

At the school where I work the kids love to play basketball. Every lunch is one long game of basketball. Every break is a game of basketball. Some of the kids are really pretty good. Some are really bad. And most think they are God's gift to basketball...but aren't.

There are two guys in particular that have stood out to me this year. One guy, we'll call him Kevin, is VERY good! He has what it takes to play on an NCAA college team. He has the moves, the shot, and plays well on a team. The other guy, we'll call him Ryan, loves basketball and he can make a few shots here or there, but he is lagging athletically.

Over this past year, I noticed that Kevin doesn't need to win to prove anything. He is good. He knows it. He could dominate a game all on his own and win it with no real struggle at all...and almost every time he has Ryan put on his team. Kevin will drive with the ball and dish it to Ryan. Because of Kevin's approach...Ryan actually gets to play.

The rest of the time, no one includes him. He stands there. He

In the Vineyard we have a great saying,

Everyone gets to play.

Jesus taught us this very clearly throughout his ministry:

Luke 8:1-3

After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

Jesus has this ragtag group of disciples. Fishermen, businessmen, a terrorist, liberals, conservatives, notorious sinners, and decent, upstanding men. Later he even adds a Pharisee Murderer. And Luke, in a very uncharacteristic move for the culture, includes a list of women. Not just names them, names and describes the women and doesn't name the men.

In this culture, it would have been too scandalous for Jesus to include women in the inner-circle of his disciples. In fact, the scandal would have become the central focus and pulled it away from the main focus. But what Jesus does instead is still very radical for the culture. He allows them to follow him, listen to his teaching, and participate in the ministry. We know this because Luke places this list of people at the beginning of Jesus' parable of the Sower. Jesus, speaking to the disciples and the women, says, "You are going to go out and scatter the seeds of the Kingdom!"

Just like Kevin makes sure to include Ryan so he can play in a game where others would keep him out. We prefer to follow the example of Jesus and make a place for anyone who wants to play.

EVERYONE gets to play.

What we mean by that is that there is a place for everyone to serve in the Kingdom of God...you don't have to be college educated to serve...you don't have to be super-Christian to serve...you don't have to be morally superior...you don't even have to be good-looking...there is a place for you to play in the ministry of the Kingdom of God.

John Wimber once said, "The Church is to be an army not an audience. It's never about a focus on the one on the stage, its about the equipping and releasing of the Church for the work of the Kingdom!"

You have a place. With all your inadequacies, all the mistakes of your past, all those things you believe make you no good...even the things you think make you God's gift to the ministry...We are called and gifted to be part of this thing.

2 Corinthians 12:4-11

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

This is more than just a cute little statement about including people...It is a call from God. He means for everyone of us who follow Jesus to find a place of ministry...a place God has been preparing you and I, growing you and I, teaching and preparing us to serve in so we can expand His Kingdom.

There is a standard rule that is surprising dead on accurate no matter what organization you are part of called the 80-20 Rule or the Pareto Principle. It says 80% of the work is

done by 20% of the people. 80% of the giving is done by 20% of the people. 80% of the effort comes from only 20% of the people working.

Do you know what one of the things that differentiates amazing organizations...amazing churches from ones that struggle and flounder? How much they break this rule in the positive sense. Just a few percentage points up...23-24-25% can make a world of difference in how we reach this area for Jesus...how we serve them...how much we are able to point them to Jesus.

Another aspect of this statement is that

Everyone GETS to play.

One of the things I love to do is backpack. I haven't done it in awhile and don't get to do it the way I would like, but I love the outdoors. Several years ago I got to go on a backpacking trip in the middle of Pennsylvania. I spent 8 days sleeping outside in 20 degree weather, walked over 70 miles, and carried a pack that weighed around 70-80 pounds up and over mountains. It was fantastic!

Do you know what the irony is? Lori wonders how I could walk 70 miles with all that against me, and why I can't walk 7 feet across the room to pick up my dirty clothes.

Do you know what the difference is? The difference is "have to" vs. "get to."

Part of being gifted for ministry is that God creates in us a passion for what He has called us to do. The times I have struggled most in ministry are times where I have not been allowed to work out of the areas where I am gifted, and was stuck doing stuff I HAD to do.

Now gifting and passion for an area doesn't mean we don't have to work hard to get better; to improve. It doesn't mean there won't be difficult times to overcome and aspects of it that we don't want to do...but it does mean the majority of the time we see it as a "get" to and not a "have" to.

If I wanted to make someone very unhappy I would assign Barb Eddy to the children's ministry department. It would make her miserable and you all angry. If I want to see the Kingdom expanded, people prayed for and find healing...then I do what even a blind person could see...I put her in prayer ministry where she GETS to do what God has gifted her to do.

Many times churches have a bunch of HAVE to ministries and people never reach the GET to stage of ministry. Sometimes people get stuck in the HAVE to ministries because the person who would view that ministry as a GET to is unwilling to step up for one reason or another...they are busy...they don't feel they are able...

God's Kingdom and the local church organization works best when we are functioning primarily out of our GET to rather than our HAVE to...but that means each one of us finding our place in the ministry of God's Kingdom and doing our GET to Jobs.

The last part of this is that

Everyone gets TO PLAY.

For me this takes on two important aspect. First, everyone get to participate.

John Wimber believed in this phrase as a founding principle of being a Vineyard because He wanted to create opportunities for normal people to do extraordinary things. The primary action, the primary movement and work of God was not just from the stage outward. In the early Vineyard meetings, Wimber gave opportunities for people to pray for one another and discern God's voice. Everyone had a part...not just pastors and the professional religious people.

The second part of this is the idea of Play...We get to play...We get to have fun with this. We get to enjoy it. We can be creative. We can try new things and either succeed or fail and try something else. One pastor I worked for in Kansas City used to say this about being a pastor, "If this ever stops being fun I don't want to do it anymore!"

What I discovered is he didn't mean every moment being fun. He simply meant overall our ministry should bring joy to our lives. We should enjoy being part of it. We should find fulfillment.

But more than that I think we should be able to play, be creative. We should be able to take all the hardwork and struggle of getting something done and creating something new and see the joy on the other side as great things come from it.

A few weeks ago Dave Workman spoke and showed us a video of their Special Needs Prom. It was a powerful and movie video...but to pull that thing off took thousand and thousands of work hours...it took over 1,500 volunteers...it took a lot of money...but the joy was worth it.

Hebrew 12:1-3

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

It takes work. It takes practice to get our ministry right. It takes gifting and trying and failing and trying again. It might take us several different attempts to find the right place. But our overall experience should be joy and play and fun.

Now, I have a word of warning. It is easy to lose that sense of fun and playfulness due to our own sin and inattention.

Galatians 6:7-10

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.
8 Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

We enjoy it so much we don't step away to learn and grow and become obsolete as others step up and take over. We enjoy it so much we want to do it all the time and we burn ourselves out because we never rest. We get to the point where we don't train and raise up others who enjoy it...so the responsibility is always on us and we start to hate the expectation of the position we have put ourselves in. We can and often do derail our own sense of fun.

It is so easy to forget how to have fun...to forget THAT we are allowed to have fun in this...we are allowed to play.

Conclusion

Story of the Vietnamese Lady, "You don't look like any Pastor I have ever seen! You are proof that Jesus looks at the heart!"