

Four Stages of Paul's Leadership

by Paul Leavenworth, the Convergence group

My study of Acts revealed that Paul went through four distinct stages of leadership development as he matured into a “movement” leader:

- **Stage 1: Paul did everything himself**
- **Stage 2: Paul developed a leadership team**
- **Stage 3: Paul raised up several ministry teams**
- **Stage 4: Paul wrote and mentored the next generation of leaders**

I have incorporated these leadership stages into my overview of Paul’s life (Time-Line) and also identified his major transitions (Awakening, Deciding, and Finishing) with his four leadership stages as a movement leader.

Time-Line, Life Transitions, and Leadership Stages for the Apostle Paul

Sovereign Foundations

- Birth name was Saul (Acts 7:58, 13:9)
- Born in Tarsus in Cilicia (Acts 22:3)
- Jewish ancestry (II Timothy 1:3; II Corinthians 11:22; Romans 11:1; Philippians 3:4-5)
- From the tribe of Benjamin (Romans 11:1; Philippians 3:5) and his father was a Pharisee (Acts 23:6)
- Lived in Jerusalem where he was trained as a Pharisee (Acts 22:3, 26:4-5; Galatians 1:14)
- A Roman citizen by birth (Acts 22:25-29)
- At least Trilingual (Hebrew/Aramaic – Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6; I Corinthians 6:22 and koine Greek – Acts 9:29, and possibly Latin)
- Zealous for the Jewish faith and persecutor of the Christian Church (Acts 7:5, 8; 8:3; 9:1-2, 13-14; 22:4-5; I Corinthians 15:9; Galatians 1:13, 22-23; Philippians 3:6; I Timothy 1:13)

Inner-Life Growth

- Encountered the risen Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-19; 22:4-16; 26:11-19; I Corinthians 9:1; 15:8-10)
- Healed from blindness and called as an apostle to the Gentiles through the ministry of Ananias in Damascus (Acts 9:10-19; 22:12-16)

AWAKENING Life Transition – Saul had amazing sovereign foundations that prepared him for God's purpose, but he had a lot of inner-life growth to do before he was ready to faithfully pursue his calling as an apostle to the Gentiles. Although Saul knew the Old Testament well and was a type A (task oriented) personality, he had to learn humility and submission as God changed his heart (character) over time.

Note here, that Saul did not enter into his calling for several years. He made a couple of brief attempts to preach/teach, but they were short lived because of persecution. Saul needed to learn to depend on God rather than his brilliance and passion. During his inner-life growth stage, Saul probably experienced some of the following:

- The surfacing of past issues that need forgiveness and healing
- The surfacing of passion and potential for leadership and ministry
- The establishing of commitment and an initial understanding of life purposes
- The initial shaping of character (being) and influence (spiritual authority)
- The establishing of healthy accountability relationships
- The launching of a lifelong journey to experience all God has in store
- Goes to Arabia for three years (Galatians 1:17)

Stage 1: Paul did it all himself – I think that during the years between Paul's conversion and his joining Barnabas in Antioch that he was pretty much of a "Lone Ranger." He was brilliant, zealous, and competent but lacked mature character and most of all humility. Later when he joined forces with Barnabas, I think that Paul experienced being part of a team, but sense that he was a very "difficult" team member who had to have things his way and may have ended up in the point leadership role during the first church planting journey because he wore Barnabas out. I sense this because of the intensity to the conflict that arises over John Mark prior to Paul's second church planting journey. There was no question that Paul was gifted and used by God significantly, but I think he learned about the importance of team through negative preparation, leadership conflict, and eventually brokenness.

- Returned to Damascus where he is persecuted by the Jews for preaching/teaching the gospel (Acts 9:19-25; Galatians 1:17)
- Flees for his life from Damascus and travels to Jerusalem where he unsuccessfully attempts to meet with church leaders (Acts 9:26-30; Galatians 1:18-24)
- Barnabas connects Saul with the apostles in Jerusalem (Acts 9:27-28)
- He stayed in Jerusalem for awhile but was persecuted by Grecian Jews for his bold witness (Acts 9:28-29)
- When a plot on his life is discovered, Paul traveled to Caesarea (Syria) and eventually to Tarsus (Cilicia) (Acts 9:30; Galatians 1:18-24)

- He lived in Tarsus for thirteen years probably working as a tent maker (Galatians 2:1)

Ministry/Leadership Maturity

- Barnabas was sent to Antioch to check out reports of Gentile conversions and recruited Saul to accompany/co-minister with him there (Acts 11:25-26)
- Barnabas and Saul took an offering to Jerusalem (Acts 11:29-30) and return to Antioch (Acts 13:2)
- After ministering (preaching/teaching) there for one year, they were set apart by the leaders for evangelism and church planting in Asia Minor (Acts 13:1-3)
- Barnabas, Saul, and John Mark traveled together as an apostolic team (Acts 13:4)
- Saul's name became Paul (Acts 13:9) and the order of "Barnabas and Saul" (Acts 13:7) changes to "Paul and Barnabas" (Acts 13:42)
- John Mark left the team and returned to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13)
- Paul and Barnabas evangelized and planted churches over a year and a half period in:
 - Cyprus (Acts 13:5-6)
 - Asia Minor (Acts 13:14-14:27)
- Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch and gave a report of their "church planting" journey (Acts 14:21-28)

DECIDING Life Transition – Paul has made the transition from inner-life growth to ministry/leadership maturing and was probably also involved in the life maturing stage. He had transitioned from relative obscurity to prominence as an apostolic church planting team leader. Notice the progression here – he was faithful in little which led to him being prepared to be faithful in greater opportunities. Paul has established an intimate relationship with God manifest in integrity and faithfulness (I Timothy 1:5). This is foundational and becomes a life-style for Paul as he matures as a leader.

Evidently, Paul remained in contact with Barnabas over the years and at the "right time" they reconnected to co-minister in Antioch. Paul has cooperated with God's refining process (James 1:2-4) of evaluation > alignment and is now ready for direction. It was probably in this context of co-ministering with Barnabas in Antioch that Paul's apostolic gifting emerged and matured, and his calling to the Gentiles was confirmed by the leaders who sent him (along with Barnabas) on the first church planting journey.

While on this year and a half trip, Paul emerged as the team leader and gained much insight and experience in his gift mix and ministry methodology. His strategy for

evangelism and church planting was processed through his experiences on this (and subsequent) church planting journeys.

During this time of ministry/leadership maturity and life maturity, Paul probably experienced some of the following:

- The further surfacing of past issues that need forgiveness and healing
- The discovery of personal uniqueness and life message
- The identification of core values
- The further clarification of calling
- The maturing of character through perseverance (deep processing)
- The identification of unique leadership methodology based on gift mix
- The initial insights necessary for living intentionally (focused living)

Life Maturing

- Paul and Barnabas attended the council at Jerusalem to discuss the Gentile issue (Acts 15:1-29)
- Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch to communicate the decision made about the Gentiles and to teach/preach (Acts 15:30-35)
- Paul and Barnabas decided to visit the churches that they planted on their first “church planting” journey (Acts 15:36)
- Paul and Barnabas disagreed about taking John Mark with them (Acts 15:37-38) which led to their separation (Acts 15:39)

Stage 2: Paul developed a leadership team – Paul had learned about the importance of traveling and ministering as a team from his experiences on the first church planting trip with Barnabas (and John Mark). The team provided companionship, encouragement, and accountability. My sense, though, is that Paul still had much to learn about “mutual submission” (Ephesians 5:21) and healthy conflict resolution. During his second church planting journey, Paul learns how to co-minister, delegate, and empower the primary members (Silas and Timothy) of his apostolic team.

- Paul chose Silas (Acts 15:40) and Timothy (Acts 16:1-3) and visited the churches in Asia Minor (Acts 15:41-16:5)
- Paul wanted to visit the province of Asia but was hindered by the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:6-8)
- Paul had a vision of a man inviting them to preach in Macedonia (Acts 15:9-10)
- Paul and his team traveled to Macedonia, Greece, and back to Antioch planting churches over a two and a half year period (Acts 15:36-18:22)

FINISHING Life Transition – Paul had become a seasoned apostolic church planter during these two “church planting” journeys. He had learned a lot about himself, team leadership, and church planting and oversight. He had developed a methodology of training leaders through an apprenticeship type of on-the-job training. He had become more focused on his calling to be an apostle to the Gentiles and had endured suffering in order to remain faithful to his calling.

Paul had also learned how to minister out of weakness, recognizing spiritual authority as his primary influence base. He had developed a plan to evangelize and plant churches in Rome and as far west as Spain (Romans 15:24, 28). He was focused and intentional, willing to pay the ultimate price (death) of fulfilling his destiny. During this time of life maturing, Paul was preparing to experience convergence as he experiences many of the following:

- The further surfacing of past issues that need forgiveness and healing
- The substantial clarification of unique calling and commitment to its fulfillment
- The discovery of humility and brokenness as a primary influence base for life transformation in one’s self and others (spiritual authority)
- The commitment to intentionality for focused living
- The discover of unique ultimate contributions and legacy
- The empowering of others through mentoring

Convergence

Stage 3: Paul raised up several ministry teams – While on his third church planting journey, Paul not only worked with his primary team, but during his several months long stay in Ephesus he identified, trained, deployed, and supported teams that planted “satellite” churches and visited existing churches to encourage them in their growth and maturation. Many of his epistles were written to these churches to provide encouragement and correction when needed. Paul grew to understand the expanded influence and power of “multiplying” teams through “equipping and releasing” (Ephesians 4:11 and II Timothy 2:2).

- After spending some time in Antioch, Paul embarked on his third “church planting” journey through Asia Minor, Greece, and eventually to Jerusalem over a 4 year period of time (Acts 18:23-21:16)
 - Paul spent several months in Ephesus teaching and equipping/releasing multiple “apostolic” teams that planted churches and encouraged established churches in Asia Minor (Acts 19)
- Paul was warned about impending hardship and prison (Acts 20:23)
- Paul ministered openly in Jerusalem, but was arrested for being a “false teacher” (Acts 21:17-36)

- Paul defended his teaching and calling to the Gentiles (Acts 21:37-23: 11)
- Paul was warned of a plot to kill him and appealed to Caesar (Acts 23:12-22)
- Paul was transported to Caesarea, where he was tried and held for 2 years by Felix (Acts 23:23-24:27)
- Paul was retried by Festus (Felix's successor) who consulted with King Agrippa and they decided to send Paul to Rome (Acts 25-26)
- Paul sailed to Rome arriving there almost three years after he was arrested in Jerusalem (Acts 27-28:28)

Afterglow

Stage 4: Paul wrote and mentored the next generation of leaders – While Paul was under house arrest in Rome waiting for his appeal to Nero, he wrote several of his “Prison Epistles” to churches that he had helped plant in Asia Minor and Greece. He also entertained younger leaders who served as couriers who brought information or carried letters back-and-forth between the churches and Paul. We are not sure about the time line of Paul’s final years as Acts concludes with him awaiting his hearing before Nero, but some commentators believe that Paul was released from house arrest and later rearrested and martyred. It was possibly during this time that Paul wrote his “Pastoral Epistles” to Timothy (in Ephesus) and Titus (in Crete).

- Paul lived and ministered under house arrest in Rome for over two years before he was martyred (Acts 28:30-31)
- Paul impacted the Gentile church through the many emerging leaders whom he mentored (I and II Timothy and Titus)
- Paul impacted the early church and the church through the generations through his writing (13 letters)