

Playing the “if just one person” card

By Bob Young

A recent article by Scott Cochrane, titled “A common phrase used to justify weak leadership,” questions the validity of the “just one person” argument to justify programs and expenditures.

In the church context, I wonder how many resources have been directed to relatively ineffective efforts because someone said, “If just one person....” In many churches, the process used to manage resource distribution begins with an invalid formula.

An example will show how this usually works. Someone notices an unusually high number on the annual budget or financial report (both of which, interestingly, are less and less accessible in many churches) and questions the expenditure. This often occurs when efforts are unproductive or relatively ineffective; other times the question relates to new, untried initiatives. Instead of using common evaluation processes, the answer uses a different logic, “If just one person is touched, it will be worth it.” In ministry and mission work, a common variation is, “One soul is more valuable than all the world—if just one person is saved....”

The “just one person” approach uses faulty logic. When one begins by defining the result as the greatest possible value, any expenditure has lesser value and is therefore justified. An expenditure is justified because one person is helped. What if the same expenditure could help 10, 100, or 1000? A mission expense is justified by citing meager results (“just one person”) when the same funding produces hundredfold or more when applied thoughtfully and wisely to more effective mission efforts.

Is it ever important to invest in efforts that are not immediately productive? Certainly so! Over 30 years ago, I remember Clyde Antwine bemoaning the fact that the church did not have a mission presence capable of seizing the moment when the Berlin wall fell. And it is true that each individual we touch is important to God.

Time to rethink the mathematics; time to be reminded of the biblical principle. Jesus again and again calls us to be good stewards. We have a responsibility for maximum return. Think about the parable of the talents. Biblical stewardship does not deny the value of the individual. Rather, it recognizes a simple principle: more of that which has value equals more value. When more individuals are helped by carefully directing resources, more value is received.

Few churches have access to unlimited resources. Maximizing resources is the responsibility of leaders. Maximizing resources is hindered by the “just one person” approach. A suggestion for moving forward: eliminate the phrase, “just one person,” from your vocabulary—especially in church leadership, ministry, and mission work. May God’s people always strive to be the best stewards possible of God’s resources.

[You can access the article by Cochrane here → (<https://www.biblicalleadership.com/blogs/a-common-phrase-used-to-justify-weak-leadership/>).