

## **The Search for Talent**

By: Keith Keyser

Recently the British newsmagazine *The Economist* ran a major story on the difficulty of finding “talent” in the business sector. With the technological advancements of the past twenty years, the need for science-savvy employees has exploded. What is more, middle and upper management is suffering from a dearth of creative minds. As the world scene becomes more economically interdependent, companies are scrambling to find dependable and capable workers to perform the skilled and innovative tasks that fuel mercantile growth. The need is so pressing, that among large American firms, the human resources manager is frequently among the highest paid executives. Similarly, the Church is in dire need of many spiritually talented people to step forward for service to the Lord.

### **An old problem**

The need for Christian talent is nothing new. Proverbs 20:6 asks: “Many a man proclaims his own loyalty, but who can find a trustworthy man?” (NAS.) Elijah lamented the lack of prophets in his day, but was assured by the Lord that he was not alone (1 Kgs. 19:18.) Later there was no one found to step into the gap between Judah and the Lord’s judgment during the time of Ezekiel (Ezek. 22:30.) The Lord Jesus Himself said that “the harvest truly is plenteous but the laborers are few” (Mat. 9:37.) Not much has changed on the contemporary scene. In many assemblies, the lion share of the service rests on the shoulders of a few dedicated – and often overworked – individuals.

There are numerous reasons for the chronic labor shortage among New Testament-style assemblies. For one, the materialistic climate of North America often saps the time and energies of otherwise capable Christians. Sadly, in some believing families more emphasis is put on academic achievement and business success than upon spiritual growth and development of gift. In other places, the older generation is reluctant to include their younger brothers in bearing the responsibilities of the local fellowship. Having long borne the yoke and faced many battles, they find it difficult to cede authority to less experienced believers. Still in other places, modern assemblies suffer the ongoing effects of divisions among them in the past. The people who left in the seventies, eighties, or nineties have not returned, and consequently their children and grandchildren are a total loss to the assembly.

### **The Great Supplier of Talent**

In addressing the talent shortage, one must remember the Lord Jesus’ instruction: “Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest” (Matt. 9:38.) Prayer is a vital component to the raising up of capable servants. The New Testament uses the metaphor of a body to describe the church, and repeatedly calls the Lord Jesus its “Head” (Eph. 1:22; 4:15; 5:23; Col. 1:18; 2:19.) Since the Head is the intelligence center and control room of the body, the example naturally points to the need for the members of the body of Christ – also known as the Church – to go to the head for the supply of their needs. He is able to give the Body whatever it needs, when it requires

it. What is more, prayer expresses dependence on God, and gives Him glory when it is answered. To our shame, our prayer meetings are often the least attended and least interesting meetings. The needs of our time demand that the Church bestir itself to supplication that is focused, sustained, and passionate.

Talent needs to be developed biblically. Timothy was instructed: "...the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2.) He was well-aware of what this entailed, for he himself had been taught by Paul. The venerable apostle spent time teaching Timothy, as well as including him in his service on his second missionary journey. As he matured and gained experience, Paul sent him on important missions to Macedonia, Corinth, Philippi, Thessalonica, and Ephesus (Acts 19:22; 1 Cor. 4:17; Phil. 2:19; 1 Thes. 3:2; 1 Tim. 1:3.) Paul was a firm believer in systematic teaching, as is evidenced by his practice in Ephesus. Out of his regular Bible teaching, the Holy Spirit raised up elders in that city. Paul's influence was also felt in the lives of Titus, Philemon, and numerous believers listed in Romans 16.

### **Training the next generation of servants**

In passing truth on to less experienced saints, Paul was merely following the practice of the Lord Jesus, who spent approximately three years training the twelve disciples. Other key servants of God followed the same pattern. For example, Barnabas spent time with John Mark, who according to church tradition was also mentored by Peter in later years. Elijah trained Elisha. Moses guided the young Joshua. Samuel prepared David for his kingly duties, and young King Joash was taught by Jehoiada the priest.

As well as training men and women who are already in the assembly, believers ought to be seeking to win the lost. Upon conversion their talents and spiritual gifts can then be developed for the Lord's usage. Christ commands us to preach the gospel to every creature (Mk.16:15.) If done with prayer and zeal, Christian witness is bound to deepen the labor pool of the assembly.

In considering the labor shortage in many assemblies, it should be noted that talented believers are also lost to the local fellowship because the mature saints do not take a loving interest in them. In the modern fast-paced world it is easy to fall into the pattern of only seeing our brothers and sisters at the meetings once or twice a week. If co-laborers in the Lord's work are to be developed and encouraged, then relationships must be assiduously cultivated. In short, modern Christians need to rediscover true fellowship. This necessitates a serious investment of time, resources, and love for one another. There are no shortcuts in the Christian life. Like anything else of value, talent will cost a great deal to increase. Eternity will reveal that it was worth the effort to assist God in His great work of building the Church.