

ROOTING » FOR « RIVALS

HOW COLLABORATION
AND GENEROSITY INCREASE
THE IMPACT OF LEADERS,
CHARITIES, AND CHURCHES

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WITH JILL HEISEY



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Dedicated to the leaders who believe
in a world of abundance,
not scarcity.

And to our HOPE International colleagues,
clients, partners, and donors.
We are privileged to serve alongside you.
Thank you for loving and serving
in the way of Jesus.

You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That's when you discover who you really are, and your place in God's family.

Jesus, THE MESSAGE¹

Contents

Foreword 11

Introduction 17

Part One: Why We Root for Rivals

1. Our Uncommon Unity 29
2. Kingdom over Clan 45
3. Abundance over Scarcity 55

Part Two: How We Root for Rivals

4. Seven Vices vs. Seven Virtues 71
5. Pride vs. Humility 86
6. Greed vs. Generosity 105
7. Gluttony vs. Temperance 123
8. Lust vs. Love 142
9. Envy vs. Contentment 156
10. Vengeance vs. Grace 170
11. Sloth vs. Steadfastness 190

Conclusion 211

Notes 217

Acknowledgments 233

Foreword

It's not about you."

I wish I had embraced this piece of wisdom sooner as a young campus minister with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. I was not well-known among my colleagues for being a team player. I liked being a pioneer, a lone ranger, a one-man show. I liked figuring things out on my own and being a trailblazer for a new generation of nonwhite missionaries. It worked for me, and my name quickly rose in national prominence.

Fresh out of college, I didn't want to serve an existing InterVarsity chapter, so I planted a new one on the Harvard campus. And because the results exceeded expectations, I quickly solo-planted another chapter at Boston University, and eventually in three other states. I wrote papers, manuals, and a book that detailed how to effectively do campus ministry, *without* consulting any peers. One of the biggest discipleship moments of my early marriage came when my wife, Nancy, and I were asked to co-direct a summer program in Vietnam. "Co-direct? What's that?"

Intentionally working alongside others was not my top priority. I sincerely wanted to serve the Lord. I urgently wanted

FOREWORD

to rescue lives being lost and to transform campuses needing renewal. I earnestly wanted more students to follow Jesus into world missions. But, deep down, something else was true—maybe even more true: *my ministry was all about me.*

My work. My gifts. My reputation. My success. I needed to learn that this wasn't the way God intended for His Kingdom to operate. So God sent me to an unreached country halfway around the world for four years, so I would see how He was using *other workers* to accomplish His purposes. To discover how much I *needed them*. To wonder if I was as much their “mission field” as the people in that country.

As I began repenting of my selfishness, pride, and independence, I began learning to embrace the upside-down Kingdom values that Jesus proclaimed—humility, generosity, and interdependency. As I began dying to my own name, I began living to see only *Jesus'* name being lifted high.

The idol of “me and mine” is deeply ingrained in all of us and our individual organizations. Its fingers are wrapped tightly around the generous, joyful life God wants us to live, and it squeezes a little tighter each time it feels threatened. Let others work with you to accomplish God's mission? *You'll look weak or unnecessary if you let others help.* Cheer for those you're competing with? *You'll never get your time in the spotlight.* Help someone become more successful than you? *You and your ministry will be supplanted. Is that what you want?*

Those questions will always persist. But after twenty years in campus ministry, and with each step into a new leadership role, I've shed more and more of my lone-ranger tendencies and embraced the importance of generous collaboration. I've learned a key lesson for any leader in faith-based work: Building the Kingdom of God is a team sport, not a competition. We're better together, not apart.

FOREWORD

It would be easy for my fellow campus ministry leaders to look at one another as competitors. After all, we are doing similar ministry, driven by similar goals, and sometimes working at the same campuses. We might assume that there are only so many students to go around and perhaps, if we were being honest, so few donors to go around. We could easily adopt an “us vs. them” mentality.

According to the values of the world, we should be competitors. We should view one another with wary skepticism, as threats to our individual success and possible disruptors of what we individually want to do. Yet the values of the world don’t dictate how we view one another; the values of God’s Kingdom do. We aren’t competitors in a limited marketplace. We’re partners in God’s mission! When this truth captivates our hearts, it pushes out any sinful tendencies toward selfishness, pride, and independence.

Twice per year, Nancy and I join the presidents of five other campus ministries, along with their spouses, for a weekend of fellowship. I treasure these times. We carry each other’s burdens, pray, and cheer each other’s successes. We invest in each other by sharing what we’re learning in our own leadership challenges. We have become friends and partners. In recent years, our commitment to partnership has also led to growing friendship and partnership among our key leaders. Vice presidents of operations, leadership development, fundraising, field ministries, and marketing meet annually in their respective groups to share best practices, new ideas, and common struggles. On the surface, it seems like a risky idea: Why would we share our most intimate struggles or our most successful strategies? Can you imagine two professional sports teams taking a joint retreat in the middle of the season? Or the CEOs of Microsoft and Apple taking a break from their battles for marketplace dominance to encourage one another and swap ideas?

FOREWORD

We do this to model our commitment to the apostle Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 3:7, 9 (NIV): "Neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. . . . For we are co-workers in God's service." We do this because we're on the same team. We're servants of God's mission. When one of us succeeds, we all win, because Jesus' name is lifted up on campus.

It's not about me. Embracing this truth has prepared me to lead InterVarsity toward a new season of generosity and partnerships. As I write this, there are over one thousand college campuses with no discernible student ministry. Millions of students lack the opportunity to hear the gospel or to join a Christian community on campus. In the past, we might have waved a halfhearted "Good luck!" to our peer organizations while trying to reach them by ourselves. No longer. It's not about planting organizational flags or making organizations great but about advancing God's mission and declaring God's name to be great on these unreached campuses. We're working together to mobilize intercessors. We're designing platforms to give away our best ministry insights and tools to anyone who wants to minister on campus. We're sharing technology and working together on legal challenges. We're asking one another: "What would happen if we stopped caring who was bigger, or better, or the most well-known? What could we accomplish if we stopped competing and started partnering? What needs to happen so that every corner of every campus hears the gospel?"

When Peter and Chris invited me to write this foreword, I marveled at God's sense of humor. It wasn't that long ago that I wasn't even aware of other workers, much less rooting for them. Today, I find myself in roles that are primarily about advocating for and helping others advance their missions. As president of InterVarsity and as a trustee of Fuller Seminary,

FOREWORD

I steward ministries that develop and prepare the next generation of leaders for other organizations and the Church. As a trustee of a Christian foundation, I channel financial resources to other ministries. As a senior leader, I invest much of my time mentoring younger men and women to accomplish *their* calling.

I urge you to study this book and take it to heart. *Rooting for Rivals* is a call to a fresh vision for our organizations and churches. It's a road map to embedding a spirit of humility and generosity in our hearts and in those of the teams we lead. And it's a field guide to the sins that bedevil our best attempts to partner and mire our ministries in lone-ranger thinking. You will find parts of it challenging or convicting. I certainly have. But I suspect you'll also find, like I have, a renewed passion for God's people to work together as one body in Christ.

You're in good hands. God has used Peter and Chris's book *Mission Drift* to equip thousands of faith-based organizations, including InterVarsity, for better Kingdom service by keeping them Mission True—radically focused on Christ and His mission and deeply committed to keeping the gospel as the center of their work.

For as long as I've known them, I've benefited from the deep wells of wisdom and humility that God has dug in their hearts. I'm grateful for their long history of leadership and for their willingness to share the lessons they've learned, even ones that have come the hard way. And I'm inspired to see how God's Kingdom will advance as more organizations and leaders take the lessons of this book to heart.

It's not about you or me. Thanks be to God!

—Tom Lin, President and CEO,
InterVarsity Christian Fellowship

Introduction

Amid the process of writing *Mission Drift* several years ago, I (Peter) was returning home from a conference in Cape Town, South Africa, when I saw Wess Stafford—someone I deeply respect—across the airport concourse. At the time, Wess was the president of Compassion International, one of the largest nonprofits in the world. In terms of organizational size and reputation, he was Michael Jordan, and I was the kid shooting hoops at the park waiting for his growth spurt. Wess was a keynote speaker at the conference, where he not only presented but also was bombarded during meals and in the hallways by people eager to have a few minutes with him.

He must have been exhausted.

As he sat at the airport, reading a book and presumably beginning to relax, I awkwardly approached him, like a fan seeking an autograph. After a bumbling introduction about how I appreciated his leadership, I asked if I could ask him a few questions. His response exuded uncommon generosity, “Of course! Would you like to sit down?”

He had no idea who I was, yet he gave me his undivided attention. Putting his book away, Wess answered my questions and

showed genuine interest in our conversation until it was time to board the plane. He responded with patience and thoughtfulness. It was clear that he was doing more than just trying to help; he seemed eager to know me and to cheer me on in my own journey. He embraced the mission I described as though it were his own, and his entire posture seemed to offer, “How can I serve you?”

Although we had just met, he was rooting for me.

When we began discussing the causes of mission drift, he shared freely from his experiences. Displaying unusual openhandedness, he offered to share any of Compassion’s documents and manuals that might be helpful in our research. There was absolutely no expectation of reciprocation and certainly no benefit to him from sharing.

Though HOPE International is far smaller than Compassion, we are also a faith-based international nonprofit. Many donors give to both HOPE and Compassion. In many respects, we could be considered rivals.

› **RIVAL:** a peer organization appearing to compete for funding, staff, or recognition.

Even though we worked at different organizations, Wess graciously offered assistance. In retrospect, it wasn’t just Wess who modeled this type of radical generosity. This attitude prevailed among the exemplary leaders we interviewed in *Mission Drift*.

They consistently went out of their way to help. Though they were busy leaders, they always seemed to make time. They shared openly about their models and missions. They answered our questions, and our follow-up questions, and our follow-up-to-the-follow-up questions. They seemed to have nothing to

hide from us, no proprietary information or trade secrets. They gave with no strings attached, and talked with us without any expectations we would feature them in the book. They actively pursued our good and not just their own.

It was as if they had a calling and passion that superseded their organization—that helping *us* was in some way part of *their* mission. They acted as if we weren't leaders of rival organizations competing for funding or recognition but friends on the same team working toward the same goal. They cared deeply about the work they do, but at the core, these leaders seemed to think more about the Kingdom and less about their organizations.

These encounters with Wess and other Mission True leaders left a lasting impression. We were inspired by these leaders who are more animated by advancing God's Kingdom than merely building great organizations.

This point, which we almost missed, is significant. Beneath the very best Mission True organizations are leaders who believe they have a calling beyond building their organizations. They see themselves as part of a much bigger team pursuing a much bigger mission.

They root for their rivals.

Work Appears and Then Vanishes

Just 28 percent of the roughly fifty thousand nonprofits that obtained tax-exempt status in the United States in 2005 reported financial activity a decade later.¹ In just ten years, roughly three out of four nonprofits ceased to exist. A mere eighty-five organizations have endured five hundred years or more.² The remaining millions of organizations closed, merged, or experienced some other demise. They are gone.

This list of shuttered institutions includes all types of charitable organizations—schools, hospitals, shelters, youth ministries. Odds of survival are slim.

This morbid reality is important for all leaders to acknowledge. Our work is “a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.”³

Even the most talented leaders and brilliant business plans will have faded from memory fifty years from now. We’ve authored this book for men and women working in Christian faith-based nonprofit organizations of all varieties, though we hope others will benefit from it as well. For these leaders, the prospect of being forgotten should not lead to discouragement. Christians understand the mist we are. Our organizations, endeavors, strategies, initiatives, and plans will one day fade from relevance.

We will be forgotten.

This might seem like an odd case to make in a leadership book. If our organizations will one day vanish, why care about leading more effectively? If it’s true most of our organizations will be forgotten, won’t that drive us to focus exclusively on maximizing our own prosperity or trying to secure some sort of enduring legacy? If it’s true our organizations will not last generations into the future, why do the hard work of building infrastructures, raising funds, creating strategic plans, and innovating? Why deal with difficult employees or disgruntled donors?

For Christians, the answer is clear. We are not just building organizations. Our success is not defined by where we stand in relation to our “rivals” or how long our name endures. We are participating in an eternal Kingdom. We are members of a community not marked by organizational boundaries but by the blood of our Savior.

As a result, we have a different, cruciform view of *winning*. Up-and-to-the-right growth is not the only metric for success for followers of the One whose legacy on earth was defined by self-sacrifice and love for those who could never repay Him.

In that light, rooting for rivals—cheering on and coming to the aid of those the world sees as our competitors—doesn't feel all that crazy. Hundreds of years from now, our descendants will likely not know our names, nor those of our organizations. But if we successfully embrace the unity Jesus taught, our descendants will remember what the Church did together.⁴ They will remember that this generation continued the work of bringing good news to the poor, proclaiming freedom for prisoners, and setting the oppressed free.⁵ They will remember that the gospel was translated into every language, racial injustice was confronted, and extreme poverty was eradicated.

If our descendants talk about us, they will talk about the miraculous ways God worked in and through the Church to bring hope, truth, compassion, and joy to our world. We can imagine no greater success.

Organizations come and go, but we are part of a movement that has no end.

Mission Not Drifting: Now What?

This book is for leaders who are untroubled about whether their names or organizations will be remembered five hundred years from now, whose ambition extends beyond themselves. For those who can join A.W. Tozer in his prayer, “Make me ambitious to please Thee even if as a result I must sink into obscurity and my name be forgotten as a dream.”⁶ For leaders who anchor their work to the things that endure forever

and elevate their vision to something bigger and better than building an organization.

This is a book for leaders obsessed with making the name of our God great and entirely unconcerned about making their own names great—and for those who aspire to become that type of leader.

Mission Drift exposed a troubling reality within faith-based organizations: many are at risk of losing their purpose and the very thing that makes them unique. As we encountered the risks of drift within our organization and conducted our research with hundreds of faith-based organizations of all varieties, we heard the same story again and again. Faith-based organizations were forgetting why they existed. The irony was that for many *faith*-based organizations, faith was slowly becoming irrelevant.

We've realized since writing *Mission Drift* that even if we get our own proverbial house in order, our broader mission will fail miserably if we stop there. We've come to believe that no matter how many guardrails we put in place or how many bylaws we draft to fend off drift, faith-based organizations cannot be Mission True unless they exist for a purpose beyond their organizational borders.

Seek First

Jesus reminds us in clear language to “*seek first* the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”⁷

To do this as leaders of faith-based organizations is much harder than it might seem. Because of how deeply entrenched we are in cultural values of winning, competition, and ownership, we regularly lose sight of how radical our organizations would be if we were truly to *seek first* the Kingdom of God.

And this, in short, is exactly what we mean by challenging readers of this book to *root for their rivals*. Because in the curious, upside-down way of the Kingdom of God, God converts our competing into rooting and our rivals into allies. *Rooting for Rivals* is an invitation to reject territorialism in pursuit of a higher, more compelling mission. To fundamentally alter the posture and practices with which we love and serve, based upon our shared core commitments as followers of Christ. To view our organizations not as grand murals but as pieces of a mosaic created by and for our Master Artist.

Rooting for Rivals is an invitation for faith-based organizations to be known for outrageous generosity and openhandedness, as we collectively pursue a calling higher than any one organization's agenda. It's an invitation to live not as warring clans but as people of a united Kingdom. To reject comparison and rivalry and pursue collaboration and friendship.

The goal of this book is to equip leaders of faith-based organizations to become exceptionally generous leaders through a posture of radical openhandedness. The first three chapters share *why* we should root for our rivals. The remainder of the book focuses on *how* we root for our rivals, as we wage war on the sins that cause us to become isolated and insular actors starring in our own small plays. The path forward, we'll argue, demands we name the "sin which clings so closely"⁸ and pursue a life of personal and organizational virtue.

We can write this book only because we are beneficiaries of leaders who have modeled this posture in our lives. We could fill a chapter with names of leaders who have shown radical concern with *our* success, regardless of whether they stood to benefit from it personally. These leaders—forebears and peers at fellow faith-based institutions, donors, professors, and pastors—have inspired this book, and many of their stories inhabit it.

Better Together

Looming high above busy Broadway Avenue in downtown Denver stands a historic mansion that until recently was rapidly losing the grandeur of its youth. Years of neglect had resulted in the once-pristine brick Victorian's slow conversion into a neighborhood eyesore and a hotbed of drugs, violence, and other illicit activities.⁹

But when Derek Kuykendall stumbled across the property, all he saw was potential. As executive director of Providence Network, a faith-based transitional housing organization, he believes in redemption stories. Through a series of remarkable events, Providence Network purchased the home with plans to rehabilitate it for men and women rebuilding their lives.

But they did not go at it alone. Kuykendall desired to do more than expand the boundaries of his organization.

“Our friends Matt and Nikki Wallace lead Dry Bones, an organization serving Denver’s homeless street youth community,” Kuykendall shared. “Together, we began to dream about what it might look like if we brought multiple organizations together under one roof.”¹⁰

Providence Network didn’t specialize in youth homelessness. Dry Bones didn’t specialize in transitional housing. But they’re now learning from each other as they serve one of Denver’s most vulnerable populations in the restored mansion.

In this flophouse-turned-home, twelve formerly homeless youth now live in community with six staff members—a team drawn from both organizations. To further support their residents, Providence Network and Dry Bones have partnered with Purple Door, a nonprofit coffee shop and roastery focused on employing and training at-risk youth. Together, these three faith-based organizations leverage each other’s respective strengths and fulfill their mission more effectively than they ever could

apart. This joint venture is a picture of institutional humility, each organization recognizing its own strengths and limitations and celebrating the power of partnership.

“At the Dry Bones fundraising banquet, Matt Wallace invited me to share about Providence Network. He welcomed me up, lauding all the great things about my organization,” Kuykendall said. “Anyone that works for a nonprofit knows how crazy that is. He invited me, the executive director of a ‘competing’ organization, to share about *our* work at *their* gala. That just isn’t normal. It doesn’t happen.”¹¹

When the mansion was still under renovation, I (Chris) took a tour. With each step, I grew increasingly excited. Kuykendall was right. What was happening under this roof was entirely abnormal. It was remarkable. But I began to wonder what might be possible if this spirit of collaboration *became* normal. What might happen to our communities—and to us—if this sort of partnership wasn’t surprising?

It’s our hope that *Rooting for Rivals* will help propel this sort of partnership into the realm of normalcy. In this book, we hope to provide a window into the virtues and practices of openhanded and extraordinarily generous leaders—and examine how these virtues can percolate into and reach beyond our organizations. We hope to demonstrate why rooting for rivals brings life to you and your organization and fosters enduring impact for the Kingdom. We also hope to provide practical examples and case studies to guide you in living out these principles and bypassing potential landmines.

We hope you’ll join us in rooting for our rivals.

»» PART ONE ««

WHY WE ROOT FOR RIVALS

//////// CHAPTER 1 //////////

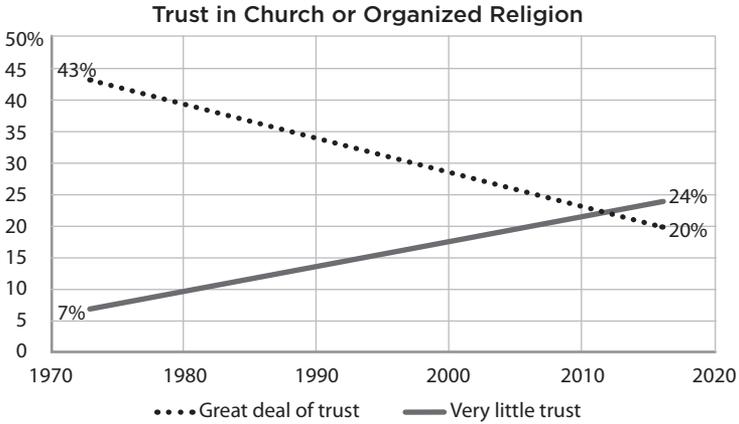
Our Uncommon Unity

For faith-based organizations, the landscape is rapidly changing. The Pew Trusts assesses confidence Americans place in our fifteen largest public institutions. The military and small business rank highest. Congress and big business rank lowest.¹

When they began doing the survey in 1973, 43 percent of Americans said they placed a “great deal” of trust in “the church or organized religion.” Today, just 20 percent do. In 1973, just 7 percent said they placed “very little” trust in the church. Today, 24 percent do. Over the past few decades, the percentage of Americans who trust the church has been cut in half. And the number of those who strongly distrust the church has more than tripled.

Governmental pressure has also increased. Over the last decade, Pew Trusts states that the United States has moved from a country of “low” religious freedom restrictions to “moderate” restrictions.² Faith-based mentoring organizations, homeless shelters, universities, and international relief and development organizations feel this surge in suspicion.

Some of the increasing mistrust results from changes in our culture, but some is a direct indication of our own state. The



world has seen celebrity pastors, faith-based nonprofit leaders, and priests abuse their power, fall into moral failure, and purvey their influence for unseemly political aims—breeding well-deserved suspicion and skepticism. As Beth Moore wrote, “The enemy’s hope for Christians is that we will either be so ineffective we have no testimony, or we’ll ruin the one we have.”³³

Trust in faith-based organizations is also eroding for a subtler but equally dangerous reason: When our organizations embody a rugged individualism and fuel division between people intended to be united in mission, we deserve the world’s skepticism. When we act like we’re entirely disparate organizations—each responsible for ourselves alone—it confuses the culture around us. When we concern ourselves only with our own organization’s success, the world wonders, *Are you on the same team or not? Are you allies or rivals? Why such division?*

United We Stand?

In our culture, division runs rampant. We disagree—often passionately—on politics, church, sexuality, science, and so many other issues.

We feel the tension in our homes when we gather at the Thanksgiving table or around the tree at Christmas. We hear the division in daily shouting matches on the news. We scroll past it—or engage in it—on social media. Every year, we are becoming more and more divided, with several research studies concluding our country has not been this polarized and divided since the Civil War.⁴

And within Christian faith-based organizations, we feel it acutely. Intuitively, we know we’re supposed to be on the same team, but reality tells another story. If we are at all unified, it’s probably in our agreement that we are a nation and a Church divided. Fragmented, really.

Guidestar lists nearly eighty-five thousand nonprofit organizations in the United States that self-identify as Christian.⁵ “The Center for the Study of Global Christianity counts forty-five thousand denominations around the world,” wrote Jennifer Powell McNutt in *Christianity Today*, “with an average of 2.4 new ones forming every day. The center has an admittedly broad definition of *denomination*, but even a dramatically lower count will be absurdly high in light of Jesus’s prayer in John 17 that we all might be one.”⁶ In 1 Corinthians, Paul chastises Christ’s followers in Corinth who have split into four groups: “Is Christ divided?”⁷ What would he think of forty-five thousand?

John 17—Jesus’ longest recorded prayer in Scripture—rebukes the present situation of the Church. Its main theme is the unity of Jesus’ followers. He prays “that [we] may become perfectly one,” so that the world may know the Father’s love.⁸ The implication is that our witness to the world hinges on our unity.

“Christ’s prayer for unity and endurance is formed, uttered, and accomplished at the greatest hour of trial in all of redemptive history,” writes K. A. Ellis. “At this critical juncture there is one relationship on his mind, and it is ours.”⁹

Jesus says our oneness is the way that others will identify us as His followers: “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”¹⁰ Yet as clearly as Jesus prioritized unity among His followers, we are quick to disregard it. Our natural inclination is to splinter. For Protestants, *protest* is in our very name. In our tribe, when disagreements emerge, we split.

There are important and legitimate reasons for churches to split and organizations to define strong boundaries. There is a time to separate. But there is an opportunity for Christians to find unity even in disagreement. There is an opportunity for us to build bridges across the lines that divide us. In this bright age of individualism, intellectual property rights, and splintering denominations, our unity in Christ is fading.¹¹ But, “How good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!”¹²

The unity of God’s people is the first reason we can and should root for our rivals. And when we consider the power and beauty of what we hold in common, sometimes our divisions seem almost trivial.

What Color Is Your Buggy?

I (Peter) live in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, where tourism—a booming local industry—is driven by a fascination with the Amish. Visitors arrive to observe this community, intentionally set apart from technology and modern dress. Tourists dine in Amish homes, take buggy rides, and tour working farms. In some ways it’s like visiting Colonial Williamsburg and seeing a snapshot of life frozen in time, but these are not actors. Very real convictions motivate their eschewal of modernity.

The modern-day Amish have their roots in sixteenth-century Europe, where their ancestors faced extreme religious

persecution. They were so strong in their convictions that thousands were martyred, being burned at the stake, drowned, and beheaded. The Amish arrived in North America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Shaped by their experience of persecution as well as their understanding of Scripture, they established a life and culture set apart from the larger society.

Soon it wasn't enough to be separate from the outside world. Even within the Amish community, schisms formed. Once they were no longer persecuted, they seemed to turn against each other. What most Lancaster County tourists don't realize when coming to see "the Amish" is that they are encountering many distinct groups.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, there were three or four affiliations. By 2012, there were more than forty, not including smaller subgroups. Rifts among the groups have been caused less by issues foundational to the faith than by matters such as the use of buttons and zippers. Churches have split based upon a disagreement between those who wear two suspenders versus one suspender, and then split again over whether the suspender should fall across the right or left shoulder.¹³

The division can even be spotted in the buggies. While driving through Amish communities, you may come across black, brown, yellow, and white buggies. Each color is an external sign stating, "We are not like *them*." It signifies a separate Amish or Mennonite church faction. The Byler Amish are distinguished by their yellow-roofed buggy, the Nebraska or Old School Amish for their white-topped buggy, and the Peachy Amish for their all-black buggies.¹⁴

"You have to get the most powerful magnifying glass to see the hairs that resulted in the splits," reflected Charlie Kreider, a friend who grew up in the Mennonite Church in Lancaster County.¹⁵ Disagreements over the letter of the law run through

the paint, proving that just about anything can drive a wedge between families and friends of the same faith conviction.

Our propensity to divide runs counter to Jesus' prayer for unity and propels us to root against our rivals. And these somewhat arbitrary distinctions can have deadly consequences.

Calipers, Nursery Rhymes, and Emblems

Several times over the past few years, I (Chris) have visited the Kigali Genocide Memorial in Rwanda. The first exhibit in the memorial displays an ominous image. At first glance, the picture is innocuous enough. It is far less grisly than many of the pictures throughout the rest of the memorial. But it is far more haunting.

In the picture, a Rwandan man sits in an examination room. A Belgian examiner measures the width and length of the man's nose with a metal caliper. He then measures the eyes of the Rwandan man, contrasting and comparing the shape and size of the man's eyes to a chart of various cultural eye shapes.

We now know that following World War I Belgian colonizers sent scientists to Rwanda, wielding "scales and measuring tapes and calipers, and they went about weighing Rwandans, measuring Rwandan cranial capacities, and conducting comparative analyses of the relative protuberance of Rwandan noses."¹⁶

These tools, though far less violent than the machetes and guns used to perpetrate the genocide, are far more barbaric. They were used to draw distinctions and grant favored status to Rwanda's Tutsi minority, who were seen as more evolved (i.e., more European), while the majority Hutus became oppressed and increasingly resentful. When walking through the genocide memorial, jarring images of soldiers and militants line the walls. But it is this seemingly benign activity—a scientist wielding a

caliper—that created division and preceded the slaughter of nearly one in ten Rwandan people.

First the calipers and scales were dispensed. Soon the common physical appearances of the Hutus and Tutsis were codified. Then, beginning in 1933, government officials mandated Rwandans record these differentiations between Hutus and Tutsis on identification cards. As the genocide unfolded, perpetrators used these cards and physical differentiations to separate neighbors from each other. To separate friends and groups of students from their peers. To determine who lived and who died.

At the memorial, the second floor exhibits the terrible realities of genocides committed across the world and across history. In each case, division precedes violence. The Nazis forced Jewish men, women, and children to adorn their clothing or an armband with the Star of David. Turkish military and government officials organized the genocide against hundreds of thousands of Armenians who were identified as Christians on their national identification cards.¹⁷

My family recently lived in the Dominican Republic for a few months. There, we learned about the history of Hispaniola and some of the horrific massacres carried out against ethnic groups on the island. In 1804, Haitian dictator Jean-Jacques Dessalines murdered all French residents who were unable to sing a Haitian nursery rhyme in Creole.

In a horrific turnabout, in 1937, Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo commanded his troops to round up dark-skinned people living near the Haitian border. Once they did so, journalist Michele Wucker recounts that the soldiers held up sprigs of parsley and asked, “‘What is this thing called?’ The terrified victim’s fate lay in the pronunciation of the answer.”¹⁸

If the victims were unable to get the Spanish just right, they were killed and thrown into the Dajabón River, known

commonly as the Massacre River in commemoration of the thousands of people who were killed because of their inability to say *perejil*—parsley—correctly.

Massacre River flows between the Dominican Republic and Haiti. This geographic divide is emblematic of the many divides we create between ourselves. Caliper or nursery rhyme. Badge or identification card. These create borders between us, separating men and women from each other, signifying those who have more (and less) worth.

As Christians, we unequivocally reject these symbols and signs of superiority, affirming that all people have been created equally in the very image of God. But, believers and unbelievers alike, we are quick to form divides and take sides.

Contrived Competition

Social psychologist Christena Cleveland shares about a 1954 social experiment titled “The Robber’s Cave” by Muzafer Sherif.¹⁹ The study explored what would happen if you take a group of homogenous and healthy kids and put them in a position of focused competition with each other. The 1950s were a period of such social experiments, and Sherif and his team gathered a group of eleven-year-old boys and told them that they were going to have a summer at camp. This became a summer-long experiment on creating conflict and managing hostility.

Gathering at a major state park in Oklahoma, the teams spent two weeks together bonding and forming their organizational identity. One group chose the name the Rattlers and the other group chose the name the Eagles. When the groups were brought together, Sherif posed as the camp handyman and observed what happened as they created a greater sense of competition among these boys.

Remember, this was a homogenous group of boys who were *randomly* assigned to different teams.

While the boys initially got along well, the competitions became more intense. Tug-of-war. Sports. Games where there would always be one winner and one loser. The winning team received prizes and recognition at meals. The losing team seethed. In a matter of days, the mood of the camp turned dangerously hostile. The Rattlers raided the Eagles' cabin. The Eagles torched the Rattlers' flag and began collecting rocks to throw at their opponents. The atmosphere grew so hostile that the boys had to be forcibly separated. How quickly these boys identified with their clan and were willing to do anything at all to the other! The teams were randomly assigned, yet they quickly became rivals willing to do whatever possible to tear the other down.

It might seem absurd to think of professionals, and particularly faith-based leaders, behaving the same way: Team Methodists vs. Team Lutherans. Team clean water vs. Team Bible translation. World Relief vs. World Vision. HOPE International vs. Opportunity International. Thankfully, we aren't in the habit of torching one another's property, but we wonder if our rivalry wiring is so deep that we often act like the Rattlers and the Eagles. If we're honest, we might be just as quick to throw stones—even when we'd objectively agree the other group is doing important, Kingdom-building work.

After hearing two nonprofits describe each other as rivals, Jeff Rutt, entrepreneur and philanthropist, reflected, "They are choosing the wrong enemy!"²⁰ When we think of other organizations as our competition, we are choosing the wrong villain. We *should* fight and struggle—but not against one another. The competition is poverty. The foe is injustice. The opponent is our own sinfulness. The enemy is the evil one. "For we do

not wrestle against flesh and blood,” Paul writes, “but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”²¹

We believe in the power of competition. In both the private and social sectors, organizations can propel their peers toward greater effectiveness and efficiency. But it’s so easy to forget that these peer organizations are not our opponents. Competition against one another is just as contrived as the Rattlers battling the Eagles, and it distracts from our true battle.

What if we were to believe that there was another way of looking at the world? What if our faith compels us to discover such a different worldview?

As people united in Christ, we are invited to dramatically expand our definition of “us” and ensure that it extends across organizational, political, racial, and denominational divides.

“Very soon we will find it difficult to sustain the metaphor of the ‘body of Christ,’” said Ajith Fernando, author and Youth for Christ Sri Lanka teaching director. “We believe in ‘a lot of bodies’ of Christ . . . [but] there is one body of Christ.”²²

What if we believed, like Fernando, that there simply are no competing teams within the body of Christ? There is either one body or there is not. Embracing this worldview would make our witness, our friendships, and our impact exceedingly greater.

For followers of Christ, “Winning is when we are united, not when one has won and the other has lost,” Fernando argues.²³

We believe the increase of external pressure on faith-based groups might provide an unexpected opportunity to rediscover our unity in Christ. As the culture around us in this country grows increasingly suspicious of and unfamiliar with our faith, it provides a new opportunity for Christians to share and show what we are *for*. To lead and serve differently. To focus on our

unified mission and tenaciously pursue it. To do more together than we ever could do alone.

From Competition to Collaboration

In this new cultural moment, there are trends accelerating an opportunity for Christians to better work together. Perhaps the most salient among these trends is the belief among academics, grantmakers, and nonprofit thought leaders that solving the big problems in our world will depend on organizations working in collaboration with, not in isolation from, one another.

“No single organization is responsible for any major social problem, nor can any single organization cure it,” wrote John Kania and Mark Kramer on the *collective impact* trend in the Stanford Social Innovation Review. “Large-scale social change requires broad cross-sector coordination.”²⁴

Mike Brock, chief strategy officer at Transforming the Bay with Christ (TBC), couldn’t agree more. Convinced that churches and nonprofits could do more together than alone, Brock hoped to systematically address homelessness in the San Francisco Bay Area. TBC began gathering Bay-area Christian leaders across various domains—including technology, innovation, business, and churches—to collectively build models for holistic and systemic change.²⁵

Brock shared, “We’ve gathered forty-six different organizations to collectively study the factors of homelessness and figure out how we can collectively address this growing epidemic.”

Knowing that God is already at work in the area, TBC sought out people, churches, and organizations already serving. “We don’t want to usurp the work that God is already doing in our cities,” Brock said. “We want to add to it.” One of the first ways they addressed homelessness was to actively pursue job

creation, recognizing underemployment and unemployment as key contributors to homelessness.

Teaming up to pioneer new employment opportunities in the Bay Area, Brock first connected with former NASA engineer Paddy Brady. Brady had retired at a young age after working on the International Space Station and the Hubble Space Telescope. Since that time, he had founded a faith-based nonprofit that specializes in bringing solar-powered appliances to communities in Malawi in an effort to promote self-sufficiency. Brock challenged Brady to create a long-term, sustainable job solution for the homeless far closer to home.

“What about an LED solar factory in the Bay Area?” Brady asked.

Modeling a Kingdom-centered, collaborative approach to addressing homelessness, TBC joined forces with Brady and his friend Tom McClellan to found Bright Vision Solar, the first LED solar factory in the San Francisco Bay Area created exclusively to employ the homeless community. As a result, formerly homeless men and women know the dignity and security of earning a living wage.

For years, Brady helped out at soup kitchens to serve the homeless, and McClellan donated clothes to those most in need. But when they collectively tapped into their gifts, callings, and talents for the Kingdom of God, the results were much greater than they could have imagined, and surpassed what they could have done on their own.

To reach more people impacted by homelessness, TBC has also extended their partnerships to create aquaponic and hydroponic gardens to help grow nutritious food for the formerly homeless population. They’ve also gathered forty-one churches across the Bay Area to share God’s love in word and deed with the men and women served through these programs.

As TBC works collaboratively with Christian leaders across various domains to effect lasting, holistic change, it is reaping the benefits of treating peers not as opponents but as friends and partners.

Intentional collaboration allows us to participate in more significant initiatives with far greater impact.

The Power of Pretzels

To compete or partner aren't the only options. While our instinct may be to push "competitors" away, there is strength in choosing proximity. We have to look no further than Hollywood (entertainment), Silicon Valley and Austin (technology), and Napa Valley (wine) for examples of competitors thriving in and through proximity.

Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where HOPE International is headquartered, is also home to Sturgis Pretzels, the oldest commercial pretzel company in the country. In almost every small town in Lancaster (believe us: we're regular partakers!) you can find pretzel enterprises large and small baking away, even though the local market is saturated with competitors. Since its founding in 1861, the pretzel industry has exploded into a half-billion-dollar industry. Over 150 years later, 80 percent of pretzels sold in the United States are still made in Pennsylvania.²⁶

Harvard Business School professor Michael Porter described the benefits of this type of proximity in his seminal essay on cluster theory in 1998,²⁷ but in our digital age, this proximity is possible even when organizations aren't based in the same city. Popular among the creative industries, specifically, are the slogans "rising tide society" and "community over competition." These trends are popular hashtags, but they are more than that. They capture an ideal among emerging entrepreneurs.

And, they've resulted in the launch of Rising Tide Society, a network of photographers, web designers, visual artists, and other artisanal entrepreneurs all rallied together under this banner.

The entrepreneurs endorsing this movement openly share their business plans and their Rolodexes, and cheer each other on. Today, the Rising Tide Society comprises four hundred chapters across the world with tens of thousands of members.²⁸

"We're all in this together . . . big dreamers, risk takers, and ground shakers," wrote Natalie Franke, a wedding photographer and founder of Rising Tide Society. "Leadership doesn't have to be lonely. It doesn't have to mean going at it alone."²⁹

In the technology and software development world, the trend toward *open-source* development—in which developers make their source code freely available for others to study, alter, or distribute—has moved from a nascent idea to an industry mainstay in just decades.³⁰

These trends define the new way leaders see the world. Collective impact, open-source, cluster theory, and *community over competition* are all ideas coined outside of the Church. If leading organizational thinkers believe this is true without sharing a bedrock of faith, how much truer should it be for those of us who do?

The Invitation

As followers of Jesus, we are all invited to join God's story of restoration. Jesus taught His disciples to pray for God's Kingdom to come and His will to be done not only in heaven, where all is new, but here on earth, where the consequences of the Fall are ubiquitous. The Son of God secured our redemption, but restoration is an ongoing work. As Christ's followers, we have

the opportunity to work as one body to reclaim *shalom*: peace, flourishing, the world as God created it to be. That is a grand mission and it necessitates our unity.

We've entered a time when the Church is no longer associated with love and compassion but rather judgment, condemnation, and infighting.³¹ We're no longer known for the sacrifice or humility Jesus modeled but rather for hypocritically failing to look beyond ourselves and our issues. If we want this to change, it's time to focus on our unified mission above our organizational agendas.

We need to look beyond our nonprofit boundaries to catch a glimpse of a bigger and bolder vision of the Kingdom of God. Our organizations are small players in a much more significant story. Understanding this story and the imperative of unity among followers of Christ should help us to do more than just get along.

Partnership won't always be the answer. Partnerships are difficult and can even be unwise. Just because two faith-based organizations work in Zambia doesn't always mean they should work together. Partnership can be a philosophical, geographical, or strategic impossibility. But even when we decide against partnership in a formal sense, it's always possible to assist one another by sharing resources, knowledge, or connections. It's worth investing the time to thoroughly consider opportunities that could help us step more fully into our shared calling of furthering God's Kingdom.

When we consider coming alongside others, we can go beyond just *fighting* extreme poverty to thinking about *ending* extreme poverty. Beyond rescuing young girls and boys from human trafficking to putting traffickers out of business. Beyond translating parts of the Bible into just a few more languages to translating the entire Bible into every language.

WHY WE ROOT FOR RIVALS

It's time to reaffirm a higher allegiance than the logo adorning our business cards. We are not just people working for organizations. We are not on rival teams. In Christ, we are brothers and sisters united for all eternity.

We're not claiming this is easy, and the stories to come are filled with our own struggles and shortcomings as well as the successes we've discovered from other organizations. We can tell you from experience that there will be disagreements and differences of opinion as we work together. In the words of author Scott Sauls, "Sometimes it takes having differences, not understanding one another, and even being a little bit irritated by and bored with one another, to remind us that the Church is a family and not a club."³² But just as healthy families help one another grow, in the best, most life-giving partnerships "iron sharpens iron."³³ Those involved accomplish far more together than the sum of their independent efforts.

We are a family. We are one body. And we root for our rivals because the unity we hold in Christ is thicker than blood. But this is possible only if we understand the magnitude and upside-down nature of the Kingdom of God.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What does the world see when looking at the Church and parachurch organizations?
2. How are our actions toward others helping or hindering our collective impact and witness?
3. Who do you see as your competition and why? What would it take to view this "rival" as an ally?
4. What "rival" might benefit from closer collaboration?