

For Our People and for the Cities of God

by John Piper

The sermon emphasizes the importance of humility, diversification, mutual helpfulness, strength, benefit to God's people, and surrender to God's sovereign guidance in team ministry.

Duration: 24:57

Scripture: 2 Samuel 10:13, 1 Chronicles 19:15, 1 Chronicles 20:1, Matthew 6:33, 1 Corinthians 12:4, Galatians 1:10

Topics: "Team Ministry", "Godly Humility"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on a passage from the Bible where Joab speaks to his brother about teamwork in battle. The speaker identifies six principles for successful team ministry: humility, diversification, mutual helpfulness, strength, benefit to God's people, and surrender to God's sovereign guidance. The speaker emphasizes the importance of humility, acknowledging our finite and sinful nature. They also highlight the need for diversification, recognizing that individuals have different gifts and should focus on what they are best at. The speaker encourages surrendering to God's will and working for the benefit of the people.

Transcript

If you will turn with me to the second book of Samuel, 2 Samuel chapter 10, beginning reading with verse 1. After this the king of the Ammonites died, and Hanan his son reigned in his stead. And David said, I will deal loyally with Hanan the son of Nahash, as his father dealt loyally with me. So David sent by his servants to console him concerning his father.

And David's servants came into the land of the Ammonites. But the princes of the Ammonites said to Hanan their lord, do you think because David has sent comforters to you that he is honoring your father? Has not David sent his servants to you to search the city, to spy it out, and to overthrow it? So Hanan took David's servants and shaved off half the beard of each, and cut off their garments in the middle at their hips, and sent them away. When it was told David, he sent to meet them, for the men were greatly ashamed.

And the king said, remain at Jericho until your beards have grown, and then return. When the Ammonites saw that they had become odious to David, and the Ammonites sent and hired the Syrians of Bethraheb, and the Syrians of Jobeth, 20,000 foot soldiers, and the king of Meachah, with a thousand men, and the men of Tob, 12,000 men. And when David heard of it, he sent Joab and all the hosts of the mighty men.

And the Ammonites sent out and drew up in battle array at the entrance of the gate, and the Syrians of Jobah and Rehob, and the men of Tob, Meachah, were by themselves in the open country. When Joab saw that the battle was set against him, both in front and in the rear, he chose some of the picked men of Israel and arrayed them against the Syrians. The rest of his men he put in charge of the Abishai, his brother, and he arrayed them against the Ammonites.

And he said, if the Syrians are too strong for me, then you shall help me. But the Ammonites are too strong for you, and I will come and help you. Be of good courage, and let us play the man for our people and for the cities of our God.

And may the Lord do what seems good to him. So Joab and the people who were with him drew near to battle against the Syrians, and they fled before him. And when the Ammonites saw that the Syrians fled, they likewise fled before Abishai and entered the city.

Then Joab returned from fighting against the Ammonites and came to Jerusalem. I'd like to make an announcement about what I'll be preaching on in the next two Sundays, so that if you know of anybody who is especially interested in these two topics, you might invite them. I just came back from speaking three times at the Tosha Vim retreat.

We have 95 of our college-age people up at Woodlake Camp this morning. The topic was sex, sleep, and the Holy Spirit. And I'm going to follow through on that, and next Sunday we'll be speaking on the topic sex and a single person, and the Sunday after that, sexual relations in marriage.

So if you know of anybody that's interested in that sort of thing, you might want to tell them. But this morning, I want to paint a word picture for you of a relationship in ministry for me and Glenn to use as a model in pastoral leadership and teamwork, and for you to hold up as something towards which to pray. For your ministerial leaders, it's a picture that I hope will shape our goals and will shape your goals for us and your prayers.

And the picture comes from those words of Joab in the 10th chapter of 2 Samuel. Joab was David's mighty man of battle, and he was a great man of faith and gave a great challenge to his brother Abishai. And I love those two verses, and let me give you the background here so that you get the full impact of verses 11 and 12.

The king of the Ammonites has died, and his son Hanun is now reigning in his place. David is a man with a great heart, and he wants to express a kindness to this young son who's just lost his father and now bears the burden of rule. And so he sends a delegation to express consolation to Hanun.

And Hanun's princes convince him that David is acting in stealth and wants to find out about the city and wants to bring ruin upon the Ammonites. And so what does Hanun do? He humiliates the delegation. He shaves off half their beard and cuts their clothes off around the middle and sends them out, utterly shamed.

And David is angry. And when they hear about David's anger, they start to mount an offense. The Ammonites call the Syrians down from the north and ask for help.

And when David hears that the Ammonites and the Syrians are in league, mounting an offense, he says to Joab, you go up against them. And as it develops, the Ammonites array themselves around their city to protect it. They put the Syrians out in the open field, and Joab and his mighty men are sandwiched in the

middle.

Now, Joab takes charge of one group and says, we will go against the Syrians in the open field. Abishai and his mighty men are going against the Ammonites at the city. And then here is what Joab says to his brother in the battle.

Verse 11. If the Syrians are too strong for me, you will come and help me. But if the Ammonites are too strong for you, I will come and help you.

Be of good courage. Let us play the man for our people and for the cities of our God. And may the Lord do what seems good to him.

I just love those words. And I see six principles for successful team ministry in those few words. And I'm going to mention them briefly, and then we'll hold each one up for a moment as a challenge to Glenn and myself, and I believe all of us.

In order to have successful teamwork, whether in battle or in church ministry, there must be humility. Second, diversification. Third, mutual helpfulness.

Fourth, strength. Fifth, benefit to God's people. And sixth, surrender to God's sovereign guidance.

Let's look at each of these in turn. First of all, humility. If the Syrians are too strong for me, you come help me.

Joab was a great and mighty warrior, but he was not so foolish as to think that he was self-sufficient or never would need any help. Abishai, my brother, the task I have set for myself today might be too big for me. Humility willingly acknowledges its own finitude and need and is open to help, to counsel, to advice.

Now, one of the reasons humility is essential in a team effort is because without humility, any lasting unity is impossible. This is taught very clearly in Ephesians chapter 4, verses 1 to 3. Here's what Paul says to the church. I beg of you, lead a life worthy of your calling to which you have been called with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit.

Now, the sequence of those virtues is crucial. Notice going backwards. The goal is unity in the Spirit.

But you can't have unity unless you can forbear one another. That is, literally endure one another's failures and foibles and idiosyncrasies. You can't have unity unless you can endure one another.

But you can't endure one another unless you are a patient person. That is, a person who doesn't have a hair trigger in the rifle of his emotions. You've got to have patience.

But you can't have patience unless you are a meek and a lowly person. A proud person will have a hair trigger. A proud person will quickly lash out when his wheel is crossed or when he's disappointed.

In order to have patience, you've got to have humility. So, to go in reverse, then, humility or lowliness and meekness will lead a person to be patient. He won't be quickly offended.

If he's patient, he'll forbear. He will endure when one or the other fails. And if we can endure our failures and our idiosyncrasies, we can maintain unity in the Spirit.

And therefore, if Glenn and I are to have unity in the ministry, we will have to maintain meekness and lowliness before God and before each other. And by God's grace, he will enable us to maintain this. Second characteristic of successful team ministry is diversification.

Abishai was sent against the Ammonites. Joab was sent against the Syrians. It's wise battle strategy when the enemy is widespread and diverse that we don't put all of our efforts in one place.

It's also wise, isn't it, that a person spend most of his time doing what he's best at. And it's a solid biblical principle that we are not all best at the same thing, but rather have been given various combinations of gifts. Here's what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12, 4. Now, there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit.

There are varieties of service, but the same Lord. There are varieties of working, but the same God who inspires them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

There's an awful temptation, I think, among everybody, every human, but especially among leaders, pastors, to view their differences in such a way that it either makes them feel inferior to the others or superior to the others. And that's a great mistake. And Paul tried to avoid that mistake by saying this further on in that chapter in 1 Corinthians.

God has arranged the organs of the body, each of them as he chose. There are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you.

Joab cannot say to Abishai, I have no need of you. Piper now cannot say to Ogryn, I have no need of you. Each person is essential on the team, though there is diversification of gifts and diversification, therefore, of ministry.

Third characteristic of effective team ministry, mutual helpfulness. If the Syrians are too strong for me, you come help me. If the Ammonites are too strong for you, I'll come help you.

Diversification in the church is not so ironclad that we can't leave our little bailiwicks to go help the person in need in his sphere. Fundamental to all successful teamwork is that the team members be for each other and not against each other. Competition in ministry is anathema to the Spirit of Christ.

And my goal in ministry must be Glenn's joy and success in ministry. And his goal must be my joy and success in ministry. We must be mutually helpful.

And there's a warning, I think, for us and for you here. There are, I think, will probably always be carnal people in the church who are factious. It's a good biblical word that Paul condemns as one of the works of the flesh.

And factious people will always align themselves with one minister or the other. They do it because they get a sense of power and significance in being on the inner ring of one leader over against the other leader. God willing, that will not happen at Bethlehem Baptist Church.

There will be no Piper party. There will be no Ogren party because Piper and Ogren are going to be praying together so closely and looking together to that one Lord so closely and so taken up with each other's prosperity and success that it will not work for anybody who tries it. The fourth characteristic of effective team ministry is strength.

Be of good courage, Abishai, and let us play the man for our people and for the cities of God. More literally, the Hebrew says simply, be strong and let us show ourselves strong. Just repeats that great word.

When the battle begins, don't limp away in fear and weakness. Attack! Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

The power that Glenn and I need in ministry does not come from within ourselves. We would be undone in a hurry if that were all we had. The strength is God's that we must have, and when we put on God's armor, we have God's strength.

And I pray that God, like Paul prayed in Ephesians 1, might grant the eyes of our hearts, Glenn, to see, these are his words, what is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe, that includes you too, according to the working of his great might, which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at the right hand of the Father in the heavenly places. May God grant us the spiritual power that we need to do our work together, and may we never flag in courage and zeal for our people and for the cities of our God. And that last phrase leads us to the fifth characteristic of effective team ministry.

Benefit to you, to God's people, for our people and for the cities of God. Joab was not fighting just for himself. Even though it must be our goal to help each other, we must always ask, help each other do what? And the answer is, to help each other serve you.

We strive for gospel humility. We employ diversification. We try to be mutually helpful.

We try to maintain strength all for you and not for ourselves. Now, notice that the aim, Glenn, is not to please the people, but to benefit the people. Paul said to the Galatians, am I now seeking to have the favor of men or of God? Or am I now trying to please men? If I am still trying to please men, I am no longer the servant of Christ.

Our first aim, Glenn, is not to please these people, but to bless these people. And if we do that, we'll have the approval of those whose approval counts, namely those who want above all what God wants. And what is the benefit now? That we want for these people, for you.

Almost exactly a year ago today, I stood here and preached my candidating message. I wonder how many of you remember what the text or the point of that was. I chose a text in which I tried to make as clear as I could what my goal in ministry was and what benefit I was after for you.

And it hasn't changed and it'll never change. And it's printed on the stationery and on the front of the bulletin. This is the text from Philippians 1. It is my eager expectation and hope.

This is Paul now writing from prison. It is my eager expectation and hope that I shall not at all be ashamed, but that with full courage, now as always, Christ might be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. And then he goes on a few verses later.

I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your advancement and joy of faith. Here's the great goal, Glenn, that we've got to have for these, our people. Whether they live or whether they die, that Christ might be magnified in them.

That they might so live at home, so live at work, so live in their leisure and so die when the time comes, such that everybody who's around them will see their Christ is a magnificent God. And therefore, since Christ is only magnified where he is trusted, our practical goal as a means to that end must be the advancement and joy of their faith. So our ultimate goal is that Christ be magnified in everybody in this church's life.

And our practical goal as a means to that end is the advancement and joy of everyone's faith. For our people and for the cities of God, that their confidence and joy might soar and in soaring to God magnify him. One final characteristic for ministry as a team, we must, Glenn, be surrendered absolutely to God's sovereign guidance.

Be of good courage. Let us play the man for our people and for the cities of God. And may the Lord do what seems good to him.

And may the Lord do whatever seems good to him. May we always have that approach to our work, lowering ourselves before God and saying, God, we want to be humble before you and before each other. We want to be diversified in our ministry.

We want to be helpful to each other. We want to be strong in the Lord. We want to work for the benefit of the people.

But Lord, we acknowledge our finiteness and our weaknesses and our sin and that you are sovereign. And therefore we don't want to say any more than Joab did. You do whatever seems good to you.

I remember another team. Now I just love this team. Another team of men who one day gave themselves up to the sovereign will of God.

You remember the story. Their names were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And Nebuchadnezzar had built this big idol and said, you bow down to that or you get roasted.

And they didn't bow down. Nebuchadnezzar came to them and said, you bow down or I'll throw you in that furnace. You know what they said? Oh, listen to this.

Just like Joab. Oh, Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from this burning, fiery furnace.

And he will deliver us out of your hand, O King. But if he doesn't, be it known to you, O King, we will not worship that golden image that you have set up. It makes chills go down my back when I hear somebody give themselves up to the sovereignty of God like that.

God can save us, Nebuchadnezzar. We believe he will save us. But if it seems good to him to let us burn, so be it.

We won't worship anybody else. Oh, that's great. Won't you be that way with me and Glenn? Absolutely given up to the sovereign will of God who always knows what's best for us.

Weren't they just saying we want God to be magnified in our bodies, whether by life or death? Paul didn't make that up. That's the way the saints have lived ever since the beginning. And it makes my spine tingle.

Oh, that the pastoral team of this church might be that surrendered to God's sovereign guidance. So to sum up now, we've got six things, Glenn, laid out before us here and people to pray for. Number one, let us be humble before this people and before ourselves in all the lowliness that befits finite sinful creatures.

Let us diversify according to our varied gifts. Let us come to each other's aid whenever one is stumbling. Let us be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.

Let us work not for our own good alone, but for the benefit of this people and spend ourselves tirelessly for the advancement and joy of their faith. And let us abandon ourselves boldly and joyfully to the sovereign will of God, whatever it is for this church, and I believe it is something great.

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