

How Can Churches Be Led Well?

Acts 11:19-30

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And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.

And a great many people were added to the Lord. So, Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. - Acts 11:21-22 & 24-26, ESV

All leadership is challenging, and church leadership is a particularly challenging endeavor. So many factors can undermine the work of the church and present unseen challenges for effective leadership. In today's passage, we have examples of excellent and fruitful church leadership in Barnabas and Paul.

The church in Antioch was greatly blessed by God. We don't even know for sure who started this church, as we're only told that "*some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus.*" This is the first encouraging leadership development in Antioch: The "church planters" didn't get possessive and act like the new fellowship of believers belonged to them.

The next positive development came when the church got outside help, wanting to be connected to the established church. These believers in Antioch were not setting out to be different and disconnected. They wanted trusted, experienced leadership to ground them solidly in the faith shared by the church in Judea.

Barnabas was a model pastor for four reasons:

1. He rejoiced in the good work begun by others.
2. He exhorted them to remain faithful to the Lord.
3. His personal character and deep spirituality were impeccable - "*he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.*"
4. He sent to get help when the church grew beyond his ability to shepherd.

Paul also showed great qualities of an effective church leader, too:

1. He came to a work he had not begun because he was needed.
2. He remained and faithfully taught the church for a year, to ensure that they were well grounded in the Scriptures.

The result of the work of God and the effective leadership in Antioch was remarkable. This was the first place where disciples were called Christians. They also responded to the word God sent through Agabus and showed sacrificial love for those who would suffer the most in the upcoming famine.

Notice what is completely lacking in this whole story: ego. Neither the original men who brought the Gospel to Antioch nor Barnabas nor Saul show any sign of ego or personal kingdom-building. They were all focused on proclaiming the Gospel, serving the church, teaching God's people and being faithful to Christ. This is the kind of leadership our churches need today.

Heavenly Father, Thank You for Your good work among Your people. Thank You for saving people through the preaching of the Gospel and for building up Your church. Give us faithful leadership, focused on faithfulness to Christ and not on ego and self-promotion. May Your church be firmly grounded in the Gospel and make us fruitful for Your glory. In Jesus' name, Amen.