Matts-Ola Ishoel

# How To Build A Winning TEAM

*Serving God together*

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**Ishoel M.**

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The book you hold in your hands is the result of the wisdom and experience gained from almost thirty years of ministry. It can be used for individual and group study and as educational material for team development."Whatever we are called to do, we are called to do it together with other people. No one serves God alone."His church is a body composed of different members, and teamwork is built into the very essence of the church. Leaders focused on the development of a team will achieve much more than those who work alone. Wisdom will increase and gifts and talents will be revealed when people with different characters serve God in unity. This book will help you understand the dynamics of building a team and inspire you to focus more on team development, regardless of whether or not you are a leader today.

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# Содержание

Introduction 6
1 8
When God says go – go! 9
When a leader appears 10
The greatest need 12
Responsibility 13
Quality training 14
Continuous leadership training 15
An example to follow 16
The quest for leaders 17
2 18
From the Old to the New Testament 19
Gifts are divided among us 20
Teams on many levels 22
Unity pleases God 23
The pastoral ministry 24
A car in a ditch 25
Why a team 26
3 27
Preparation 28
1) A right understanding of authority 29
In the family 29
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента. 31

# Matts-Ola Ishoel
# How To Build A Winning Team. Serving God Together

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MATTS-OLA ISHOEL is the senior pastor and president of Word of Life Bible Center in Moscow, and the president of Churches of Faith Russian Association. Under his leadership, Word of Life church has grown every year and now has over 4,000 members. The church is active in social, charitable, youth, publishing and missionary ministries. Matts-Ola Ishoel is married and has four children adopted from Russia.

# Introduction

One of the greatest blessings God has given me is the privilege to serve Him together with a great team of leaders in Word of Life Moscow. The men and women of this team have become my best friends. Together we have experienced both victories and setbacks, but most of all we have seen God's protecting and guiding hand over the work we are a part of.

I believe that in some way, every leader should continuously build a team of other leaders with whom he serves God. Whatever we are called to do, we are called to do it together with other people. No one serves God alone. His church is a body consisting of different members, and teamwork is built into the very essence of the church. When leaders develop teams that minister together, they build strength and stability into the church, and they give opportunity for growth and training.

A church can be organized in many ways, with different interpretations of leadership positions. But whether you belong to an Episcopal, Presbyterian, or Congregational organization, I believe this book can be equally helpful. Teams can function everywhere, we just need to adapt to the order of the church we are a part of.

Leaders who are skilled in team building will accomplish so much more than those who work alone. Wisdom will increase and gifts and talents will thrive when people of different personalities serve God in unity.

Though many see and understand this, there is often a lack of clear understanding about how this should be done. I believe many pastors and leaders work too spontaneously, and could be much more effective with a clearer plan of how to create, develop and work in a team.

It is my prayer that this book will help you to understand the dynamics of a great team and inspire you to focus more on team development – whether or not you are in a leadership position right now. Very often we are in fact both; we serve under some authority together with others, and at the same time we are also leaders in a ministry, branch or cell group in the church.

The principles I share in this book are the result of what The Holy Spirit has shown me during almost 30 years of pastoring. As the years have passed, I have realized more and more, the importance of creating the best possible relationships with my closest co-workers, and continuously investing time into leadership training. Almost all of the examples I will mention come out of the work in Word of Life Moscow.

This book is therefore dedicated to this team, the best men and women I know, who have so faithfully, generously and sacrificially served God with me for many years, to Randi, Oleg and Julia, Sergei and Valja, Alexander and Zhanna, Ilya and Zhenja, Nikolay and Lena, Alexei and Katja, Pjotr and Tanja, Volodja and Olga, Alexei and Ira, Andrei and Larissa – and many, many others.

At the very end of His time on the Earth, Jesus spoke to The Father about the twelve disciples:

> *"While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost…"*
> *John 17:12*

Jesus watched over His closest men, every one was precious to Him, and He rejoiced to see them continue doing God's work.

That joy should also be yours. In this book, I want to remind you that besides being a fisher of man, a giver, and a worshiper – you can also be a team builder!

The book can function as study material for team building. You can read chapter by chapter together with your co-workers, and at the end of every chapter there will be questions and exercises that you can work with together.

*May God bless you in all that you do for Him,*
*Matts-Ola Ishoel*
*Word of Life Moscow*

# 1
# The quest for leaders
# About the greatest need in the church

At the very end of May 1988, I mounted my motorcycle and after two wonderful years at the Bible School in Uppsala, I set off toward my hometown in Norway. The 700 km trip was a sheer joy. As I made my way through Swedish forests and Norwegian mountain plateaus, I had so much to be thankful for. The Bible School had given me an entirely new start in life, and I had accepted a calling from my church to begin working as a youth pastor.

I was very eager to get started. I knew I was inexperienced, but did not think so much about that. The youth group was not so big, and I trusted that God would lead me. But little did I know about what was waiting for me.

The church I belonged to was not very big, but it was very influential. For years it had been one of the centers of the Charismatic revival that swept through Scandinavia during the 1980s. The church arranged several charismatic conferences every year. In the beginning people came from all over Norway to these conferences, but soon they started to come also from other countries.

The senior pastor of the church was a national authority, and one of the most known preachers in the country. But very unexpectedly, because of personal problems he left his position more or less at the same time I arrived home from Uppsala. So when I came, the church was quite bewildered because the senior pastor was gone. Then the board of elders gathered, and I was invited to join. In this meeting the leader of the board looked at me and said something like this: “We do not have a pastor, but you Matts-Ola have been in Bible School. Now you have to take over the spiritual leadership of the church.”

I almost fainted. This was like a bolt from heaven. Churches all over Norway looked to this congregation for inspiration, and I was without any experience as a pastor. I had prepared to work with the youth, but now I was additionally supposed to preach every Sunday and plan the further development of the whole work. I truly felt like David standing in front of Goliath.

Well, what should I do? The challenge seemed overwhelming. To lead a church with a national influence and to start preaching to a congregation that for years had been listening to one of the best preachers I knew, was more than I ever had thought of. But this is very often the way God calls a man. The task is so much bigger than us, that either we turn away, or we completely surrender ourselves to God’s grace.

I chose to throw myself on God, and I told the church I was willing to take on whatever responsibility they wanted to give me. My helplessness drove me into the prayer chamber, and there I found the confidence I needed. The Holy Spirit started to guide me step by step. I felt an amazing joy in what I was doing, and I discovered that I actually could cope with the responsibility I had been given. Some very joyful and fruitful years followed, and I learned a lesson for life: When God calls, don’t look at yourself – look at Him who gave the calling!

# When God says go – go!

This book is about team building and leadership training. I believe that you who read are called to some kind of leadership, and it is my prayer that you will understand how important it is that you do not step back when God calls. Maybe you have fought the same battle as I, doubting if you really are up to what God asks you to do. We can all feel that we lack both worth and talent. But that is not a problem with God! When He finds a willing heart, He can add all abilities we need to fulfill His will.

YOU ARE THE ONE WHOM GOD HAS BEEN LOOKING FOR.

God wants you to discover that you are just the one whom He has been looking for. This is your time! Do not be afraid of failure; rather be afraid of never trying. God will lead you according to your willingness, it is His work, His kingdom – He will give the fruit. There are great teams waiting to be built, and people who wait for you to start training them.

Just as I discovered that God's grace matches the calling He gives, I believe you will discover that God will never put a mountain in front of you that you cannot climb. And whenever a leader reaches the top, he will discover there are plenty of people right behind him.

DO NOT BE AFRAID OF FAILURE; RATHER BE AFRAID OF NEVER TRYING.

# When a leader appears

The sixth chapter of the book of Judges opens with these words:

> *"Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord. So the Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian for seven years."*

In other words, there was trouble in the land. The Midianites were a powerful Arabian tribe that lived on the Eastern side of the Sinai Peninsula. They were descendants of Abraham's son Midian, and this was not the first time Israel was in conflict with them. During the time in the desert, Moses and Israel waged war against the Midianites and defeated them. But at this time in history, Midian had grown stronger and discovered that the land of Israel was a suitable prey to plunder. Every year the Midianites raided the countryside, stealing and destroying. The book of Judges tells us that *"Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites…"* (Jud 6:6) In desperation, the people started to cry out to God.

And as so many other times in history, God's answer was to raise up a leader. He sent one of his angles to a young, inexperienced, and timid man living in Ophrah in the territory of the tribe of Manasseh, saying to him:

> *"Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have I not sent you?"*
> *Judges 6:14*

The name of the man was Gideon. After overcoming his own intimidations and doubts, he finally rose to be a national leader who broke the yoke of the Midianites and delivered his nation from the occupation. The story of Gideon is one of the most vibrant and exciting stories in the Old Testament, still inspiring us to believe that God can deliver, even from the most wicked oppressor.

Reading this tale, there is one particular thing that strikes me. And that is, even though the whole nation was spiritually broken and in chaos, when a leader appeared, he was able to rally them and bring back their faith in victory.

> *"But the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon; then he blew the trumpet, and the Abiezrites gathered behind him. And he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh, who also gathered behind him. He also sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali; and they came up to meet them."*
> *Judges 6:34–35*

Gideon gathered tens of thousands of men, and even if God later reduced this number to only 300, we see that there was a great potential in Israel to take up the fight – as soon as a leader stepped forward!

The battle of Midian became one of the greatest victories in Old Testament history. And after the battle, as long as Gideon was alive, the nation thrived and experienced a period of peace.

> *"Thus Midian was subdued before the children of Israel, so that they lifted their heads no more. And the country was quiet for forty years in the days of Gideon."*
> *Judges 8:28*

That things went so well for Israel during the days of Gideon, makes it even sadder to read about what happened after his death. What could have become a permanent change in history, only lasted for one generation.

> *"So it was, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel again played the harlot with the Baals, and made Baal-Berith their god. Thus the children of Israel*

*did not remember the Lord their God, who had delivered them from the hands of all their enemies on every side."*
*Judges 8:33–34*

This is unfortunately not a unique story in the Bible. There are many examples of how the nation stayed sound and obedient to God, as long as there were God-fearing leaders who ruled the land. But there are too many other stories about how Israel broke His covenant when these leaders were gone. After Joshua died, Israel left The Lord to worship the gods of Canaan. The same happened after the deaths of godly kings like Hezekiah and Josiah.

All these stories point to one spiritual principle: the great need for godly leaders. When there were leaders in Israel who went first and wholeheartedly sought God, the people usually followed them. And in the same way, there are people all around us who possess innumerable talents and qualities, people who want to serve God, but cannot seem to get started. There are many who want to change the world and do something meaningful with their lives – if only someone would rally them, train them, inspire them and show them what they can do for God.

And that is why I believe that the quest for leaders is still the greatest need in God's kingdom.

# The greatest need

The lessons of the Old Testament continue into the times of Jesus and the apostles. Jesus urged his followers to *"…pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest."* (Matt 9:38) Paul commanded Titus to *"…appoint elders in every city"* (Tit 1:5) To Timothy he wrote: *"And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."* (2 Tim 2:1)

God has always looked for faithful and committed leaders, and no matter where we live, we should make it our number one aim to train as many leaders as we can. It is hard to overemphasize the importance of ongoing leadership training in our churches. Wherever I travel both inside and outside Russia, I see the same thing: the fastest growing churches are those that are most devoted to leadership training.

Jesus spent most of His time with His twelve disciples, not preaching to the crowds. He understood that the best He could do with the time He had was to raise up devoted leaders who would continue the work He had started.

THE FASTEST GROWING CHURCHES ARE THOSE THAT ARE MOST DEVOTED TO LEADERSHIP TRAINING.

# Responsibility

The key word for a leader is responsibility. This is the main difference between a leader and the people he cares for. The leader needs to feel a higher degree of responsibility than all others; that is why he is a leader. He stays in all kinds of weather, he knows he is accountable for what he does and he will do his very best to complete the tasks given to him.

Many people like to join a church, visit the Sunday meetings, but not take responsibility. Responsibility is a burden not everyone wants to bear. It is convenient for the flesh to come to church when it suits, go some other place when that seems better, and not take up any obligation that binds up the time. This is a little like the spirit of our time. People do not want to have too many attachments, but pick what is most comfortable for the moment.

But the church has no future without responsible leaders. Isaiah heard The Lord asking this question:

> *"Whom shall I send, And who will go for Us?"*
> *Isaiah 6:8*

In other words, who can be trusted? On whom can God lay a burden, knowing that the person will be ready to accept the responsibility?

> THE CHURCH HAS NO FUTURE WITHOUT RESPONSIBLE LEADERS.

# Quality training

Real leadership training takes time. To develop accountably is not done overnight, and it is not done over distance. Joshua spent most of his life in the presence of Moses before he was fully trained to lead the conquest of Canaan. Elisha served Elijah for a long time, Timothy followed Paul for years all around the Roman Empire.

If your heart burns for leadership training, you must devote your full strength and your best time for that. You must know who are the ones whom God calls you to train, and you must have a plan to follow. Halfhearted attitude and sloppy preparation will never produce strong leaders.

Paul used these words when he wrote to Timothy:

> *"I remember you in my prayers night and day, greatly desiring to see you…"*
> *2 Timothy 1:3–4*

When you can think of your co-workers with the same passion as Paul, you can become a great leader.

# Continuous leadership training

It is my prayer, that God will open our eyes even more to see the great need for new generations of leaders. Some will be ministry gifts, some will be deacons and home group leaders, some will work in the church while others will be volunteers, but they will all have in common that they will share in the responsibility for the church and be willing to lead others.

Team building and leadership training go hand in hand. In our church in Moscow, we have a Bible School, many different leadership courses, and a seminary for the education of pastors. All this is necessary, but for leaders to grow, there must also be places where people can start to minister under the supervision of another leader.

> WHEN A LEADER TAKES TIME TO TRAIN, ENCOURAGE, AND CORRECT HIS CO-WORKERS, THERE CAN BE A CONTINUOUS GROWTH OF NEW LEADERS.

In a well-functioning leadership team, individuals can serve and grow at the same time. When a leader takes time to train, encourage, and correct his co-workers, there can be a continuous growth of new leaders. This should be our aim! I believe that with a thoughtful and purposeful strategy for leadership training, this can happen in every church and in every branch inside the local congregation.

# An example to follow

We should consider how Jesus started His earthly ministry. He found some simple men, often with very little confidence in what they could do, and called them to join Him. Why did He do so? Because he understood that preaching, healing and delivering people were not sufficient for His ministry. He needed to raise up leaders. Only if there were well-trained workers who could remain standing in all kinds of circumstances, would His mission be completed.

Think in the same way! Whatever leadership task you have in the church, you can also simultaneously train other leaders. When we who are pastors make this our main cause, I believe we are on the right track. The number and quality of the leaders you leave behind determine the result of your ministry.

THE NUMBER AND QUALITY OF THE LEADERS YOU LEAVE BEHIND DETERMINE THE RESULT OF YOUR MINISTRY.

During my first years of ministry in Norway, I got calls to preach in some very interesting places, but The Holy Spirit did not allow me to go. I was once invited to go to the USA on a very exciting trip, and for a newly graduated Bible School student, this was more than great news! I remember that when I got the invitation, I ran around the house in sheer excitement. But when I asked The Lord about it, He quietly told me to stay at home. He made me understand that I should stay in my hometown, and care for the youth group that I was responsible for.

I was puzzled at this, wondering why He would not send me out into the big world. But later it started to dawn on me why He was leading me in this way. Your greatest moments are not always when a lot of people see you and listen to you. If you want to be like Jesus, think about how He spent His time. By patiently ministering to a handful of men, he turned ordinary fishermen and tax collectors into mighty leaders in the church. And what can be greater than that!

# The quest for leaders
# Tasks to work with

1) What priority does leadership training have in the ministry you are involved in?
Think about how many workers and leaders this ministry has produced during the last few years.

2) Speak with your team about how is it possible to serve and train someone at the same time.

3) Speak also about the place that Jesus gave leadership training in His ministry, and why this was such a priority for Him.

# 2
# Why a team?
# About the benefits of working together

All Christian ministry is teamwork.

When Jesus taught us about the church He would build, He made it clear that teamwork, unity and brotherhood would be the core principles. God's kingdom is not the place for him who does not want to submit to leaders or work with others. There is no place for a solo carrier in the church. Selfish ambitions must be left outside the door when you enter God's house. Here, you need to dress in humility and companionship.

A team is a group of people who not only know each other, but also strive together to reach a common goal. The word "team" is often used in sports or businesses, but nowhere does it have a deeper meaning than when we speak about the church. Nobody can bring people closer to each other than The Holy Spirit. He can deliver us from our own arrogance, and melt us together for the purposes of God.

> NOBODY CAN BRING PEOPLE CLOSER TO EACH OTHER THAN THE HOLY SPIRIT.

# From the Old to the New Testament

"Teamwork" can sound like a contemporary expression, but it represents the same truths that the church was founded on from the very beginning.

In the Old Testament we often see that men and women of God served individually in their callings. Men like Joshua, Gideon, Samson, Elijah and Jeremiah seem more like elected individuals who carried out important missions from God, than people who served in community with others.

This picture changes however when we come to the New Testament. Jesus made it clear from the beginning that the disciples needed to continue the work together in unity with each other. He said:

> *"…but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant.*
> *And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave."*
> *Matthew 20:26–27*

He emphasized humility, submission and cooperation. During three and a half years, He turned His disciples into a strong group of ministers, and this was the concept that was supposed to continue in the church.

As the story continues in the book of Acts, this is the very pattern we see. Among the first Christians, we do not read about any inclination amongst the apostles to dominate the others. What we read is about believers who lived in a unity and fellowship that astonished the world.

> *"Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul…*
> *And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.*
> *And great grace was upon them all."*
> *Acts 4:32–33*

The apostles appear in the book of Acts as a group of leaders, and even though Peter was the one in charge among them, they served together as a team. When difficult questions needed to be decided, as in Acts 15, they came together, listened to each other, respected the senior leaders and came out with a common answer. Their unity and mutual respect became the strength of the church. No more do we see the lonely prophet who walks and serves by himself.

When the gospel started to spread in the Roman Empire, it was through mission teams travelling together. The first example is Paul, Barnabas and John Mark, followed by larger teams. Luke, who travelled with Paul on some of his journeys and wrote the book of Acts, simply says "we" when he tells his story. *"…we sought to go to Macedonia", "…we were staying in that city for some days", "… as we went to prayer."* (Acts 16:10, 12,16)

Paul was the leader of the team, but Luke did not use expressions like "Paul and the rest of us". No, he said "we" because this is how they thought.

# Gifts are divided among us

When Paul in his letters teaches about ministry, he develops the doctrine that Jesus had established. Maybe more than any other place this is seen in 1 Corinthians 12, when he uses the human body to illustrate how the church must function. I am sure you have read these verses many times, but read them again, thinking about a leadership team in a church:

> *"For as the body is one and has many members… so also is Christ."*
> *"If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased."*
> *"And the eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you'"; nor again the head to the feet,*
> *"I have no need of you."*
> *1 Corinthians 12:12, 17 and 21*

Paul's aim is very clear: We need to work together! When we join our gifts and talents, we will complete each other and together have the needed capacity for ministry. This is of course seen in a general sense when we think about the whole church, but it also has a more specific meaning when we speak about branches and ministers inside the local church.

> WHEN WE JOIN OUR GIFTS AND TALENTS, WE WILL COMPLETE EACH OTHER AND TOGETHER HAVE THE NEEDED CAPACITY FOR MINISTRY.

Think for example of a worship team consisting of different musicians with different skills. Everybody has a different ability, but together they become a beautiful symphony. The same is true regarding a pastoral team, or among youth leaders, children's workers, ushers and so on. The more people with different abilities and personalities can respect each other and operate together, the more effective they will become.

Paul also makes the point that this is pleasing to The Lord (v.17). God wanted it to be this way! When He distributes His gifts and talents, he does not give one person all that he needs to fulfill his calling. He makes us depend on each other.

Nobody has all that is needed. We only possess a part of what is necessary – the other parts are given to other people. God wanted us to work together and depend on each other in humility; therefore nobody has all the grace needed to complete a ministry. Our destiny is to serve God in close cooperation with a lot of other people!

Paul says, *"…the eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you'"*. In other words, the eye needs the hand to do what it is supposed to. This may be humiliating to the eye, which cannot say, "I manage alone". But this kind of humiliation is divine, and is God's will for us. When we discover how limited we are in what we are able to do, then we can open ourselves for God's Spirit and the body of Christ. Then we can, in thankfulness, realize that The Holy Spirit has put people around us who cover our shortcomings. And then building unity and good working relationships with these people becomes a main aim for us. In this way God wanted the church to grow and function.

I remember a story I heard many years ago when I attended a cross-denominational Charismatic conference in Sweden. The main speaker was a well-known pastor from the USA. He was leading a big church, and in one of the meetings he shared about his grandmother. She was a real prayer-warrior, and she had devoted herself to pray for her grandson and his pastoral work one hour every day.

But after some years, the grandmother passed away. And the following Sunday the pastor was supposed to preach as usual. But this time, he felt completely empty. He had no word from God, no sermon, nothing to say to the congregation. So when the time came for the sermon during the

meeting, he could only tell the church that he had no message to share with them. He said that he now realized that it was his grandmother's prayers that had carried him all these years, and when she was gone, he felt entirely helpless.

For him this became a revelation about how little he could do by himself. He had thought of himself as a good pastor and a clever speaker, but without the prayer support of this old lady, he was nothing. And that is how it is for all of us. The church does not consist of superstars and their followers, but of members of the same body who together become the world changing force that the church is called to be.

The story however did not end with him sobbing behind the pulpit. After he had made his confession, although he was a white man, a solid built African-American lady stood up in the meeting and shouted: "Don't worry pastor, I'll be your new grandmother!" And from that day she began to pray for him an hour every day, his strength came back, and his ministry continued forward!

I wish we could all make the same discovery. The praying grandmother was neither seen nor heard in the church, but she was nevertheless a necessary part of the body. In the same way, there will always be a lot of people around you who have other strengths than what you have. But they have been put there by The Holy Spirit to create a sound balance regarding gifts and abilities. And the more you love and respect them, the more you will be able to work together with them. The better you function together, the more fruitful the church will be.

# Teams on many levels

To be a part of a team is a great adventure. It is truly a great joy and satisfaction to discover talents that The Holy Spirit has given to other people, and how well they correspond with what you are able to do.

As a leader in a church or a ministry, it is your responsibility to turn the group of people you work with into an effective team. Unity and a good spirit of cooperation do not come by themselves; it must be nurtured and brought forth by the leader. A leader who is only occupied with the work itself, and does not pay attention to relationships inside the team, will never reach the full potential of his calling.

> UNITY AND A GOOD SPIRIT OF COOPERATION DO NOT COME BY THEMSELVES; IT MUST BE NURTURED AND BROUGHT FORTH BY THE LEADER.

Teambuilding in a church can function on many levels. The principles I share in this book can be adapted everywhere where Christians work together. When I use the term "team", I do not of course think of an exclusive group who separates themselves from other ministries in the local church. I am thinking about people who are already serving together in a certain area, but could benefit a lot if they structured their cooperation better. The same person can be a part of several "teams", depending on how we use the word. If you are singing in the choir and leading a home group, both these ministries can be strengthened by applying the principles I write about.

The right kind of teamwork does not weaken the general unity of the church. It will only strengthen it, by creating committed church members. Think of it in terms of team building as a tool to make the existing branches stronger and more effective.

There are endless examples of what kind of teams there can be in a church. First of all we can think of the senior pastor and his closest co-workers as a team. Then each of these co-workers can have their own leadership groups that they work with. And then this can be followed by other levels of leaders, depending on the activity and size of the church.

In Word of Life Moscow there are teams of leaders serving together on a number of levels. I basically lead two teams in the church: the church board consisting of 10 members, and the pastoral team that I work with on a daily basis, consisting of more than 30 ministers. But every one of these leaders must also build and train a team together with their closest co-workers. In our working instruction for a pastor it is written:

> "Every pastor must create a team consisting of his closest co-workers, and gather this team either once a week or every two weeks. The pastor must coordinate the common work, inspire and individually train these leaders."

This way of working has proven to be very effective for us. Every pastor or senior leader is both a part of a team, and leads one himself. The district pastors gather their zone leaders, the children's pastor the children's leaders, the media director his co-workers in the media department and so on it goes. Then, many of these team members are also in charge of their own teams. The zone leaders for example continually meet and train the home group leaders that they are responsible for.

In this way we end up with literally dozens of leadership teams that meet weekly to plan their common work and grow together. I will later share more about how this is organized, but just to discover this way of working is a great revelation.

# Unity pleases God

As we can see, creating leadership teams has numerous advantages. But we cannot only look at this from a sheer ministry point of view. Creating good, spiritual working relationships, is also valuable from a doctrinal side.

Every pastor knows the words from Psalm 133:1

> *"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"*

This is pleasant not only in the eyes of man, but much more in the eyes of God. When we can bury our pride and selfish ambitions, and serve Him together in deep respect for each other, that brings joy to heaven.

> WHEN WE CAN BURY OUR PRIDE AND SELFISH AMBITIONS, AND SERVE HIM TOGETHER IN DEEP RESPECT FOR EACH OTHER, THAT BRINGS JOY TO HEAVEN.

The Bible does not hide how God grieves over divisions among His children. This does not only go for denominations that wrangle with each other over doctrinal questions, but also when people in the same church cannot work together. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul writes

> *"I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord." Philippians 4:2*

This is about two women in one church, who for some reason could not function together. But that was enough of a reason for the apostle to address the matter and plead them to have the same mind. He even asked the other leaders to help them to restore the relationship. So even if it is only two Christians who live in disagreement, it is a matter that The Lord cares about.

I am sure that many times we cause grief onto God's heart more than we are aware of when we avoid each other, and are unwilling to deepen our relationships. The apostle Peter said, *"Love the brotherhood"* (1 Pet 2:17). This is something more than loving your neighbor. "The brotherhood" is the people God has placed around you, those with whom you are called to serve God. Loving and honoring them will glorify God and open up for His grace in the ministry.

# The pastoral ministry

The pastoral calling consists of many sides. Preaching, counseling, handling the sacraments and many other areas. But working with and training those who are closest to you, is a part of that calling that must not be neglected.

In his very last letter, Paul told his friend and disciple Timothy:

> *"And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."*
> *2 Timothy 2:2*

At the same time as Timothy preached, opened new churches and counseled people, he was also supposed to train other men in the same calling he had been given. This dual side of the calling, to train someone at the same time as you perform your ministry, is to me the key to church growth. When you systematically give time to train a group of people, you actually do what Jesus did with the disciples. He understood that quality fellowship with a certain group of men will, as time goes by, produce a new generation of leaders.

To be busy, is not the same as being effective. To be exhausted, does not mean you have achieved much. As leaders, we should not only work hard, we should also work smart.

The most productive time I have, is the time I spend with my leadership team. I have made this the number one priority in my schedule, and I trust God that all these wonderful pastors and department leaders whom I meet every week, will continue to develop their talents to God's honor.

If you desire to serve God, build a leadership team. Love them, train them, invest in them and work with them. That will become your greatest joy.

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# A car in a ditch

Once when I was driving my car on a highway during the winter, I spotted a man that had lost control of his vehicle and ended up in a deep ditch. As I stopped to check if he needed any assistance, he said everything was alright and that he did not need any particular help. Together with a couple of friends who had been riding with him in the car, they were now waiting for the tow truck.

I told them we didn't need the truck, but we could lift the car back up on the road ourselves. The guys just looked at me and shook their heads. They pointed out how steep the hill was where the car went down, and there was no way just a few of us could pull it up again. But I insisted that we tried, and finally they agreed.

It just took us a few seconds, and the car was back on the road. The other guys looked amazed, and admitted that they never thought we could do it. But I pointed out to them the same principle that I am addressing to you; if we work together, we can do more than we imagine.

*"Two are better than one."*
*Ecclesiastes 4:9*

# Why a team
# Tasks to work with

1) Speak together about what are the advantages of creating leadership teams that work together.

2) Help your team members recognize what strong and weak sides they have. Help them realize how one person's weaknesses can be covered by another person's strengths.

3) Think about the church you are a part of. Are there initiatives that need to be taken to establish leadership teams?

# 3
# To lead a team
# About how to prepare for leadership

Leadership is a central subject in the Bible. Jesus spent much time teaching His disciples not only that they should lead people, but also how a leader should behave and what kind of motives he must have. All kinds of leadership include influence, and it was important for Christ to teach His followers that this influence should not be used for their own gain. He warned against arrogance and exploitation of the ones they would lead, and made it clear that every leader is accountable before God for how he treats his subordinates.

# Preparation

Before we can lead someone else, we must first learn to follow. God will lead us through years of preparation of character and motivation, and if we are willing to learn, He can make something beautiful out of everyone of us. We are the clay – He is the potter. We need to have a teachable heart and be attentive when He corrects us. He wants to bring out the very best in us, release the full potential He has invested in us, so we can become good and faithful leaders.

BEFORE WE CAN LEAD SOMEONE ELSE, WE MUST FIRST LEARN TO FOLLOW.

So if you want to lead a great team, you must first be a good team member. A good leader must himself learn how to follow, to listen and to be loyal. These qualities do not come overnight. Nobody can lay his hand on you and pray that you will be faithful the rest of your life. Faithfulness is built into your character step by step when you follow Jesus and learn from Him.

Leaders like Joshua, Samuel, David and Nehemiah had to be trained in obedience and how to fulfill their duties under different leaders, before God could put them in charge of others. God sees how we follow, and according to how we handle it, He calls us to lead.

I will mention three areas that I believe are particularly important for team leaders to develop: a right understanding of authority, trustworthiness and self-confidence.

# 1) A right understanding of authority

Maybe the most important lesson we need to learn before we step into a leadership position, is how to handle authority. All leadership includes authority, and when this is misused, it causes great harm to the church.

Jesus said, *"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth"* (Matt 28:18), and that means that the authority we possess is delegated from Him. We must never think of a position and the influence it gives as something that belongs to us. Every leadership position in the church is a stewardship. We only lead because Jesus has delegated this task to us. And we are not ready to lead anyone, until we have understood how He looks upon authority.

The main lesson is that authority is never given for selfish use. All authority in God's kingdom is given for the purpose of serving others. Jesus said:

> *"The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called 'benefactors.' But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves."*
> *Luke 22:25–26*

ALL AUTHORITY IN GOD'S KINGDOM IS GIVEN FOR THE PURPOSE TO SERVE OTHERS.

Authority has another meaning among us than how it is perceived in the world. Jesus emphasized *"Not so among you…"* We must not exercise lordship over people or dominate others for our own gain. Many ministry gifts enjoy great respect from church members, but it is a great sin to use this respect to manipulate people. If a pastor from the pulpit speaks about his lack of money, some will probably show up and give him something. But that will not be because The Holy Spirit urged them, but because the pastor manipulated them with what he said.

It is good when the church takes good care of its leaders, but that must always happen in a voluntary and joyful spirit. Leaders must not announce their personal needs in front of the congregation, but trust that God will in every way care for them. God gives authority to him who serves others and uses his position for the benefit of those around him.

## In the family

A good example is how the Bible teaches about leadership and family. God has already said in the book of Genesis that man should have a certain authority, but it is not enough to know *what kind of authority* he has, he must also know *in what spirit* that authority is exercised.

Let us look at what the apostle Peter says about this:

> *"Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered."*
> *1 Peter 3:7*

In this verse Peter says three things about exercising authority:

a) First: *"…dwell with understanding"*. If a man does not understand the needs of his wife and children, he can never be a good leader. Only when he is familiar with how they really feel and what they need to be happy, can he lead the family in a proper way.

This is true for every leader, in any kind of position. A leader must do what he can to understand the people he leads. Knowing their feelings and how things looks from their point of view, gives him the information he needs to make the right decisions. Jesus knew what was in the heart of his disciples. Therefore he gained their trust and confidence.

Sometimes the people you lead are eager to serve and need someone who spurs them ahead. But other times they can be tired and frustrated, and then it is more important to comfort them, than to chase them forward! A good shepherd understands the state of the flock, he knows both strengths and weaknesses among them – and chooses his actions correctly.

b) Secondly Peter says: *"…giving honor"*. A good leader honors the people he works with. As leaders we like to require that every worker does his best, but often forget to honor them. If you already are in a leadership position, when was the last time you really thanked your helpers? When was the last time you made a pleasant surprise for them? Have you taken the opportunity to thank them for what they are doing for the kingdom of God recently? Good leaders do things like this!

c) Third: *"…being heirs together"*. Peter reminds us of a very important thing: We are all heirs of the same inheritance. When the day comes when we will stand before God, we will all be on the same level. No one is a leader or a subject anymore. All privileges are gone, and we will be judged according to our deeds. Remembering this will help us to stay humble. It will protect us from arrogance and misuse of authority. It will help us to be better leaders.

These are good examples for us who serve in the church. The best that can happen to us is that we learn these principles before we start to lead ourselves. As I said, misuse of power causes great harm and brings judgment upon us.

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