

The Dream Team

Sterling UMC

September 25, 2011

1 Corinthians 12:12-20

What if God were to write a want ad? I think perhaps it might read something like this:
Kingdom workers needed immediately. Urgency of task and shortage of workers makes it mandatory that we expand our labor pool immediately. Recent resignations have left many openings.

Frequent absenteeism will force us to make unwanted cutbacks in services unless we expand work force immediately. Ability not as essential as availability plus an excellent training manual is available. Training manual has been tried and proven over the past two thousands years.

We hire regardless of sex, race or age. Diverse backgrounds welcome and even helpful. In the past we have used peasants and poets, kings and fig pickers, fishermen and doctors, harlots and queens, young lads and wise old men.

Main qualifications: firm faith in Christ, a soft heart and a thick skin.
Work not suitable for everyone. Must be able to withstand criticism of fellow workers and shirkers who often insist on their rights while ignoring their responsibilities.

The pay is not too high, but the retirement plan is heavenly.

How many of you would be willing to answer that ad?

Brothers and sisters, one thing I believe is beyond debate is that Jesus Christ expects His followers to serve other people in His name. Jesus clearly instructs His church to go into the world to heal broken lives and to bring hope and help to those in need. Jesus said, "*The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.*" What the church needs most are those who are willing to serve. There is plenty to do ... just not enough hands to do it.

Last week I shared with you a little about my dream, my vision for our church. One of the things I shared with you was this: I envision a body of believers where every person is actively involved in ministry using his or her gifts for the work of building God's kingdom.

God is not looking primarily for a church that has a lot of people . . . He is looking for those who not only hear the word but those who act on it. He calls us to stop talking and get working; to put our faith in action. He is looking for a mobilized church. . . .a church where people serve each other out of love for Him. When we are equipping people to serve we not only expand our ability to minister, we bring glory to God.

However there are many excuses for not being involved in the ministry of the church. Maybe you've heard some of them. Maybe you've used some of them.

Some folks say, "I've served my time."

What would happen if parents took that approach with their children: "O.K. I've been this child's parent for ten years and I think I've done my part . . . it's time for someone else to take over."? Obviously this kind of person would show that they did not understand the concept of parenthood. Once you become a parent you are always a parent. Your relationship with your children changes over time . . . but you never stop being a parent.

The same is true of the child of God. Jesus warned us: "*No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.*" Jesus tells us plainly: if you don't plan to finish the job . . . don't start it. In Acts 20:24 Paul writes: "*I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me-- the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.*"

Christian service has no retirement age. It is a marathon run, not a sprint. There is no such thing as a retired Christian worker.

Someone else might say, "I don't Know Enough. I don't have the training, the knowledge, the experience to do it. I haven't been a part of this church long enough."

Do you realize that the most important pre-requisite to serving the Lord is a willing heart? Moses didn't feel qualified, but God used Him. Jeremiah felt he was too young, but God used Him. Saul felt unqualified to be King, but God used Him. He can use you, too.

Besides, the best way to learn is to do. People learn more by experience than by lectures. We want to be a church that helps train you. We can provide Bible Studies, give personal counsel, and provide other types of leadership training. But first, there must be a willing heart.

One of the most popular excuses these days sounds something like this: "I'm Too Busy. I just don't have the time."

In Joshua 24:15 we read: "*choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.*"

The same question is posed to all of us: who are you going to serve? I know you will say you want to serve God . . . but whatever is standing between you and ministering in His name, dare I say it? ---- has become your God.

Jesus said it plainly: "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added unto you." If you are too busy to serve . . . you are too busy.

Someone else might say, "I don't Want to Get Involved."

For everyone who has declared their resolve to follow Christ I must say: "think carefully about what you are saying." When you come to Christ, you are coming with a willingness to follow . . . a willingness to serve. When you join the church you promise before God and the rest of the congregation that you will "serve the Lord with your prayers, presence, gifts, and service." You may not have taken the promise seriously . . . but God does.

And let me ask a simple question: What if God had taken that attitude with you? Or, What if those friends or relatives that introduced you to Jesus had adopted that attitude? You would be on the road to destruction. Thank God, He DID get involved. I pray you will too.

Friends it is time for us to quit trying to make excuses and put our faith in action. I challenge each and every one of you to get up off of the sidelines and join the team. For you see the church is the Lord's "Dream Team."

What does it mean to be a part of the Dream Team?

First of all it means acknowledging that you have a role to play on the team. 1 Peter says it this way: *"Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms."* What is Peter saying to us? Peter tells us that God has given every believer a ministry. Paul tells us the same thing in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12. The Biblical teaching is clear: we all have a place where God wants us to serve in a significant fashion. Everyone has a "spiritual gift" - an ability that equips us to serve God in a special way.

The gifts God gives are varied. Some are very public, some are not. All are significant. Paul likens our gifts to parts of a body. Each part is important. None can exist for long without the others.

Secondly as a member of the Dream Team we complement each other. Ministry is not about US . . . it's about Him. God has given us gifts so we might enrich each other and glorify Him.

In our physical bodies each and every one of our parts is valuable. They depend on each other. Our muscles and bones and systems are all interconnected and complement one another. When one part is sick or injured that pain or disease impacts all of the others.

Do you understand? The church is healthy to the degree that the people of the church are involved in ministry. When people sit on the sidelines the church becomes ill and handicapped. The church needs you. You need the church. We need each other.

Look around you this morning, what do you see? You see some people who are like you and many who are very different from you. You see people with tremendous gifts, talents, and abilities. You may even see someone who you don't see eye-to-eye with on some things, but that's okay because you have more in common than you do different. Each person you see plays an important role in the church. Each one is needed. Each one is valuable. Each one of us designed to complement, not to tear down one another.

Then as a member of the Dream Team we have the privilege of being used by God to extend His grace.

When we minister in some capacity we become channels of His grace. Our faithful service reveals God's grace to those around us. But, the converse is also true - when we fail to do what God has called us to do we restrict God's grace in our own lives and the lives of others.

Being a part of the Dream Team also means that we are called to serve with enthusiasm.

God has not called us to "do our duty" or to "get by". He calls us to excel. He calls us to do our best, to strive for excellence, to "give it all we've got". We might not have great abilities. We may not have great opportunities. However, we can serve enthusiastically with what we have and where God has placed us. It was D. L. Moody who said: "I am only one, but I am one. I cannot do everything, but I can do something. And that which I can do, by the grace of God, I will do." With that simple commitment, God used him to bring revival to England and America. God will supply what we need.

So that brings us to the question, How Do I Know Where I Should Serve? Let me give you three simple principles:

First, make sure you are part of the body. It is important that first things come first. You cannot truly serve until you have settled the issue of your personal relationship with Christ. Receive the forgiveness he offers through the cross. Do not commit yourself to the church as an organization. Commit yourself to Christ. Put your faith in him and then put your faith in action.

Second, determine your S.H.A.P.E. This tool for evaluation was developed by Saddleback Community Church and their Pastor Rick Warren. Each of us has a number of factors that figure into God's choice for our place of ministry:

- Spiritual Gifts. As you look through the Biblical list of spiritual gifts (Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4) do you see any gifts that sound like you?
- Heart. What do you feel passionately about? Are you passionate about youth? About fellowship? About music in worship? What you care most about may very well point you in the direction where God wants you to minister. (BEWARE: not everyone feels as strongly about these things as you do.)
- Abilities. What natural talents and abilities do you have: music, technical or administrative skills, craftsmanship, writing, office skills? It is likely that God will use some of these.
- Personality- Where you serve will depend somewhat on your personality. If you had a gift and heart for evangelism and were an extrovert you might be one going door to door to talk to people about the gospel. However, if you are an introvert then you would be better suited for one on one evangelism. You might be more comfortable organizing outreach events or working with publicity.
- Education- this falls into several areas: 1) What do you know how to do? What academic credentials do you have? 2) Your ministry experience. What other ministries have you been involved with . . . and what did you learn?

Now when you get a clear picture of who you are . . . what your S.H.A.P.E. is, you have a much better focus of what God wants you to do. When you are in your area of ministry all these things will be in harmony. To serve in an area that is at odds with your heart, will leave you unfulfilled. To serve in an area outside of your personality will leave you frustrated.

That leads us to the third thing, experiment. The best way to know if a certain ministry is what you are called to is to give it a try. Don't be afraid to try something new. God is always doing new things in our midst. Do you know that the words, "We've never done it that way before," are probably some of the most dangerous and limiting words we can ever say? If we remain in that kind of attitude then we will never make any significant progress. I want us to be free to try things, to dream, to reach. So be bold, be daring, be persistent.

So where does this lead us this morning? My friends, I believe that we are at a very important point in the life and history of our church. There are many wonderful things happening among us. God is at work and through many of you as you have put your faith into action. But we also face some challenges that concern me greatly and I feel sure many of you as well. No, our attendance is not what it should be. And though our giving is strong there never seems to be enough resources to do all we want to do. No, we don't always have enough volunteers to do the things we want to do. Yes it's frustrating. Yes it can be discouraging. So what are we going to do about it? What are you doing about it? As I see it we can do one of two things:

- 1) We can sit here and reminisce about the good old days gone by and continue to let time and nature take its natural course. But I don't know about you, I not content with that, and I don't believe you are either.
- 2) We can dream and then put our faith into action and seek to build an even better future.

We have to stop being stationary and be visionary. We can dare to dream of an even greater future. We can stop thinking like a church whose only concern is maintenance. I don't want to merely maintain. I want to change our community with the Gospel. I don't want to worry about merely balancing a budget or doing only what is necessary. I don't want to worry about what so and so says or thinks. I want to worry about what God says and thinks. I want to worry about doing what is right and what is needed. I think you share these feelings.

My dream for our church is that we would reach many people with the Gospel, that we would provide a church family for them which will strengthen them and help them to dig deep roots. And finally that we would begin to act on what we are learning by serving the great Lord who has saved us. But my friends I can't do it alone. You can't do it alone. We need each and every one of us to make it happen.

The thing that excites me this morning is that I know I haven't thought of even a small percentage of the things that God might want to do through you. Maybe you're the one who will make a significant reduction in our budget; or the one who will help take our children's ministry to a new level; or the one to step forward to teach a class or lead a group, or the one to be involved in evangelism and visitation; or the one to help our Hispanic/Latino Ministry take off, or the one who will open doors to people and ministries we weren't even aware of. Maybe you're the one who will make a significant difference in some way to lead us to even greater heights, not for your glory, or for my glory, but for the glory of our great and mighty God.

My hope and prayer is that we would have a church full of people willing to dream. Willing to expand our horizons. Willing to put our faith into action. Willing to join the dream team. Will you answer the call?