

Leadership

Leadership is a pronounced theme throughout the Scriptures. Usually when we read about the leaders that God uses, it's someone who seems unqualified until the Lord qualifies them. Sometimes the leader is responsible for a small amount of people, maybe just a family, like Noah. Sometimes a leader is responsible for a much larger group, like a Moses or Joshua. Great leaders generally do their utmost to listen and obey the Lord first, no matter what the cost. Godly leaders display competence, humility, service to others, and are eager to continue to learn and grow themselves. God places high value on leadership.

Looking at one particular account, we see leaders mentioned in Acts 13:1, ***"Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul."*** Five leaders; prophets and teachers of the church at Antioch. Notice the man named Manaen, ***"Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch."*** Manaen had apparently grown up with Herod Antipas, the man who had beheaded John the Baptist. Exactly how they were brought up together is unknown; perhaps foster brothers or school mates. This gave Manaen preferment to nobility, something which he had denied in order to follow Jesus. This choice of Manaen's is similar to the way Moses refused to be called the Son of Pharaoh's daughter. A servant of Jesus may wisely use his background as a way to open doors to ministry, but those who want to be leaders for Jesus, will be willing to turn down worldly status and recognition in order that they be known by a greater identity.

Setting the scene here, these five church leaders had been calling out to the Lord, seeking the Lord's direction. Verse 2 shows, ***"While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting..."*** The five men were busy fasting, praying, and worshipping together. Good leaders know they need other leaders in their lives. It's only in our pride that we choose independence. Are you inviting others to join you in seeking the will of the Lord? Are you welcoming the counsel of others in decision making? Others who share a mutual passion for Jesus, will strengthen your hand.

Good leaders fast and pray with intensity. How they sought the Lord in these verses is not the typical casual cookies and prayer meeting at church on a Wednesday night. When leaders really need God's clarity on an issue, there's a fervor in how leaders seek the Lord. Strong leaders know that when something matters enough, they'll become uncomfortable to seek the Lord for help. Fasting does this. Additionally, inviting the Lord to change your will, can be an uncomfortable surrender that many won't undertake. Godly leaders ask the Lord to break their heart for what breaks His.

A leader's highest agenda is to be directed by the Spirit. Verses 2-3 say, ***"the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away."*** Is there anything you're unwilling to move on from? A godly leader is available to go and do whatever God desires. I think the way God answered this prayer, wasn't the way these men were expecting, or perhaps even hoping for. God's answer, was a command to make a difficult leadership change within the Antioch church. I call it difficult, because two of their main leaders, Paul and Barnabas, were told they'd be going elsewhere. I think in most cases, that would be considered a tough answer to prayer. Their time in Antioch was useful to accomplish what they had originally been sent to do. Acts 11, says the church in Antioch was growing, and Barnabas was sent to shepherd it (11:22-26). Barnabas saw huge growth and needed help, so he went to Tarsus to fetch Paul (Saul). The two led the church for a year. But now, they receive new marching orders.

“Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” God was about to change the world forever. These two leaders had been called already, not as a result of their prayer and fasting, but called long ago. Now, it was time to put that calling into motion. Here begins one of the great missionary advances ever; as both Paul and Barnabas launch the Church in Asia Minor, and then Paul takes Christianity into Europe. Because these five leaders prayed and fasted, the Spirit spoke. Because the Spirit spoke, leaders are sent. Because leaders are sent, churches are planted. Because churches are planted, other missionaries are sent. Because other missionaries are sent, the world is reached. So, Barnabas and Saul were commissioned and redeployed out of Antioch. Good leaders can let go of what they’ve established, and entrust those things into the hands of someone else.

Part of God’s strategy to reach the world, is to reach leaders around the world. When a leader puts his trust in Jesus, that leader will naturally influence others. This is a discerning practice. This is why Christians are commanded to pray for world leaders, as 1 Timothy 2:1-2 says, ***“First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.”*** Leaders at any level will have a great impact in sharing their faith with those under their influence.

After the Holy Spirit directed Paul to leave Antioch, Paul is led to the island of Cyprus. God had appointed that the governor of that island is to come to faith, and Paul is about to be instrumental in leading the governor to Jesus. The governor (or, proconsul) over this Roman province, is a man named Sergius Paulus. When the Apostle Paul finds the governor, the proconsul was already being taught by a false-prophet named Bar-Jesus, whose name in Arabic is Elymus. Here’s what the Scriptures say, picking up in Acts 13:6-12, ***“When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they found a magician, a Jewish false prophet whose name was Bar-Jesus, who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence. This man summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. But Elymas the magician (for so his name is translated) was opposing them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. But Saul, who was also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze on him, and said, “You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord? “Now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and not see the sun for a time.” And immediately a mist and a darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking those who would lead him by the hand. Then the proconsul believed when he saw what had happened, being amazed at the teaching of the Lord.”*** Let’s unpack this.

Paphos was a harbor city on the west end of Cyprus, and the home of Sergius Paulus. Governor Paulus had been hearing an earful from Bar-Jesus, who turns out to be a pawn of Satan, and who was trying to keep the governor from embracing Christianity. Upon learning that the Apostle Paul was now preaching on the island, the governor, no doubt moved by the Spirit, requests the presence of Paul, hoping to hear more about Jesus. Perhaps too, the governor suspected that Bar-Jesus was misleading him, as the governor was ***“a man of intelligence.”*** As Satan had deployed Bar-Jesus to mislead, the Holy Spirit now sends Paul to bring the truth. We see how the Holy Spirit intervened, ***“Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze on him (Bar-Jesus) and said, “You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord? “Now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and not see the sun for a time.”*** Elymas, or Bar-Jesus, was made blind. This miracle provided the affirmation to Paul’s message, which resulted in proconsul Paulus turning in faith to the Lord, ***“Then the proconsul believed when he saw what had happened, being amazed at the teaching of the Lord.”***

Once the governor of the island comes to faith, the Apostle Paul and his traveling companions leave to continue their journeys elsewhere. They trusted that the governor would have an influence on the island. The Bible repeatedly shows us a strategy in winning those who lead, since leaders recruit others. Are you praying for the leaders in your life, that they turn to Jesus? Pray for your local leaders to know Christ. These are the leaders in the homes around you, and the leaders in your local community. Pray more broadly for leaders in the state, and leaders in the country, and leaders around the world. Pray for leaders to know Jesus, and to lead the masses in the way of truth!

Who is a leader in your life that you can begin praying for, and/or ministering to?

Pray for the Lord to raise up godly leaders!

Pray that the Lord would use you to lead others.