

Finding Strength in Our Collective Voice

Having grown up in New York City, I have been acutely aware of how divided we are as a city and how many are content to remain behind those walls of separation. Our communities reflect self-selected segregation by race, religion and class.

As I observed some of my old friends, I was amazed by how some of them didn't visit other communities. Their world consisted of the immediate locale in which they resided. They didn't experience different cultures, or explore the vast resources contained in the greatness and diversity of New York City. Their mentality seemed full of barriers, a barrier of "I don't belong," "This is a reality I can't possess," viewpoints that were often the result of generational poverty and hopelessness.

My life was set towards a trajectory of similar despair, but my mom held a different view of the world that infused my future with the hope of possibilities. She accepted Christ when I was still a young child, and her decision radically changed our family. We began attending Bethel Gospel Assembly, where I eventually accepted Christ at 11 and today serve as an elder in the church.

Faith in God changed how we viewed the world. There were no limits. We weren't second-class citizens, and the world was ours to pursue. My siblings and I were enrolled in schools where we were the minority, not in our zone schools where would have been the majority. What ignited in our hearts wasn't division, but a tearing down of racial and class barriers. Jesus did that. He liberated our lives and our destinies.

Thanks to God's intervention in my family, I now approach life

by asking what can I contribute, how can I make my community better, how am I living out my purpose, where do I need to join with others for a greater impact. My heart is drawn towards connecting people with the necessary skills and resources to make empowered decisions.

I seek to enlarge vision, tear down walls, and infuse hope in the hearts of others. I have found that serving others has led me to unique opportunities that fuel these areas and enhance my community.

For the past four years, I've been working for a local non-profit, The New York City Leadership Center, where I currently serve as the director of Movement Day. This one-day event seeks to catalyze Christian leaders to serve their cities more effectively by advancing city-changing collaborative partnerships. This has been a tremendous opportunity to live out and further my calling.

As gifted and talented as we are individually, history has proven that movements of committed people, purposed towards one vision, unified in their determination to change culture, have brought forth lasting change because of the strength found in their collective voice.

I have found that collaboration through this collective voice strengthens us in four ways.

1. Collaboration fine tunes the vision and deepens the conversation. What do we want to accomplish and how do we sacrifice collectively to attain the goal? Not one person has the big idea. Each person is viewed as a necessary piece of the puzzle.

2. Collaboration builds relationships and creates opportunity to connect beyond your ethnicity, denomination, title, or profession. The relational connectors are centered around passion, a heart for people, valuing the story of those you're journeying with. We have a lot more in common than many

believe.

3. Collaboration thwarts division and reminds us to surrender our logos to the logos, the living Word. Focus can be shifted from self-aggrandizement, building a platform for “my ministry,” or “my organization” to making Christ’s name great in the earth, one thing we all have in common. We become unified in the One who has redeemed us all equally and freely. The unity of our speech emerges which transcends race, gender, class and culture. It will speak of authenticity.

4. Collaboration demands community and intuitively fosters it. With the right leadership and rhythms of strategic planning, this community has the potential to become a lasting and sustainable movement of unified and committed thinkers determined to reach a goal.

Collaboration through our collective voice is where we are strongest. We can accomplish profound change in cities by strategically addressing today’s urban issues in the spirit of unity and community.

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