

HOW TO JOIN CHRIST'S TEAM

Today's Text: Matt. 4: 17-25

Extracts:

From that time, Jesus began to preach and to say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon, called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. Then He said to them, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” They immediately left their nets and followed Him. Going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. He called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him [Matt. 4: 17-22]

In May 1860, the national convention of the Republican Party was held in Chicago, Illinois, USA.¹ Vying for the nomination for President were Senator William H. Seward from New York (a former Governor of that state), Governor Salmon P. Chase of Ohio, Edward Bates, a judge, and Abraham Lincoln, a lawyer and former one-time congressman from Springfield, Illinois. The other three looked down on the young Lincoln for his inexperience. After two ballots, Lincoln won the nomination and ultimately the Presidential Elections in November 1860. Having run on a platform to abolish slavery, the Republican victory spurred seven southern states to secede to form the Confederate States of America. To every one's surprise, Lincoln appointed his three main rivals for the Republican nomination into his cabinet: Seward as Secretary of State, Chase as Secretary of the Treasury and Bates as Attorney-General. As justification, he said, “We needed the strongest men of the party in the cabinet... (and) I had no right to deprive the country of their services.” Seward later said of Lincoln, “The President is the best of us.” Lincoln won the war and set the slaves free. Today, he remains the most admired President of the United States.

What would you do if you had the opportunity to choose members of your team? It could be in your family or school, office or business, or church. Would you select your rivals or mere sycophants? In this week's study, we shall examine how Jesus chose His first few disciples and learn useful lessons for our situations.

¹ Based on the reviews of Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals* [Simon & Schuster, 2005] by Linda Wertheimer, “‘Team of Rivals’: Lincoln’s Political Prowess,” www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4989622 and James M. McPherson, “‘Team of Rivals’: Friends of Abe,” www.nytimes.com/2005/11/06/books/review/o6mcpherson.html

1. Criteria for choosing team members

You may be a young pastor trying to set up an administrative structure for your new ministry. You may be a political head of state trying to appoint a new cabinet. You may be a school principal trying to select key teachers to run a committee. You may be a business chief trying to assemble a team to work with on a new project. In such cases and more, you have to select the *right* people. The criteria you apply may depend to a large extent on what you want to achieve. For example, Abraham Lincoln faced a major crisis soon after he took over the Presidency. In order to win the civil war, he needed unity and support from his constituents. It is possible that that was one of the reasons that he appointed rivals to his cabinet. It is also possible that he was a man who loved to be challenged before taking key decisions.

In general, team leaders would like to select members that can satisfy the following criteria:

a) *They must be qualified*

You would want people who are qualified to perform the tasks to be assigned to the team. This is the component of *competence*. If the work requires it, you want to know if those to be selected can work hard or produce results. Since you cannot know that until they assume duty, you then measure their potentials by looking at their qualifications (as measured by educational attainment) and experience (as measured by length of service).

Unfortunately, many of us carry paper qualifications that we cannot defend. Our education consisted of passing exams, not necessarily preparing for life! Therefore, we have forgotten so much of what we had learnt at school. That is why some certifying boards are now insisting on life-long learning through issuing time-bound certificates that can only be renewed/extended by passing proficiency tests that are based on cutting-edge knowledge in the field.

Experience measured as length of service also has its draw backs. Does it matter that people can spend donkey years on a job without learning anything and without taking any risks that will challenge them to learn new experience? After all, some people are known to come to work but make little or no contribution to productivity. This phenomenon is called “presenteeism.”² It is a complement of absenteeism. Instead of being absent, because of possible sanctions, employees simply show up for work but operate at reduced productivity due to many factors, such as poor

² Daniel Sitter, “Presenteeism: The Hidden Costs of Business,” <http://ezinearticles.com/?Presenteeism-The-Hidden-Costs-of-Business&id=40408&opt=2005>

health or family matters not related to the business place. All that will count as part of work experience!

Even though entry tests may be used to supplement qualification and experience, you cannot still measure the real thing. For example, you may wind up bringing in a competent bookkeeper who is also a clever thief!

b) *They must be able to work in teams*

Some people may be very competent but they are lone rangers! They cannot work with others or in teams. Some people are simply glued to the monitors of their computers and communicate with their nearest colleagues only or mainly by e-mail or intranet. One possible explanation for that is that performance is rewarded individually. Yet, team success can only come from cooperation, consultation and collaboration among team members.

Every team needs stars, that is, people with abundant talents. However, that you have a basket ball team made up of the Michael Jordans of this world, or a soccer team made up of the Peles and Diego Maradonas cannot guarantee victory if they do not cooperate. Everybody wants to be a star without realising that stars only come out at night! Team work produces what is called *social capital*.

c) *They must be trust worthy*

Competence and team spirit are not enough. You are going to entrust team members with resources- human and material. Can you trust them to use those resources with integrity? That is why you must also be interested in the team members' *character*. That is why you use scientific tests and ask for letters of references. That is why you may use the services of state security units for fingerprints.

Again, just like the résumés (or CVs) that employers ask for, you cannot obtain the full picture on anybody from documents alone because, according to the word of God, “the wickedness of man (is) great in the earth (and) every intention of the thoughts of his heart (is) only evil continually” [Gen. 6: 5]. That people were good in the past does not mean that they will not turn bad in the future, especially when you tempt their lusts. See how pedophiles and other sexual predators have invaded the priesthood of some churches where celibacy is practised. They were well screened before they entered the seminary and yet they could not be filtered out.

From the forgoing, we see that teams based on human principles can only be effective for a season. Sooner than later, disharmony sets in and corporate goals

and objectives cannot be met. Is there not a better way? Let us examine how Jesus chose His early disciples.

2. Jesus chooses His inner circle members

Jesus chose twelve of His disciples as apostles [**Matt. 10: 1-4**] but three of them can be called members of His inner circle. They were Peter, James and John. They were the ones who witnessed His transfiguration on a high mountain [**Matt. 17: 1**]. During His passion, they were the ones that He took beyond a point to keep watch with Him [**Matt. 26: 37**]. When He was returning to heaven, He left the church under Peter's leadership [**Jn 21: 15-17**] and His mother, Mary, in John's care [**Jn 19: 26-27**]. Who were these 'super stars'?

In this week's Bible text, we are introduced to two sets of brothers, Peter and Andrew and James and John. Jesus met them near the Sea of Galilee. He called them and they immediately followed Him [**Matt. 4: 17-22**]. Before that call, they had heard of the Messiah through John the Baptist [**Jn 1: 29-37**]. Andrew was one of the two disciples of John who had seen him point to Jesus as the Lamb of God. So, Andrew came to his brother, Simon Peter and told him, "We have found the Messiah (which is called the Christ)." He brought Simon Peter to Jesus who changed his name to Cephas (translated a stone) [**vv. 40-42**]. Peter and the Zebedee sons, James and John, were business partners [**Lk 5: 10**]. Expectedly, he could have told them about Jesus before He met them by the Sea of Galilee. Let us use the criteria developed in the section above to analyze their attributes and why Jesus possibly selected: them

a) *Their qualification*

Jesus began His ministry by preaching, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" [**Matt. 4: 17**]. So, He was looking for a team of followers that would help Him to achieve that objective. This is well supported by His parting commission on His ascension to heaven when He asked them to spread the gospel of the kingdom to the whole world [**Matt. 28: 19-20**]. Peter and his brother Andrew lived by fishing on the Galilee [**Mk 4: 18**]. James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were also fishermen who were Peter's business partners. Since they had paid servants [**Mk 1: 20**], it can be inferred that they had a thriving enterprise.

When Jesus called them, He said that He was going to make them fishers of men [**Matt. 4: 19**]. That suggests that they were skilled in their line of business and those skills could easily be upgraded for catching converts.

b) *Their team spirit*

Since they were already doing business together, there is evidence that they already had team spirit and shared mutual trust. Peter was married

[**Mk 1:30**]. Yet, he could still go out to fish all night [**Lk 5: 5**]. That suggests that he had developed an effective family -work life balance, an attribute that Jesus could tap. In due course, Peter asked Jesus, “We have left all and followed You. Therefore, what shall we have?” Jesus replied, “Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life” [**Matt. 19: 27-29**]. So, Peter and His colleagues were quite compatible for Christ’s earthly ministry.

c) *Their character*

There were problems here! For example:

- Peter was a study in contradictions. Where he was strong, nobody could beat him. For instance, he had the energy and patience to fish all night even without the hope of a catch [**Lk 5: 5; Jn 21: 3-4**]. He could row a boat for hours against strong winds [**Mk 6: 47-48**]. But when he faced overwhelming odds, he could be cowed, afraid and vulnerable. For example, the man who could swim like a fish [**Jn 21: 7**] cried for help while sinking when Jesus asked him to walk on water [**Matt. 14: 30**]. The man who cut off the ear of the servant of the chief priest during Christ’s arrest [**Jn 18: 10**] was the one to deny Jesus thrice soon after [**Matt. 26: 69-75**]. How could you build leadership around such a mercurial man?
- James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were surnamed “Boanerges,” that is, the sons of thunder, by Jesus, an indication of their fiery disposition [**Matt. 10: 2-4; Mk 3: 17**]. They were the ones who called for Christ’s permission to command fire from heaven on the Samaritans for refusing to receive Jesus on His way to Jerusalem [**Lk 8: 54**]. They were ambitious and manipulative. For example, with their mother’s connivance [**Matt. 20: 20-28**], they asked Jesus to allow them to sit on His left and right when He had come into His glory [**Mk 10: 35-44**]. It caused such a major row among their colleagues that Jesus had to personally intervene [**Matt. 20: 25-28**]. Peter was so envious of John’s special place with Jesus that, even after His resurrection, Peter wanted to know what would happen to John if he Peter was going to be martyred, as prophesied by the Lord [**Jn 21: 20-21**]. John flaunted his special closeness to Christ. Everywhere in the gospel that he wrote, John referred to himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” [e.g., **Jn 19: 26; 20: 2**]. During the Last Supper, he was “leaning on Jesus’ bosom” or “lying on Jesus’ breast” so much so that Peter had no choice but to pass questions to Jesus through John [**Jn 13: 23-25**].

We might add that the other disciples of Jesus were not any better than those above. For example, Judas Iscariot that Jesus appointed His treasurer was a thief

[Jn 12: 6]! Therefore, *we can clearly conclude that, on the basis of their human weaknesses, none of His disciples qualified to be selected for His team. In like manner, we do not qualify!*

3. Conclusion: Only the Holy Spirit can qualify you to join Christ's team!

Like Peter, James and John (and all His other disciples), we are conniving, ambitious, full of ourselves and envious of one another. But as soon as the Holy Spirit descended on them on Pentecost Sunday, they were transformed into new creations in Christ. Here are some examples:

- The impulsive and quixotic Peter became eloquent, coherent, fearless, calm and humble [**Acts 2: 14; 4: 5-13; 12: 6-7**];
- The scheming and ambitious sons of Zebedee fell in line behind Peter and accepted him as their leader [**Acts 3: 1-7; 4: 1-21; 8: 14-25**].
- After James had been killed by Herod Agrippa [**Acts 12: 2**], Peter and John brought in James, the Lord's half-brother to replace him and they became the pillars of the early church. The inner circle was neither envious nor afraid of Paul, a former persecutor and late convert. Instead, they extended to him "the right hand of fellowship" as the apostle for the Gentiles [**Gal. 2: 9**]; That enhanced the spread of the gospel to the then known world.

By the same Holy Spirit, Jesus is calling you this moment to join His team. Congratulations!