders. Jesus modeled *the way* throughout the Farewell Discourses. In John 13, Jesus modeled the way of service, but more importantly, He served truthfully and purposefully. John’s description of Jesus washing the disciples’ feet at the Last Supper created a narrative saturated with service and sacrifice. John begins the narrative by stating that Jesus “knew that his hour had come” (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, John 13:1). Jesus’ *knowing* was a matter of identity and context. Jesus not only had a firm grasp of His identity, but He also understood the magnitude of the moment. Jesus embodied two principles of authentic leadership: balanced processing and internalized moral perspective. Facing the most challenging moment in His ministry, Jesus

chose to remain focused on His mission (internalized moral perspective) and demonstrated an ability to lay aside ego and worldly images of success (balanced processing) to communicate truth to His disciples through service (Walumbwa et al., 2008). It was from this posture of service that Jesus then called His disciples to love another (John 13:34), encouraged them to have hope for the future (John 14:1), challenged them to a life of submission to His commandments that can only come through abiding in His love (John 15:10), assured that the presence of the Holy Spirit would bring joy and peace amid challenge circumstances (John 16:13, 24, 33), reminded them of the power of faith (John 17:8-19), and prayed for their unity (John 17:21).

While the Farewell Discourses demonstrate important biblical values such as service, love, hope, submission, joy, peace, faith, and unity, the consistent theme throughout the narrative is truth. All biblical values are an outgrowth of the reality that God sent His only begotten Son — the Truth incarnate — to redeem a broken, sin-filled world. Jesus exemplified authentic credibility through balanced processing and internalized moral perspective. He was fully aware of His identity as the Truth while understanding His context, and, as such, Jesus led His disciples a pivotal moment in their development.

### **Intentional Follower Development**

The authentic leadership development process develops leaders and followers. Ilies et al. (2005) viewed the development process as a cyclical process of leader-follower well-being through personal expressiveness, self-realization/development, flow experiences, and self-efficacy/self-esteem. Luthans and Avolio (2003) wrote that authentic leaders stimulate follower growth and development such that their behavior “positively transforms or develops associates into leaders themselves” (p. 243). Likewise, the discipleship model follows a similar process as the Apostle Paul wrote: “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, 1 Corinthians 11:1). John implies Jesus’ intentional leadership develop of His disciples as he recorded Jesus’ prayer for His disciples “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word” (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, John 17:20) and provided hope to Peter’s future as He prophesied “when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers” (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, Luke 22:32b). The Farewell Discourses provide a meaningful perspective on Jesus’ purposeful development of His disciples through intentionality, dialogue, modeling, and empowerment.

### **Intentionality**

Authentic leaders intentionally prioritize behaviors that promote leader and follower development (Wong & Cummings, 2009). There is a clear intentionality present in the Farewell Discourses such that Jesus moves His disciples from the upper room to the entrance of the Garden of Gethsemane (John 18:1). John communicated Jesus’ words and actions in a way that demonstrates the purposefulness of every step on Jesus’ journey to Gethsemane. John begins with Jesus’ knowledge of the timing and context of the night’s events (John 13:1, 3) and then provides a clear progression throughout the rest of the narrative: “after these sayings” (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, John 13:21), “rise, let us go from here” (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, John 14:31b), “I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away” (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, John 16:1), and “when Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered” (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, John 18:1).

## Dialogue

Authentic leaders enrich development through positive social exchanges that create an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect (Wong & Cummings, 2009). These supportive relationships require investment from the leader and follower, especially time, effort, and presence (Doran et al., 2004). As the descriptor *Farewell Discourses* expresses, the narratives of John 13 through 17 serve as a series of conversations between Jesus and His disciples. The dialogue addressed various topics and emotions; however, the conversation itself was purposeful. From the questions to the answers, the rebukes and the retorts, Jesus had one purpose: “to keep *them* from falling away” (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, John 18:1). Given the distance between the writing of the Synoptic Gospels and John’s Gospel, John’s readers already knew of the disciples’ failures; however, in providing a detailed account of the hours before Jesus’ arrest, John demonstrates the care and concern that Jesus had for His disciples and the way that Jesus used dialogue to prepare His followers for their future.

## Modeling

A primary strategy used by authentic leaders to develop and influence followers is positive role modeling (Gardner et al., 2005b). The Farewell Discourses continue two examples of Jesus modeling positive behaviors: washing the disciples’ feet (John 13) and the High Priestly Prayer (John 17). Jesus expresses the purpose of role modeling: “What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand” (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, John 13:7). According to Morris (1971), *afterward* either pointed to Peter’s understanding after the feet washing or after the promised illumination of the Holy Spirit. In the High Priestly Prayer, Jesus prayed: “And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth” (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, John 17:19). There are two principles that can be extracted from Jesus’ statements. First, positive role modeling has the *afterward* in mind as leader role modeling is the catalyst for follower change. Second, leaders use positive role modeling purposefully to exemplify the kind of change they desire in their followers. For believers, however, positive role modeling coupled with the work of the Holy Spirit creates effectual, long-term transformation.

## Empowerment

While empowering followers is generally a sign that they are trusted and respected by the leader, empowerment does not remove challenges nor guarantee effectiveness; leaders can create an empowering environment for their followers (Wright & Henson, 2019). John 14 through 16, the heart of the Farewell Discourses, exemplifies how Jesus empowered His disciples. The primary source of empowerment for believers is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is the work of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26). The Holy Spirit as Advocate and teacher would provide more illumination and insight than could be contained in the words in their writing (Michaels, 2010). Not only did Jesus promise the Holy Spirit, but He reminded the disciples of their calling: “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you” (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, John 16:13). In this statement, Jesus affirms the disciples’ present status but also their potential for the future. Jesus provided a sense of hope and long-term perspective that the moment’s challenges could have been extinguished. However, Jesus continued by connecting the work of the Holy Spirit to the authority of the Father (John 16:13). The empowerment of the Holy Spirit involves a transfer of authority. The disciples felt empowered because they were empowered: “He said to them, it is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses

in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, Acts 1:7-8). Credible leaders not only talk about empowerment but create mechanisms that empower others.

### **A Purposeful Posture**

According to Kouzes & Posner (2011), credible leaders serve a purpose and serve others by demonstrating their commitment through visible actions. Followers accept leader authority when they believe that there is a compatibility between their interests and organizational purpose (Joullié et al., 2021). Leaders build trust by demonstrating “a morally virtuous commitment that others are willing to follow” (Caldwell et al., 2010, p. 500). Wood (2020) explored the concept of *logos-inspired leadership* in the Gospel of John and concluded that logos-inspired leaders are committed to the growth of people and “accepting responsibility for the leadership role, willingness to be openly identified with actions and words, and readiness to explain their beliefs, decisions, commitments, or actions to constituents” (p. 23). While it is clear that credible leaders must visibly demonstrate their commitment to their values and purpose, the mechanisms by which this occurs is worth further exploration. The Apostle Peter testified that Jesus Christ modeled a visible commitment to His Kingdom purpose: “For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps” (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, 1 Peter 2:21). The Farewell Discourses provide details of visible actions on the part of Jesus that demonstrated to His disciples that He was serving a greater purpose.

The Farewell discourses provide evidence of three specific postures utilized by Jesus to communicate His purpose to the disciples. First, washing the disciples’ feet was a deliberate change in posture. While Jesus maintained an altruistic posture throughout His ministry (Dobrotka, 2021), Jesus’s act of bowing before His disciples was significant because Jesus recognized the necessity of humility and devoted service among disciples such that He, as a leader in the Jewish community, willingly took upon Himself a task that would have been relegated to a servant. By leading through a posture of servitude, Jesus built trust with the disciples and worked to develop of a culture of service among His followers (Lauren & Henson, 2021). Second, there is an implied posture found in the Farewell Discourses as the narrative seems to point to Jesus and His disciples conversing as they walk from the Upper Room to the Garden of Gethsemane. As much as we picture the last moments of Jesus’ life as being one of isolation, this is not necessarily the case. Until His arrest, Jesus intentionally surrounded Himself with His inner circle: the Twelve (John 13-17) and Peter, James, and John (Mark 14:33). Hannah et al. (2008) posed the concept of collective leadership efficacy. The idea that a group or team can accomplish something together requires dyadic leader-follower interactions (as witnessed between Jesus and Peter) and leader interactions with the collective group. These high-quality exchange relationships create an atmosphere of trust, warmth, and collective vision (Blake et al., 2022).

Further, through these collective exchanges, a climate to communicate leader efficacy for thought, motivation, means, and action (Hannah et al., 2008). Last, John 17:1 records that Jesus “lifted up his eyes to heaven and said ‘Father’” (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016). Looking toward heaven was a common posture for prayer in Judaism (Keener, 2014). The emphasis on “Father” was typical of Jesus’ prayers and is especially true in the High Priestly Prayer as Jesus refers to God as Father six times in the prayer (Burge, 2000). This reference to God signified a relational intimacy between Jesus and His Father. In one of His final acts before His disciples, Jesus took the posture of authentic worship and relational intimacy with God and created an atmosphere for the presence of God (John 17:5).

The High Priestly Prayer was the culminating moment in one long conversation. Throughout the Farewell Gospels, Jesus modeled open and transparent communication. While it was typical of Jesus to speak in parables, the Farewell Discourses became increasingly straightforward as Jesus continued His dialogue. Like many of His teachings, Jesus used metaphors: the bread and wine (John 13), the bridal chamber (John 14), and the vineyard (John 15). One of the unique elements of the discourses in John is that Jesus provided the disciples with “why” — His motivation for leading the way He did. Jesus says, “I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away” (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, John 16:1) and continues, “I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you” (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, John 16:4). The disciples testified of Jesus clarity: “Ah, now you are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech” (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016). It is striking that while metaphors heavily influence the first three chapters of the Farewell discourses, the last two chapters do not contain any. In His final words to His disciples, Jesus clearly communicated his rationale and purpose.

Lastly, He demonstrated His commitment through submission and obedience. Jesus begins the High Priestly prayer with: “I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed” (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, John 17:4-5). The High Priestly Prayer is best understood as a threefold prayer; He prays for Himself, His disciples, and for those who will believe because of the disciples (Burge, 2000; Carson, 1991). It was important for the disciples to hear the words of the prayer as they needed to understand that the crucifixion was Jesus’ willing submission to the will of God: “for their sake I consecrate myself” (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, John 17:19). By modeling submission and obedience, Jesus undergirded His lessons: “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father... If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, John 14:12, 15). As a credible leader, Jesus did not require of His disciples that which He did not practice — submission and obedience.

### **Sustainable, Spiritual Hope**

Snyder (1994) wrote that hope equals mental willpower plus waypower for goals. According to Snyder, for a person to have hope, they must have clear goals, the ability to find pathways to accomplish the goals (waypower), and the motivation to explore these pathways (willpower). Like previously discussed concepts like authenticity and self-efficacy, hope falls into the larger category of positive psychology (Snyder & Lopez, 2002). Avolio et al. (2004) asserted that authentic leadership influences positive psychological processes such as hope. Cooper et al. (2005), in a case study of authentic leaders, found that leaders perceived to demonstrate authentic behaviors engendered feelings of confidence, hope, and resilience in their followers. Furthermore, Fry (2003) connected hope with faith. Despite the challenging context surrounding the Farewell Discourses, there is evidence that Jesus invested significant time and effort into providing hope for His disciples through willpower and waypower.

The Farewell Discourses begin with “What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand” (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, John 13:7) and end with “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word” (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, John 17:20). From start to finish, Jesus provided hope: that the disciples would have an effective future — an afterward — that would produce new disciples. Further, the discourses are saturated with references to eternity. Jesus provided the disciples with hope in this life and eternity. The discourses yielded six ways that Jesus sought

to provide hope to His disciples: establishing community, encouraging faith, promising relationship, providing resources, and imparting peace and joy.

There is evidence of Jesus being concerned about developing the disciples as a community. In John 13:31-35, Jesus commanded the disciples to love one another, and in John 17:21 He prayed that they would be in unity. Both occurrences are connected to the disciples' effectiveness in reaching the world; specifically, the world would know that they were Jesus' disciples and believe that He was sent from the Father. In John 14, Jesus encouraged the disciples to believe in Him, but not only in Him as a person, but in Him as "the Way" to Truth and Life. So then, faith provides the willpower to explore the waypower (a relationship with Jesus Christ) that results in the ultimate form of hope for believers: eternal life. Continuing in John 14 and 16, Jesus promises the disciples the Holy Spirit. The language of the promise is essential to understanding its relationship to hope: "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you" (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, John 14:18). The word "orphans" can be translated as "desolate;" Jesus promised that He would not leave the disciples deserted (Burge, 2000). This promise created a perpetual Divine connection, "God with us" (see Matthew 1:23). This is evidenced as the "early church chose incarnation instead of isolation" (Serrano, 2022, p. 124)

In John 16, Jesus reminds His disciples that God, as the True Vine, is the source of life. Jesus called on His followers to remain connected to God as the source of spiritual nourishment, growth, and productivity. However, Jesus returns to a previous commandment: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, John 15:12). Herein, Jesus pointed two sources of provision: a relationship with God the Father and connectedness in a community of faith. Lastly, while Jesus identified outside sources of hope: a relationship with God the Father, the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, and connectedness in the community of faith, He provides two sources of internal motivation: peace (John 14:27) and joy (John 16:24). Faith, peace, and joy are simultaneously internal values and external practices that help to develop cohesiveness in groups and teams. Faith, or trust, is an antecedent of peace. It is the "affective state" of those who trust God (Bocarnea et al., 2018, p. 38). Peace comes through a relationship with God but is lived out in unity with others (Bocarnea et al., 2018; Hunt & Dobrić Veiss, 2022). Like peace, joy comes from a relationship with God, but from a communal perspective, joy springs from love (Bocarnea et al., 2018). While the sorrow of the circumstances caused the disciples to be troubled, Jesus offered them an internal gift that was not dependent upon circumstances. In providing hope for the future, Jesus provided His disciples with external mechanisms and internal transformation that create both the waypower and willpower to accomplish their calling.

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Authentic, credible leaders create an atmosphere of trust, hope, and empowerment that helps followers discover their divine design. The lessons extracted from the ministry of Jesus as described in the Farewell Discourses, provided a wealth of data on how leaders can be authentic and credible amid challenging circumstances. The foundation of credibility is a matter of authentic Christian identity. In order to establish trust with their followers, leaders must have an authentic, self-aware understanding of themselves, and for Christian leaders, this identity begins with a relationship with Jesus Christ. Authentic leaders value truth as a premium characteristic of their communications, behaviors, and relationships. All other positive psychological actions and effects — service, love, hope, submission, joy, peace, faith, and unity — are outgrowths of the trusting relationships developed as leaders are their authentic selves.

Christian leaders are called to move beyond their true selves and discover their transformed selves through a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Authentic, credible leaders engage in intentional follower development through purposeful dialogue, modeling, and empowerment. They create mechanisms by which followers explore and learn while identifying growth opportunities. Everything that authentic, credible leaders do is purposeful: behaviors, conversations, and modeling. Leader posture is more than a physical stance; it is an attitude, approach, and intentionality. Authentic, credible leaders communicate their commitment to the mission and their followers by modeling their priorities through submission to the process. Last, authentic, credible leaders evoke a sense of hope even in times of crisis. Jesus demonstrated a concern for His followers' perspective. He encouraged them by building their faith, imparting peace and joy, and empowering His followers.

Given the concerns of Gardner and associates regarding the potential limitations of authentic leadership, reconfiguring authentic leadership through the paradigm of credibility provides an opportunity to consider the relational implications of authenticity and credibility. First, while Einola and Alvesson (2021) established the limitations of authentic leadership from a behavior perspective, credible leaders intentionally — through actions and communication — develop trusting relationships with followers. Second, Douglas et al. (2005) asserted that authentic leaders must exercise political skill since leadership is a social phenomenon. It is through practicing “political skill” that leaders can develop trust and credibility. The lessons from Jesus's life and ministry provide insight into how Christian leaders can be “true to self” while developing high-exchange and trusting relationships with followers. Additional research is needed to understand better how Jesus practiced political skill while remaining consistent with His Kingdom identity.

While this article explored the leadership of Jesus in the Farewell Discourses, there is a need for continued research on the relationship between authenticity and credibility from additional biblical pericopes. Further, there is a need to explore how these biblical principles are lived-out in contemporary leadership in various leadership contexts. Further, while there are questions regarding perceptions of authenticity in various cultures, future research should consider how authentic credibility is perceived in diverse and organizational cultures.

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