

## Article

**Leadership That Lasts: Journeys to Significance**

An Examination of Paul's Improving Missionary Advancement

By Neil Cole

Leadership is influence. Not all leaders are good ones. There are some leaders that God doesn't want to multiply. The best leaders are not those who win the most followers, but those who create other leaders. What does it take to be a leader who lasts to the finish line and even finishes stronger than he started? The Apostle Paul provides us with a great example of the best sort of leader.

We are used to thinking of the Apostle Paul as a teacher, but if we can see him as a learner we will discover what it takes to be a leader who finishes well and leaves behind a lasting influence. Most studies of Paul's missionary methods do not take into account the fact that Paul is himself a learner who improves in his influence as he follows the Lord of the harvest.

We can learn much from the lessons Paul learned in his journeys with God.

**A. First Journey (Acts 13:1-14:28) took place in South East Asia Minor—the Galatian region.**

This trip covered 1500 Miles in one year without frequent flier miles! Paul and Barnabas functioned as a team of traveling evangelists leaving new disciples behind in every city. This method saw great fruitfulness, but left behind weak churches that had an overwhelming leadership vacuum. Paul and Barnabas felt the need to return and visit each church and appoint leaders. After returning to Antioch and reporting the results they later felt the need to once again make contact with these churches. Eventually the leadership vacuum proved to much and was filled with an unhealthy and domineering leadership that led the churches into legalism and death requiring Paul's most stern letter of rebuke (Galatians).

*First Journey Lessons:*

- The first journey leader often tries to do it all himself, which leaves weak churches who are susceptible to domineering leadership (Galatians).
- The apprentice leader on his first journey begins to flex his own leadership muscles and become a leader in his own right stepping out from the shadow of his mentor.
- First journey leaders often seem in a hurry to move on.
- The first journey is where the leader gains the know-how to later pass on to others. You can't skip the first journey.

**B. Second Journey (Acts 15:36-18:22) was to Macedonia and Achaia.**

Paul, learning from the weaknesses of his first journey, started out with twice the team—Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke. Paul, like most of us, when he saw a great need for leaders his first response was to recruit more leaders. This is a shortsighted and short-lived solution. The problem is that we are all recruiting from the same pond. Eventually the pond dries up and we are only left with the muck at the bottom. But as he left leaders behind to care for new churches he soon found out the disadvantages of recruiting leaders as apposed to raising them up. In Athens and then Corinth he found himself alone, provoked by demonic idolatry and afraid. Jesus intervenes in a vision telling Paul not to leave, but to find a team in the harvest itself. This changed everything for Paul. He soon led Acquilla and Priscilla to Christ who in turn won Apollos. Paul had learned to multiply his influence by raising leader for the harvest from the harvest.

*Second Journey Lessons:*

- The emerging leader often shows less respect for the mentor leader as he steps out on his own to do things his way. This usually lasts about one year and if the mentor responds graciously he will gain even greater respect afterward. Ralph Moore refers to this as "adolescent rebellion syndrome" because it so closely parallels the struggles of a teenager coming of age.
- The 2nd journey leader often finds his plans are not God's plans. The quicker he learns to listen and follow the better. Strategy is not a bad thing, but it is second to listening to God's voice and obeying.
- The lesson of the second journey is learned through conflict, pain, loneliness and fear.
- You can't skip the second journey either.

**C. Third Journey (Acts 18:23-21:16) reached all of Asia with the Word of God, yet Paul spent the**

### **whole three years in only one city---Ephesus.**

Employing the lessons learned on the third journey, Paul began a true multiplication movement by releasing workers for the harvest from the harvest and started all the churches if Asia Minor without going to all the locations himself (Col. 2:1).

1. Paul established a regional base of church planter development (Acts 19:9, 20:18).
2. Paul implemented a teaching/mentoring strategy by life example, both in large gatherings and small groups (Acts 20:19-20).
3. Paul integrated evangelism into the spiritual formation of his disciples as a foundation for training leaders for ministry (Acts 20:21).
4. Paul released the power of God's word in people's lives to carry the grassroots movement of multiplication (Acts 19:20).
5. Paul gave the Holy Spirit His rightful place in leading his disciples into ministry (Acts 20:28).
6. Paul mentored individuals on a one-to-one basis (Acts 20:31) holding back nothing from his apprentices.
7. Paul empowered his leaders with accountability to God for the work that he modeled for them, so that his presence wasn't needed for the work to continue after him (Acts 20:32).

#### *Third Journey Lessons:*

- Many leaders do not reach this journey, because of arrested development in earlier phases.
- Writing is often more prolific in this phase.
- God entrusts third journey leaders with more quality emerging leaders because they are valued and given great opportunities.
- Third journey leaders have an expanding influence because others take their message further than he/she could themselves.
- Though the third journey leader may find he/she is doing less things they are more focused and more is accomplished through the multiplication of new leadership.

### **D. Fourth Journey (Acts 21-28) Paul's influence spread in space and time—reaching all of the known Gentile world and human history.**

While we don't usually consider Paul's imprisonment as a missionary journey, I assure you he did. Paul referred to his imprisonment as an increased effectiveness in global expansion of the Gospel (Phil. 1:12; 2 Tim 4:16). Under house arrest in Rome he reached the entire Gentile world. How?

1. His legal appeal itself brought his message to key people such as Festus, Felix, and even Nero.
1. He planted the first church of Malta on his way to Rome.
2. His reputation brought many to hear his message in his rented quarters where he had special visitation privileges.
3. His incarceration allowed him to write four epistles that would carry his message throughout the world and time.
4. One sure way of spreading the church is to take out her leaders! Being locked up provoked others to take up his mission (Phil. 1:14-18).
5. He now had access to lost people that the church could never reach otherwise (Phil. 1:13-14; Acts 28:16; Phil. 4:22).
6. He was always mentoring new leaders and sending them out into the world to reproduce his ministry and multiply his influence around the world.

Present with him in this imprisonment are at least the following:

Epaphroditus, Timothy, Luke, Mark, Demas, Aristarchus, Jesus (called Justus), Epaphras, Tychicus, and Onesimus.

#### *Fourth Journey Lessons:*

- Most Christian leaders will never get to the fourth journey. They usually plateau or die on a previous journey.
- The fourth journey leader cares less about daily provisions than they used to. They have learned the secret of contentment and trust (Phil. 4:10-14)
- The fourth journey leader's reputation increases even in the eyes of secular leaders.
- The fourth journey is one of greater expansive influence, beyond what expectations or circumstances would dictate.
- The fourth journey is when the leader often expands his/her written influence so that countless others are benefited by their experience and maturity. Books written in this journey are longer-lasting works.
- The fourth journey leader still faces life tests of character growth.

One of the leaders Paul won to Christ, mentored and sent out to do ministry during his fourth Journey was a slave named Onesimus. Paul sent him back to his master, Philemon, to seek freedom from his bonds to serve the Lord fully. The Bible doesn't tell us what happened to Onesimus. We do have a glimpse in church history from a letter written by Ignatius to the Ephesian church. The Ephesian church was last seen in Revelation as having left their first love. Ignatius writes...

*"I gave a godly welcome to your church which has so endeared itself to us by reason of your upright*

*nature, marked as it is by faith in Jesus Christ, our Savior, and by the love of Him. You are imitators of God; and it was God's blood that stirred you up once more to do the sort of thing you do naturally and have now done to perfection...In God's name, therefore, I received your large congregation in the person of Onesimus, your bishop in this world, a man whose love is beyond words. My prayer is that you should love him in the Spirit of Jesus Christ and all be like him. Blessed is He who let you have such a bishop. You deserved it!"*

--A portion of a letter from Ignatius to the Ephesian church

"He who is forgiven much loves much," and Jesus found Onesimus to be a man who was very useful in leading his beloved church of Ephesus (perhaps the most influential church of the first century) back to her first love. Paul finished well, and the men he mentored learned to do the same.

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