

I played the clarinet in the Greenwood High School Marching Band. The band sounded okay, but we weren't very good at marching. We had a precision problem—the ranks were crooked, and we were out of step with each other. This lack of accuracy made for a sloppy saunter down the field.

Marching bands are supposed to resemble the crisp, preciseness of military units. A band, just like a military unit, lines up side by side in horizontal rows or ranks. Theoretically, each rank is to march as one, with perfect alignment. To be able to do that, the person on the farthest right in each horizontal row becomes the guide. That person is called the “right guide.” If everyone uses the right guide as the reference point, the ranks remain aligned.

A marching unit also uses cadence to stay in step: “left, right, left, right, left.” The percussion unit or the drill sergeant provides the cadence. Sometime a person gets out of step and has to get in step again. But if each person listens closely, and responds to what she hears, the unit will stay in step with each other.

In the life of the believer, the Holy Spirit is the Right Guide and the Cadence. When the Body of Christ references the Right Guide and listens for His timing, we will stay in step with the Spirit and each other. Paul writes about this principle.

Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Galatians 5:25 NIV

In previous columns, we've observed two of the three original words Paul uses for “walk” in Galatians. The first original word (Galatians 2:14) urges us to walk straightly in relationship with the Gospel. In other word, practice what you preach. The second word for walk is found in Galatians 5:16 and refers to our walking in such a way that we guard the perimeter of our lives against enemy intrusion. Paul cautions us to be aware of the places we are most vulnerable to temptation and to be on the offensive. The verse above contains the third word, *stochio*, which in this case is translated “keep in step.” It means to “get in the right place in formation in relation to everyone else.” This sense of walking in the Spirit is corporate, relational to others. In essence, he is telling us to move forward together.

Each of us has been given a special and significant gift in ministry. (Ephesians 4:7-13; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11; Romans 12:3-8; 1 Peter 4:9-11) God has something for you to do that no one else can do. You are created for a specific purpose. You have a distinct path to walk. Your gift can not be duplicated by any one else. And you have a unique message that only you can deliver.

Problems in the Body of Christ, just like marching bands, occur when believers get out of step with each other and misaligned with the Right Guide. They abandon their God-ordained marching arrangement, the unique place to which God has called them and begin to compare themselves with others.

Rick Warren writes in [The Purpose Driven Life](#) about the danger of comparing ourselves with others or of conforming to the expectations of others. He says, “Both are deadly traps that will distract you from serving in the ways God intended. Whenever you lose your joy in ministry, start by considering if either one of these temptations is the cause” (pg.253).

Comparing ourselves with others causes jealousy and creates dissatisfaction with what God has given us. It also promotes selfish ambition. The writer of James has strong, sobering words about this danger.

For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. James 3:16

My grandson, Sam, is quite the athlete. He is a pitcher on his baseball team and a quarterback on his football team. But he didn't always understand the importance of team work. He started sports with flag football when he was six. Sam scored a lot of touchdowns but hardly any of them counted because he was prone to stiff-arming and tackling the competition, both forbidden in flag football. I guess he had watched too many college games to understand the difference.

During one game, the coach huddled the little guys on the field and explained the next play. The coach told the little boy who was behind center to hand the ball to Sam as soon as it was snapped. Then he said, "Sam, when you get the ball, run *really* fast down the field and score a touchdown." Wow! Sam was shaking in anticipation. He couldn't *wait* for his big moment.

The count came; the ball was snapped. The little guy behind center got overly excited, confused about what the coach had instructed him to do, and in the uncertainty of the moment, instead of giving the ball to Sam, he gave it to the little boy standing next to Sam. After a second of shock, the little fellow took off down the field, running with all his might.

Sam was outraged. That was *his* ball, *his* assignment. *He* was supposed to be the one running toward the goal line. *He* was supposed to be the one basking in this flash of instant glory. You need to know that Sam has an exceptionally strong sense of what he considers to be fair, and *this* was *not* fair. So to make it fair, Sam took off down the field, out ran his teammate and pulled his flag.

We might laugh at Sam's ridiculous solution to his disappointment. But I've seen similar things happen in ministry. Someone in the discontentment of comparison pulls her teammate's flag and chaos results. In the Body of Christ, we are on the same team, committed to the same purpose, reaching for the same goal. Dallas Willard gives us the cure for an envying spirit.

"The next time you are in a competitive situation, pray that others will be more outstanding, more praised, more used by God than yourself."

God has called us to specialized service in His Kingdom. Our mission is to attend to the assignment He's entrusted to us, walking in step with other believers, preserving the unity of the Body of Christ. Besides, the glory always goes to the Person of Greatness. And that's not you or me. Our only triumph comes from the satisfaction and reward of being in step with the Spirit and with each other. Are you ready? "Left, right, left, right left..."