

Equipping the Kingdom Requires Encouraging Believers to Fulfill Their God-Given Purposes

The church's mission is all about people, or at least it should be. Unfortunately, in some ministries, and especially in many churches within America today, this is not the case. Although the mission statement may have remained the same, the underlying focus has shifted from helping people to using them.

I believe that every church starts out with the right intentions and goals: to see people's lives impacted for the kingdom of God and to help them grow and develop in the Lord. But if we're not careful, there's something that can happen to that simple focus as the years go by. While the church grows, more programs and groups are developed, and several ministry departments are created, each having unique protocols and expectations. As the church grows larger and larger, it is easy for those in leadership—in all areas of leadership—to place more focus on the logistics of how church happens than on fulfilling the purpose for why the church started to begin with. The end result is that you end up losing the one thing you are called to grow—people.

I have real-life experience in this area. I have been involved in several churches throughout my lifetime, both as a volunteer and in pastoral staff positions, so I know the struggle firsthand. I understand it both from the perspective of a leader needing to have positions filled in ministry areas and as a volunteer who felt as though the church leaders just saw her as a piece of their complicated puzzle.

One church I was involved in was very inward-focused, and much of my volunteer ministry was focused solely on how I fit into their ministry, more precisely, how I could fit into exactly what they needed me to become for them. Although this comes with the territory of ministry, too often, it's like trying to jam a square peg into a circular hole—the two aren't designed to work together! For over a decade of service, I can't remember one conversation with the leadership about what I felt God was calling me to do individually. At times, I went home on Sundays wondering when and how I would ever fulfill my own individual calling and if anyone would ever help me. During that season of my life, it sometimes felt as though nobody cared for me as a person, but merely a musical talent created to fill the holes and slots within a ministry system built on the wrong foundation and focus.

Are Church Leaders There to Be Served or to Equip God's People?

We have to be extremely careful not to view people (volunteers) through the lens of our tasks, programs or ministry departments. When we disrespect the sovereignty of a person's life and calling, we lose sight of who they are as individuals within God's kingdom. Selfishly using a person for our own agendas, ministry plans or church visions is just the same as blatantly dishonoring them. Church volunteers should never feel as though they are just filling a slot in our ministry.

I recently came across a very healthy ministry view found in the vision statement of a local church. This healthy perspective spawns a desire to be involved and serve! This specific church has one simple plan: to grow the people rather than growing the weekly church attendance count. The main focus is on the person and not on the ministry—the way it's supposed to be.

I understand that there are many tasks, especially in larger

churches, and things need to get done to have a successful and safe ministry week in and week out. And this can sometimes get overwhelming when working with volunteers who are not always reliable. But we have to be careful to never get to the point where we only see people as components to place in our machine so the gears will keep turning. Remember that each person under your care is a unique individual with their own goals and vision that God has mandated them to fulfill—and God has placed you in their life to help them fulfill it! Not the other way around.

When we start to see people this way, a beautiful thing happens! When we focus actively on growing people, they start fulfilling their God-given mission for their life, and it flows out and spills over into other ministries. Then we get the benefit of their joy and passion—and naturally, they will be even more willing to dig in their heels and fight the good fight alongside us. It's a win-win!

“Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others too” (Phil. 2:3-4, NLT). {eoa}

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