

Barnabas as Networked Developmental Leader

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Abstract

Barnabas is often remembered as the “son of encouragement,” yet Acts portrays his encouragement as more than a personal disposition. This article examines Barnabas through a qualitative biblical case-study approach using narrative-derived qualitative ego-network analysis. Rather than reconstructing the complete historical network of the early church or assigning computational centrality measures, the study analyzes selected Barnabas episodes in Acts and the later canonical reference to Mark in 2 Timothy 4:11. The argument is that Barnabas illustrates networked developmental leadership: a form of informal leadership in which a trusted actor uses relational credibility, brokerage position, and developmental advocacy to create access, bridge communities, and preserve future usefulness. The analysis identifies three primary patterns. In Acts 9, Barnabas brokers trust for Saul by creating access to the Jerusalem apostles. In Acts 11 and 13, he spans boundaries between Jerusalem, Antioch, Gentile believers, and the Spirit-directed expansion of the church. In Acts 15, he advocates for John Mark after prior withdrawal, modeling a cautious form of talent rehabilitation. The article contributes to business theology by reframing encouragement as organizational capacity-building while maintaining theological controls on the movement from biblical narrative to contemporary leadership practice.

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1. Introduction

Barnabas occupies a distinctive but often underexamined place in the leadership narrative of the early Christian movement. Although Paul, Peter, James, and John dominate much of the scholarly and ecclesial imagination, Barnabas appears at several pivotal moments in Acts where the developing church confronts issues of trust, expansion, leadership emergence, and relational conflict. Branch (2007) argues that Acts presents Barnabas as a major early church leader and model of encouragement, while Stenschke (2010) frames Barnabas as one of the significant mentors and leaders in early Christianity, particularly in relation to Paul’s early development. Barnabas is introduced as Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles name Barnabas, commonly rendered “son of encouragement” (Acts 4:36–37). Yet this designation should not be reduced to a merely affective or devotional trait. Within Acts, Barnabas’s encouragement operates through concrete relational action. He creates access for Saul when the Jerusalem believers distrust him, strengthens the emerging Gentile-inclusive community at Antioch, participates in

missionary expansion, and later advocates for John Mark after Paul questions his reliability.

This paper argues that Barnabas is best understood as a networked developmental leader whose influence emerges through sponsorship, trust brokerage, boundary spanning, and talent rehabilitation. Rather than exercising leadership primarily through formal authority or institutional position, Barnabas functions through relational credibility and networked influence. Social network approaches to leadership emphasize that leadership is not only a matter of individual traits or hierarchical roles but also of relational embeddedness, network position, and patterns of interaction among actors (Balkundi & Kilduff, 2006; Hoppe & Reinelt, 2010). Barnabas’s leadership is visible in the way he connects separated actors, legitimizes distrusted persons, develops emerging leaders, and preserves future ministry potential after failure.

The study develops three related contributions. First, it offers a Barnabas-centered synthesis for biblical leadership studies by showing that Barnabas’s encouragement is a network function rather than only a

temperament. Second, it adapts existing leadership constructs—brokerage, sponsorship, developmental networks, and boundary spanning—into a business-theology framework that keeps biblical interpretation primary. Third, it clarifies the construct of networked developmental leadership as an interpretive lens for understanding how trusted relational actors build organizational capacity without necessarily occupying the most visible role in the network. The contribution is therefore not the claim that Barnabas invented modern management practice, but that his narrative role provides a biblically grounded case for thinking about trust, access, development, and restoration in organizational life.

The article develops this argument around three major episodes. Acts 9:26–28 presents Barnabas as a trust broker who enables Saul to gain access to the Jerusalem apostles after his conversion. Acts 11:19–26 and Acts 13:1–4 present Barnabas as a boundary-spanning leader in Antioch, where he validates and strengthens a growing Gentile-inclusive community while participating in Spirit-directed expansion. Acts 15:36–41 presents Barnabas as a developmental sponsor who advocates for John Mark after a prior withdrawal from missionary work. Together, these episodes show how encouragement becomes organizational capacity-building: Barnabas does not merely console individuals; he creates access, strengthens communities, and preserves future usefulness.

2. Conceptual Framework: Networked Developmental Leadership

This paper uses the term networked developmental leadership to describe a pattern of informal or semi-formal leadership in which influence emerges through relational position, social capital, sponsorship, boundary spanning, and the development or restoration of others. The term is intentionally synthetic. It does not replace mentoring, sponsorship, brokerage, boundary spanning, or developmental networks. Rather, it names the point where these constructs converge in a leader who uses relational credibility to strengthen people and communities for future mission.

The construct has three core elements. First, it is networked: the leader's influence depends on relational position, bridging ties, and social capital rather than only formal office. Second, it is developmental: the leader's actions enlarge the capacity of others through access, advocacy, teaching, opportunity, or restoration. Third, it is bounded by purpose: the leader's brokerage is not merely self-interested or informational; it serves the growth and faithfulness of the community. The construct's limits are equally important. Not all brokerage is developmental, not all mentoring is networked, and not all boundary spanning is restorative. Barnabas uniquely illustrates the convergence of these elements because he repeatedly uses trusted relational position to develop or restore other actors within the narrative of Acts.

Social network analysis shifts attention from isolated individual attributes to patterns of relationships among actors. In organizational life, leadership does not occur only through formal structure or individual charisma; it also operates through the social ties that connect people, groups, and communities. Balkundi and Kilduff (2006) argue that a social network approach to leadership examines the ties that surround leaders and followers, while Hoppe and Reinelt (2010) show how SNA can be used to evaluate leadership networks by examining connection patterns, bridging ties, and relational structures. From this perspective, the question is not simply what Barnabas personally possessed, but where he stood in relation to Saul, Jerusalem, Antioch, Gentile believers, Paul, and John Mark.

Social capital theory further clarifies this role. Social capital refers to resources embedded in relationships and accessible through networks, including trust, information, credibility, influence, belonging, and opportunity (Galli & Müller-Stewens, 2011; Williams et al., 2017). Barnabas possesses social capital within the Jerusalem community before he uses it on behalf of others. Acts 4:36–37 presents him as generous, trusted, and recognized by the apostles. This initial credibility matters because later episodes depend on Barnabas's standing within the network: he can advocate for Saul because he is already trusted, assess Antioch because Jerusalem sends him, and recruit Saul because he possesses relational mobility between Jerusalem, Antioch, and Tarsus.

The language of brokerage is particularly important. Network brokers connect actors or groups that would otherwise remain disconnected, often creating value by bridging structural holes and enabling the movement of information, resources, influence, and opportunity across disconnected parts of a network (Burt, 2004; Burt et al., 2020; Long et al., 2013). Barnabas's advocacy for Saul is a clear example. Saul cannot easily enter the Jerusalem network because his prior identity as a persecutor creates a relational barrier. Barnabas bridges that barrier. Yet Barnabas's brokerage is not merely informational; it is developmental and ecclesial because it opens space for Saul's participation in the community.

Barnabas's leadership also fits within the literature on mentoring, sponsorship, and developmental networks. Mentoring is commonly understood as a developmental relationship in which a more experienced person provides support, guidance, role modeling, and career-related assistance to a less experienced person (Hezlett & Gibson, 2005; Inzer & Crawford, 2005). Developmental-network research broadens this perspective by emphasizing that individuals often receive career and psychosocial support from multiple relationships rather than from a single mentor-protégé dyad (Dobrow et al., 2011). Rock and Garavan (2006) similarly reconceptualize developmental relationships within HRD as multiple forms of support, learning, and development.

Sponsorship, however, is more active and risk-bearing than general mentoring. A sponsor does not merely advise; a sponsor advocates, endorses, creates visibility, and opens access to important networks. Ang (2019) describes sponsorship as an important mechanism for developing leaders because it involves advocacy, access, stretch opportunities, and political support. Hewlett (2019) similarly distinguishes sponsorship from casual mentoring by emphasizing the sponsor's investment in talent and access to opportunity. This distinction is crucial for the Barnabas narrative. Barnabas should not be described only as Paul's mentor, although that language is useful. His role with Saul in Acts 9 is better described as sponsorship because he uses his own relational credibility to open access that Saul lacks.

Talent rehabilitation is also defined here with caution. In this paper, the term refers to developmental advocacy for a person whose credibility, role, or future usefulness has been damaged by a prior failure or perceived unreliability. It does not imply that John Mark was a modern executive, a formal employee, or a fully derailed leader. Rather, Acts 15 presents Mark as a contested worker whose prior withdrawal becomes a basis for Paul's refusal. Leader derailment research is helpful only by analogy because it describes how leadership trajectories may be damaged by failure, maladaptation, interpersonal problems, or unmet expectations (Williams et al., 2013). HRD and mentoring research also show that developmental relationships can support recovery, learning, and renewed contribution (Conger, 2024; Hezlett & Gibson, 2005; Kim, 2007; Sonnenfeld & Ward, 2008). Barnabas's advocacy for Mark is therefore interpreted as cautious talent rehabilitation, not as a direct modern HR case.

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative biblical case-study approach using narrative-derived qualitative ego-network analysis. The primary texts include Acts 4:36–37; Acts 9:26–28; Acts 11:19–26; Acts 13:1–4; Acts 13–14; Acts 15:36–41; and 2 Timothy 4:11. These passages were selected because they present Barnabas in relation to major actors and communities within the early Christian movement, including the Jerusalem apostles, Saul/Paul, the Antioch church, Gentile believers, John Mark, Silas, and missionary communities. The study uses the phrase qualitative ego-network analysis rather than computational SNA to avoid overclaiming. It does not reconstruct the complete historical network of the early church, assign centrality scores, or infer tie strength beyond the narrative evidence.

Recent biblical studies have applied SNA to New Testament narratives by identifying actors, relationships, interactions, and network patterns within the textual world of the narrative (Dörpinghaus, 2024; Duling, 2013; Massey, 2019; McClure, 2020). This study follows that general approach but limits its claims to the relationships explicitly represented in the selected Barnabas passages. The result is a

narrative-derived, Barnabas-centered ego-network model that helps organize relational evidence but remains subordinate to textual, historical, and theological interpretation.

3.1 Theological and Analogical Controls

Because the paper works at the intersection of Scripture and management theory, the analogical movement from Acts to organizational implication requires explicit theological controls. Acts is read first as theological narrative, not as a management manual. Luke's narrative emphasizes the witness of the church, the work of the Holy Spirit, the expansion of the gospel, and the formation of a community that crosses ethnic and geographic boundaries. Management concepts are therefore used heuristically: they help describe relational patterns in the text, but they do not determine the text's theological meaning.

This approach also requires attention to divine agency. In Acts 13:1–4, the Antioch leaders worship, fast, pray, and lay hands on Barnabas and Saul, but the Spirit is the one who sets them apart and sends them. Ochsmeier (2022) is therefore right to caution against reading Antioch as a modern mission agency that strategically dispatches workers according to contemporary organizational planning. In the present argument, Barnabas participates in Spirit-directed expansion; he does not manage the mission as if divine agency were absent. Similarly, 2 Timothy 4:11 is treated cautiously as later canonical evidence that Mark was useful to Paul, not as direct proof that Barnabas's intervention alone caused Mark's rehabilitation.

3.2 Coding Procedure and Role-Assignment Criteria

The unit of analysis is the narrative episode. A passage was included when Barnabas appears as an actor in the episode or, in the case of 2 Timothy 4:11, when a later canonical reference bears directly on the John Mark episode. Nodes were coded as named individuals or collective actors that function as participants in the narrative. Collective nodes such as Jerusalem believers, Jerusalem apostles, Antioch believers, Gentile believers, and missionary communities were included only where the text presents them as recognizable relational actors.

A tie was coded when the narrative depicts an explicit relationship, action, or interaction between actors. Tie categories included resource-sharing or trust, fear or distrust, advocacy or endorsement, inspection or validation, recruitment or developmental partnership, commissioning or release, co-labor in mission, conflict or refusal, and restored usefulness. Ties were treated as directional when one actor initiated action toward another, such as Barnabas taking Saul to the apostles or recruiting Saul from Tarsus. Role assignments were made by linking the coded tie to the narrative function it performs. For example, Barnabas is coded as a trust broker in Acts 9 because he stands between Saul and the Jerusalem apostles at a point where fear blocks access. He is coded as a boundary spanner in Acts 11 because he connects Jerusalem and Antioch in a

culturally expanding mission context. He is coded as a talent rehabilitator in Acts 15 because he advocates for Mark after Mark's prior withdrawal has damaged his perceived reliability.

The study uses figures and an evidence table as analytical aids rather than as statistical outputs. The figures visualize selected ties in order to clarify how Barnabas functions within the narrative. The study does not claim that the figures represent the full early Christian network or that they establish quantitative network measures. Their purpose is to make the coding logic visible to readers and to distinguish the analysis from a purely thematic reading.

4. Barnabas in the Biblical Narrative

Barnabas first appears in Acts 4:36–37 as Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles call Barnabas. Luke explains the name as “son of encouragement,” a designation that becomes important for Barnabas's later narrative role. His first recorded act is the sale of a field and the placement of the proceeds at the apostles' feet. This episode establishes Barnabas as generous, trustworthy, and communally committed. Stenschke (2010) notes that Barnabas is the first named individual after Pentecost outside the circle of the twelve apostles and that his action contrasts sharply with the later negative example of Ananias and Sapphira. Branch (2007) similarly argues that Acts presents Barnabas as a model of integrity, generosity, and encouragement. From a network perspective, this introductory episode is significant because Barnabas's later advocacy depends on the credibility he first possesses within the Jerusalem community.

The next major Barnabas episode occurs in Acts 9:26–28, after Saul's conversion. Saul comes to Jerusalem and attempts to join the disciples, but they are afraid of him and do not believe that he is truly a disciple. Booth (2018) emphasizes the dramatic transformation in Acts 9, where Saul moves from violent opponent of the Way to one who proclaims Jesus. Yet the Jerusalem believers do not immediately accept that transformation. The issue is not only theological but relational. Saul lacks trust and legitimacy within the Jerusalem network. In this context, Barnabas takes Saul and brings him to the apostles. Stenschke (2010) describes this as an outstretched hand toward a former enemy and argues that Barnabas must have possessed sufficient respect and trust among the apostles to appear with Saul at his side. Branch (2007) likewise presents Barnabas's action as courageous advocacy in which he places his own reputation at risk.

Acts 9:27 requires interpretive caution. Many English translations present Barnabas as the one who tells the apostles about Saul's encounter with the Lord and his bold preaching in Damascus. Wilson (2015), however, argues that the Greek text is ambiguous and that Saul may be the preferred subject of the verb describing the report. This distinction matters for exegesis, but it does not weaken the network argument. Whether Barnabas verbally narrates Saul's conversion or enables Saul to

bear witness for himself, Barnabas remains the relational broker who creates Saul's access to the apostles.

Barnabas appears again in Acts 11:19–26, where the narrative shifts to Antioch. Following the persecution connected with Stephen, scattered believers travel as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch. Some speak to Hellenists or Greeks, and a significant number believe. When news of this development reaches Jerusalem, the church sends Barnabas to Antioch. Antioch is an important setting because it represents a major geographic, cultural, and missional expansion of the Christian movement. Duşe (2024) describes Antioch as a major Roman metropolis marked by cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity and as a significant center for the spread of Christianity to the Gentile world. Taylor (2000) also treats Antioch as a critical context for understanding the Gentile mission. Barnabas's role in Antioch therefore places him at a boundary between Jerusalem's established community and an emerging Gentile-inclusive mission field.

Luke's description of Barnabas in Acts 11:23–24 is notably theological. Barnabas sees the grace of God, rejoices, and encourages the believers to remain faithful to the Lord. He is described as a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith. His discernment is therefore not merely organizational assessment; it is a recognition of divine activity in an expanding mission context. Yet Barnabas also acts practically. He goes to Tarsus to find Saul and brings him to Antioch. For a year they meet with the church and teach many people. This action is central to Barnabas's developmental leadership. He identifies both a growing community and a developing leader, then connects them. Stenschke (2010) argues that Barnabas's relationship with Paul provides a case study in leadership development and changing leadership roles.

Acts 13:1–4 places Barnabas within the leadership community at Antioch. Barnabas and Saul are listed among the prophets and teachers, and the Holy Spirit sets them apart for the work to which they are called. The community fasts, prays, lays hands on them, and releases them. This episode is often treated as the beginning of Paul's first missionary journey, but Ochsenmeier (2022) cautions against reading Antioch as a modern strategic church-planting agency. Acts presents the Spirit, not Antioch as an institution, as the initiator of Barnabas and Saul's departure. Antioch may be understood as a significant relational and missional hub, but the text should not be forced into a modern organizational strategy model. Barnabas's role is better described as participation in Spirit-directed network expansion.

The final major Barnabas episode in Acts occurs in Acts 15:36–41. After the Jerusalem Council, Paul proposes revisiting the believers in the cities where they had proclaimed the word. Barnabas wants to take John Mark, but Paul refuses because Mark had previously withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not continued in the work. The disagreement becomes sharp, and Paul and Barnabas separate. This episode is

often read as a conflict narrative, but it is also a developmental narrative. John Mark's prior withdrawal has damaged his credibility in Paul's eyes. Barnabas, however, sees the possibility of renewed usefulness. Branch (2007) argues that Barnabas saw potential in John Mark and championed him, just as he had earlier championed Saul.

5. Findings and Discussion: Barnabas's Networked Developmental Leadership

The preceding sections establish Barnabas as a significant relational actor in Acts and define networked developmental leadership as the conceptual frame. This section presents the findings from the narrative-derived qualitative ego-network analysis. The findings are organized around three roles: trust broker, boundary spanner, and talent rehabilitator. Table 1 maps the textual evidence to the coded tie, network role, management construct, and interpretive warrant.

Table 1
Evidence Map for Barnabas's Narrative Network Roles

Passage	Textual Observation	Coded Tie	Network Role / Construct	Interpretive Warrant
Acts 4:36–37	Barnabas sells a field and places the proceeds at the apostles' feet.	Resource-sharing / trust tie between Barnabas and the apostles.	Trusted insider / social capital formation.	Barnabas's later advocacy depends on prior credibility within the Jerusalem community.
Acts 9:26–28	Jerusalem disciples fear Saul and do not believe he is a disciple; Barnabas takes Saul to the apostles.	Fear/distrust tie between Saul and Jerusalem; advocacy/endorsement tie from Barnabas to Saul and the apostles.	Trust broker and sponsor / credibility transfer.	Barnabas bridges a relational gap that fear has created and gives Saul access to the apostolic network.
Acts 11:19–26	Jerusalem sends Barnabas to Antioch; he sees God's grace, encourages the believers, and recruits Saul from Tarsus.	Inspection/validation tie between Jerusalem and Antioch; recruitment/development tie between Barnabas and Saul.	Boundary spanner / talent deployment.	Barnabas connects an established center with an emerging Gentile-inclusive community and increases leadership capacity.
Acts 13:1–4	The Spirit sets apart Barnabas and Saul; the Antioch leaders fast, pray, lay hands on them, and release them.	Commissioning/release tie in a Spirit-directed mission context.	Network mobilizer / mission diffusion.	Barnabas participates in the expansion of the mission without reducing the event to organizational strategy.
Acts 13–14	Barnabas and Saul/Paul travel and work together; Paul becomes increasingly visible.	Co-labor and developmental partnership tie.	Developmental partner / leader emergence.	Barnabas's sponsorship allows Paul's visibility to grow rather than preserving Barnabas's own centrality.
Acts 15:36–41	Paul refuses to take Mark because of prior withdrawal; Barnabas takes Mark to Cyprus.	Conflict/refusal tie between Paul and Mark; advocacy/restoration tie between Barnabas and Mark.	Talent rehabilitator / developmental sponsorship after failure.	Barnabas treats damaged credibility as requiring developmental opportunity rather than permanent exclusion.
2 Timothy 4:11	Paul later describes Mark as useful for ministry.	Later restored-usefulness tie between Paul and Mark.	Canonical evidence of repaired usefulness.	The verse cautiously supports Mark's later usefulness without proving the details of Barnabas's rehabilitation process.

Note. The table summarizes the coding logic for the narrative-derived qualitative ego-network analysis. It is not a quantitative centrality table.

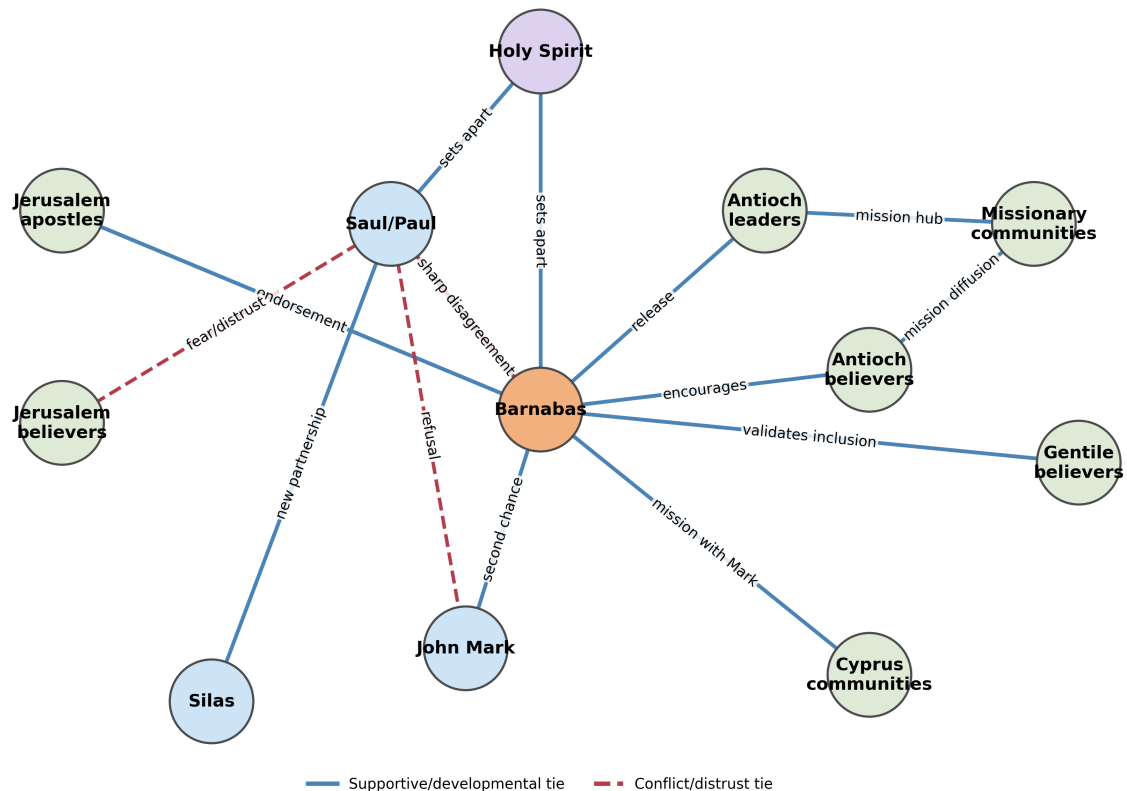
5.1 Trust Brokerage: Saul and Jerusalem

The clearest example of Barnabas as a trust broker appears in Acts 9:26–28. Saul attempts to join the disciples in Jerusalem, but they are afraid of him and do not believe that he is truly a disciple. This situation represents a network blockage grounded in legitimate fear. Saul has experienced a genuine conversion, but his prior identity as a persecutor prevents his new identity from being recognized by the Jerusalem community. His former ties to persecution make his desired tie to the disciples appear risky and illegitimate.

Figure 1 presents the Barnabas-centered ego network developed from the selected narrative episodes. The figure shows Barnabas's ties to the Jerusalem apostles, Saul/Paul, Antioch, Gentile believers, John Mark,

Cyprus, and missionary communities. The visual is not offered as a complete historical reconstruction of the early church. It shows how Barnabas repeatedly occupies a relational position between actors and communities requiring trust, access, development, or restoration.

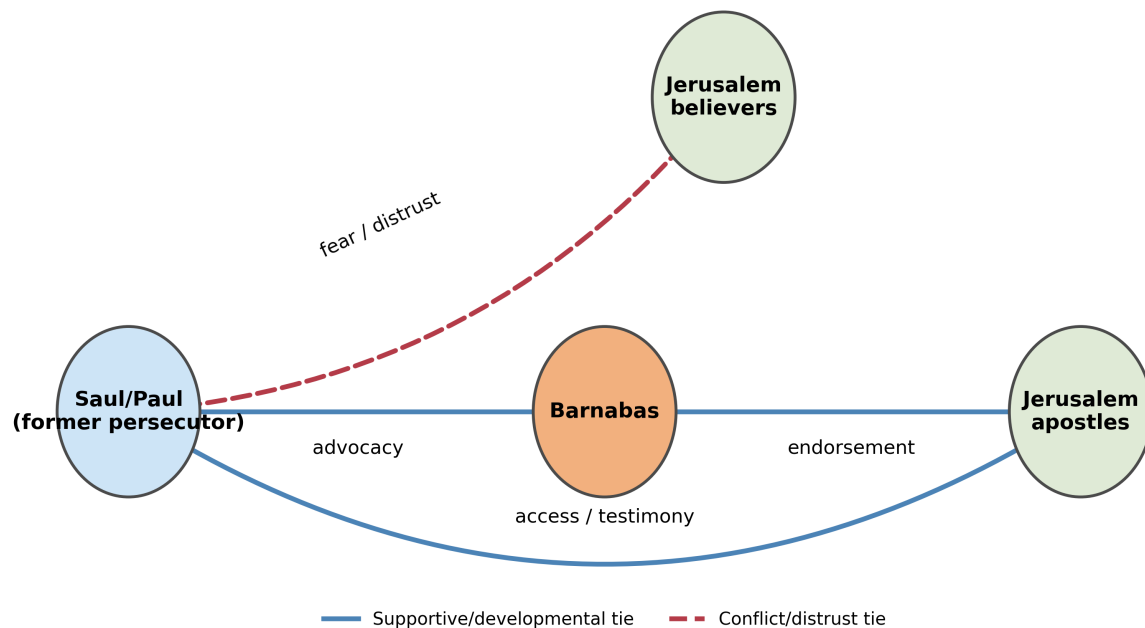
Figure 1
Barnabas-Centered Narrative Ego Network



Note. The figure presents a qualitative, narrative-derived ego network based on the selected Barnabas episodes. It visualizes relational roles rather than quantitative centrality metrics.

Figure 2 isolates the Acts 9 trust-brokerage episode. Saul stands outside the trusted Jerusalem network because of his prior reputation. Barnabas occupies the bridging position between Saul and the apostles. His intervention allows Saul to move from feared outsider toward accepted participant. Trust theory helps explain the seriousness of the barrier. Trust involves vulnerability under conditions of uncertainty and risk (Burke et al., 2007; Hasel & Grover, 2017; Mishra & Mishra, 2013). The Jerusalem believers are not merely being inhospitable; they are protecting a vulnerable community from someone previously associated with violence against them.

Figure 2
Trust Brokerage in Acts 9:26–28



Note. The figure shows Barnabas bridging a trust gap between Saul/Paul and the Jerusalem apostles while fear/distrust remains associated with Saul's prior reputation.

Barnabas intervenes by taking Saul and bringing him to the apostles. This action positions Barnabas as a broker across a structural hole between Saul and the Jerusalem leadership. Brokerage creates value by connecting actors or groups who would otherwise remain disconnected, enabling the movement of information, influence, resources, and opportunity across network gaps (Burt, 2004; Long et al., 2013). Burt et al. (2020) further connect brokerage with perceptions of leadership, suggesting that those who coordinate across network gaps may be perceived as leaders because they enable connection and flow. Barnabas's action in Acts 9 fits this pattern, but with a theological and communal purpose: he brokers access so that a former persecutor can be evaluated within the fellowship of the church.

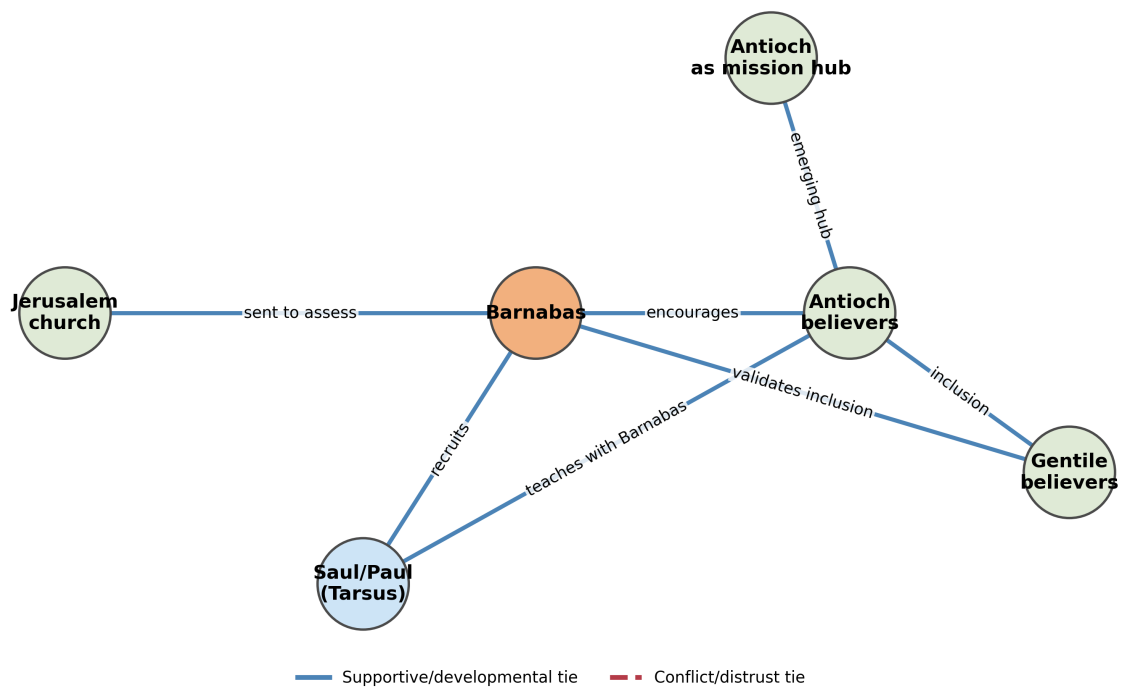
This brokerage also involves credibility transfer. Trust-transfer theory suggests that trust in one source can influence trust in another actor under certain conditions (Chen et al., 2015). Barnabas's credibility in the Jerusalem network helps Saul gain access to that network. The apostles and disciples are not asked to trust Saul in isolation. Saul is introduced through Barnabas, whose own standing reduces perceived risk. Van den Broek et al. (2023) emphasize that endorsement can shape legitimacy judgments by influencing whether evaluators publicly express acceptance or approval. Barnabas's action functions analogically as a public endorsement of Saul's new identity.

5.2 Boundary Spanning: Antioch and Spirit-Directed Expansion

Barnabas's second major network role appears in Acts 11:19–26 and Acts 13:1–4. The gospel has spread to Antioch, where a significant number of Gentiles or

Hellenists are responding. When news reaches Jerusalem, the church sends Barnabas. This episode places Barnabas between the established Jerusalem community and an emerging, culturally complex mission context. Figure 3 presents this boundary-spanning structure by showing Barnabas linking Jerusalem, Antioch, Gentile believers, and Saul.

Figure 3
Boundary Spanning at Antioch



Note. The figure visualizes Barnabas's boundary-spanning role between Jerusalem, Antioch, Gentile believers, and Saul/Paul in the Antioch narrative.

Barnabas's response in Antioch is both theological and relational. He sees the grace of God, rejoices, and encourages the believers to remain faithful. He does not treat the new development as a threat to Jerusalem's control. Instead, he validates the work and strengthens its connection to the broader movement. Boundary spanners operate across organizational, social, cultural, or institutional divides, connecting people and groups that differ in location, identity, expertise, or function (Cross et al., 2013; Long et al., 2013; Miller, 2008). Cross et al. (2013) argue that boundary-spanning networks are critical for organizational change because change requires direction, alignment, and commitment across boundaries. Glaser et al. (2015) likewise show that boundary spanning can shape strategic renewal across levels of an organization. Barnabas's Antioch ministry fits this pattern analogically because he strengthens alignment across an expanding community.

Barnabas's decision to go to Tarsus to find Saul further strengthens this interpretation. He recognizes that Antioch requires additional leadership capacity and recruits Saul into the work. This act connects three network locations: Jerusalem, Antioch, and Tarsus. It also connects a growing Gentile-inclusive community with a developing leader whose future ministry will become central to the Gentile mission. From a management perspective, this is talent deployment within an expanding organizational network. From a theological perspective, it is also participation in the Spirit-directed expansion of the church.

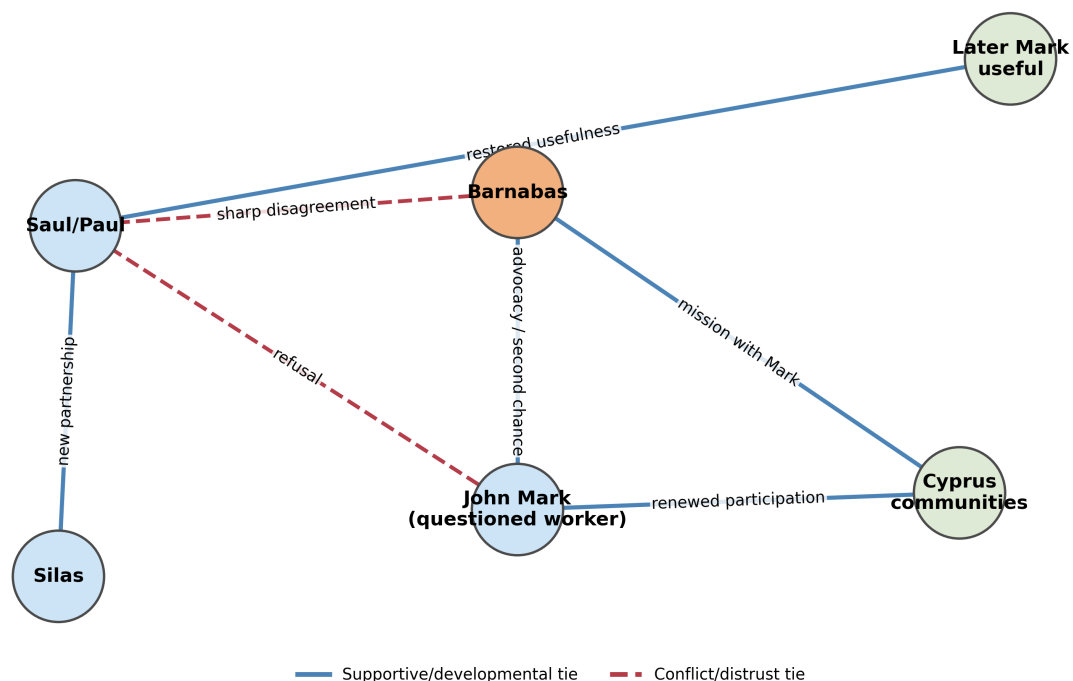
The Antioch episode also connects to diffusion theory. Diffusion refers to the spread of practices, beliefs, behaviors, or structures through social systems and

along channels of communication and influence (Strang & Soule, 1998). Naumovska et al. (2021) emphasize that diffusion does not simply produce sameness; as practices move across contexts, they may generate both similarity and difference. Antioch is not simply a copy of Jerusalem. It becomes a distinctive mission hub in which Gentile inclusion and cross-cultural ministry become increasingly visible. Barnabas participates in this diffusion process by validating the work and strengthening its leadership capacity, while Acts continues to locate the mission's ultimate direction in the activity of the Spirit.

5.3 Talent Rehabilitation: John Mark After Failure

The final major network role appears in Acts 15:36–41. Paul proposes revisiting the churches, and Barnabas wants to take John Mark. Paul refuses because Mark had withdrawn from the work in Pamphylia. The disagreement becomes sharp, resulting in two separate missionary teams: Barnabas and Mark go to Cyprus, while Paul and Silas travel through Syria and Cilicia. Figure 4 depicts this talent-rehabilitation dynamic by showing Paul's refusal, Barnabas's advocacy, Mark's renewed participation, and the later canonical reference to Mark's usefulness.

Figure 4
Talent Rehabilitation in Acts 15



Note. The figure depicts the conflict over John Mark, Barnabas's advocacy for renewed participation, and the later canonical witness to Mark's usefulness.

This episode is often treated primarily as an interpersonal conflict between Paul and Barnabas. It is certainly that, but viewed through qualitative ego-network analysis, it is also a dispute over whether a damaged tie should be restored. John Mark's prior withdrawal has weakened his credibility with Paul. Paul evaluates the previous failure as disqualifying for the next journey. Barnabas evaluates Mark through a restorative lens and seeks to include him again. The issue is not whether failure occurred; the issue is whether failure should permanently define Mark's future network participation.

Human resource development provides useful analogical language for this episode. Although John Mark should not be described as a modern derailed leader in a technical sense, Acts 15 presents him as a worker whose prior conduct has damaged his perceived reliability. Barnabas's response can therefore be interpreted as developmental sponsorship after failure. Conger (2024) argues that leadership development should attend to derailment risks before failure becomes irreversible, while Sonnenfeld and Ward (2008) emphasize the possibility of recovery after career setbacks. Grocutt et al. (2020) and Joo and Cruz (2023) also show that mentoring and developmental networks can contribute to leadership development by providing access, support, and opportunity. Barnabas appears to act from a similar developmental logic. He sees Mark not only in terms of prior withdrawal but also in terms of future usefulness.

This interpretation does not require portraying Paul negatively. Paul's concern for mission reliability is understandable. Organizational leaders must consider

the cost of repeated failure, especially in demanding and risky contexts. The text itself does not explicitly declare one leader right and the other wrong. Instead, it reveals two legitimate leadership concerns in tension: Paul prioritizes mission continuity and team reliability; Barnabas prioritizes restoration and developmental opportunity. The later reference in 2 Timothy 4:11, where Mark is described as useful for ministry, strengthens the rehabilitation reading only cautiously. It suggests that Mark's usefulness was not permanently lost, but it does not prove the details of Barnabas's role in the intervening development.

6. Limitations

Several limitations constrain the interpretation before moving to practical implications. First, this study is based on narrative-derived qualitative ego-network analysis rather than a complete historical reconstruction of the early Christian movement. Acts does not provide exhaustive data regarding every relationship, tie strength, interaction frequency, or relational duration. The figures and table therefore organize textual evidence; they do not function as statistical network outputs.

Second, the study uses management and organizational theory analogically. Barnabas was not operating within a modern corporation, nonprofit organization, or formal HRD system. Concepts such as sponsorship, talent rehabilitation, social capital, and boundary spanning are heuristic tools used to illuminate relational patterns in the narrative, not claims that Acts directly teaches contemporary management theory. Third, the analysis focuses on Barnabas-centered relationships rather than

the full network of Acts. A broader study could compare Barnabas's network position with Peter, Paul, Philip, James, or other early Christian actors.

7. Implications for Business and Leadership Practice

The Barnabas narrative offers several implications for business theology, leadership development, human resource development, and organizational practice. These implications should not be understood as direct transfers from the ancient church to modern organizations. Nevertheless, the relational patterns in Acts illuminate enduring dynamics involving trust, sponsorship, informal leadership, boundary spanning, and restoration after failure.

First, Barnabas demonstrates that informal or semi-formal leaders can create organizational capacity through network position. Leadership studies increasingly recognize that influence is not limited to formal authority, hierarchical office, or individual charisma. Rather, leadership can emerge through relational embeddedness, patterns of connection, and the ability to mobilize social ties across a network (Balkundi & Kilduff, 2006; Hoppe & Reinelt, 2010). Some of the most consequential leaders may be those who connect departments, translate across cultures, sponsor emerging talent, and repair damaged ties. Such individuals may not always be the most visible executives or public representatives, but they often enable the organization to function across boundaries.

Second, Barnabas shows that encouragement becomes organizationally significant when it takes the form of sponsorship. In ordinary usage, encouragement may suggest emotional support, affirmation, or kindness. These are important, but Barnabas's encouragement is more active. He creates access, endorses, advocates, and takes reputational risks on behalf of others. Organizations often identify high-potential people but fail to provide the relational access necessary for those individuals to flourish. Talent development requires more than training programs or individual skill acquisition; it also requires sponsors who connect emerging leaders to key networks, stretch opportunities, and legitimacy-conferring relationships (Ang, 2019; Dobrow et al., 2011; Hewlett, 2019; Rock & Garavan, 2006).

Third, Barnabas illustrates the importance of boundary-spanning leadership during growth and change. The Antioch episode represents the expansion of the Christian movement into a culturally diverse and Gentile-inclusive context. Barnabas validates what is happening beyond Jerusalem without severing Antioch from the broader movement. In contemporary organizations, change efforts often require leaders who can recognize emerging possibilities at the margins, reduce mistrust, translate across groups, and maintain alignment with core mission.

Fourth, Barnabas's advocacy for John Mark highlights the importance of restorative developmental leadership. Contemporary organizations often struggle with the

tension between accountability and restoration. Reliability matters, but organizations lose future capacity when they permanently define people by a single failure. Restorative developmental leaders distinguish between a failure that reveals permanent unsuitability and a failure that requires correction, support, and renewed opportunity. Barnabas does not deny Mark's previous withdrawal, but he refuses to let it close Mark's future.

8. Conclusion

Barnabas occupies a vital but often underappreciated leadership role in Acts. While Paul eventually becomes the more prominent missionary and theological figure, Barnabas repeatedly appears at moments when the early Christian movement requires trust, connection, development, and restoration. He is a trusted insider in Jerusalem, a sponsor for Saul, a boundary spanner in Antioch, a partner in mission expansion, and an advocate for John Mark after failure.

This paper has argued that Barnabas is best understood as a networked developmental leader. The construct does not replace existing leadership concepts; it synthesizes them around a biblical case in which relational credibility, brokerage position, and developmental advocacy converge. Barnabas's leadership operates through social capital, sponsorship, boundary spanning, and talent rehabilitation, but it does so within Luke's theological narrative of Spirit-directed witness and expansion. The phrase "son of encouragement" therefore carries organizational significance. Barnabas's encouragement is not merely a personal temperament. It is a leadership practice that creates access, strengthens communities, develops leaders, and restores opportunity to those whose usefulness might otherwise be lost.

Future research could extend this approach through narrative-derived qualitative ego-network studies of other biblical figures, such as Nehemiah, Joseph, Moses, Esther and Mordecai, Paul, Deborah, David before kingship, Joshua, and Jesus with the Twelve. A broader computational study of Acts could also code nodes, ties, and episodes across the entire book. For the present study, Barnabas demonstrates how organizations and movements grow not only through dominant public figures, but also through relational leaders who build trust, bridge boundaries, and develop others for future mission.

9. Author Declarations

9.1 Ethics Statement

This study analyzes biblical texts and published scholarly literature and does not include human-subject research, interviews, private institutional data, or identifiable participant information.

9.2 Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

9.3 AI Use Disclosure

The author used ChatGPT and Grammarly in a limited assistive capacity for outlining, editorial refinement, formatting support, and preparation of submission materials. All biblical interpretation, scholarly analysis, source selection, argumentation, conclusions, and final authorial decisions are the author's own.

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