

Paul's Missionary Band as Metaphor

by Dr. Dan Reeves - IMLT Strategic Consultant

Backdrop For The Metaphor - Continued

PART TWO OF A SIX PART SERIES

Paul's Missionary Band serves as an excellent biblical metaphor for 21st century ministry. When combined with leading edge postmodern congregational laboratories, its radical themes provide the potential to:

- ◆ Eliminate institutionalism
- ◆ Avoid burnout among staff and lay leaders
- ◆ Drop the casualty rate among missional teams from 95% to 0%
- ◆ Ignore the bell curve statistics and entropic principles (which insist upon the inevitability of a cooling pattern), create sustainability in health and growth patterns and perpetuate congregational life
- ◆ Double or triple the amount of real front-line ministry for the same cost. We call this the stewardship advantage.

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Here are some immediate reasons we can depend upon the PMB approach as an appropriate framework for postmodern, multicultural ministry.

Paul's missionary team thrived on the kind of culture-shifting turbulence that we are experiencing in this new millennium. Paul's missionary band was cross-cultural from day one. The spread of the first century church was more missional than institutional. The band employed teams and leadership principles appropriate to our postmodern setting. Their characteristics have been present in all the great historical movements of Christian revival and growth from Paul to McGavran.

I believe that in the study of Paul's missionary journeys, several important points are often overlooked. These points center on the crucial issues of selection, training and strategy.

Paul's selection: In Acts 11 we see that it was Barnabas who recruited Paul to join the missionary team ministering to the new Gentile churches in Antioch of Syria. As the initiating team leader, Barnabas was the one who spiritually discerned the potential of Paul and recognized his aptitude to reach those outside the Jerusalem world. Because of this talent for sensing and releasing gifts, Barnabas was able to link Paul to a highly appropriate pioneer mission.

The role of Barnabas has been undervalued in most commentaries. His leadership was critical in the team's development and outcomes. Without the spirit-filled discernment of Barnabas, there would not have been the rapid multiplication of churches through Paul's leadership. The tendency of most leadership development studies is to focus on the second or third generation leader, without recognizing the importance of the one who initially saw the potential and then acted upon those instincts.

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Notice the progression. A naturally gifted man, Paul was selected by an astute and committed leader, Barnabas. The foresight and the trust modeled by Barnabas are two critical selection requirements that leadership demands. Paul then adopted this same pattern that he observed in the ministry of Barnabas. He learned quickly to discern and trust leaders, and to let go of them early.

I see a quite different pattern in churches where I minister. Repeatedly I hear pastors tell me that none of their new converts, and very few of their volunteers are ready to assume leadership. This results in both lack of growth and internal tension. The underlying cause is the resistance of most pastors to give over their position to those who appear to them to be backward and untutored.

Paul's training: The way in which Paul's training was conducted is also overlooked. As Dean Gilliland points out, Paul did not train anyone for ministry. He trained them in ministry. Paul's apprenticing style was learning by doing. He believed that Christians could best learn while serving.

Matriculation took place at baptism, with appointment to ministry following almost immediately, even while engaged in the first courses of study. They were not only to be instructed, but were to teach as well, beginning with the first day after their conversion (Rom.15: 14, Phil 1:5, Col. 3:16).

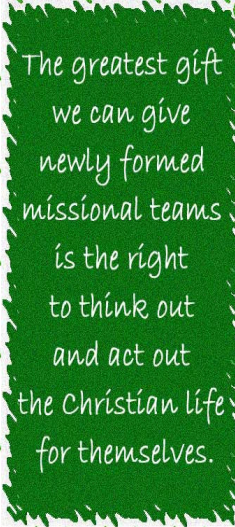
Our tendency is to insist upon a sequence which delays participation in ministry until there has been what we perceive to be, sufficient, supervised learning. We over prepare and under empower. The greatest gift we can give newly formed missional teams is the right to think out and act out the Christian life for themselves.

Paul's strategy: Most studies of Paul's missionary journeys do not emphasize the structural pattern that was established by this pioneer team. In Acts 13:2 we read, "As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." This pioneer team, engaged in what Wagner describes as the Cyprus and Cyrene Mission, was called to separate itself from the rest of the church for a special mission.


Ralph Winter uses the term sodality to describe these legitimate specialized teams. The other, more "normal" redemptive structure in Paul's day was the local synagogue. As Barnabas and Paul were sent out they built upon the familiar structure of the Jewish proselytizing bands Jesus referred to in Mt. 23:15, which functioned apart from the local synagogues.

According to Winter the very fabric of the Christian movement will be torn apart if either the warp or the woof does not play its essential part. The warps are the longitudinal, vertical or modality structures. The woofs are the lateral, horizontal or sodalic structures. Groups with membership restrictions such as age, gender, or disciplinary standards are sodalities; those that are non-restrictive and that in principle desire to include everyone, are modalities.

There are several characteristics of Paul's missionary strategy that illustrate the advantages of sodalities. Their ability to attract the unchurched and to incorporate new Christians is undeniably superior to the ability of modal structures. Although their existence has created



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tension for churches throughout the ages, they are not an aberration, but a complementary, biblical vehicle for reaching non-Christians. Missional teams should be allowed as much autonomy to design and complete their calling as church polity will permit. Bureaucratic restrictions and effective mission are incompatible.

The strategy of Paul and Barnabas was quite different from the normal, modality strategy at the Church of Jerusalem. The intricate relationship between Barnabas and Paul proved itself not only in their rapid formation of reproducing Christian communities, but also in the delicate communication with Jerusalem. Barnabas was the encourager. Whenever Barnabas found a person or a cause needing to be encouraged, he supplied all that he could.

Paul on the other hand, consistently created a stir wherever he went. According to F.F. Bruce, when Paul left for Tarsus after his 15 days in Jerusalem, they probably breathed a sigh of relief. He had been a thorn in their flesh in his persecuting days. They were to learn that Paul the Christian could also be a disturbing presence. Trouble was liable to break out every time he visited Jerusalem.

This is what missional team leaders typically do. They make things happen, and they create tensions. They also need someone like Barnabas to go before and after them. Another example of this divine partnership in action was the critical selection of Barnabas during the investigation of the rapid growth of the churches at Antioch, recorded in Acts 11:21-23.

Since the leaders of the Jerusalem church exercised supervision and control over the spread of the gospel into adjacent territories, had someone other than Barnabas been selected a quite different outcome might have occurred. There were probably some who suspected wild syncretism, since the forward movement at Antioch presented features which some members of the church of Jerusalem would have found deeply disturbing. But through the lens of Barnabas they accepted these strange developments. Barnabas, the encourager, found much cause for satisfaction.

1. For a technical profile of Barnabas, see Raab, Laura and Clinton, Bobby, *Barnabas, Encouraging Exhorter: A Study in Mentoring*, Barnabas Resources, Pasadena, 1985.
2. Gilliland, Dean S., *Pauline Theology and Mission Practice*, Wipf and Stock, Eugene, 1998, pp. 91, 214-216.
3. Wagner, Peter, *Lighting the World: A New Look at Acts - Bringing the Gospel to Every Nation and Every People*, Regal, Ventura, 1995, pp. 96-98.
4. Winter, Ralph, *Warp and the Woof*, William Carey, Pasadena, 1970, pp. 3-4, 55.
5. Bruce, F. F., *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1978, p.94, 167-8