

Matthew Porter - BIBLE STUDY

(PRE-READING: [Acts 11:19-30](#); [12:25-13:4](#))

### What's your favourite church in the New Testament?

Mine is the Antioch Church ([Acts 11, 12 & 13](#)), because it impacted its locality & its region with the gospel.

### This church...

- did this through effective evangelism ([v.21 & 24](#): seeing 'a great no of people ...brought to the Lord') & probably through caring social action
- grew missionary disciples – hungry to learn from the word of God ([v.26](#) – 'for a whole year B & Saul taught great numbers')
- became the key church planting centre for their region. Guided by the Holy Spirit, it was from here that Paul was sent out on all three of his missionary journeys to evangelise and plant churches ([in Acts 13; 15 and 18](#)). They were all from Antioch.

The thing I especially want you to notice about this Antioch church is its leadership. We don't know who led it in phase 1, when it was initially planted to reach local Jews. We don't know who led it in phase 2, when they reached out to non-Jews & growth really took off. We do know who led it in phase 3 ([11:22ff](#)): Barnabas, who shaped this church from a *growing* church into a *resource* church.

### Leadership that Barnabas nurtured

First, the leaders of Antioch were good in character:

- Barnabas' real name is found in [Acts 4:36](#), *Joseph*, yet everyone called him 'Barnabas', *son of encouragement*. He had the gift of encouragement! *Encouragement* was intrinsic to his character. It was who he was.
- When Barnabas arrives in Antioch, **what does he do?** [Acts 11:23](#); he stops to **look**. He is observant, looking for signs of the Spirit at work; when seen, he is 'glad'; he 'encourages' them 'to remain true to the Lord'. He's an encourager. Observant. Joyful.
- Luke takes a moment ([Acts 11:24](#)) to tell us even more about his character, describing him as 'a good man, full of faith & the Holy Spirit.'
  - i) he's 'good'. Good like God with a compassionate heart.
  - ii) he's 'full of the Holy Spirit.' Something is full when it overflows. *When people bumped into Barnabas, the Holy Spirit spilled out!*
  - iii) he's 'full of faith.' He's expectant of God, believing God hears his prayers, & assuming God really will transform lives through his word & Spirit.
- He's generous. When he first appears in Acts, in [4:37](#), we're told that he sells a field & gives all the money to the apostles in Jerusalem. He clearly has a *generous heart & trusts the leadership* with his finances.

Then, when later leading the church in Antioch, we're told (in 11:27) that travelling prophets come & prophesy that a great famine is coming; that will impact the whole Roman world, including their area.

*A cost of living crisis is coming!* And they're given the heads up from the Lord! As the leader of the church, **what does he get the church to do?** They have a Gift Day!

They could have kept it *for themselves*, to support each other when the crisis comes. No!

They could have given it to *the local community*, in preparation for the crisis. No!

Instead, Barnabas gets them to give it all away. To the churches in Judea (some 200 miles away). *They give it all away!*

You can imagine some asking: **will we be ok?** It seems they are – that God blesses their giving – for when we next see this church there's no sense that they're poor. In fact, they've grown in generosity through the experience: *by chapter 13 they're not just giving money, they're giving away people.* People to plant churches. They go on a journey from giving money to giving people.

### **How did they learn to do this?**

They learned it from their generous leader, Barnabas, who modelled & taught generosity.

### **Generosity is a key value of the Resource Church.**

1. this important resource church was led by a leader who was good in character and modelled this to others
2. the leaders of Antioch were strategic in their actions

a) We've already seen that the Antioch Church probably did good social action, but on top of this, we know (v.24) that Barnabas ensured they prioritised evangelism.

There's much for us to learn and apply in the UK:

- I don't see many places where evangelism is really high on the priority list.
- I don't see evangelism prayed for in Sunday intercessions.
- Or where the raising of evangelists is a priority of leaders.

b) Although God is blessing their evangelistic endeavours, Barnabas still wants more. He recruits a specialist evangelist. Someone who is *more gifted in this area than him*.

This is a good strategic action, he's a secure leader, bringing gifted people into areas where he is weaker. So Barnabas goes to Tarsus in search of his old friend Saul, & gets him to come over to Antioch.

c) As well as helping with the evangelism, notice Barnabas & Saul also prioritise discipleship, spending much time teaching the people (4:26). We know Saul (Paul)

was good at this. But so was Barnabas, with Luke telling us (in 4:36) that he was a Jewish convert from a Levitical family, so he'd have been well versed in the Scriptures from youth.

d) If you want to know more about the shared Leadership Team that Barnabas develops, well Luke helpfully tells us about them in Acts 13:1.

- Simeon, from Niger, in sub-Saharan W Africa. Probably ethnically black.
- Lucius from Cyrene, now in Libya. Probably an Arab.
- Manean, from somewhere in the Palestine region; probably olive-skinned.
- Paul from Tarsus, of Greek extraction.
- Barnabas, who Luke tells us (in 4:36) is a Cypriot.

Notice Luke is intentionally highlighting the diverse ethnic mix in their team. It probably reflected well the ethnic mix of the city of Antioch, which was a cosmopolitan Roman trading centre full of a variety of people.

*So having a rich ethnic mix in your Leadership team today is nothing new (!) but it was new in religious life back then, as most religions were ethnically monochrome, and this Leadership team was modelling a diversity that was very different, and very attractive. That of course is still the case today.*

Finally, as the church grew, and Barnabas no doubt sensed a growing call to plant, Barnabas knew that they needed more leaders. So they didn't just do evangelism & make converts; they ALSO grew disciples and raised missional leaders.

That meant that when he & Saul were sent out to plant, they were able to take a team AND the Antioch church didn't fall apart! There were other leaders ready to step up, or already leading.

There's an easily-overlooked little phrase in Ac 15:35 that helps us see this. They return to Antioch, and *what happens?*

Paul & Barnabas remained in Antioch where they and many others taught & preached'

*Where did the 'many others' come from?*

They must have raised them from within, trained them & released them.

They did what church planting leader Ed Stetzer says we should all do, when he says: 'If you want your church to live, produce more leaders than you think you will ever need.'

### Conclusion

So, *can you see why I love this church? And why I so appreciate its leaders, esp. Barnabas?*

He was good in character & strategic in his actions.

May we be like him, and led by the Holy Spirit, see many come to Christ, many leaders raised, & many churches planted, again & again & again! Amen.