

Teams and the New Testament (2): Understanding the Task By Bob Young

"...you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Putting a team together is no easy task. Putting together an effective team is even harder. Perhaps it goes without saying, but an important first step is prayer. Jesus prayed all night just before he selected his team members. Prayer should always precede the selection of team members.

Another essential first step is to consider what the team will do. No effective team can be formed until the task to be accomplished is identified and understood. Did Jesus know, even as he was choosing the Twelve, that their primary function would be to testify concerning his life, death, and resurrection after he had returned to the Father? If so, he chose them to be witnesses; he trained them to be his witnesses. He walked and talked with them, crisscrossing the hills and plains of Galilee and surrounding areas. He mentored them, prepared them, and turned weaknesses into strengths. Later, those observing them would know that they had been with Jesus (Acts 4:13). He helped the team members 'gel'—bringing together followers with diverse backgrounds who could together work toward his purpose after he was no longer among them.

The task to be accomplished indicates the skills required. Before you begin to think about the members of the team, or begin to bring a team together, you should sit down and make a list of the skills you need on your team. Only after you, or a small group, have carefully identified the task are you ready to identify team members. When the task is understood, some of those with initial interest may lose interest. I sat recently with a returned missionary who explained how the mission team he was a part of several years ago chose its members, depending on God's guidance because of the limited number of visas available to the team. The task had to be redefined less ambitiously because fewer team members would be allowed to enter the target country.

Once the task is initially understood, it is time to recruit and invest spiritually in the team. The right task—big enough, challenging enough, communicated with enthusiasm and excitement will help attract the right kind of team members. It will also attract some who should not be part of the team. Some of those will drop out immediately; others will hang on and drop out later (Judas?).

Some team members may be qualified, yet should not serve for a variety of reasons. Let me illustrate this from church leadership teams. Some people think that every man who is qualified to serve as an elder should do so. A few years ago, I knew of a congregation with almost a dozen men qualified to serve; most of them had previously served as elders in other locations. Should all of them be selected? Please answer before you read my next sentence.

The congregation was composed mostly of retired couples and had less than 50 members—about half of the members were the 12 couples mentioned! The task to be accomplished influences the team selection. Some churches have so many elders that they no longer have a pool of active deacons. (This occurs because most men, once selected as elders, give up any real involvement in the day-to-day ‘work’ of the church, choosing rather to serve in consulting, counseling, and advisory roles.)

This series of articles urges you to proceed carefully, step by step. One of the first steps is to identify the task the team will undertake. The task will inform the nature of the team, the members needed, necessary skills, team size, and a host of other factors.

Start with God in view; this requires prayer. Start with the end in view—this involves carefully defining the task. Who knows, your team might just change the world as Jesus’ team did!