



Playing Backup

by Rodolpho Carrasco

Many people ask me how they can get involved in community ministry. Helping kids do their homework sounds appealing. Leading a volunteer group that builds something of lasting significance is motivating. Serving in an evangelistic outreach and seeing people come to Christ that night, inspiring.

Our desire to do outreach ministry has elements of personal gratification mixed in. We want significance. We look for activities with measurable results, preferably in the short term. I say go on and do it. Seek it. Try it. Often, Kingdom advancement occurs through short-term ministry efforts, where we get as many of our needs met as those of the people we seek to serve.

Just leave space for the idea that the most lasting fruit of your outreach efforts may not be in what you personally accomplish. Your most lasting fruit may come when you serve in a support role for someone who was there before you showed up.

I remember the day in 1998 when two teenagers, one black and one Mexican, duked it out in a raw fistfight at the corner of Howard and Navarro streets, where Harambee Ministries is located. Man, were they mad at each other. They were both in our Harambee teen Bible study that met on Tuesday nights. We could stop the fight, but I didn't know how to bring peace between these valuable young men.

But Derek Perkins did. He was the leader of Harambee, a community ministry veteran who helped start this ministry back in 1983. Derek wasn't too disappointed about the fracas because he saw an opportunity to go deeper with these youth. First, he stopped the fight and made them go, well, not to opposite corners, but to different parts of the block. He didn't lecture them. But that weekend, he invited them on a fun fishing trip to Mexico. Both went. They were still angry, but they respected Derek and trusted him to keep the other calm.

They returned with a tale. Out on the Sea of Cortez, the wind kicked up, and waves splashed seawater into their small boat. Slowly, it filled up with water. Far from shore, these two tough guys

on the way. The intern and I stood there, trying to look tough, while Derek talked to the guys. Crisis averted.

Other occasions were not so dramatic. Once, while Derek focused on preparing a lesson for the Tuesday night study, I made a Carl's Jr. run for 40 of the 99-cent burgers. It wasn't a real spiritually significant task but important nonetheless: Two burgers each filled up the guys and kept their attention on Derek and his teaching.

I affirm the desire of individuals and churches to create or lead a unique community outreach ministry. Just know that sometimes we hurt our cause if we cannot flex, like a basketball team, into a support role when necessary. In our outreach efforts, we're often like base-

ball players—we have our position, that's the only one we play. But basketball players can play any position—bring the ball up the court, guard any player, take any shot. In

community ministry, we need less baseball players and more basketball players.

I would be amiss if I failed to mention the joy of supporting others in their community ministry. It was a joy to play backup to Derek. I knew firsthand the need to dramatically reach out to youth in the community, but I didn't know how to go about it. Derek did, and in a real sense, I too helped turn many young people to the hope that is in Christ.

It felt good then. Looking back, it feels great now.

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bailed water, wiping back a few tears of fear as they scooped. They made it back to shore, back to America, back to the 'hood. And they were friends after that.

While Derek was away on that trip, I held down the fort doing mundane organizational stuff. They fished for dorado; I got out the receipts for donations. As he explained to them from the scriptures that Jesus wasn't just for women or white people, I met with volunteers to plan their service activities.

There were other times when I was Derek's direct backup. Some crazy guys were doing selfish things on the corner. Derek was about to walk out the door to confront them, but he needed backup, or at least the appearance of it. I went with him. We grabbed an intern

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