

DEVELOPING AND SENDING LEADERS: AN ANALYSIS OF SELECT PASSAGES IN ACTS

Introduction

The importance of leadership should not be underestimated. Alexander Strauch states, “No society can operate without leadership and structure, and the local church is no exception.”¹ Local churches need competent leaders to provide stability and guidance so that Christ’s commission to make disciples of all nations can advance. Since leadership is extremely important, who is primarily responsible to develop and send Christian leaders for effective service? Denominations, para-church organizations, seminaries and Bible colleges, local churches, or a combination of these groups are all potential answers to this question. Mark Dever answers the question by stating, “When a young man evidences gifts for the pastoral ministry, many churches simply send him off to seminary to make him a minister. And, well, God help the seminaries that that happens to, which is I think just about all of them. They’re not to make pastors. Churches make pastors.”²

As opposed to educational institutions, para-church organizations, or any other entity local churches are primarily responsible for developing and sending church leaders for effective ministry. The book of Acts supports this claim as the churches in Antioch, Asia Minor, and Ephesus served as the places where church leaders were confirmed and sent (Acts 13:1-3), disciplined and appointed (Acts 14:21-23), as well as taught, developed, and encouraged (Acts 18:24-28, 20:17-38).

¹Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership* (Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth Publishers, 1995), 135.

²Mark Dever, “Raising up Pastors is the Church’s Work,” *9Marks eJournal*, 6, no. 1 (January/February 2009): 6, accessed August 2, 2015, <http://9marks.org/journal/raising-next-generation-pastors/>.

Delimitations and Definitions

Scripture provides many examples to demonstrate that the primary arena of leadership development and locus of responsibility should be local churches. Paul's charge to Timothy to develop leaders who would also teach others was to be in the context of the local church at Ephesus (2 Tim 2:2).³ Discipleship and appointment of elders was to be implemented in the churches at Crete (Titus 1:5-9).⁴ Timothy's gifts and calling were affirmed by the church leaders at Ephesus (1 Tim 4:14-15).⁵ Though these examples are important, this paper will restrict its discussion to examples of local church leadership development in Antioch, Ephesus, and Asia Minor as described in the book of Acts.

Definitions of a number of important terms are necessary to create clarity within the argument of this paper. This paper defines a church leader as anyone involved in Christian service that is influencing people or has responsibility over a group including missionaries, deacons, pastors, church planters, and elders. The examples from Acts in this paper will mainly concern elders, pastors, and missionaries. Leadership development is defined as the process of training, equipping, teaching, shepherding, and encouraging leaders for service. The process of sending leaders for effective ministry is defined as confirming the call of God on a leader to serve, appointing a leader to a ministry position at home or abroad, and taking the responsibility to remain active in the leader's ministry through providing accountability, encouragement, and resources. Christian leaders are called and sent to three major areas serving as (1) local church ministers, (2) church planters, and (3) missionaries.⁶

³Mark Dever, "Raising up Pastors is the Church's Work," *9Marks eJournal*, 5.

⁴Brian Croft, *Prepare them to Shepherd: Test, Train, Affirm, and Send the Next Generation of Pastors*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 37.

⁵Albert Mohler, "Interview with Dr. Albert Mohler, Radio Host and Theologian." (Interview by Adrian Warnock at patheos.com, November 8, 2006) accessed on September 19, 2015, patheos.com.

⁶These three areas of Christian service are defined by Albert Mohler, Donald Whitney, and Daniel Dumas, *The Call to Ministry*, (Louisville, Kentucky: SBTS Press, 2013), 112-115.

This paper also recognizes that educational institutions, para-church organizations, and other groups currently training leaders are important. Many of these groups are performing effective leadership development; helping people grow in character, skills, and knowledge; and training leaders to serve Christ as pastors, missionaries, and church planters. Christian educational institutions offer an environment for rigorous study and academic advancement that many churches simply do not have the resources to provide.⁷ Para-church organizations are able to offer specific training and specialized instruction. Yet for all of the benefits of these groups, Scripture demonstrates that local churches are primarily responsible for developing, appointing, and sending Christian leaders. This paper is not arguing for schools and para-church groups to close their doors and shut down. Nor is this paper arguing that these groups are unable have an important role in church leadership development. Rather, it is being argued that these organizations do not bear the primary responsibility for Christian leadership development and sending. It may be wise for churches to partner with schools and training groups, utilize their resources, and take advantage of the training they offer.⁸ Yet it is imperative that churches do not simply send their leaders off to these organizations thereby completely outsourcing leadership development and abdicating their responsibility to their calling. C. Franklin Granger names this posture toward the seminary and church relationship “the deposit-and-withdrawal” problem and discourages this type of thinking.⁹ Instead of adopting this deposit-and-withdrawal approach, churches should utilize the resources of schools and training groups while at the same time developing their leaders and remaining involved in their lives—never forgetting that it is their responsibility to develop the next generation of Christian leaders.¹⁰

⁷Mark Dever, “Raising Up Pastors,” *9Marks eJournal*, 6.

⁸Daniel Akin, “A Seminary President’s Forum,” *9Marks eJournal*, 11.

⁹C. Franklin Granger, “Seminaries, Congregations, and Clergy: Lifelong Partners in Theological Education.” *Theological Education* 46, no. 1 (2010): 87.

¹⁰Albert Mohler, *Training Pastors in Church*, Reformed Theology Articles at Ligonier.org, accessed August 1, 2015, <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/training-pastors-church/>.

Discussion of Evidence

In order to provide evidence for its thesis, the first section of this paper will demonstrate that the church in Antioch was the entity that confirmed and sent Paul and Barnabas for further ministry (Acts 13:1-3). The second section of this paper will describe how the churches in Asia Minor provided the context of Paul's development and appointment of leaders (Acts 14:21-23). The final section of this paper will explain that the church in Ephesus was the environment where Apollos was further instructed, developed, and sent (18:24-28) and where Paul modeled local church leadership development (Acts 20:17-38).

The Development and Sending of Leaders at the Church in Antioch (Acts 13:1-3)

The local church's responsibility for developing and sending leaders is first evident in the scene at Antioch in Acts 13:1-3. This passage demonstrates that the church in Antioch was the entity that confirmed Saul and Barnabas' calling and sent them out for further ministry.

Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. (Acts 13:1-3)¹¹

Along with Saul and Barnabas, Acts 13:1 explains that the church in Antioch had strong leadership including prophets and teachers, Simeon, Lucius, and Manaen.¹² These church leaders along with the church members had met with Saul and Barnabas for edification and prayer for a whole year and a "great many people" had been impacted by their ministry together (Acts 11:26).¹³ After this year of effective ministry in the church at Antioch, Acts 13:2-3 describes that

¹¹All quotes in this paper are from the English Standard Version.

¹²Craig Keener observes that these men were "spiritually and intellectually mature leaders, who helped to confirm the Gentile mission of Saul and Barnabas." (1982). For a thorough background to these leaders see section on "Leaders of the Antioch Church" in Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary & 2: Introduction and 1:1-14:28*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012-2013).

¹³Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 416. Also covered in Brian Croft, *Prepare them to Shepherd*, 36.

the church leaders confirmed the call of God on the lives of Saul and Barnabas to go to the Gentiles by hearing the will of the Holy Spirit during a time of worship.¹⁴ These church leaders then obeyed the will of the Spirit by laying their hands on Saul and Barnabas in an act of confirmation of their calling, spent time praying for them, and sent them off to minister to the Gentiles. Craig Keener explains how God worked to send Saul and Barnabas through the confirmation of the church leadership; “The Spirit calls the church’s leadership to share responsibility for sending them out.”¹⁵ This passage is a clear example of a local church that confirmed and sent its leaders for ministry.

The church in Antioch also remained involved in the lives and ministry of Paul and Barnabas during their missionary journeys. Acts 14:27-28 reveals that the church in Antioch gathered to celebrate God’s work through Paul and Barnabas and to spend time together. F.F. Bruce explains the significance of this passage. “The church of Antioch was naturally eager to learn how they had fared: it had shared in the responsibility and the glory of their service.”¹⁶ Paul and Barnabas’ repeated returns to the church at Antioch for reporting and encouragement demonstrates local church responsibility for the sending and continued development of its leaders (Acts 14:26-28, 18:22-23).¹⁷ Eckhard Schabel explains the strength of Paul’s connection with the church in Antioch,

Paul did not operate as a missionary independent of the church but as a missionary who belonged to a local congregation, who was recommissioned by a local congregation to a new missionary initiative, and who regarded himself to be accountable to the congregations in Antioch and in Jerusalem—two churches which he regularly visited after the conclusion of another phase of missionary work.¹⁸

¹⁴Dave Harvey, *Am I Called? The Summons to Pastoral Ministry* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2012), 170-172.

¹⁵Craig S. Keener, *Acts*, 1991.

¹⁶F.F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 281.

¹⁷Brian Croft, *Prepare them to Shepherd*, 37.

¹⁸Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts*, Expanded Digital Edition., Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New

In summary, Acts 13:1-3 reveals that the church in Antioch was the entity that confirmed Saul and Barnabas' calling and sent them out for further ministry thus serving as supporting evidence that local churches are primarily responsible for developing and sending church leaders for effective ministry.

Churches in Asia Minor: The Context of Leadership Development (Acts 14:21-23)

The local church's responsibility for developing and sending leaders is also evident in the ministry of Paul and Barnabas described in Acts 14:21-23. The churches in Asia Minor provided the context of Paul and Barnabas' development and appointment of leaders (Acts 14:21-23). During their first missionary journey after experiencing persecution at Lystra, Paul and Barnabas went on to Derbe. The passage explains,

When they had preached the gospel in to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed. (Acts 14:21-23)

This passage reveals that Paul and Barnabas' ministry strategy in the cities of Asia Minor was to preach the gospel, make disciples, strengthen believers, and appoint elders—thus establishing churches in these locations. An important aspect of their ministry strategy was to develop leaders at the churches in these locations. I. Howard Marshall explains that God worked through Paul and Barnabas “to bring many to faith, so that churches were planted and patterns of leadership established over a wide area.”¹⁹ In Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch (of Pisidia) Paul and Barnabas not only preached the gospel and helped believers grow, they also appointed elders and spent time committing them to the Lord through prayer and fasting (Acts 14:23). This strategy is

Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Acts 13:1–12.

¹⁹I. Howard Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 5, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 214.

also reflected in Paul's exhortation to Titus to appoint elders in every town in Crete making sure they met the qualifications of good character, orderly households, and teaching competence (Titus 1:5-9). In reflecting on Paul's strategy of leadership development by appointing elders with good character, Don Howell writes "His greatest concern is the spiritual maturity and emotional stability of those who are appointed to leadership...It was his practice to appoint elders or overseers to direct the affairs of the emerging churches."²⁰

Paul may have had the themes of these elder qualifications (Titus 1:5-9) in mind as he and Barnabas established churches and appointed elders in the Asia Minor region. The ministry of Paul and Barnabas at these churches may have included elements of leadership development in character, household management, and teaching. Regardless of the specific topics that may have been covered, Paul and Barnabas' leadership development efforts in the churches in Asia Minor were effective because many men grew to sufficient maturity in order to be appointed to elder positions. David Helm explains Paul's leadership development strategy in the of local churches,

The apostle Paul may have earned a theological education in the school of Gamaliel, but he looked to local churches to do the work of carrying on his gospel work. He asked Timothy to entrust the gospel to "faithful men who will be able to teach others" (2 Tim. 2:2). He told the Ephesians that pastors and teachers were called to "equip the saints for the work of ministry" (Eph. 4:11-12). He knew his work in Crete was not complete until Titus appointed "elders in every town" (Titus 1:5). Simply put, Paul put his gospel hopes for the world on the backs of local pastors who served in local churches.²¹

Additionally, the process of appointment and committing the elders to the Lord acted as a type of sending by Paul and Barnabas to ministry at their local church (Acts 14:23). In summary, Acts 14:21-23 describes how Paul and Barnabas' establishing, equipping, developing, and appointing of leaders was accomplished in the setting of local churches thus providing

²⁰Don N. Howell, *Servants of the Servant: a biblical theology of leadership*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003): 287.

²¹David Helm, "A Pastor's Forum," *9Marks eJournal*, 15.

evidence that local churches are primarily responsible for developing and sending Christian leaders.

The Church at Ephesus: Developing and Sending Leaders (Acts 18 and 20)

The local church's responsibility for developing and sending leaders is also evident in the church at Ephesus. Two examples to be considered are (1) the Ephesian church was the environment where Apollos was further developed and sent (18:24-28) and (2) the Ephesian church was the context in which Paul modeled leadership development (Acts 20:17-38).

First, the church at Ephesus came alongside Apollos during his teaching and preaching ministry to give him much needed instruction and send him for further ministry. Acts 18:24-28 describes Apollos as an eloquent and effective speaker, competent in the Scriptures, fervent in spirit, and knowledgeable of the things concerning Jesus. Yet as the leaders and members of church that met in Ephesus related with Apollos it became clear that he needed further instruction and development in order to continue maximum effectiveness for the cause of Christ. So Priscilla and Aquila, instrumental figures in the church at Ephesus, took Apollos aside and helped him learn the way of God more accurately by explaining about the baptism of Jesus as he only knew about the baptism of John (Acts 18:25-26; 1 Cor 16:19).²² After spending time in Ephesus, Apollos desired to go to Achaia to continue ministry. The brothers at Ephesus agreed with this direction and sent Apollos to his next ministry assignment, encouraging Apollos to go and writing to the disciples in Achaia to welcome him (Acts 18:27). Darrell Bock comments on the significance of the brothers writing to the disciples in Achaia; "Apollos now understands better than before the full benefits offered in salvation, especially as it relates to the Spirit of

²²I. Howard Marshall explains that "the brothers" in this passage was a group converted as a result of Paul, Priscilla, and Aquila's efforts and may have included converts who came from elsewhere. A church had been established in Ephesus and met in the home of Priscilla and Aquila as revealed in 1 Cor 16:19. I. Howard Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 5, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 322.

God. Certainly the commendation of him to Achaia tells us that the church does not have any concerns after the time of additional instruction.”²³ This entire scene is a clear example of a local church developing and sending a leader. At a crucial stage in Apollos’ leadership and ministry, the church at Ephesus helped him gain important knowledge as well as encouraged and sent him to his next place of ministry.²⁴

Second, the church at Ephesus was the context of Paul’s model for leadership development. Paul’s description of how he taught and loved the Ephesian church elders serves as a powerful example of how the local church should be the primary environment for effective leadership development. The scene is found in Acts 20:17-38 as Paul travels to Jerusalem after his three missionary journeys. On his way to Jerusalem, Paul calls the elders to meet him and, through tears and prayers as they would not meet again, he shares heartfelt words of exhortation and encouragement. Paul also provides a description of how he ministered to the leaders of the church while he lived at Ephesus for three years (Acts 20:18-31). Though his stay there was filled with many trials, Paul viewed his ministry of leadership development at Ephesus as one of humble service to the Lord (Acts 20:19). Paul also reminded the elders how he “did not shrink back from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:20-21). These verses demonstrate that Paul’s ministry to the Ephesian elders included declaring anything profitable for their growth and teaching them truths about repentance and faith. Paul’s model for developing these church leaders through instruction was accompanied by “admonishing” them “with tears,” by declaring them “the whole counsel of God,” and by instructing them how to continue effective leadership at the church in Ephesus

²³Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 592.

²⁴Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, 593-594.

(Acts 20:26, 28, 31). Ajith Fernando explains how this passage reveals Paul's priority on leadership development in the local church,

A good leader must give high priority to equipping others to do the work. Paul, of course, was a master at this. This is why he called only the leaders of Ephesus to come to Miletus. Though he had a general concern for the entire church at Ephesus, he took on the special responsibility of equipping leaders. When he started churches, he soon appointed leaders (14:23).²⁵

Acts 20:17-38 reveals a clear illustration of leadership development in the local church setting as Paul taught, equipped, and served the Ephesian elders with all his heart and mind. Both passages, Acts 18:24-28 and Acts 20:17-38, serve as evidence that local churches are primarily responsible to develop and send leaders. The Ephesian church was the environment where Apollos was further developed and sent and also the context in which Paul modeled local church leadership development.

Conclusion

In order for the church to grow and the gospel to advance in this world it is imperative that Christian leaders are continually developed, raised up, and sent out to spread the message of the good news of Jesus Christ. Educational institutions, para-church organizations, and other groups are able to effectively develop certain aspects of Christian leaders and it is wise for local churches to utilize the rich resources offered by these groups.²⁶ But regardless of how effective or successful these organizations are, this paper has demonstrated that it is the local churches that have the primary responsibility to develop and send leaders. The evidence for this claim has come primarily from the book of Acts:

²⁵Ajith Fernando, *Acts*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 546.

²⁶Rick Thoman, "Leadership Development: Churches Don't Have to Go It Alone, Part I," *Christian Education Journal* 6, no. 2 (2009): 296.

- (1) Saul and Barnabas were confirmed in their calling and sent for further ministry by the leadership of the church in Antioch (Acts 13:1-3). No other type of group confirmed or called them.
- (2) Furthermore, the fact that Paul and Barnabas repeatedly returned to the church at Antioch to report and to receive encouragement demonstrates local church responsibility for the sending of its leaders (Acts 14:26-28, 18:22-23). They were not demonstrated to be responsible to any other entity.
- (3) Paul's strategy to develop and appoint leaders was executed in the environment of local churches in Asia Minor (Acts 14:21-23) not in the environment of a school or training center.
- (4) Apollos was further instructed and developed in his leadership in the context of the church in Ephesus (Acts 18:24-26). He was also confirmed, encouraged, and sent for further ministry by this same local church (Acts 18:27-28).
- (5) Finally, Paul modeled leadership development in the local church setting at Ephesus. His description of how he ministered at the church in Ephesus and his exhortations to the church elders illustrates that local churches should be responsible to develop leaders (Acts 20:17-38).

Pastor David Helm summarizes the importance and urgency of the responsibility for local churches to develop its leaders, "Churches should train future pastors because the Word commends it, the apostolic practice modeled it, the next generation requires it, and the lost shall remain eternally lost without it. If we don't train, who will?"²⁷

²⁷David Helm, "A Pastor's Forum," *9Marks eJournal*, 15.

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Summary Handout

