

SERVING TOGETHER

A guy from the city was driving his car through a small town when he drove his car into a ditch in a desolated area. Luckily, a local farmer came to help with his big strong horse named Buddy. He hitched Buddy up to the car and yelled, "Pull, Nellie, pull!" Buddy didn't move. Then the farmer hollered, "Pull, Buster, pull!" Buddy didn't respond. Once more the farmer commanded, "Pull, Coco, pull!" Nothing. Then the farmer nonchalantly said, "Pull, Buddy, pull!" And the horse easily dragged the car out of the ditch. The motorist was most appreciative and very curious. He asked the farmer why he called his horse by the wrong name three times. "Well... Buddy is blind and if he thought he was the only one pulling, he wouldn't even try!"

Like Buddy, all of us want to be part of a team. We don't want to have to do everything on our own. God put us in this world to make a difference. God has a contribution He wants you to make with your life. Remember life is practice for eternity. When you get to heaven, one of the things you're going to do there is serve God and God wants you to get some practice here on earth. How do you serve God? There's only one way. We serve God by serving other people. You cannot serve God directly. You can only serve God by serving others. When we use our talents, time, energy, and resources to help other people that is service. The Bible calls that ministry.

Every person is a minister. God says I don't want you to do this by yourself. I don't want you to minister alone. I don't want you to be a lone ranger servant. I want you to do it in community. I want you to do it with others.

Phil 2:1 If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.

How do you work together with one heart and one purpose? We need to be part of a TEAM. There are 4 essential elements to working together:

T – TRUST

Trust is the emotional glue that draws you closer to people. Without trust you're never going to have the intimate relationship that God wants you to have. Teamwork without trust is impossible. Jesus and Paul traveled with a team, they never ministered by themselves.

1 Tim 6:20 Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care

The key word here is ENTRUSTED. To entrust means to place your trust in someone. You have to share responsibility. You have to let other people take part of the work.

Everyone knows that a quarterback can't pass the ball to himself. If you're going to win the game you have to pass the ball to somebody else. There are very few times that a quarterback gets to run it in himself. His job is to give the ball away. As we talk about starting small groups, we need to say from the beginning that these will be groups that seek to hand off ministry to others. We will be handing off who'll lead the discussion. Handing off who will bring the food. The ministry will be shared by everyone.

So how do you know who to trust? How do you find a trustworthy person? More important than that let me ask you this question: How do you become a trustworthy person so that people trust you? I hear youth saying this all the time – why won't you TRUST ME? Trust is something that is not just given – it must be earned. If you want to become a trustworthy person you need to do three things.

a. Gain Trust - By being consistent

Have you noticed that most people hate surprises? They don't want you to be acting one way this time and acting another way another. They expect you to be predictable and consistent. E.g. people expect me to be on time and consistent in my messages so I try very hard to always do that.

Luke 16:10 Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.

Being consistent starts with small things. Today everybody wants to serve God in big ways that are seen by everyone. God says you build trust by being faithful, trustworthy, in the little things that often nobody sees. Character is built by being faithful in the little things that only God sees. God says that if you are faithful in the little things then He will give you greater and greater responsibility.

Cliff Barrows sings for Billy Graham's crusades. When he was 21 years old, he attended a meeting in a small town in California. There was this young preacher who was 23 years old who spoke that day. He went to the meeting but the music leader didn't show up because he was sick. Somebody volunteered Cliff so he led the music that night. He was a substitute. He was faithful in little things. After the service was over Billy Graham put his arm around him and said, "I'm not too choosy. Why don't you come with me?" And he began to travel with Billy Graham. He said, "I've now been at his right side for sixty years."

b. Gain Trust - By being confidential

People trust you when you can keep a secret. When they unburden themselves with something on you they expect you will not go and spread it all over. One of the rules for our small groups will be that what is said in the group stays in the group.

Prov 11:13 A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret.

Gossip is when you're sharing information and you're neither part of the problem nor part of the solution. If you want to be trustworthy you have to gain that trust by being consistent and by being confidential. People who talk to you about other people will also talk about you to other people. If they gossip *to* you, they're going to gossip *about* you. The Bible says don't hang around gossips. In fact, say to people like that, "I don't want to hear it!"

c. Gain Trust - By being close

Prov 17:17 A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.

Time creates trust. Another way you could say it is like this - Trust takes time. You can lose trust very quickly - you can lose it in a second. But it can take months and maybe even years to build trust. Trust takes time. You can't grow it quickly.

I remember watching a father play with his little boy, repeatedly throwing him in the air and catching him just before he hit the ground. The child is relaxed and having a great time saying, "Do it again! Do it again!" I thought, if that was me, I'd be stiff as a board. "Can you explain why he's so relaxed, even when he's out of control?" I asked the father. "It's very simple," he said. "We have a history together. We've played this game before, and I've never dropped him."

E – EMPATHY

To be part of a team you have to learn to be sympathetic. You can't have in harmony with others without sympathy. And you can't have a team without being aware of what's going on in each other's lives. People can work together in an office for years but they are not a team unless they know what's going on in each other's lives. You have to have empathy.

1 Pet 3:8 Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.

How do you show empathy?

a. Slow Down

Speed destroys empathy. If I were to get in a plane and fly to Toronto, I would travel a similar course than if I drove but I would not see nearly as many of the details because I'm going so fast. If I were to drive a car to Toronto, I would see a lot more because I'd be going slower. If I were to ride a bike to Toronto, I would see even more. However, if I really wanted to really get all the details I would go and find somewhere to sit down and stay there without moving. When was the last time you just sat somewhere quietly? If I don't move, I'm going to see all kinds of details like little ants moving around in the sand, birds flying overhead - stuff that I would never see any other way. When you're moving you miss the details. The faster you move the more you miss.

James 1:19 My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry

This is great advice for all of us - be quick to listen and slow to speak. The average human can comprehend about 650 words a minute? The average person speaks 150 words minute. That means you've got a 400-word boredom factor between what they're saying and your ability to comprehend it. People use this gap as an excuse – "I can read the paper and listen to you! I can watch TV and listen to you." Yes, the truth is you can but it's not empathetic. So, you have to intentionally slow down.

This has to be intentional. Often people will meet in small groups at the end of the day and you go running in at high RPMs, on the cell phone and doing three things at once. What you need to do is go stand at the door before you even knock, take couple of deep breaths, and slow down. If you don't, you're going to miss the details. You're going to walk in and ask someone "How you doing?" and they will say, "I'm fine!" and you will keep walking. If you had been slower, you would have looked at them and realized that they were not fine by their body language.

b. Ask Questions

Prov 20:5 The purposes of a man's heart are deep waters, but a man of understanding draws them out.

You show empathy by asking questions. You often have to draw things out of people. Most people don't blurt out their emotions (some do not many). You ask how they are and they answer automatically "I'm fine". They're not really telling you how they feel. They're just giving you the polite response. They don't know if you really mean it or not. "How you doing?" can really be a serious question or it could be just nothing.

Learn to ask the question twice. Or ask the question in a different way, "How's it going in your life? When they tell you what is happening pause and say, "Tell me more." Often it is the second question which people open up on. Be empathetic you learn to ask the question twice.

Learn to linger. That means don't be afraid of silence. You just be in the moment, stay in the present, ask the question and just kind of sit there. You don't immediately go into your agenda. You just listen. You learn. And don't be afraid of silence. For those of us who are High I this is excruciating. It's like ants crawling up and down my back when this happens. But you can be mature enough to kind of tune in and force yourself to go against your natural inclinations, which is, "Let's talk about something else." Slow down, ask questions.

c. Show Emotions

Rom 12:15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

That's how you emphasize with people. Empathy is more than saying, "I'm sorry you're hurting." Empathy is saying, "I hurt with you." You're willing to cry with them. You're willing to rejoice with them. How do you do that? There's only one way you're going to be that empathetic. Stay filled up with God. That's the only way. If your tank gets empty of God, you're not going to be empathetic to anybody. So, if you get low on God, you're not going to be empathetic at all. You've got to stay filled up with God.

A – ACCOMMODATION

Building a team is not just building trust and showing empathy but accommodating people. When you make accommodation for somebody it means you give them room. You provide them space to attend and to serve on your team. That means you have to accommodate people in lots of different ways on your team and in your small group.

As a church we need to be constantly seeking to make room for new people. The same thing is true in terms of our small groups. We need to make room for more people to be able to join our groups. That means that we need to raise up leaders to start new groups as well as make room in our existing groups for new people. That is accommodation. It is making room for others.

M – MISSION

To have a team you have to have a cause. You have to have a purpose. You have to have a mission. Teams do not just exist for themselves. They have a reason. They are doing something together. They're making a difference in the world in some way. That's the purpose of a team, to accomplish something together.

Phil 2:2 make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose

You may not feel like you have very much to offer but every person has a God given gift and a part to play in ministry. Everyone is important.

TEAM means T-OGETHER E-ACH A-COMPLISHES M-ORE. If you've ever seen the giant redwoods, they are the biggest living things on this planet. They can grow to 400-500 feet tall. The trunks can get so big you can cut out a hole in them and drive a car through them. What most people don't know is they have incredibly shallow roots. These very, very tall trees have almost no root structure. Redwoods always grow in groves. What they do is although their roots are shallow, they intertwine with each other and they hold each other up. When the storms come and the winds come, they are holding each other up. That's how they're the biggest thing in the world.

At one point during a game, the baseball coach said to one of his young players, "Do you understand what cooperation is? What a team is?" The little boy nodded in the affirmative. "Do you understand that what matters is whether we win together as a team?" The little boy nodded yes. "So," the coach continued, "when a strike is called, or you're out at first, you don't argue or curse or attack the umpire. Do you understand all that?" Again, the little boy nodded. "Good," said the coach. "Now go over there and explain it to your mother"