Leading Ministry Teams, Part I: Theological Reflection on Ministry Teams

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Abstract: This article seeks to establish the biblical and theological foundations for teamwork and team leadership for ministry practice. In order to understand and evaluate the applicability of a ministry team approach, selected models of team leadership in both the Old and New Testaments are explored. Some biblical concepts including love, unity, and the image of the body, together with concepts such as co-laborer, plurality of leadership, shared leadership, and servant leadership, are also explored. The models and concepts reviewed show key elements and spiritual principles for leading ministry teams. Scriptures clearly depict teamwork through the practice of loving each other and living in the unity of the Spirit to the building up of the body of Christ. Therefore, a ministry team approach structured upon biblical and theological foundations should help the church to work together harmoniously and corporately as intended by Jesus Christ, the founder and head of the Christian church.

Introduction

The topics of *teams* and *teamwork* are huge in the fields of business and leadership. Teams are acknowledged as critical for coordinating efforts of individuals to achieve group goals. Vast resources are devoted to learning how teams of people work best, how to lead teams, how to improve teamwork, and turning workgroups into teams. *Books in Print* currently lists over 3,000 books dealing with teamwork, over 600 of which have *teamwork* in the title.

Because many church and parachurch ministry leaders read broadly on leadership issues, it is not surprising that there has been a rising interest in how understanding effective teams and teamwork might strengthen ministry practice. While the number of books on team ministry does not come close to matching that of the broader market, there are enough to indicate that this topic has captured the attention of church leaders. Many popular books have

been written on how teams might be used in church ministry and how they ought to be developed and led. Here is a sampling of recent titles:

- Cladis, G. (1999). *Leading the Team-Based Church: How Pastors and Church Staffs Can Grow Together into a Powerful Fellowship of Leaders.*
- Cordeiro, W. (2001). *Doing Church as a Team.*
- Galloway, D. E. (2001). *Building Teams in Ministry.*
- Gangel, K. (1997). *Team Leadership in Christian Ministry: Using Multiple Gifts to Build a Unified Vision.*
- Gilbert, L. (1991). *Team Ministry: How to Find Meaning and Fulfillment Through Understanding the Spiritual Gifts Within You.*
- Iverson, D. (2007). *Team Ministry.*
- McIntosh, G. (2000). *Staff Your Church for Growth: Building Team Ministry in the 21st Century.*
- Ott, E. S. (2004). *Transform Your Church with Ministry Teams.*
- Putnam, J. (2008). *Church is a Team Sport: A Championship Strategy for Doing Ministry Together.*

There is no doubt about it—teams and team leadership are hot topics in church ministry. Most of what is published in this area deals with general leadership principles, some with the application of team building practices to church staffs. some authors draw heavily from their significant ministry experience; others glean principles and practices from popular business and leadership literature and draw out implications for church ministry. While this topic is a hot one, and many people are writing about it, with few exceptions, little has been done to explore the results of some of the major empirical research efforts on this topic and bring it to bear on the ministry leadership context. In addition, while many authors discuss a few relevant passages from Scripture that relate to team ministry, a more thorough review and reflection would be helpful to assess the compatibility of current writings on teams with the church's ministry efforts.

This first article begins with an overview of some key biblical passages that form the basis for considering the issues regarding teamwork and team leadership as they relate to church ministry and leadership. It then surveys a number of relevant theological themes that are developed throughout Scripture that can help evaluate the team approach to ministry and understand where its application may be helpful and how it would need to be approached and carried out if it were used.

The second article describes two of the major research efforts on team effectiveness of the past 20 years and their findings. It also explores how the results of recent case-study research on various kinds of church ministry teams

help expand our understanding of effective ministry teams. This article concludes with a discussion of 13 implications for ministry team leadership in light of both the biblical/theological and research data reviewed.

Definitions

For the purpose of this study, it is essential to provide some definitions that will be used in the discussion of the main sections. These are as follows:

> *Team:* Larson and LaFasto (1989 in their seminal work used a broad definition of team by stating, "A team has two or more people; it has a specific performance objective or recognizable goal to be attained; and coordination of activity among the members of the team is required for the attainment of the team goal or objective" (p. 19). Similarly, Katzenbach and Smith (1993) define a team as "a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable" (p. 45).
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> *Teamwork:* LaFasto and Larson (2001) define teamwork as "people with different views and perspectives coming together, putting aside their narrow self-interests, and discussing issues openly and supportively in an attempt to solve a larger problem or achieve a broader goal" (p. xvii).
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> *Ministry Team:* "A ministry team describes a particular way of patterning our life together in order to grow in faith, experience Christian fellowship and accomplish a ministry vision" (Ott, 2004, p. 7). According to Ott (2004), a ministry team is committed to take action on the vision entrusted to it; a ministry team also develops its experience of Christian fellowship (*koinonia* fellowship) as well as the discipleship of its members (p. 7).

Biblical and Theological Review on Ministry Teams

As was said above, church leaders have been eager in understanding how teams and ministry teams can be effective in working with their staff, by exploring business focused and Christian resources. However, due to the nature of the church, it is also necessary to explore Scripture teaching on this subject. Although Scripture explicitly speaks little about teams themselves, it strongly records and supports ministry teams. Ministry teams reflect an ancient pattern portrayed in both the Old and New Testaments as an important approach for the specific ministries to which God called some people. For the purpose and limitations of this study, only a few cases will be explored.

Biblical Model of Team Leadership in the Old Testament

Principles and examples of some individuals who were called to accomplish functions that they could not do any other way but by working as a team are found in the Old Testament. Israel's elders and Moses are considered in this section, since we find several cases in which Israel's leaders worked together with Moses to carry out God's specific task of delivering the Israelites from the Egyptians and leading them to the Promised Land.

Israel's Elders' Model of Team Leadership

Team leadership among the Israelites is depicted through the functions of their religious, social, and political leaders (Exod 3:16; Ezra 10:8). The Hebrew term *zaquen* is used to refer to someone old; however, according to Conrad (1980), the term "is used in the specialized sense of 'elder'" (p. 123). He adds, "The elder is thus a member of a special committee representing a specific, clearly defined social community; he must be thought of primarily as the holder of an office, not the representative of a particular age group" (p. 123). The elders performed different functions in Israel's life; they served as "national, political, and religious representatives and leaders" (Merkle, 2003, p. 27). Merkle (2003) summarizes their functions as follows:

> (1) The elders represent the entire people or community in religious or political activity . . . (Ex. 12:21; 1 Sam. 8:4); (2) The elders are associated with the leader, or accompany him when he exercises his authority . . . (Ex. 3:18); (3) The elders appear as a governing body . . . (Ezra 5:5; 6:7, 14); (4) The elders are sometimes part of the royal council . . . (2 Sam 17:4, 15); and (5) The elders are a judicial body . . . (Deut 19:12; 21:3; 22:15). (pp. 26–27)

Israel's elders functioned as a corporate body of community leaders. Scripture portrays them working collectively as they led the people of God. They had a clear goal of leading the different areas in the daily life of the Israelites. Their different functions among their people required them to have political, religious, and judicial skills. They worked together with a leader to help him to carry out his responsibilities, but they also took leadership roles on many occasions.

Moses' Model of Team Leadership

Exodus 3:4–4:17 recounts Moses' appointment by the Lord to liberate his people from captivity and to lead them for 40 years during their

wandering in the wilderness. As a leader he experienced a number of challenges, such as opposition by the Egyptians' political leader, as well as complaints, grumbling, and rebellion of the congregation against him and his brother Aaron (Num 16). Bearing the overwhelming burden of caring and solving problems of the whole congregation was not an easy task to accomplish alone. Therefore, Moses had to let others take charge of some of his responsibilities. Scriptures relate several occasions on which Moses called other people to carry out with him the mission assigned by God.

Moses' first concern was to gain the confidence and support of acknowledged leaders of the people, the elders of Israel, who would act as the spokesmen and the delegates of the tribes (Sarna, 1991, pp. 18–27). He did not consider himself skilled to accomplish the mission assigned and asked God to provide a person who would go with him and to be his mouthpiece. By doing so, Moses not only shared his leadership with the elders of Israel but also with his brother Aaron as his spokesman to the Israelites and to Pharaoh (Exod 3:4–4:17, 27–51ff). Moses and Aaron's complementary skills were to be used toward the goal of liberating the Israelites from captivity.

Power and decision-making were shared by Moses with a team of counselors for the Israelites during the wandering in the wilderness, because as their leader he recognized that he could not bear all the Israelites' burdens (Exod 18:15–26). Moses listened to his father-in-law's suitable advice and chose capable men out of all Israel with the social, spiritual, and moral qualifications for judges, and appointed them as his assistants for political and judicial activity. Most of the decisions were made by them, but they brought the difficult disputes to Moses as the team leader.

Moses involved others in solving problems. Numbers 11:16–17, 24–26 relates another occasion in which Moses was assisted by 70 elders in leading and caring for the people. The overwhelming burden of leadership due to the complaints of the Israelites brought Moses before God to desperately plead for help. Thus, God instructed him to appoint 70 elders from among the leaders who were also officers among the Israelites (Cole, 2000, p. 188). After Moses followed His instructions, God enabled those 70 men with His Spirit to assist Moses in bearing the burdens of the people. According to Cole (2000), "The spiritual dimension differentiates this group from those appointed for administrative and judicial tasks in Ex. 18: 25–26" (p. 189).

In short, as a leader, Moses looked for the assistance of a number of people who also qualified to take the role of leaders. He had a humble attitude before God and men, recognizing that other people could carry out the mission with him. He trusted their capacity and skills and built confidence in them by letting them make decisions and solve problems.

Biblical Model of Team Leadership in the New Testament

The New Testament also provides us with principles and examples of ministry teams. Jesus' and Paul's models are considered in this section as leaders who performed their leadership in the context of teams.

Jesus' Model of Team Leadership

Jesus is the supreme example of team-based leadership. His definition of ministry team was displayed through His earthly ministry, which was mainly performed surrounded by His disciples with whom He shared during His public ministry and whom He taught how to minister to others. Jesus built His team by appointing a group of 12 disciples to have intimacy with Him and to carry out some responsibilities. Mark 3:13–17 describes the institution of His team, first of all to intimate discipleship with Him and to share His authority with them in the service of His kingdom. Luke 9:1–10 relates how He gave them authority to cast out demons, to heal the sick, and to proclaim His message. He allowed them to represent Him and empowered them with His authority (Luke 4:36), as Green (1997) observes: "The same power and authority are now extended to the apostles, who will exercise them as participants in Jesus' ministry, in a way that points forward to the apostolic mission in Acts (cf. Acts 1:8)" (p. 358).

Jesus also built mutual accountability to a higher purpose among His disciples. He Himself was obedient to God and taught them to love obedience. Jesus kept all of them, including Himself, aimed to a larger purpose. Matthew 17:14–21 provides an example of this dynamic when Jesus, returning from the mountains with Peter, James, and John, found that the other disciples could not heal an ill boy. He not only cast out the demon from the boy but also taught them what hindered them from delivering the boy from the demon. By doing so, Jesus reoriented them toward the thing to which they were mutually accountable; that is, faith as the higher standard that His disciples needed to reach (Beausay, 1997, pp. 31–32).

Mutual trust and confidence was another component Jesus built within His team by teaching His disciples the truth. An example of how Jesus did that is found in Matthew 16:13–20, when He asked His disciples, "Who do you say I am?" Since the disciples were going to lead the church of Jesus Christ, they needed to have a grasp on the identity of Christ and His purpose. By confessing that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God, Peter as the spokesman for the 12, who had been addressed collectively, exhibited their understanding of the Lord's unique relationship with the Father and His purpose (Blomberg, 1992, pp. 250–251). Jesus' response to Peter was not only an

affirmation of Peter's God-given insight, but also an expression of His confidence in the disciples' future role in leading the church. Jesus entrusted Peter with a key leadership role (Buzzell, Boa, & Perkins, 1998, p. 1138).

Through His ministry Jesus had to solve problems, but He took advantage of those opportunities to get His disciples involved in solving all kinds of needs. Luke 9:11–17, for example, presents the event that follows the mission and report of the 12 (Luke 9:1–10). Jesus' attempts at getting away with His team for prayer ended with Him preaching about the kingdom of God and healing the crowd. At the end of a long day, instead of sending the hungry crowd away, as His disciples came to ask Him what to do, Jesus said to them, "You give them something to eat." Even though the disciples lacked faith to feed the crowd, Jesus involved them in participating actively in providing food for this huge crowd, "first by organizing them for distribution and then by setting the food before the crowd" (Green, 1997, p. 364).

Jesus, therefore, is the perfect example of a team-oriented leader, committed to bringing out the potential of His followers. They lived together, ate together, and shared a common purpose. Boehme (1989) points out, "He gave Himself to them for three long years, walking with them, living among them, demonstrating His righteous life, and training them to be followers after His likeness" (p. 215). In the last days of His ministry with His disciples, Jesus promised them the Holy Spirit's presence (John 14:16–18, 26; 16:13–16), which would empower and enable them with spiritual gifts (Acts 1:8). After His death and subsequent resurrection, Jesus commissioned the 12 to take charge of what He had begun, because He had trained them to carry out the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19–20; Acts 1:1–4).

Paul's Model of Team Leadership

Paul's leadership is not that of a lone worker. He saw great advantages in working with a group of qualified people and built his ministry with a team. There are indications that Paul was usually accompanied by two or three fellow workers in his journeys and in the work that he did to preach the gospel to the Gentiles.

Paul initiated his ministry by being introduced to the apostles by Barnabas, who also invited Paul to join him in leading the church in Antioch (Acts 9: 26–27; 11:25–26). Acts 13:1–3 tells us that Paul and Barnabas were already doing teamwork when the Holy Spirit set them apart from among a team of church leaders for a missionary work to the Gentiles. To this point it seems that the leader was Barnabas. However, in Acts 13:13 a leadership shift takes place, and Paul becomes the leader, as Fitzmyer (1998) comments: "Now the Spirit takes over and inaugurates the joint missionary work of the two, and especially of Saul, who becomes 'the apostle to the Gentiles' (Rom

11:13)" (p. 497). From that moment until the end of Paul's missionary ministry, Luke refers to Paul as the leader by listing him as the first among the missionary team, which indicates that Paul was not traveling alone (Fitzmyer, 1998, p. 508). Paul was able to invite others to join his team, including Silas (Acts 15:41), Timothy (Acts 16:1–3), and Luke (Acts 16:10–13, 16–17; 20:6) among others who are mentioned in Paul's writings as his co-laborers.

Another example of Paul's ministry team is related in Acts 18:1–3, 18–19. After joining Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth and staying with them for 18 months, Paul invited them to join him for the ministry in Ephesus. "Aquila and Priscilla apparently accompanied Paul in his voyage, then stayed to help in the synagogue at Ephesus" (Keener, 1993, p. 377). At Ephesus, they attended the synagogue where they heard Apollos, an eloquent speaker and teacher, finding out that even though he spoke accurately the things concerning Jesus, there were some gaps in his knowledge of the gospel. Thus, they took him home and "explained to him the way of God more accurately" (Acts 18:26). Later, in his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul acknowledges the work of Priscilla and Aquila as being the spiritual leaders of a church in their house (1 Cor 16:19).

Paul also honored his team members by recognizing their special skills and contribution to the team. In the salutation in some of his letters, he lists and points out specific information or contributions of those accompanying him: Paul and Sosthenes (1 Cor), Paul and Timothy (2 Cor 1:1–2; Phil 1:1; Col 1:1–12; Phlm), Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy (1 & 2 Thess). Paul also mentions specific names in his letters, for example, Epaphroditus, sent to him by the Philippian church to assist him (Phil 2:25–30; 4:18); Priscilla and Aquila, as his fellow workers and the ones "who for his life risked their own necks" (Rom 16:3); the household of Stephanas (1 Cor 16:15–16); Luke as the only one with him in his prison while writing to Timothy (2 Tim 4:11); John Mark as one who was useful to him for service (2 Tim 4:11); and so on.

Paul was essentially a team worker. He built his team, trained its members, and fostered their growth by supporting them in their vocation. Timothy, Titus, his fellow workers on the mission trips, and leaders at the local churches were among them. Grassi (1978) talks of Paul's missionary team by pointing out that "his roving little community of apostles was at once a training school, a miniature church, and a mutual source of growth and support in a very difficult vocation" (p. 63). Paul valued their contributions and recognized their skills and spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12–14; Rom 12:3–8; Eph 4:1–16).

Key Biblical and Theological Concepts Related to Team Leadership

From a biblical and theological perspective, ministry team is defined by concepts that are required for effective ministry, including the use of the

image of the body, unity, and love. Thus, it can be seen that it connotes an ongoing relationship between the leader and team members as a body united in love. Other concepts such as co-laborer, plurality of leadership, shared leadership, and servant leadership also indicate two or more people working together for a common purpose.

The Biblical Concept of the Body

Teamwork is illustrated in the New Testament by using the image of a human body and the work that its parts perform together. In 1 Corinthians 12:12–30, the body's harmony consists of all its parts working together and caring for one another in such a way that "if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it" (vv. 25–26). However, Paul's teaching goes beyond a human living body, which he uses to illustrate the functions of the body of Christ, His church (Eph 1:23; 4:4–12, 16; Col 1:24; 2:19; 3:15). According to him, the body of Christ is formed of people who belong to the Christian community, redeemed by Him who is the head of the church. This community represents different parts of the body, where each of them have different functions "yet they are bound together in a common sharing and loving relationship" (Cladis, 1999, p. 5). Diversity in unity is highly emphasized among the members of the body, as pointed out by MacArthur (1984): "The most important characteristic of the Body is unity; but diversity is essential to that unity. The church is one body, but the body is not one member, but many" (p. 314).

The Biblical Concept of Unity

Scripture teaching on unity emphasizes the togetherness of the people of God. In the Old Testament, for example, unity was required of Israel "as one people under Yahweh" (Thompson, 2008, p. 122). Israel's togetherness as one community was part "of a claim for the identity of the people of God" (Thompson, 2008, p. 123). When we examine the New Testament teaching on unity, we find that the unity of the Christian community is built upon Jesus' death and resurrection (Eph 2:14–16). Jesus prayed for the unity of the church. His intercessory prayer to the Father was that the Christian community "may all be one" and "may be perfected in unity" as He and the Father are one (John 17:21–23). Acts 2:42–47 recounts the first Christians' examples of togetherness highlighting their common devotion: "to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and to prayer" (42). Early Christians also demonstrated life in community by having all things in common and by sharing with one another, as Bock (2007) states: "The quality of mutual caring is highlighted in verses 44–45, as the believers are together and

treat everything as belonging to everyone, holding all things as common be-tween them" (p. 152). Unanimity (one mind, one accord) and togetherness are reflected as part of the continual practices of the New Testament church as they prayed, worshipped, and made decisions together (Acts 1:14, 15; 2:1, 46; 4:24, 26; 5:12; 8:6; 15:25).

An important component in maintaining unity among the Christian community is the unifying role of the Holy Spirit who has been active from the very beginning of the church building up a community united in "one heart and soul" (Acts 2:4–47; 4:3–32). His primary task is to unite every be-liever to the body of Christ and to one another (1 Co 12:13; Eph 4:1–6).

The Biblical Concept of Love

Love is another essential element for ministry teams. Jesus' example of love is required for effective teamwork. He embodied love and commanded us to love God and to love one another as He did (Matt 22:37–39; John 13:34–35). Love is demonstrated in the way we treat other people (1 Co 13:4–7) (Chamblin, 1993, p. 217). Love is not self-seeking; it wants to give to the other for the sake of the other. Love does not allow space for pride, jeal-ousy, and selfish ambition (1 Co 13:5–6). Loving each other is essential for the church to keep working together harmoniously and corporately (1 Thess 4:9–11; 1 John 3:11–15; 4:7–21). Teamwork is realized with love, and there is no place for selfishness.

These three concepts discussed above are closely related, as they are es-sential for effective team ministry. Unity is mentioned alongside the image of the body; that is, the church as the body of Christ called to live in unity. Thus, for a community to build up in Christ, Christians are called to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace and in love (Eph 4:1–6, 13–16). Close and intimate relationships are needed to function as a living organism (Richards & Hoeldtke, 1980, p. 48).

The Biblical Concept of Co-laborer

Teamwork in Scripture teaching is a cooperative work. As a model of team leader, Paul uses this concept to refer to some of the members of his missionary team and to other fellow workers who were involved in carrying out the Great Commission with him. The term Συνεργός (*sunergos*) refers to a fellow-worker or helper (Rom 16:3, 9, 21; 2 Co 8:23; Phil 2:25; 4:3; Phlm 24). Paul considered himself among others as a *sunergos* (2 Co 1:24; Col 4:11), which indicates that "Paul and the rest are in the same service; they are all God's 'helpers' and 'handymen' (1 Co. 3:9) and they are thus 'workers' in the kingdom of God" (Bertram, 1971, p. 874)

The verb Συνεργεο (*sunergeo*) is also used to denote the following: to work with, to help, to help to something, a worker, a co-laborer. Its use in 2 Corinthians 6:1 and 3 John 8 is referring to the labor or ministry that Christians realize in the context of Christian community, as God's servants. Teamwork is pictured in the work of the members of the community working together toward a common goal, the propagation of the gospel, or "for the Church" (Bertram, 1971, p. 876).

The Biblical Concept of Plurality of Leadership

This concept is used in both Old and New Testament writings to refer to a body of elders leading God's people. Plurality of leadership was vital in the Israelites' life (Exod 4:29, 31; 19:7–8; Lev 4:13–15; Judg 12:16; 2 Sam 17:4, 14). Although their functions differ, when we explore the New Testament model of leadership, several passages teach that there was a plurality of elders leading the church (Acts 11:30; 1 Thess 5:12; Titus 1:5; 1 Pet 1:1; 5:1–5; Heb 13:17). The book of Acts and some of the epistles use two key terms to refer to the church's spiritual leaders. The first one is πρεσβυτερος (*presbuteros)* used for an elder who exercised his functions along with the apostles, prophets, and teachers, participating in the government of the whole church, and πρεσβυτεριο (*presbytery*), which means a council of elders (Acts 14:23; 15:2, 4, 22–23; 1 Tim 4:14; 5:17, 19; Jas 5;14). This term was used to refer to the elders of the church, after it was established in Jerusalem and in other parts of the world. The other term is ἐπισκόπος (*episcopos)*, which is translated *bishop*, referring to the function of overseer. Six out of nine times, this term describes church leaders (Acts 20:28; Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:7; 1 Tim 3:1). These two terms, are used interchangeably by New Testament writers to refer to church leaders. Scripture emphasizes moral and spiritual qualifications for those who aspire to the office of overseer (1 Tim 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9) (Strauch, 1995, p. 39). Deacons and women were also required to meet similar qualifications (1 Tim 3:8–13).

It is clear that passages related to the church's leaders speak of plural leadership in the New Testament church (Acts. 14:23; 20:17–28; 1 Thess 5:12–13; 1 Tim 5:17; Titus 1:5; and Jas 5:14). The Church's leaders made decisions, solved problems, visited the sick, prayed, and carried out every single function together. Thus, it can be said that "pastoral oversight of the apostolic churches was a team effort—not the sole responsibility of one person" (Strauch, 1995, p. 35). Getz (1974) confirms this when he writes, "The 'one man' ministry is a violation of this important guideline. The Scriptures frequently stress the 'mutuality of the ministry.' No local church was ruled and managed by one person. Plurality of elders appears as the norm" (p. 121).

The Biblical Concept of Shared Leadership

Shared leadership in Scripture teaching is presented through some of the passages and models examined above. Practices such as letting others take charge of some responsibilities, sharing power and decision making, involving others in problem solving, building mutual accountability to a higher purpose, building mutual trust and confidence, recognizing special skills and contributions to the team, and supporting one another, among many others (Exod 12:21–28; Num 11:16–17, 24–26; Luke 4:36; 9:1–10; 11–17; Matt 16:13–20; 17:14–21; Acts 1:12–26; 6:1–7; 15:1–35), clearly support sharing leadership with others. Pointing out the contrast between a pyramidal structure and team leadership structure, Strauch (1995) states, "In a team leadership structure, . . . different members complement one another and balance one another's weaknesses . . . If some members fear confrontation with people, others can press for action" (p. 41).

In line with Strauch's point of view on shared leadership, a clear example of complementing one another and balancing one another's weaknesses is found in Judges 4–5, where Deborah comes to Barak and gets him involved in delivering the Israelites from the Canaanites. Shared leadership is also clearly expressed in the New Testament through the plurality of leadership in the new Christian churches (Acts 14:23; 15; 20:17–28; Jas 5:14–15; 1 Tim 5:17) and through other examples in which teams were integrated by prophets and teachers (Acts. 13:1); Paul and Barnabas teaching and preaching with many others (Acts 15:35); the household of Stephanas and others helping in developing the new churches (1 Cor 16:15,16); believers laboring and ministering among new Christians (1 Thess 5:12,13); and other leaders mentioned in Hebrews 13:7, 17, 20.

The Biblical Concept of Servanthood

Another area to consider in ministry team is servanthood. Servant leadership is defined by Jesus in Matthew 20:24–28 through one of His greatest statements on how one becomes great in His kingdom. Knowing His disciples' earthly desires of power and authority, Jesus drew a contrast between greatness among pagans and greatness among heirs of the kingdom. He used two terms to refer to service and the servant attitude that should characterize His disciples. The first term, διάκονος (*diakonos*), refers to "a table servant, waiter or waitress"; the second one is δουλος (*doulos*), which literally means "a slave." Wilkins (2004) comments about the roles of these two positions: "A 'servant' (*diakonos*) worked for hire to maintain the master's home and property, while a 'slave' (*doulos*) was forced into service" (p. 669). Therefore, as

douloi of the Lord Jesus, unquestioning obedience was expected of them, but as *diakonos* the disciples were supposed to willingly and gladly minister to each other. That is to say, "the way of greatness is the way of willing service" (Luter, 1989, p. 1042). Carson (1984) affirms, "Greatness among Jesus' disciples is based on service. Anyone who wants to be great must become *diakonos* ('servant,' v.26) of all" (p. 432).

Jesus concludes His teaching in verse 28 by presenting Himself as the ultimate example of service to others: "just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as ransom for many." The conjunction "just as" indicates that Jesus as Son of Man is being reasserted as a model for the disciples' own lives and ministry (Boring, 1995, p. 398). His death on the cross was the greatest service that Jesus offered to all men. He exemplified servanthood in such a way that "he gave up the honor and glory that belonged to him in heaven (John 17:5). He also gave up his right to exercise divine authority for his own benefit and right to enjoy his lordship over all things in heaven and in earth" (Grudem, 2001, p. 1147).

Conclusion

To conclude, the purpose of this first of two articles has been to provide a more thorough biblical and theological review on ministry teams, based on selected biblical passages. Without attempting to be inclusive, this review clearly shows that Scriptures contain abundant examples of ministry teams. The models of Israel's elders, Moses, Jesus, and Paul were examined to understand how God's people have followed a ministry team approach in both the Old and New Testaments. From these models some key elements and spiritual principles for effective teamwork have been obtained, such as the need of specific skills, commitment to a mission or common goal, letting others take charge of some of the leader's responsibilities, community life, mutual trust, mutual accountability, bringing out the potential of the followers, honoring team members by recognizing their special skills and contribution to the team, and other practices that reflect effective teams.

Some biblical and theological concepts, such as love, unity, the image of the body, co-laborer, plurality of leadership, shared leadership, and servanthood, were also examined. All of these concepts have been shown to be essential components for leading ministry teams. Scriptures depict teamwork through the practice of loving each other and living in the unity of the Spirit to the building up of the body of Christ. According to biblical teaching, which surpasses earthly desires of power and authority, selfishness and divisions have no place in order to have effective ministry teams.

It was also seen, through the various passages examined in the New Testament, that the church of Christ has been called to work together harmoniously

and corporately (1 Thess 4:9–11; 1 John 3:11–15; 4:7–21). A ministry team approach to the church's tasks that has its foundation on God's Word will have as its ultimate goal the building up of the body of Christ. This way of doing ministry is motivated not for the good of one single person or leader but for the good of the Christian community that worships and serves together, keeping the unity in the Spirit and being committed to obey God. Implications for church ministry and leadership are included in part II of this series.

The second article of this series complements this first part by describing two of the major research efforts on team effectiveness of the past 20 years and their findings in the corporate world. In order to explore the applicability of a ministry team approach in the church and other Christian ministry contexts, a series of case studies have been conducted over a period of 10 years by the authors and some groups of doctoral students. The results of these studies have provided insights to the advantages of a team-based ministry structure. More of this is discussed in the following article.

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