

Holy Heroes: TEAM
Exodus 18:13-27; Acts 6:1-6
July 1, 2007

A mule named "Jim" was being driven by his owner. When everyone got on the wagon, the driver yelled, "Giddyup, Jim. Giddyup, Sue. Giddyup, Sam. Giddyup, John. Giddyup, Joe."

As the wagon started to move, one of the passengers asked, "When Jim is the only one there, why did you call all those other names?"

The owner replied, "If Jim knew he was the only one pulling this wagon, he'd never budge an inch."

If that's what the mule would think, he was one smart animal. He knew what good leaders from all professions, all economic sectors, and all around the globe know: you can't do it alone. "Leadership is not a solo act, it's a team effort."¹

This summer as we continue exploring the leadership God desires of us, we consider the importance of teamwork, for **Together Everyone Accomplishes More**.

This was a lesson Moses learned from his father-in-law Jethro. Having earned the respect of the community as leader of the Exodus from Egypt, Moses now had the role of serving as judge in his community. People came to him to discern the wisdom of God in making decisions and settling disputes. While visiting his son-in-law, Jethro recognized that Moses was overworked. He needed to share the responsibility with others. He suggested that Moses recruit team members, seeking out persons who respected God, were trustworthy, and who would not be fall into corruption. Moses took the advice of Jethro and delegated responsibility. Not only did it relieve him of an excessive burden, but it enabled justice to permeate the community.

Even the twelve apostles discovered that as the early church grew they could not fulfill all the responsibilities of ministry themselves. In addition to preaching and teaching, their ministry included administration and distribution of the offerings to those in need. Greek-speaking Christians complained that their widows were being neglected when food was distributed. There simply weren't enough workers to go around. From the community the apostles selected men to whom they could delegate responsibility. The qualities of these co-workers were just as important as the judges chosen by Moses. They looked for persons of good standing, marked by wisdom, and full of faith and the Holy Spirit. By laying hands on those chosen, the disciples granted authority to these seven to govern the life

of the community. This allowed the original twelve apostles to fulfill other tasks. The ministry was shared and grew. If the twelve apostles had refused to share responsibility and power, the growth of the church would have been stifled. Teamwork was essential to the development of the Jesus movement. Indeed it was the model Jesus himself established.

Both of these biblical stories highlight the importance of selecting the right team members with the desired qualities. A common guideline in all the prominent books on leadership is getting the right persons on the team. Bill Hybels, pastor of Willow Creek Church in Illinois, one of the largest churches in the country, has 3 C's he uses in selecting team players: Character, Competence, and Chemistry.² In his staff he seeks persons who are committed to spiritual disciplines and have evidence of honesty, teachability, humility, reliability, and a healthy work ethic. He has found that in church work an occasional lapse in competence can be accepted. But lapses in character create problems that can breed distrust and alienate team members. Bestselling author and management consultant Jim Collins says that "the good-to-great companies placed greater weight on character attributes than on specific educational background, practical skills, specialized knowledge, or work experience. Not that specific knowledge or skills are unimportant, but they viewed these traits as more teachable (or at least learnable), whereas they believed dimensions like character, work ethic, basic intelligence, dedication to fulfilling commitments, and values are more ingrained."³ There is a strong consensus that the character or moral excellence of team members is the highest priority.

As we look toward Independence Day, we remember the team built one of America's greatest presidents, Abraham Lincoln. In her best selling book, *Team of Rivals*, Doris Kearns Goodwin writes about Lincoln's unprecedented decision to incorporate his eminent rivals into his cabinet. Seward became secretary of state, Chase secretary of the treasury, and Bates attorney general. "Every member of this administration was better known, better educated, and more experienced in public life than Lincoln."⁴ Lincoln was not threatened by these colleagues; rather he knew his need of their strengths, which he himself lacked. The character and competence of his cabinet members were far more important than his own ego.

That leads to another key dimension of teamwork: empowerment. If we're going to work through teams, they have to have the responsibility and authority to do the tasks assigned to them. Some leaders are reluctant to share control. They may fear the quality of work done by others or fear their own loss of status. Harboring control thwarts the creativity and synergy of teams. Good team leaders empower others, literally giving power away.

They listen more than tell. They trust others. They risk sharing responsibility. They value the input of others in order to foster a team spirit. They instill in team members a sense of personal power and ownership.

Jesus empowered his disciples to go out into ministry as he had modeled for them. Even with three years of mentoring, sometimes they still didn't get it, but that didn't prevent Jesus from sending them out to the mission field to seize their successes and learn from their mistakes. He granted them responsibility and authority for their spiritual leadership.

Leaders called by God select quality team members, empower their teams, and create a culture of teamwork. There is an atmosphere in which each person is seen as gifted with talents and wisdom to contribute. No one person is allowed to dominate, not even the leader. The collective wisdom is sought and valued. Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner "developed a simple test to detect whether someone is on the road to becoming a leader. That test is the frequency of the use of the word *we*."⁵ Leaders who value their teams know that they cannot go it alone; anything they accomplish is a collaborative effort.

There is a story about a turtle who wanted to go to Florida for the winter. He knew he could never walk all the way, so he talked to the two ducks who shared his pond. They were better equipped for long-distance travel. He found a piece of stout cord and persuaded each of them to take an end while he, with his strong jaws, held on in the center. It was a pleasant flight and everything was going as planned until someone on the ground looked up and said with admiration, "Who in the world thought of that?" Unable to restrain the impulse to take full credit for the idea, the turtle opened his mouth to say, "I did."⁶

Compare that to this true story. Several years ago Billy Graham received the Congressional Gold Medal of Honor. When Dr. Graham stood to receive his medal in the Capitol Rotunda, he looked at the award and then said quietly, "This medal is really not for me. This medal is for our team. We've been together for about forty-five years. Without each member my life would not have been the same. I owe them so much." Then he listed, one by one, the names of those who had formed the core of his evangelistic ministry.⁷

"Leadership is not a solo act; it's a team effort." As we celebrate our nation's founding this week, may we renew our commitment to working together as citizens for the betterment of all. As we begin a new year as pastor and people, may we rejoice in the opportunity given us to share our varying talents that we might joyously continue the ministry of Jesus Christ

in this time and place. I cherish the teamwork we have shared and trust that in such a spirit, God will lead us into deep and broad ministry.

¹ James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), pp. 241-242.

² Bill Hybels, *Courageous Leadership* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2002), p. 81.

³ Jim Collins, *Good to Great* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), p. 51.

⁴ Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), p. xvi.

⁵ Kouzes & Posner, *ibid.*, p. 18.

⁶ J. Walter Cross, "Second Seatings," Bradenton, Fla. *Homiletics Online*, retrieved June 29, 2007.

⁷ Hybels, *ibid.*, p. 75.

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