

Why Team Ministry Is Better Than a One-Man Show

Last week I served alongside a team of pastors at a ministry school in Debrecen, Hungary, a city I've visited four times. Even though I don't speak Hungarian (it's one of the most difficult languages on the planet), I had a blast working with my friends Zsolt, Eugene, István, Pál and Attila. We shared meals, worshiped and prayed together and opened our hearts on a deep level—with the help of my interpreter and, on a few occasions, the Google Translate program on my phone.

Nobody tried to be the star as we shared teaching slots during the week. We preferred each other and encouraged each other. And we laughed a lot because we really enjoyed each other's company. Every leader contributed his part—and in the end the students were blessed that their teachers flowed in harmony.

Teamwork is an essential part of God's plan for ministry. In both the Old and New Testaments, we see teams of people working side-by-side to further His kingdom. Moses shared leadership with Aaron and Miriam (see Micah 4:6) and David had a group of "mighty men" who performed valiant deeds under his command. Solomon appointed a team to serve as his deputies, Nehemiah rebuilt Jerusalem with teams of workers, and Esther's maidens prayed and fasted with her before she saved Israel from genocide.

Jesus loves teams. He gathered a group of hand-picked disciples and then sent them out to minister in pairs (Luke 10:1). He involved them in feeding the multitudes and healing sick people. In the same way, the apostle Paul never traveled anywhere alone, and he always credited the people who helped him. His love for Timothy, Phoebe, Luke, Silvanus, Titus, Priscilla and other team players is an obvious backdrop in his epistles.

So if teamwork is so essential to Christianity, why do we prefer the celebrity model of ministry today? Here are five clear reasons that teamwork is a better approach:

1. Teamwork accomplishes more. Anybody who has ever chopped down a tree with an axe or painted a house knows the job gets done quicker and easier when more people are working. Ecclesiastes 4:9 says: “Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor.” Ministry leaders are compared to oxen in the Bible, and Jesus said He would place a “yoke” on us when we are called to ministry (see Matt. 11:29). A yoke connects a team of oxen. Jesus never referred to his followers as renegade stallions who run off on their own. He called us to be yoked together with others. You will not achieve as much if you insist on doing everything yourself.

2. Teamwork unlocks people’s potential. In a one-man show, a leader performs the up-front job, a few overworked people help in the background, and the crowd watches. Religious spectators are trained to sit—as if they have nothing useful to contribute. Yet the New Testament tells us the Holy Spirit gives every believer certain gifts, and we all are to use these gifts for the common good (1 Cor. 12:7, 11).

In today’s megachurch culture, the celebrity pastor looms large on the big screen, and he may even broadcast his message to several satellite congregations. This might effectively reach some people for Jesus, and it might be a short-term solution for growth, but does it encourage every church member to discover his or her potential? The best leaders know how to involve lots of people to reach God’s goal.

3. Teamwork encourages healthy relationships. It’s easier to do ministry alone. But you will never grow if you do a solo act. When you are part of a team you must deal with competitive attitudes, jealousy, pride, complaints and hurt feelings. This is exactly why Jesus wants us to work together! You will never confront the flaws in your character unless you

work with others. They will expose your selfishness, and you will expose theirs. Proverbs 27:17 says: "Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another." God will use Brother Bothersome and Sister Sandpaper in your life to make you more loving—and more humble!

4. Teamwork prevents scandals. Years ago after televangelist Jim Bakker was released from prison, he admitted that he had surrounded himself with yes men who didn't have the courage to tell him he was making unethical business decisions. Leaders with a one-man-show mentality are in danger of doing incredibly stupid things because they lack accountability. Team ministry encourages transparency, and senior leaders recognize the value of getting honest feedback from their colleagues. You will fail as a leader if you don't have wise counselors who have access to you. Surround yourself with team players and ask them to point out your blind spots!

5. Teamwork keeps us from idolizing men. A well-known pastor in Nigeria was known to record his sermon each week and then send tapes of his message to his pastors throughout the country. The pastors were then expected to stand in their pulpits the following Sunday, play the recorded sermon ... and move their mouths to the words! They had no message of their own. They were simply clones of the "All-Important Man of God."

That may sound silly, but aren't we guilty of similar foolishness when we put leaders on pedestals and idolize their preaching style? The one-man show may have worked in the past, but the emerging generation has zero tolerance for religious phoniness. People today want healthy leaders who know how to share power instead of grabbing or abusing it.

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