

Multilevel Marketing in the Church – by Thailer Jimerson

Thirty-One. Mary Kay. Young Living. Amway. Tupperware. It Works! Pampered Chef. What do all these brands have in common? They're the various names which represent the growing presence of multilevel marketing in the church. In many ways, the church is the perfect place for multilevel marketing to thrive since we're all for community and relationships and even more for evangelism.

After reading CT Magazine's 2015 article *Brand Evangelism*, I realized I'm not the only one who has noticed the rise of salesmanship – *or is it sales(woman)ship, since they are the greatest proponents of multilevel marketing* - in church circles. The article explains how multilevel marketing works: "MLM companies train sellers to become experts in a distinct product line to market to friends and acquaintances. Sellers earn a commission on their sales as well as the sales of their recruits." Now, let me just quickly say there's nothing wrong with multilevel marketing. It provides another point of connection between homemakers; it grants a hobby and a sense of purpose for many women in the church; it's one way in which stay-at-home moms have helped out with the bills.

But, as is the case with everything in our fallen world, we need wisdom in dealing with the rise of multilevel marketing among our numbers.

Here's a bit of wisdom from the article: "To prevent pressure within Bible study groups, Wilkin tells women not to use each other for business contacts, MLM or otherwise. Greg Baker, who leads Fellowship Bible Church in Liberty, Utah, asked the congregation's leaders not to participate in MLM, and told congregants not to distribute materials or products at church events. By doing so, he hopes to keep suspicion out of church relationships. 'I don't want anybody wondering why I'm calling him,' he said. He also worries that MLM testimonials foster a 'love of money,' and meets with congregants involved with MLM to learn about their motivations."

Bottom line: Multilevel marketing can be good if used for God's glory, but it can be abused if not exercised wisely. We should always be questioning our motivations behind every action. Are we more evangelistic over this item, more so than, perhaps, the gospel? And can turning evangelistic contacts (or even brothers and sisters in Christ) into business relationships be harmful? Let's exercise cautions and wisdom in all of our activities.