

The Corporate Walk

by Albert Zehr

The sermon explores the significance of corporate unity in the church as a divine strategy for spiritual authority and blessings.

Scripture: Acts 4:32

Topics: "Corporate Unity", "Church Leadership"

Description

Albert Zehr preaches about the importance of genuine corporate functioning and unity as a powerful end-time weapon for the church, emphasizing the need to surrender personal ambitions and agendas to hear and obey the voice of God. The sermon highlights the negative and positive impacts of corporate unity, drawing from examples in Genesis and Acts, and stresses the significance of corporate oneness in leadership and decision-making. The journey towards a healthy corporate body life involves practices like corporate hearing, prayer, and meetings, with a focus on involving the entire body in leadership and decision-making processes.

Transcript

THE CORPORATE WALK

For Spiritual blessing and Authority

INTRODUCTION

This writing makes several bold assumptions:

-Genuine corporate functioning as expressed in John 17 "May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that You sent Me" and as the church experienced in Acts 4, "All the believers were one in heart and mind." may become God's end time weapon to consummate the age.

-The moving of a body in full unity and a complete corporate oneness will attain spiritual authority and bring blessing beyond anything that has been seen since early the days of the church.

-Satan realizing our personal inclination for independence, individualism and domination of others has been able to delay this inevitable end time weapon which will eventually subdue him.

-A remnant that is ready to pass through the cross, surrendering personal ambition, position, rank, agenda and organizational strategies is now being prepared in hidden places.

-The simple secret is to cease from taking our own initiative or repeating yesterday's successes and programs, but rather begin to hear clearly and obey fully in each and every step.

Therefore this is not a call to a ministry, or a manual for evangelism, or tips on how to build a successful church. Those who are still looking for organizational techniques or personal development are not yet ready to apply. This is rather a call to those who "have tried all that" and are ready to die to personal agendas and ambitions; those who are ready to lay everything down at the cross and join with others to hear the voice of the One who said, "I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH." They like those in the upper room will be willing to stay together and "tarry" until He speaks.

The Awakening Desire for Unity

John Chapter 17 is become an increasingly popular scripture in the church. This has prompted many to place a renewed emphasis on the matter of unity. Certainly this is as much on the Father's heart as it was when the Lord first spoke it. However, it seems many believe that unity is a movement, or ministry, or an outpouring, or a matter of convincing everyone to promote the same program.

Unity is far deeper than any of these. Unity is the very nature of God himself, and if we carry the same nature, or DNA, then unity will be at the center of our relationships. Real unity is possible only when the Lord himself is allowed to be in complete control of our lives, and activities both in what we initiate and in how we perform it.

Unity does not take away from us being individuals with unique backgrounds or characteristics, it does not mean we will all look the same or speak the same, it does not mean we will all minister the same, and unity does not mean we must see each other daily, but unity does mean we have a love and honor for one another that goes far deeper than the gifting and calling. Unity begins with a desire to be together as friends and family believing that together we can get to know and hear from our all knowing and loving Father more clearly than we can individually.

History has shown us that when the church family made doctrine or gifting the primary concern the result has been endless divisions resulting in thousands of denominations and para church ministries with little spiritual authority or impact on the earth today. Once we have a revelation of the Lord's heart to be one, and are willing to pay any price to attain and maintain that unity all the other functions of the Body of Christ will fall into place with each joint supplying as the Lord desires.

Note, that we will be using the words corporate and unity interchangeably.

The Negative and the Positive Proof

In Genesis 11 we see the evidence of the negative power of corporate unity. Here their purpose was to make a name for themselves. Even the Lord Himself recognized the potential impact of unity. "The Lord said, 'If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will become impossible to them'." Genesis 11: 6

The beautiful counterpart to this is seen in Acts 2-4. Here the Lord sets forth the positive alternative which occurs when His people come together in one accord and speak His language with His name and purpose

as our corporate goal.

The authority by which they spoke and the fruit that they bore and the growth of the early church stands to this day as proof of the blessing on the Body moving corporately.

General Definition

The dictionary definition for corporate is: to unite in one body, pertaining to a united body, persons considered collectively as one individual.

There are several Greek words which we wish to deal with. Each of these expresses one facet of corporate oneness.

- The Greek word homothumadon which is translated one accord. The prefix homo refers to the sameness or uniformity of kind such as in: homogenous or homonym. An interesting rather relevant application can be seen in the English word homogenize. This is accomplished when raw milk is forced under pressure against a hard surface. The larger fat molecules of the cream are broken up so they mix with the regular milk molecules. As we will see later this may have an interesting application in the process of the corporate walk.
- The Greek word sumphaneo translated agree. Actually this is a compound made up of two words, together and sound. From this we get the word symphony which refers to many voices and instruments yet producing a harmonious sound at the direction of one conductor.
- The Greek word koinanea translate fellowship, which means to share or participate in or hold something in common. Someone has quipped that it means several fellows in the same ship.

THE FOUNDATION

The ideal standard for our present age seems to be self expression, independence and individualism. Unity and corporate blessing is possible only when we have more care and concern for the whole than for our personal agenda. It can only be realized when we are on close fellowship with others whose singular desire is to corporately hear and obey the Lord's directives.

In the Beginning

Actually the nature of the corporate walk is rooted in the very nature of God, who by nature is triune; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. None in the Trinity does anything independently or individually. From the very beginning, scholars have long puzzled over the fact that the very first mention of God in the Bible, Genesis 1:1 is a plural word, elohim. Further the pronoun in verse 26 is also plural, as in "let us make man in our image."

From this it becomes clear not only that our God is triune; Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but at the same time they work and function as a corporate entity. Since the body of Christ reflects the nature of God, ("we being many are one") we are intended to function as a corporate entity. As the many members we move in an organic co-ordination, each being dependant on and in harmony with the whole.

Corporate Union Maintained in the Life of Jesus

"I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by Himself, He can do only what He sees His Father doing, because whatever the Father does, the Son also does." John 5: 19

"By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me." John 5:30

Even though Jesus was God incarnate and could have called on myriads of angels He chose to move only in co-ordination with the Father. If the Lord Himself would do nothing of Himself, surely we are even more in need of sovereign grace to find our way. The good news is the He is more than willing, and has sent the Holy Spirit, the Helper, and comforter to lead us into all truth. We see here again how even the Holy Spirit will not even speak of himself, but "Whatever He Hears"

John 16:13-14 "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come."

Just as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit agree and move in a corporate unity, the eventual desire is that the church and the Spirit move and speak as one; "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!'" Revelation 22:17

Pre-requisite for Gospel Impact and Spiritual Authority

Not only is it essential that we as individuals agree and are in unity with the Holy Spirit. For spiritual authority it is also necessary that we agree with each other.

"Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree (sumphoneo) about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them." Matthew 18:19-20

It's interesting that the Lord did not say you need hundreds of people to agree, but if with only a few beautiful things can happen, how much more if there truly was a multitude in one accord, then nothing would be impossible.

In the Lord's crucial and final prayer for His followers, His primary plea was for them to be one, i.e. corporate, in unity for several reasons. 1) Because this is the fundamental basis or relationship between the Son and the Father, and 2) So that the world may believe.

"I in them and You in Me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that You have sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved me." John 17:23

In this verse the words translated complete unity from the Greek word teleo can also refer to being perfect. This implies that for the believers to be perfect as He is perfect they must enter into that same corporate unity.

FOUNDATIONAL FOR THE CHURCH IN ACTS

We generally assume that the secret of the success and impact of the church in Acts was the release and power of the Holy Spirit. But, if we look more closely we will see that there was even a pre-requisite for the Holy Spirit's outpouring.

"I am going to send you what My Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." Luke 24: 49

Perhaps the key words which are often overlooked here are, "stay until." As we will see later this is the "price tag" for the corporate walk which few are willing to pay.

As we come to the book of Acts the secret begins to unfold. In order to replace the vacancy left by Judas they entered into that corporate dimension which allowed the Holy Spirit to make the choice. "These all continued with one accord (homothumadon) in prayer and supplication with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus and with His brothers." Acts 1:14

As we will see every act and every decision in the early church was made was by a corporate unity and not the result of an individual's action.

Peter Stood up with the Eleven

This corporate stance not only allowed the out pouring referred to in chapter two but became the modus operandi, i.e. foundational mode of operating for the church's early advance. Certainly the Holy Spirit fell but was subject to the corporate body being willing to be in one accord and, wait until!

"And when the day of Pentecost was fully come they were all with one accord in one place." Acts 2:1

This corporate bond of unity held as Peter became the voice of the corporate body. "Then Peter stood up with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd. . . ." Acts 2:14

The Early Church Life

It is hard to find anything more corporate than we see in the early church life. "All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions were his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all." Acts 4: 32-33.

It seems obvious here that the great power which the apostles exercised was a result of their unity

In chapter five and following, although Peter may have been the primary spokesman it is clear that all of the apostles were mutually involved. In chapter six we see that the twelve together involved the whole congregation. They asked the "brothers" to chose seven from among themselves and after they chose the seven; "This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen. . . . They presented these men to the apostles who prayed and laid their hands on them." Acts 6:5-6.

We are all aware of Peter's visit to Cornelius and thus opening the gospel to the Gentiles. But, if we take another look we will note that Peter did not do this alone. "The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the brothers went along." Acts 10:23

Paul's Corporate Ministry and Travel

From the beginning of Paul's ministry and travel it is clear that he always moved with a co-worker or as a corporate team. In his first mission he was accompanied by Barnabas and later by Silas as well as others. Acts 11:30; 13: 2-3.

Note further that in Acts 13:13, "From Paphos Paul and his companions sailed to Perga and Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem."

By Acts 16 we find that Timothy has joined with Paul and Silas. There is no evidence that Paul ever travelled alone. It is commonly accepted that Luke wrote the Book of Acts, so Luke or some other "reporters" must have been with Paul all of the time. The point is clear, Paul was not a lone itinerate preacher building his own personal ministry. While he may have been the most powerful servant of the Lord he moved in unity and co-operation with a team of co-workers.

Furthermore, upon close scrutiny we would find that Paul was not alone during the time when he wrote his pastoral epistles. See: Romans 16: 21- 23, "Timothy my fellow worker sends greeting to you as does Lucius, Jason and Sosipater, my relatives. I Tertius, who wrote down this letter, greet you in the Lord. Gaius, whose hospitality I and the whole church enjoy, send his greetings. Erastus, who is the city's director of public works and our brother Quartus sends you their greeting."

See also 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Corinthians 13:13; Ephesians 6:21; Philippians 4:21; Titus 3:15; Philemon 1:23; Hebrews 13:23

INHERENT IN THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

From the compound Greek word ekklesia a called out/gathered together people translated church as well as every description or reference to the church there is always a corporate assumption.

As A Body

In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul gives us a beautiful description as to how the church is comparable to a Body. While the body is made up of many separate parts its purpose can only be fully realized as each part functions in corporate conjunction with other parts. When any part functions on its own, it simply gratifies itself and the body's purpose is not realized.

When any organ or even a cell moves or functions beyond its measure or out of harmony with other parts we have the beginning of a cancer.

It is also note worthy to observe that the members which might be considered less honorable are not ignored or overlooked but given proper attention. This will be dealt with in the practice session.

As A Family

The members of the church are consistently referred to as brothers or sisters. John in his epistles uses terms like: my dear children, fathers, mothers, sons and daughters.

Although a family needs order and structure, as it matures each member finds their place in decision making and function. If one member maintains exclusive control other members cannot grow and gradually the body becomes dysfunctional.

Plural/Corporate in Leadership

The New Testament speaks of multiple gifts in operation in the body. In Ephesians 4 the leadership is specifically described as a corporate entity; i.e. Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Pastor and Teacher.

All of Paul's writings except for the letters to Timothy were addressed not to a particular leader but to the body of believers in that city.

A beautiful example of corporate leadership is seen in Acts 13:1-2, "In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manean (who had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshipping and fasting the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off."

Here we see a powerful example of corporate hearing, granting corporate authority for a corporate commission. In Acts 15 we see an even more powerful example of dealing with a major issue through corporate hearing. Such a corporate decision is the best antidote to division in the church.

OBSTACLES and REMEDIES

Here we need to consider and perhaps deal with some commonly accepted habits and practices if we wish to realize the blessing so clearly promise in Psalm 133. "How good and how pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity. . . . For there the Lord bestows His blessing, even life forevermore."

Being Right vs. Seeing the Full Picture.

Much conflict and endless divisions have resulted from being stuck in the "who is right" mode. Of course every believer desires to know the truth and wants to avoid compromise. For some this is how they interpret what it means to be faithful. This assumes that if two believers see things from a different perspective only one can be right, therefore the other must be wrong.

But, is it possible to have two different views or perspectives and neither be wrong? In an earlier booklet: *Releasing the Body*, we describe how each different personality gift sees things from their perspective. To the prophetic gift the vision is clear and the time to act is now. To the teacher gift the matter must be studied, researched and more time is needed. To another gift it is all about the price tag. Furthermore, nothing will actually come to fruition if the servant gift is not involved.

In a healthy corporate team each ones gifting with its respective perspective will be appreciated and given room. When each perspective is given place the big picture will be realized. With each considering the other perspectives and honoring one another a clearer view of the full picture can be realized. This will incorporate the vision, along with the details, the timing, the cost and implementation. This may take longer than one leader's vision and ultimatum but result in a much more wholesome building up of the body in a healthy balanced way.

Much Thinking but Little Hearing

By nature and training we are conditioned to depend on our ability to think and reason. However our thought and reason can only process what our experience, knowledge and history has experienced. This will limit us to what has been and can restrain us from going to get to: "what no eye has seen, nor ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him, but God revealed it to us by His Spirit." 1 Corinthians 2: 9-10

To realize this we must learn to "set our mind on the Spirit," that is to focus our mind on what the Spirit is speaking into our spirit. Many times I tell our people, "Don't tell me what you are thinking, tell me what you are hearing." More on this in the later application sections.

The Clergy Laity Concept

To address this area may be somewhat controversial, but nevertheless necessary if we wish to reach our goal. In the traditional church leadership model there is usually one person referred to as "the pastor" who is considered the leader. If the church is large there may be several, but one is usually referred to as the senior pastor. This is not to say that the pastor should not be the leader, but if he or she is the exclusive leader then the potential for the corporate walk will be greatly limited.

Why the term pastor is used is questionable, since the term pastor is the least referred to in the New Testament. Furthermore there is no indication that the pastoral gift should lead the congregation. Often the "pastor" is not a pastor by gifting, but perhaps a teacher, or perhaps an evangelist or a prophet. In this case the church will be strengthened in this particular dimension. So, in order for the church to grow in a healthy balance he or she must be periodically replaced. A person with a genuine pastoral gift tends to become a spiritual father/parent to many. If then he is replaced, we end up in a sense exchanging fathers without consideration as to how many orphans are being created. Perhaps we can begin to see how a corporate leadership can alleviate this problem.

In many cases where there is a church board, often referred to as elders they tend to see the pastor as their employee. Rather than they being co-workers joining the pastor in seeking to hear and discern God's mind for the congregation simply observe to see if the pastor meets their expectations. Or they expect him to accommodate and serve their interests. This relegates him to be little more than a hireling. May the Lord help us find a way to make room of a genuine corporate leadership within the Body.

We will attempt to put forward some practical examples from our own experience later under Living the Body Life. Before we come to that let's deal with another hindering factor.

Seeing Position Rather Than Function.

Another hindering factor results from seeing position as more important than function. Biblical leadership has more to do with gifting and function than with position. We must come to see that a proper appointment or ordination must be recognition of a person's organic function in the body. If we wish to build an organization we can give persons titles and positions of authority. In an organic body there is an intrinsic development of various members as the body grows and matures. As each member functions it becomes obvious that some function with a pastoral care for others. Others can explain and express ideas which attract the interest and desire to learn among the body. Still others may tend to generate vision and excitement. Still others spontaneously attract and bring in new members.

While these may be designated as and referred to as pastor, teacher, prophet and evangelist it should not elevate them into a position above the other members. Nor should we assume that they are the only ones to function in those respective areas. In fact if they are so designated their primary function is not to hold these positions but rather to activate those gifts within the body: "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith. . . and become mature. . ." Ephesians 4:12-13

Revelation Being Exclusive to the Key Leader

While this may seem to be a way of protecting the body from division, it has many weaknesses. First, it does not recognize the fact that every member is also connected to the head. It overlooks the fact that Paul declared that "whenever you come together each one has a tongue, a teaching a revelation. . ." and "all can prophesy" See 1 Cor. 14:26, 30

Another major problem with this view lies in that it often allows the key leader to become unapproachable and isolated and not accountable to others. The fall of many great leaders could have been avoided if they had remained in co-ordination and accountable to others. While it may not be proper to challenge a key leader openly, no one should assume that their view or revelation dare not be subject to honest dialogue.

A mature leader, like a loving father, is always open to and interested in the new and creative insights of his children. Rather than wanting them to be pawns in his game he wants them to attain greater heights than he has.

PRACTICING THE CORPORATE BODY LIFE

The word corporate is derived from the Latin corpus meaning Body. The significance and implications of God's people being a Body is very significant but often not realized. Let's consider some aspects of a Body and see how these aspects translate themselves into the life of the church as a Body. We will look at, corporate hearing, corporate prayer and corporate meetings.

Every part of the Body is connected both to the head and to other parts of the Body. Any action by one part affects the other parts. While every member is able to hear and can receive directions from the head, the implications involve others, so we must allow what we hear to be balanced by those close to us in the Body. No part of the Body exists or operates independently or for its own purpose. Our pain, our joy, and our success involve not just ourselves, but are to be shared with others.

If any part of the Body draws attention to itself it creates a distortion. Even though my hand or my mouth may be the most active part, if it draws attention to itself it becomes a distraction and the message is compromised.

Some parts are more obvious, others less obvious but of equal necessity for full function of the Body to realize its purposes. The primary purpose of every part is to express the head in harmony with the other parts.

Example of Corporate Hearing

We were meeting in a large theatre style auditorium for several years. This was a facility much larger than we needed. Since another larger church wanted the use of the auditorium we were asked to meet in a cafeteria for a trial period. Toward the end of this trial period we needed to decide whether to stay in the cafeteria or return to the auditorium. The poor sound and other factors in the cafeteria had produced considerable frustration and we needed a corporate sense as to how to proceed.

Summary of Corporate Hearing -Aug. 7, 07 At a particular evening meeting we decided to see what the sense of the Body was. We agreed not to discuss the pros and cons, not to get into all the implications, but simply invite each one present to ask the Lord as to what was His desire in the matter. "After you feel that you have heard from the Lord come forward and share what you are hearing. We are not here to debate, to try to convince or persuade anyone, we just want an environment where anyone can share what they feel they are hearing."

The following is a summary of what was shared that night. Each paragraph is the response of one person.
-Songs 2:4 He's taking me to the banqueting hall... -An auditorium is a place where we can be independent, and not so close to each other, in the cafeteria God is teaching us to be more corporate.
-The Cafeteria: is all open, well lit, transparent, with sky lights, very transparent. In the theatre we could

hide, now God is taking us from a dark place where we can hide to where He is shining light and we can be seen.

Even the prayer room is exposed, not hidden. -God is challenging us to be able to overcome distractions and focus on God. -He must increase and we must decrease. Though the place decreases, He will increase. -The Cafeteria is an eating place - a place for family and sharing time. -Oneness takes place in natural and spiritual realms. When we work together to set up and take down chairs and equipment, through our working together we come into a deeper oneness, and hear corporately. -Don't lose focus of God because of the building.

He is preparing us for the next stage. I saw picture of loaf of bread being baked in the kitchen. Others will smell the fragrance of the loaf as it is done. -He is taking us from spectators to ownership of the church even as we set up. As we stay together we can fight the next battles. -Be faithful in little things. He will give more. Our unity will increase. Fight to the end. We need to face the problems, like the sound system and so on, but we will overcome. The Lord will give us a strategy. -It is not where we meet but HOW we meet.

The Lord is in either place. -An Auditorium is a place to pretend, dress up, and put on costumes and masks. A cafeteria is where people eat, being themselves, food in mouth, being who we really are, as a real family. Place of enjoyment and coming together. -Tonight we are a family who can hear together and work together. -In auditorium we were on two levels, in the Cafeteria we are all on the same level. At this point there was a plea that no one should be intimidated, by the majority view, everyone should feel free to express themselves.

No one should leave feeling that they were not allowed to be heard. Even though less than half had spoken, everyone was at rest and agreed that the Lord had spoken in a clear and beautiful way. Prior to and during this time none of the primary leaders indicated their feeling on the matter. Eventually we could confidently say, "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us." This was much healthier and fulfilling for all and a much more solid decision than could have resulted from taking a vote. After this decision everyone owned the decision since everyone felt ownership.

Corporate Prayer

For five years a group of about twelve men met at 5:00 am on Fridays for prayer. For the first hour we pray and seek God's face individually. Just being together in the Lord's presence in this way draws us into a deeper intimacy with the Lord.

During the second hour we gather in a circle for corporate prayer. At this time we gather not to pray around the world, or to pray for everyone's personal concerns. The question is; "Lord what is on your heart that you desire to release through us?" Someone may express a burden and offer a prayer. If this resonates in another heart it will be picked up, if not, then that person's prayer will suffice. Suddenly, someone will offer a prayer that will somehow touch the sense of the Body and different ones will pick it up and carry it higher and higher until there is a rest and assurance that the goal was reached in response to our corporate prayer.

This of course requires grace and maturity, and a trust that we are not for or against any person. We are here to honor one another and yet not to cater to anyone in particular. We must learn that there are times when we want to move beyond personal and individual concerns to connect with the Head of the Body. In this way He can find expression for what is on His heart to be released through His Body.

Sometimes during this time someone will try to move to something else, but there is still a sense that the earlier matter was not yet complete, so the prayer will be brought back to complete the unfinished item. To realize this everyone must be willing to bring his spirit into subjection to the Lord and to the other members of the Body. This requires a trust and assurance that at times the Lord's voice in the Body is more reliable than my personal hearing.

This practice has brought us to a measure of unity and authority. We are often in awe as to how the Lord has both directed our prayer and honored us with His favor and changed circumstances, even in our city and our nation.

When at times someone does have a personal burden they are assured that we will pray for them specifically at the end of the meeting. This can allow us to remain with what is being revealed by the Spirit until it has been carried to its conclusion.

CORPORATE MEETINGS

"But if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everyone is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, 'God is really among you!' What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. .

Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. And if revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. The spirits of the prophets are subject to the control of the prophets. For God is not a God of disorder but of peace." 1 Corinthians 14: 24 -26, 29 -33.

Here we have a clear model of a corporate meeting; but where is it in practice and how shall we implement it?

First we begin by believing it and desiring it. It may initially best be practiced in smaller group settings. Sometimes to bring an understanding requires that we deal with misunderstandings. We have been conditioned to assume that a meeting of the church follows a format where believers gather, the pastor opens the meeting, we have a time of worship then there will be a time when by prior arrangement a leader will speak. This model is hardly related to the above passage.

While this usual format may have a place for a regular "church meeting," for corporate gatherings we must change this mindset by sowing seeds of understanding and cultivating corporate habits from infancy to maturity.

First we must understand that a corporate meeting is a time when various members of the Body who each have a measure of Christ come together to release their measure. This will allow Christ to express Himself through the Body. For this to transpire each member must be actively open to receiving from the Spirit and releasing what they hear as He prompts them.

As an illustration: suppose I have a full picture which I have cut into sections. I then give each section of this outline to a different person to present spontaneously. Each one must attain some grasp as to what the overall picture is, and then sense when their part should be presented to harmonize and develop the full picture.

This will require practice, but with an environment of encouragement, forbearance and experience, confidence will increase and the joy realized will be a great reward. If many of the appendages of a body have been in a state of atrophy it will certainly take time for them to regain normal function. The principles shared in the corporate hearing and corporate prayer will be very helpful in this journey.

FOLLOWING THE SPIRIT IN LEADING MEETINGS

There are also times when the church gathers for a specific time of ministry or teaching. The following has been our practice at Church of Zion for these types of meetings. During the week the key leaders are seeking the Lord for a word or a message for the congregation. On Sunday at 9:00am there is an open pre-service prayer at the end of which everyone present is given an opportunity to share briefly if they feel they sense something from the Lord.

Next the leadership team, pastors with spouses and about eight to ten key leaders gather to discern what the Lord may have on His heart for the meeting. One or several may have prepared a message; others may have a word or a vision. Everything is laid before the Lord to sense what is on His heart. Usually there is a general agreement and a confirmation that the message prepared by a certain one is the Word for this hour. Or there may be a sense that the Lord has something else in mind. This process takes only about 15 minutes.

During the worship time and the actual meeting the leaders sit close to each other so that if anyone senses the Spirit moving in a different direction they can confer with each other. This is often sensed while in the Lord's presence during worship. Sometimes the message planned will not be delivered. Each one has learned to hold things lightly and trust that the Holy Spirit can lead more clearly through the corporate counsel, then through ones personal agenda. If persons from the congregation feel that they have a timely word they may share with the leaders who will consider whether this seems timely and profitable to the Body.

As we are ready to lay down our agenda and allow the Holy Spirit to be in charge, over and over He surprises us and takes us beyond what we had planned or thought. In this way every meeting is an exciting adventure and never a routine rerun of the last meeting!

A HEALTHY BODY IS COMPREHENSIVE

"But, we cannot let just anyone speak or it could bring confusion in the body," is a common response to such an "open mike approach." The above describes how we do have some degree of limits in the large general meeting; however please also consider the following.

Like the human body so the corporate Body is very comprehensive. The healthy human body's immune system detects foreign or destructive elements. It responds positively to what is health enhancing. Each part grows and moves in relation to others and in proportion to its place in the body. When sickness or injuries happen, it will immediately begin the process of self healing.

If the corporate Body is healthy it also has an "immune system" which will organically accept that which is positive and constructive and resist what is negative. When pain or injuries occur through offence or misunderstanding the healing oil of the Spirit will generate self healing to the Body as a whole and to the members in particular. A further necessity for a body to maintain health is exercise. This includes the continuous moving and functioning of all the members in their God ordained place according to their

gifting.

Furthermore a Body will recognize its' true leaders and shepherds. They will have a sense of trust, security and respect toward such, whether they have a title or not. They may obey the appointed leaders out of obligation, but they will sense the warmth and fatherly or motherly love from the real shepherds who lay down their life for the sheep. Truly the Body is an amazing organic organism! The healthy Body alive and indwelled by the Spirit will protect itself.

INVOLVING THE BODY IN LEADERSHIP

Certainly there must be leadership in a congregation. While we need an environment where all can be involved and each allowed to function in their capacity with Christ as the head there is still a need for order and leadership. Let's look at some principles relative to leadership.

1. Plural leaders as a core team

Whether these are referred to as pastors, elders or otherwise it is best that there be at least three who form the primary leadership core. Ideally it could include at least three of the equipping gifts. If these persons are married it is ideal that both spouses be involved if possible. Spouses can often add a perspective and a balance. These oversee the congregational activities and find ways to activate the Body and endeavor to hear the Lord's heart coming through the Body as well as directly. These should deal with the more intimate and personal aspects of the church. While they may make final decisions these decisions should seriously consider the corporate voice of the Body.

Decisions affecting the Body life as a whole should be clearly communicated with and agreed upon with an expanded leadership team. One of these may well be considered the senior or primary leader. But it is important to keep the perspective of "a team with a leader" and not "a leader with a team." This means that although he takes the primary leadership role, the others are not there simply to fulfill his dictates, but they together with him seek the mind of the Lord. So that, when he speaks he can say, "it seemed good to us and the Holy Spirit." Even if one or several are fully supported by the congregation they should not be regarded as employees of the others. They should love and honor one another as co-workers in the Lords' Vineyard.

2. A leadership team.

This should be made up of mature members who are active in caring for various parts of the Body. These are representing the heart and interests of the Body as a whole, and not simply their own interests or agenda. They should be representative to the extent that no one in the Body feels they have no access to leadership. At the same time their over riding desire must be to hear the Lord's voice and harmonize with the rest of the leadership rather than to cater to a particular interest group. Depending on the size of the congregation this group could number up to twelve. If there is a larger number due to time limitations some may well feel like spectators.

It is best if these are selected by the consensus of the core team, rather than by an open vote. In spite of all we have said about corporate we must realize that the Body is not a democracy where the majority or people of influence can have their way. There actually is an order and a spiritual government which the Lord will honor if it is according to His order and design.

If there is no unanimity but a decision must be reached the team members, after clearly stating their view, should defer to and fully support the decision of the core leaders. The Lord can accommodate and override a wrong decision more readily than healing a division.

I often say keeping the unity is more important than being right! Even if a wrong decision is made if there is a mature level of humility a confession and correction can be made later on. This is much easier than to repair a division which can easily be caused by an open leadership disagreement.

3. Open Access to all.

In order to maintain a sense of ownership in the Body all members should have access to relate to some level of leadership. When possible open meetings should allow sincere input, but saints must learn to simply present what they sense that they may be hearing from the Lord. And, present it as an offering not as a demand. Argumentation and debate prove nothing and only activate the flesh and promote the private interests of the debaters. If there is an awareness and appreciation for the different perspectives of those with different giftings defensiveness should be kept to a minimum. After leaders have sincerely heard the sense of the Body there are times when leaders must make a decision and this needs to be respected. This is much more scriptural than having a vote to determine the will of the majority. See Numbers 13 where the majority delayed the people for many years!

WALKING THE CORPORATE JOURNEY

As mentioned in the preface, for about fourteen years the writer has been involved in the practice of the corporate walk with both Church of Zion in Vancouver, BC Canada and Watchmen for the Nations.

Many of the principles shared in this writing were learned through experience in these two settings. In the meantime many who have participated in this journey have been given invitations and access nearby and abroad, and by the Lord's gracious and Sovereign pleasure the impact has been affecting congregations and nations.

The applications shared in earlier pages were mostly reports and descriptions of the process with Church of Zion. The following is an excerpt from the Church of Zion website under "Who we are." More information can be found at: www.churchofzion.org.

The final pages (page 25-28) will share some insights gained and results realized through the Watchmen for the Nations journey. We believe these can have powerful implications, personal, congregational and national.

Church of Zion -Who We Are

We are a people with a passion to know and experience the presence of the Lord and to spend time and wait in His presence to hear His heart and His desire. This expresses itself in much time in worship and prayer. We find that His presence brings healing, comfort, encouragement and resolves many problems and issues more effectively than much discussion and human effort. Frequently we sense His further direction for our meeting and for our lives during this time. Our primary concern is not so much, "what do you think?" but, "what are you hearing the Lord say?"

We continually lay down our agenda and do not take initiative until He speaks and His desire is confirmed by others in the body. This maintains the unity and grants a sweet anointing and an amazing corporate

authority. This is not a matter of telling anyone what to do, but rather results in a special wisdom and spiritual impact even world-wide.

Each one is open to input and fellowship so that we corporately own whatever action is taken. So, when we go out we carry the weight of the body and whatever results are attained belongs to the whole body.

The Lord has granted us a love and trust for one another so that we can truly prefer one another and drop our personal interests without jealousy or suspicion. This often expresses itself by recognizing that at times, another, perhaps much younger, may have a clearer sense or a timely word. We prefer to travel and minister in teams. Practically this means that our meetings are never routine and always contain life, insight, and adventure beyond our personal plans. We are open to the spiritual gifts, prophetic words, praying and singing in the Spirit, manifestations, etc.

We sincerely desire that every believer's calling and gift be perceived and released according to God's purpose for them and not for furthering leader's purposes.

Presently many of our leaders and teams are sought out and travel to many places throughout the world to mentor and shepherd, and are asked to be "fathers" to many persons and groups. This involves many who have gifts and callings, but who have felt used, abused and confused.

Our purpose is to bless, release, cover, comfort, protect and mentor such in a relationship of love and trust. The relationships thus formed do not create an organization but a fellowship and a bond in the Spirit that transcends human or religious structures. At the same time we do not challenge, or question, anyone's involvement with or loyalty to denominations or other organizations. Each must be encouraged and set free to respond to the Lord as He directs.

WATCHMEN FOR THE NATIONS -A Corporate Journey

Watchmen for the Nations could be described as a "child" of Pastor Robert Birch as senior spiritual father and intercessor that lived in Vancouver, BC until his death at age 99 in 2007. His watchwords were; 1) what is the Spirit saying to the church? And 2) how can we experience the unity Jesus prayed for in John 17? This was the focus of his prayer as for years he rose up in the early hours daily and cried out to God to see these questions answered in a people. This message resonated deep in the hearts of some who were close to Pastor Bob, among them David Demian to whom he passed his commission to lead Watchmen for the Nations.

While the message was shared in many settings eventually a large corporate Gathering was called in 1995. The invitation was to church leaders and other believers who were willing to come together with no fixed agenda or prominent speakers. The announced purpose was to Gather together in His presence, pour out our hearts in worship and invite Him to reveal what was on His heart. The expectation was that if His people would gather in unity and sincerely ask what the Spirit wished to say to the church the Lord would respond. At that time our nation and our governmental leaders were moving into great moral decline and social liberalism. During the following years further Gatherings were held in various parts of Canada as the Lord indicated and each one resulted in a further step which shifted the very course of our nation.

All of these Gatherings and all the steps were the result of corporate discerning and confirmed by numerous prophetic voices in the country. When it was clear that the Lord wanted His people to gather at a specific time and place human convenience was not allowed to intervene.

To chronicle these nation changing steps (which may be found at: www.watchmen.org) is beyond the scope of this writing. What we wish to share are some of the basic principles which unfolded as the journey progressed.

Never Gone This Way Before

A basic premise we needed to constantly embrace is found in Joshua 3:2-5. "After three days the officers went throughout the camp, giving orders to the people; 'When you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, and the priests, who are the Levites carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it. Then you will know which way to go since you have never been this way before. But keep a distance of about one thousand yards between you and the ark, do not go near it.'"

The first thing we must realize is that always the central issue is to care for and be in His Presence. Our first duty both personally and corporately is to carry and care for the ark -His Presence. Then it becomes a matter of letting His presence lead us. In practice many times worship occupied most and sometimes all of the meeting time.

Further we must come to fully realize that if we have not gone this way before, then our personal knowledge and past experience will not suffice to take us to the goal. Since we have been conditioned and schooled to function out of our experience we must break this self sufficiency and become totally dependent on His fresh "rehma" speaking.

Here we should note that even in the Old Testament the Lord never expected the same process to be repeated. Only once did he ask for a march around a city, or a breaking of pitchers, or a sling with five stones. We must see that it is obedience and not the action that brings the results. It is obedience that inspires the Lord to do amazing things.

By nature when we hear of a successful project or program we are anxious to repeat it with the hope of similar success. Do we have the daring faith to simply step out in simple obedience trusting the consequences to the One from whom we take our instructions?

No Presumption

The warning not to go near the ark might have preserved Uzzah's life when King David tried to move the ark. Here it is even clearer that God has his prescribed way and our own presumption will only result in death and discouragement. Upon David's second attempt he enquired to see what God's way to move the ark was. Even then, every six steps he offered a sacrifice. See 2 Samuel 6:13

Even though King David seemed to have a habit of enquiring of the Lord, See 1 Samuel 23 & 30, it is at the moment of success that we easily fall prey to presumption.

In Joshua 5:13 ff, we see that even though Joshua was the general he had to be reminded that there was One who had, "now come as the commander of the army." The most critical time to remain dependant is when matters seem well in hand and results are apparent.

Not Initiating -No Human Agenda

"Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably able to do far more than all we can ask or imagine. . . ." Ephesians 3: 20. No eye has seen, nor ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for

those who love him. . ." 1 Corinthians 2 9.

"My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways,' declares the Lord. 'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.'" Isaiah 55:8-9

If we would take the above words seriously we would surely shrink from initiating things for God and assuming that our agenda is His agenda. As we saw earlier even Jesus declared that He only did what He saw His Father doing. In practice this runs counter to our long established routines and requires a radical step of faith.

Beginning with a Willing Remnant

While the above seems formidable and beyond reach yet our spirit cries yes! How then can we begin? We can begin in our personal lives, then with a few willing co-workers. The Lord has never waited for a majority but simply needs a few which we sometimes refer to as a critical mass or a remnant. Had there been only ten righteous God would have spared Sodom. For Jesus it took only twelve, in Acts it only took 120 to give up everything to be in one accord who became irresistible to the Holy Spirit and brought the church into full bloom in just a few years.

How to begin? Lay aside our human agenda and hear from above. Gather with others who have the same heart to hear His voice until you arrive in one accord and then take small steps of obedience. This is how we can begin to enjoy The Blessings and Authority of the Corporate Walk.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/albert-zehr/the-corporate-walk/>

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