

# Ants and Goldfish

29 January 2006  
(Oak Hill's 3<sup>rd</sup> Birthday)

Bible passages (*The Message*)

Exodus 4:10, 12-17 (*selected verses*)

Moses raised another objection to God: “master, please, I don’t talk well. I’ve never been good with words, neither before nor after you spoke to me. I stutter and stammer...” God said, “So, get going. I’ll be right there with you—with your mouth. I’ll be right there to teach you what to say.”

Moses said, “Oh, Master, please. Send somebody else...” God said, “Don’t you have a brother, Aaron the Levite? He’s good with words; I know he is. He speaks very well...When he sees you he’s going to be glad. You’ll speak to him and tell him what to say. I’ll be right there with you as you speak and with him as he speaks, teaching you step by step. He will speak to the people for you. He’ll act as your mouth, but you’ll decide what comes out of it...”

Mark 6:7-8, 12

Jesus called the Twelve to him, and sent them out in pairs. He gave them authority and power to deal with the evil opposition. He sent them off with instructions...and they preached with joyful urgency.

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**Sermon nugget:** We need to realize that synergy and energy that come together when we work well with one another at home, at work, at The Garden.

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## Message part 1

Jerry Toomer shared a story with some of us a while back—a story that was about ants and goldfish. It goes like this:

An ant, working alone moves 232 grams of earth every six hours. Add another ant, and his productivity increases to 765 grams. Add a third ant, and the output of the first ant rises to 778 grams. This increase occurs despite the fact that they seem in no way to coordinate their efforts. Apparently, a “beneficial tension” is produced by the mere presence of others. Now, remove the second and third ants and the productivity of the original ant drops to 180 grams, less than its original load.

Now, take goldfish; they’re different. One goldfish can master a maze in 35 minutes on the fourth try. Put other fish in the tank, and they will master the maze in 7 minutes. Apparently the first fish teaches the others.

Then Jerry also shared about cockroaches. One of them can master a maze in 4 minutes on the 10<sup>th</sup> trial. Two of them take 6 minutes, and 3 of them require 10 minutes to master the maze.

This lesson ended with the question: Is your team made up of ants, goldfish or cockroaches? And that’s what I want us to think about today. How do we help or hinder one another at home, at work, at school, at The Garden, anywhere? How is the most energy generated to make us all the most effective team members we can be?

There are a couple of Bible stories that give us a glimpse of the importance of working together as a team to do what is being asked. Take Moses, for instance, in our first passage. Moses believed he had had an encounter with God, and at this point, he was pretty sure he was being asked to do something he just couldn’t do. He wasn’t a good speaker, by his own admission, and even though God assured Moses that he would not be alone, that God would be with him, Moses insisted that God send someone else.

According to the story, God was a bit frustrated by Moses, but came up with a possible solution—Aaron, the brother of Moses. This was like an “aha!” moment for Moses, because Aaron had the ability to speak and could share what Moses wanted him to share.

This segment of the story concludes with God saying: “*You’ll speak to him and tell him what to say. I’ll be right there with you as you speak and with him as he speaks, teaching you step by step. He will speak to the people for you. He’ll act as your mouth, but you’ll decide what comes out of it...*” And so, one of the first teams came into being—Moses, Aaron and God.

Jesus also understood the multiplication of talent that can occur with teamwork. He chose 12 folks to be around him, forming the team in whom he was willing to commit his time and energy, teaching, healing, leading by example, empowering. Then, according to our second Bible passage, Jesus sent them out—but not solo—no lone rangers here. Jesus sent them out in pairs, because he knew that people who are well prepared and well-matched can compliment each other, and the capacity for accomplishing what they set out to do is increased more than double.

As the passage from Mark’s gospel says, “*Jesus called the Twelve to him, and sent them out in pairs. He gave them authority and power to deal with the evil opposition. He sent them off with instructions...and they preached with joyful urgency.*”

How and why did all this work so well? Obviously, the message that Moses and Aaron carried, and the message of Jesus that spread because of his team’s work—both, had a profound impact on the history of our world. And I believe one of the key reasons the team worked and the message was carried was that all the players were focused on the goal.

The goal for the disciples was to share the word of God’s saving love to the entire world. With the notable exception of Judas, they were united in trying to follow where they believed God was leading them. That created the focus and synergy needed to “git ‘er done!” They were able to speak and teach and heal because they were committed to following God’s lead, and not their own private agendas. Therein lies one of the keys of effective teamwork—being

united for a common cause, wanting to live out God's direction for our lives corporately.

There's another reason those two different kinds of teams represented in our Bible passages did what they were led to do, and that's reflected in the different abilities and talents represented by the various members of the team. Clearly, Moses was not a strong or confident speaker, and he did not feel that he could get the message across the way it needed to be communicated. Aaron, on the other hand, seemed to be a gifted speaker, so the two complimented each other, and together, they led the people of Israel toward the Promised Land.

I'm sure the same thing was true of the 12 disciples who surrounded Jesus. They weren't perfect, by any means, and they didn't always "get it," but my guess is that their different personalities, backgrounds and skills really came together to form a team that was much stronger together than any of them could be alone. Obviously, they were not all of one mind; they were not clones of one another. However, their various abilities, interests and passions created a whole that was much greater than the sum of its individual parts.

It's clear that it takes various kinds of abilities to get the job done. Take setting up a circus tent, for example. There's no way it can happen with a sole being with a single set of abilities can make it happen. Take a look and see what Dumbo the elephant already knows.

**VIDEO:** *Dumbo*

### Message part 2

I have been reading a book that talks about the necessity of having various kinds of people as a part of a team. The book is by Tom Kelley with Jonathan Littman, and it's entitled *The Ten Faces of Innovation*. The book is about the creativity of a company called IDEO, and some of the keys that organization has discovered to keep an innovative spirit.

A large part of their learning is that an effective organization needs all kinds of folks to keep the creative juices flowing. As you might imagine, the author names 10 different roles that people can play in a business, church, or any work setting, to foster new ideas and to counter those who are so prone to cut them down.

Let me just name a few of the roles that are cited in the book. One is the anthropologist. This is the kind of person who is an observer, one who goes into the field to see how customers are using and responding to various products in order to come up with new ideas. Another is the Cross-Pollinator who works across disciplines to mix and match ideas, people and technology to create innovative ideas that drive growth. The Hurdler is yet another role. That's the kind of person who looks for ways to overcome the limits and challenges in any given situation.

That's just a quick glance at what I'm talking about, but I think the point is clear. We need all kinds of people on a team, contributing their particular viewpoints and understandings in order for a team to be complete. A team built on a variety of talent can produce more innovative results than any single individual can, no matter how gifted that individual may be.

Clearly, the picture of teamwork is not all rosy. I have experienced teams that are less than effective and productive—more cockroach-like, and I suspect you have, too. There is a downside of teams that shows its face in interpersonal conflict, power struggles and unclear objectives. And teams don't just happen; learning and nurturing must go on. Trust must grow and develop, and if all that happens, the energy is unimaginable!

Clearly, God made us for teamwork, for working together, and that's something all of us needs to think about. It might be helpful if we stopped to think about the various teams of which we are part? What role do we play on this team or that one? How do we work and play with others? Are we good team players? Do we give it our best for the overall good? In my view, that's what true teamwork is all about, and I think it's a good way to live and work and play.

### Closing:

Len Sweet, in his book *Soul Tsunami*, writes: "I can't be me without you. *Me* needs its flip-side *we* if we are to *be* what God is calling us to *be*. Collectively we are better than any of us individually."

Working and living together well with others is the way God has intended us to live. As we leave here this morning, I hope and pray we can do it.

Have a good Sunday, and go in peace. Amen.