
THERE'S NO "I" IN TEAM

In 1999, Raul Mondesi of the LA Dodgers was trying to accomplish a difficult feat: to hit 30 home runs and steal 30 bases in one season.

- He had done it once before two seasons earlier.
- Now, he was having a great season and looked like he just might do it again.
 - But then the wheels came off.
 - He wasn't hitting homeruns.
 - He wasn't getting on base to steal bases.
 - And he was playing poorly in the field.
 - The harder he tried, the worse he got until he was benched and asked to be traded.

Management didn't give up though and held private meetings with him, and something changed.

- He stated playing better and he kept moving closer to 30-30.
- Late in the season, I was at a Dodgers game and saw Mondesi do something very unusual.
- There was man on first, the game was tied, and the Dodgers needed a run.
 - Mondesi came up to bat.
 - A homerun might win the game and would move Mondesi closer to his 30 homeruns and 30 stolen bases goal.
 - But, Mondesi laid down a bunt and was thrown out at first.
 - In doing so, though, he moved the runner into scoring position.

That bunt was unusual for a homerun hitter, but it reflected a change Raul Mondesi had made in the way he played.

- No longer was he playing for his own personal accomplishments.
- Now he was thinking about the team and trying to help them win.
- Raul Mondesi had learned that old saying, "There's no 'I' in team."
 - And by the end of the season, he had 33 homeruns and 36 stolen bases.

That lesson is also important for Kingdom people to learn.

- It can be helpful for Christians to think about the Church as a team.

JESUS said, "Whoever wants to be MY disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow ME."

- What JESUS is saying is that if you want to be HIS follower, you have to put the team first.
- "For whoever wants to save their life will lose it."
 - You gain your life when the team wins, even if you get thrown out at first.

Teams are made up of a group of players, each with different gifts and abilities.

- The positions they play are based on these specific abilities.
 - Some are gifted to be superstars because of great ability.
 - Some are gifted to play lesser, but essential roles because of their abilities.
 - Some are gifted to play multiple roles.
 - But who plays where and for how long is decided by one person—the manager.

For the Church, JESUS is the manager and HIS followers are the team.

- In today's gospel, Peter is having trouble with the MANAGER'S game plan.
- The strategy is for JESUS HIMSELF to go to Jerusalem and be put to death for the team.
 - Peter thinks he knows better and wants to see his own game plan put into action.
 - But Peter only sees what's best for himself.
 - In fact, truth be told, it's not even what's best for him.
 - JESUS, however, is thinking about the whole team.
 - JESUS knows what will bring everyone, including Peter, home safely.

So, JESUS the MANAGER lays out HIS expectations for HIS followers, the team.

- JESUS knows that the cross is not optional if the game plan is to succeed—not just for the manager, not just for any one player, but for the team.
 - The team can only win if all the players are ready to do three things.

First, they must be ready to deny themselves.

- Self-denial means giving up one's desire to have one's own way, one's own glory and acclaim, so that GOD'S team is successful.

I once served with a pastor who bragged, not about himself, but about everything I did.

- He believed that doing so raised up the work of the whole church.
- It made me want to do better.
- It led me to start bragging about him.
- People got excited and involved.
 - But it wasn't about him or about me.
 - It was about the team.

Second, the team members must be ready to take up their cross.

- I think there's great misunderstanding about what taking up the cross really means.
 - It's not the challenges that come like caring for an invalid family member, or having to work in a difficult job, or living with a challenging health condition, or other such difficulties.
 - You may even hear someone say, "That's the cross I bear."
 - But that's not the cross.
 - Those are just the normal burdens and struggles of life.
 - No, real crosses are the things that we are called to do because of our relationship with CHRIST.
 - Christians may have to take on additional responsibilities or new ministries at church because you know CHRIST needs these things to be done.
 - You may have to deal with the discomfort of talking to or helping someone you would rather not because you sense CHRIST is calling to do so.
 - You may have to speak out or speak up because of a need that requires the love of CHRIST to be proclaimed so that an unfair or unjust situation might change.
 - Personal preferences or desires may have to be set aside for the sake of the Kingdom of GOD.
 - Perhaps you've had to make your own sacrifices of time or wealth to bring others to church, or support a needed ministry, or share the story of JESUS.
 - These are the crosses of CHRIST that we must be ready to take up.

Third, team members must be ready to follow JESUS the MANAGER.

- Walking in the footsteps of JESUS and doing what HE came to do can be a bit intimidating and overwhelming, but if JESUS is going to accomplish the things HE says need to be done, it's going to be through us.
 - These things include serving those who otherwise would not be served;
 - giving to help those who have not;
 - doing things that may not make sense simply because it may be GOD'S foolishness at work.
- Peter and the disciples had to see that JESUS' plan was not about power or wealth or territory, but about mercy and love and acceptance.
- Those things could only come if JESUS went to the cross and had a team ready to follow.
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So, how do we go about finding our crosses?

- It starts with keeping your eyes on JESUS (remember Peter walking on the water?) and watching what HE does and to whom HE does it;
- listening to HIS words and then asking how they apply to us.
- seeing others as people for whom JESUS died,
 - in other words, to become cross-eyed and look at everyone through the filter of the cross where JESUS died for all.

Finding your cross and taking it up may mean:

- serving to or with someone we may not care to because the ministry is important;
- giving sacrificially so that people outside the church may be reached;
- risking our comfort to tell others the good news of JESUS CHRIST.

The bottom line is that taking up the cross means making sacrifices in the name of HIM who sacrificed for us.

- JESUS sacrificed HIMSELF on the cross of Calvary so that the team might get home safely.
 - But playing on HIS team means being ready to sacrifice for others.

“Whoever wants to be MY disciple must deny themselves, take up their cross and follow ME.”

- If you want to play on JESUS' team, you must be ready to bunt when you'd rather swing for the fences.

By the way, the batter that followed Raul Mondesi got a hit, the runner scored, and the Dodgers won.

- There's no "I" in team!