

Building Leaders Together

— Earl Brubaker —



It was a daunting task. Jesus instructed them to represent Him in the whole world, proclaiming the gospel as they went, then teaching, training, and baptizing – planting churches. After the miraculous events on the day of Pentecost, their mission had really taken off. Thousands of new believers filled Jerusalem, straining the resourcefulness of these men even though they had spent three plus years learning from the Master and observing His ministry. They soon needed assistance, and they responded by calling on the church to appoint overseers of the widows ministry. Still it must have been difficult to keep up with teaching, training, and leading the burgeoning church.

They were still in the city. They had not left Jerusalem.

When would it be time to leave Jerusalem and begin going to Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth? Where would they find the personnel to take on this huge task? Jesus had clearly left them with a huge assignment that would require a massive

mobilization of witnesses, evangelists, and teachers. Perhaps the apostles had long discussions among themselves about these things as they directed the rapidly growing ministry in Jerusalem. No such discussions are recorded in Scripture, but the fledgling church did go on to preach the gospel and plant churches throughout the known world.

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The book of Acts records persecution which forced the followers of Jesus Christ from the city to the surrounding countryside, and eventually as far as Antioch. At Antioch the Spirit of God initiated the next step, and the church's first missionary movement was born (Acts 13:1-4).

Woven through the account of the growing church in Jerusalem, and its growth from Jerusalem through Judea and Samaria, and on to Antioch, are hints of how the early church found,

prepared and commissioned men to make the church's expansion into a world-wide movement a reality. The same pattern surfaces in the Holy Spirit-inspired account of the ministry of Paul as he pursued the task of taking the gospel to the world through evangelism and church planting.

WHAT IS THE KEY?

The key issue in the New Testament (and for us today) is personnel, leadership personnel. How did the early church find enough leadership personnel to make world-wide outreach possible? Scripture reveals an uncomplicated, but profound, plan of action based upon commitment to two important underlying principles.

The two underlying principles are these:

The church's primary goal is not building world-class churches but reaching the world's classes, societies, and nations with the gospel.

Churches are not merely independent outposts of gospel ministry, but interdependent groups of believers committed to the common goal of reaching all classes, societies, and nations of the world with the gospel.

Absent these two underlying principles, Christians will always be content with just a bit more than status quo. If the goal is a world-class

church, any small evidence of progress is, if not affirming, at least placating. If the church is composed of merely independent local congregations, then the health of other churches and needs in other communities is inconsequential. If, however, the goal is to reach the world, one can never be satisfied merely with a comfortably growing local church. If the goal is to penetrate society, the limitation of a local fellowship seeking to reach that goal in the isolation of independence soon becomes apparent.

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How then did the early church, committed to the goal of interdependently reaching the world, move toward that goal? How did it grow in one generation from a dozen Apostles to a worldwide force? The answer is found in the words of a prominent television commercial: “It’s The Network.”

The network existed before the birth of the church on the day of Pentecost. Those gathered in the upper room for prayer and supplication included the eleven Apostles, the women, and the brothers of Jesus – a total of about 120 people (Acts 1:12-15). Peter was so concerned about the network that he urged the group to fill the vacancy created by the defection of Judas, and Matthias was numbered with the Apostles (Acts 1:23).

On the Day of Pentecost, 3000 souls were added (Acts 2:41) and this band of 120 believers became a megachurch. These “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellow-

ship” (Acts 2:42), and “the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). Note that it was the apostles who were at the center of serving and teaching. That same pattern carries through chapter 3 and most of chapter 4. At the end of chapter 4 (vv. 36, 37) Barnabas is introduced. By the beginning of Acts 7, the network of ministering individuals had increased and seven men were appointed to oversee ministry to widows.

Did all this “just happen?” Did the apostles preach good sermons and hope for the best? Or were they doing what they had learned from Jesus – making disciples and teaching them to serve? If one assumes they were committed to Jesus’ teaching and principles and bound by His commission, it is safe to assume they were intentionally preparing a network of people for ministry – building leaders together.

Another step in building leaders appears when Barnabas introduced

Saul in Jerusalem. The disciples in Jerusalem were afraid of Saul because of his record as a persecutor of the church. Barnabas, however, brought Saul to the Apostles, the leaders of the Jerusalem church, and vouched of the genuineness of his conversion. Scripture then indicates that Saul “was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out, and he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 9:27, 28). When antagonists plotted for Saul’s life, the brethren secretly escorted him from Jerusalem and sent him to Tarsus. The network was rapidly growing.

When news came to Jerusalem that the gospel had reached Samaria, the Apostles sent Peter and John to minister there (Acts 8:14). Three chapters later, however, when news came of the church at Antioch, they sent Barnabas. The network was functioning.

Not long thereafter, Barnabas sought out Saul, and the two of them served together in Antioch for a full

year (Acts 11:25, 26). An impending famine prompted the Christians at Antioch to send assistance to Judea by the hands of Barnabas and Saul (Acts 11:29-30). When Barnabas and Saul returned to Antioch from Jerusalem, they brought John Mark with them (Acts 12:25).

The team that God would send on the first missionary journey was thus assembled. But it was not just a team. It was a network of believers from Judea to Antioch, all acquainted with one another, all committed to the same ministry goals, working together interdependently to achieve those common goals. Barnabas of Cyprus was introduced in Jerusalem just as Saul of Tarsus was. God worked in both lives in very different ways, and then brought them together in ministry first in Jerusalem, then in Antioch... all with the support and backing of the original church in Jerusalem! From Antioch, Barnabas and Saul went back to Jerusalem to meet the needs there, thereby strengthening the network of believers.

At the end of the first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas returned to Jerusalem to meet with the church council and deal with false teaching that had risen concerning circumcision. After that meeting they returned to Antioch with two of the brethren from Jerusalem. One of those brethren, Silas, became Paul's partner for his second missionary journey. During this second trek Timothy was added as a part of the ministering network. At the end of this second journey, Paul again returned to Antioch.

At the end of his third missionary journey Paul went back to Jerusalem. Acts 21:17-20 records that "When we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. When he had greeted them, he told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord." The next few verses raise issues of differences between the Jewish and Gentile churches and often cause the reader to overlook the fact that Paul still felt

himself to be part of the network of believers that was committed to world-wide evangelism. It is quite probable that Timothy was introduced to the church leaders in Jerusalem at this time as well.

How large was the void in the church at Jerusalem when Barnabas went to Antioch? Who filled the hole left in Tarsus when Saul joined Barnabas in Antioch? How could the church at Antioch have sent out key people like Paul and Barnabas without suffering ministry deficit disorder? The church in Jerusalem took another hit when Silas decided to stay in Antioch after going there to represent the Jerusalem Council. The church at Derbe and Lystra was still in the process of establishment when Paul enlisted Timothy to go with him. None of this would have happened if men and churches were myopic in vision and independent in endeavor. All this was possible only because these churches were fully committed to being part of Jesus' promise to build His church, and willing to work interdependently toward that end by releasing ministry quality people than protecting their local ministries.

SOME APPLICATIONS FOR VISION AMERICA

Vision American seeks to address the need of personnel for evangelism and church planting in America by assisting IFCA churches to seek, train, and send out men like Barnabas and Paul and Silas and Timothy and John Mark in an interdependent manner.

Vision America will require seasoned pastors of established churches to send out their well trained leaders to new works and then train others to take their places.

Vision America will depend upon pastors with a heart for evangelism, willingness to train and develop leaders, and the maturity to withstand church birth pangs to accept the challenge to plant a church. For example, in one American city is an experienced pastor in his 50s, whose wife is an invalid. For the first time he is planting a church because he saw the need for a multi-ethnic church and was willing to be God's tool to accomplish that task.

Vision America needs for you to look beyond your local assembly and see what God may do in America if we join together to release men for ministry in needy communities.

We must build a leadership network within IFCA International in order to help make Vision America's goals a reality. Will you do your part in building such a network?

Earl Brubaker served for many years as a church planter in the Pacific Northwest. Now he serves as General Director of Northwest Independent Church Extension of Tacoma, WA. He also serves as a member of IFCA International Board of Directors.