

LESSON 9

The Importance of Teamwork

Andrew Carnegie said, “Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision. It is the fuel that allows common people to obtain uncommon results” (Ventura and Templin 2005, 1). Teamwork is a good thing. The local church needs to stress the importance of building teams of Spirit-infused and ministry-gifted people to serve God and people. The results of a team always transcend the outcome of any individual from that same team. It is said that geese can fly 72 percent farther when they fly in formation rather than alone. Together, everyone achieves more!

The Bible is full of examples of teamwork. God gave Moses the vision to build the tabernacle, but Moses did not do it by himself. God gave him a man named Bezalel, who had the “skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts” (Exodus 35:31). God also gave Ezra the dream to lead Israel into rebuilding their nation after the Babylonian captivity. Ezra did not do it alone. He gathered leaders from Israel to go with him (Ezra 7:28). And, of course, Jesus built one of the most famous teams of all—the twelve apostles—in order to change the world.

Many pastors today have shifted from the preacher-counselor role to the leader-trainer role. The outgrowth is the training and deploying of congregants to be key leaders in the local church. Some committed believers eventually become pastoral staff members as churches increasingly promote from within the congregation. In this lesson, we will focus on local church teamwork, but many of the truths we explore will help you in other areas such as work, family life, civic responsibilities, sports, and so on. Let us journey together in this chapter and learn the importance and practicality of working as a team.

LESSON OUTLINE

Biblical Examples of Teamwork
 Why Teamwork Is Important
 Things That Sabotage Teamwork
 Building Church Ministry Teams
 Teamwork Values

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- 1: *Identify biblical examples of teamwork.*
- 2: *Discuss the importance of teams.*
- 3: *Explain why some people are not team players.*
- 4: *Indicate characteristics of good teams.*
- 5: *State Rick Warren's eight values of teamwork.*

Biblical Examples of Teamwork

Objective 1:

Identify biblical examples of teamwork.

The Bible teaches the value of community, unity, diversity, mutual trust, and interdependence of spiritual gifts. The phrase “one another” or “each other” (from the Greek *allēlōn*), which is used almost 100 times in the New Testament, often indicates that God wants us to work together, live in teams, and be the Body!

The Holy Trinity

As evangelicals we believe God to be a TRI-UNITY, three Persons wrapped in one. We call this the Holy Trinity. God himself has worked throughout history in a team of divinity. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have each complete unique purposes in creation and redemption. God created team. God is team!

Moses

Moses was an incredible leader, but he was reluctant at first and hampered by limitations. He needed a team, and God gave him Joshua, Aaron, and Caleb to share the load of leadership. Through his father-in-law, he became aware of his personal deficiencies and learned to divide his leadership responsibilities into manageable portions that were delegated to a team of gifted servants. That freed Moses to focus on directing his team and doing those things that only he could do. While solo leadership is limited to one's individual capacity, teamwork increases leadership capacity and the quality of life of those you lead.

Nehemiah

Nehemiah relied greatly on teams to restore the walls of Jerusalem. Gifted, skillful people were used to fulfill the vision of God. Nehemiah organized different teams for different purposes. The walls would never have been rebuilt had he tried to do it alone. It demanded a team.

Solomon

Solomon understood the wisdom of team ministry. In Ecclesiastes 4:9–12, he writes, “Two are better than one . . . a cord of three strands is not quickly broken.” Teams are better and stronger than individual performances.

Jesus

Jesus modeled team ministry. Very few of Jesus' disciples seemed to be world-changing leaders. He called a group of uneducated, unknown persons who were willing to sacrifice all to be apprentices to Jesus. Though uneducated, these men were uniquely gifted, capable people who needed training and direction. Jesus' team was a humble group whose limitations forced them to work together toward a common vision. Jesus even sent seventy-two out in ministry teams (see Luke 10:1–24). He transferred this team model to His disciples, who would continue His vision and ministry after He was gone.

The Early Church

Had the early church depended upon some extremely gifted individual to replace Jesus, the church would have failed miserably. The disciples discovered that none of them had the complete package of gifts necessary to grow the early church. They did, however, understand that each had a role in the overall picture.

- In Acts 6:1–7 we read about the choosing of the seven for a new ministry to widows. As a result of recruiting and releasing teams in the early church the church grew exponentially, the Word of God spread quickly, more disciples were raised up, and many were called to the ministry.
- We see great examples of teamwork in the early church (see Acts 11:19–30). Paul and Barnabas worked as a team with the new church of Gentiles in Antioch.
- In Acts 12:12–17 teamwork is demonstrated in the believers' praying for Peter's release from prison.
- Paul and Barnabas were commissioned as a ministry team (see Acts 13:1–13). Along the way they built a team of others to work alongside them.
- Teams of leaders are consulted and sent out to Antioch (see Acts 15).
- In Acts 18:1–4, Aquila and Priscilla joined Paul's team in Corinth.

The Apostle Paul

In 1 Corinthians 3:7–10, Paul urges the Corinthians to work as a team. They had been bickering about which leader to follow, so Paul emphasized teamwork as foundational to growth. He was a church planter, Apollos was a nurturer and discipler, but God brought the results. Paul and Apollos were on the same team, God's team!

Paul was the ultimate team player! He partnered with Barnabas, John, Simeon, Lucius, and Manaen (Acts 13), Timothy, Judas, and Silas (Acts 15–16). He believed in the Ephesians 4:12 model of team ministry. He wrote about gift-

based ministry in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12. God's plan has always been about using role players rather than superstars. When we work in concert with others, God orchestrates beautiful ministry that produces eternal results.

Why Teamwork Is Important

Objective 2:

Discuss the importance of teams.

Most Churches Are Small

Most churches around the world have under one hundred in attendance and cannot afford to hire a full-time staff of workers. They must look at building laity teams from volunteer help, and this is very good. I am convinced that the majority of ministry should be carried out by ordinary Christians who love God and are dedicated to serving Him. Individuals who reject the call to be team players hurt their local church and deny an important principle in the Word of God.

Pastors Are Not Called to Do It All

A leader succeeds only if his or her team or followers succeed. This is true in every area of life, including the church. Building teams of committed believers with complementary gifts will boost the impact of the local church. A wise pastor becomes a leader of a strong contingent of lay leaders who serve in their community.

The Local Church Benefits from Team Leadership

Following are several benefits to developing team leadership within the local church:

- Team approach is the biblical model.
- People get involved. Christ has given His church the leaders and workers necessary to accomplish the task of winning the lost and training the found. God takes great pleasure in His people serving together and attaining goals.

- A team environment is created. Jesus said, “If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand” (Mark 3:25). We are not here on earth solely for ourselves, but also for others. If you are there for others, then later on when you are in need, people will be there for you. It is the law of reciprocity! We reap what we sow.
- There is less stress for everyone. Ministry is hard work. It means sacrifice—giving of time, money, and other resources. The hardships of serving God are not eliminated completely by teamwork, but teamwork makes the work manageable.
- The results are multiplied. The group always outperforms the individual. The sum is greater than its parts. Our personal success is linked to one another’s success on the team.
- Greater creativity is fostered. There are many challenging issues churches must deal with, so God’s people must be problem-solvers. A team of believers tasked with the responsibility of meeting needs and impacting others’ lives can come up with a plethora of new ideas. Creative teams breed even greater creativity.
- Increased joy is produced. Joy increases as bonds of love and cooperation develop among people. Furthermore, participation in a successful team process can be a reward in itself. It is fun to do something effectively and, at the same time, serve and obey God.
- Greater individual and group potential is discovered. Believers will discover more about their gifts and talents when they link up with others to serve the Lord. Team-oriented ministry best deploys people’s gifts for maximum ministry effectiveness.
- Church growth occurs. Team ministry decentralizes the church and opens it to growth.
- Pastors appreciate great teamwork. When teams take the lead to serve God and minister to others,

the pastor is freed up to study, pray, and find fresh anointing for preaching and teaching. The pastor can dedicate himself or herself to training and mentoring lay leaders, promoting God-given vision for the local church, and equipping the people to fulfill their mission. In team-led churches, pastors enjoy their pastorates more, stay longer, and experience less burnout (Barna 2001, 74).

Things That Sabotage Teamwork

Objective 3:

Explain why some people are not team players.

Some people are not team players because of the following reasons:

Soloing is Easier

Getting a team on the same page takes time, persuasion, ownership, and energy. So rather than engaging in these time-consuming efforts, some people prefer to work alone. They think that soloing is more efficient.

Control Issues

It is easier to dictate than to rely on the wisdom and breadth of a group of leaders. But dictatorship results in stifled creativity.

Ego Needs

Teamwork diminishes the perceived value of the individual. The individual is no longer the center of attention. Individual egos are not stroked since the attention is spread out over a team.

Resistance to Change

Many people resist change within the local church. But effective team ministry involves doing things in new ways. Though it remains predictable, cozy, and comfortable, the old way may no longer be effective.

Ignorance

Many people in churches have never been trained to do team ministry, especially since some pastors never embrace the team approach. Such leaders have no idea how to make the change and are afraid.

Moral Failure

While all sin is failure to do God's will, some sins have more serious consequences. Sins of moral failure—adultery, fornication, homosexuality, uncontrolled gossip, disrespect for godly leadership, dishonesty, and embezzlement—immediately disqualify the individual from team leadership. Following the fallen leader's repentance and restoration, determination must be made as to when he or she can return to leading.

Few Models

Many people have never seen the team model used effectively. No wonder—the superstar model is easier, more natural, and more prevalent. Thankfully some businesses and churches are now aggressively promoting team leadership, but this thinking has not been widespread. New Christians may not understand that the church operates best as a network of committed teams, but mature believers can provide teaching and a credible example to follow.

Lack of Motivation

It is tough to admit that the things we have invested so much time and energy in are no longer effective. It calls into question the wisdom of our past decisions and the value of prior achievements. Many do not want to expend the energy it takes to learn how to do ministry in new ways. The upfront investment to build teams requires sacrifice from the leader.

No Vision

Some pastors do not believe their churches are going anywhere special. They have little or no vision for the future, thus they have no destination. Simply helping

the church to survive or exist in a holding pattern is unscriptural and requires no leadership whatsoever. Without vision the local church will die!

Local Church Culture

Culture is what gives meaning and context to experience. The local church structure must be able to facilitate teams. Since many churches are not team friendly, there has to be a transformation for the culture of the church to be healthy. In some churches, this innovation would require rethinking core values and practices.

Building Church Ministry Teams

Objective 4:

Indicate characteristics of good teams.

Are you already serving on a ministry team? This is where church involvement really starts. Many are content simply to come to Sunday services. They want to be fed and entertained but have little appetite for real ministry. I hope you have determined to get busy and make a difference. Following are many characteristics of good ministry teams:

Teams Should Be Kept Small

The best teams are small in number, consisting of people with complementary skills who are committed to the same purpose, goals, and approach. Each member contributes experience, skills, and viewpoints. This diversity fosters synergy, where the sum is greater than its individual parts. The group should not be too large, lest its effectiveness be compromised.

Teams Need Leaders

Successful teams are a collection of leaders who possess influence, character, and competencies. Influence must be used positively to motivate people to act. Character, as the well-known saying goes, is what you are when no one is looking. Leaders must be people

of integrity and fully committed to God. Competencies are the accumulation of skills, knowledge, and experience that allow individuals to lead others well.

Teams Need Complementary Gifts

The combination of various gifts allows teams to surge ahead. Do not look for similar aptitudes but for complementary aptitudes. Leadership aptitudes generally reflect the four primary personality quadrants: directive, influential, steady, and calculated (D.I.S.C.). Let me explain what this means in everyday terms.

Some leaders are more directing. They are catalysts who motivate people to get involved in the cause. Such leaders are natural decision makers. They do not shrink back from the tough calls.

Other leaders are more influential at team building. They love people but hate paperwork! They are good at mobilizing people around the vision through relationships. They are the life of the party, and their interpersonal skills are excellent. However, these leaders tend to be weak on details.

Then, there are steady managers who are operational or best at creating operating systems that facilitate ministry. These are the ministry managers, who maintain the status quo. Operational leaders create systems that make things run more smoothly. They tend to dislike and avoid conflict. These managers choose short-term fixes at the expense of long-term results.

Other leaders are more calculated and strategic in development. They love calculating detailed plans of action. These are the complex analysts who are very thorough and ask the hard questions. They take their time to arrive at decisions, are not afraid to create controversy, and are more loyal to the vision than to people.

One chronic mistake that churches make is teaming together leaders with the same aptitudes rather than complementary aptitudes. No single personality or leadership type is more necessary than the other. Yet, neither can be successful without the partnership of the others.

Teams work best when they comprise persons whose gifts contribute value while their deficiencies are compensated for by the strengths of other team members. Effective teams have multiple leaders with complementary aptitudes working together. You need all types on your team!

Teams Are Committed to Their Members

Team members must be committed to one another's growth and success. Members must demonstrate mutual respect and trust and must self-correct and monitor one another's progress toward the goal. Henry Ford said, "Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success" (Straub 1998, 13). Therefore, for one to succeed, the whole team must succeed.

Teams Have Shared Vision

The corporate vision brings a team together and facilitates its passion to move forward. Proverbs 29:18 notes, "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (KJV). Vision comes first from God and is intended to bring focus to us. God has a unique vision for your church and for each ministry within your church. It is our commitment to God's vision and our decision to bring it to pass that determines the health of the local church and the degree of influence that it has on the world. While cooperation gets teams moving together, it is the church's mission that gets them moving in the right direction.

Teams Share Values

Values are the standards that define what is right and worthwhile. Values relate to character and are non-negotiable. Every person and church acts in relationship with personal values, whether spoken or not. Values provide the behavioral parameters that limit what you may or may not do in the pursuit of your vision. Every church must clearly articulate its mission, vision, and values.

Teams Must Have Goals

A team without a goal is merely a social club. Goals focus the team on what is important. Effective ministry teams lean heavily on the Bible and prayer for guidance.

Team Members Are Mutually Accountable

Team members must evaluate their efforts and push one another to live up to their shared standards. Traditionally, in many churches, everyone answered to the senior pastor. This old model can be called one-on-one accountability. While the senior pastor is ultimately responsible for all that happens in the church, a better model for accountability is that all individual team members be accountable to the whole team. Performance is reviewed by the entire group, not just by one individual.

Trust and vulnerability keep us honest, focused, productive, and inspired to achieve. Excellence happens when performance standards are known and applied.

Sadly, in some church situations, there is little or no accountability required of teams and individual team members. In such cases, people assume that mediocrity is sufficient. However, most people will live up to the expectations placed upon them if they believe they will be held accountable for their respective performance. The level of community among team members is a telltale sign of their maturity and potential.

Teams Deal with Dysfunction and Conflict

We all make mistakes. Be sure to learn from them and make the needed corrections along the way. It is possible that team members slip into gossip, ministry sabotage, withholding important communication, or even more serious sin. Deal quickly, decisively, and graciously with such behavior that works against the team. Here are some conflict resolution tips to consider:

- Go straight to the source.
- Do not cast blame.
- Attack problems, not people.

- Listen to other people's concerns.
- Do not take it personally.
- Act swiftly.
- Believe the best of your team.
- Relieve stress from others. (Ventura and Templin 2005, 30–31)

Without trust, conflict can disable a team's progress towards its vision. But conflict can be resolved in different ways. For instance, bargaining generally resolves conflict through compromise. Teams can collaborate and come up with alternatives. Often we argue about things we know very little about. Our strong opinions are based on very few facts. Perhaps research and data gathering could help resolve a conflict. Also, voting by the team can resolve a conflict. The setback with this choice is that it leaves winners and losers. In the event of inflexibility, it might be best to have a third-party mediator. Objectivity is key. Conflict resolution can happen in several ways, but it must happen successfully for the sake of the team and the mission.

Teams Invest the Time

Take the time to have meetings, communicate frequently, attend retreats, brainstorm, and have fun together. Take the time to pray together and for one another. Take the time to build friendships and enjoy the team. Collaboration is best when the team has invested the time it takes to understand the individual strength, gifts, and personalities of its members.

Teamwork Values

Objective 5:

State Rick Warren's eight values of teamwork.

Well-known Christian leader and pastor Rick Warren outlines eight values of teamwork. Practicing these values can help you experience greater levels of teamwork in

your church. Some of these values are repeated in other ways in this lesson, but they are worth repeating.

1. *Trust*. Trust is the emotional glue that binds a team together. Three things can help create trust in a team: consistency, loyalty, and delegated authority.
2. *Economy of energy*. The quickest way to burn out your team is to run them too hard and not allow the needed rest times. Pace matters!
3. *Affirmation*. We can affirm one another by valuing ideas, appreciating uniqueness, commending efforts, and praising loyalty. Affirmation builds up the team.
4. *Management of mistakes*. Mistakes are not failure if you keep getting back up (see Proverbs 24:16). Mistakes teach us what does not work.
5. *Weekly staff meetings*. Communication on a consistent basis builds continuity, friendship, shared experiences, and loyalty.
6. *Open communication*. Three barriers to communication are presumption, impatience, and pride. Communication is the lubricant of ministry.
7. *Recognition and reward*. Give honor and respect to those who deserve it.
8. *Keep learning*. "The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge; the ears of the wise seek it out" (Proverbs 18:15). Books, conferences, networking, education, and risk-taking are important (Warren 2005, 1).
9. *What does all of this mean?* It means that we can do ministry more effectively in teams, as people are more motivated to join a team than to do ministry by themselves. Teamwork is well worth the effort. Team spirit is not accidental but intentional. Your success in serving God depends greatly on being a good team player. So get involved in a team today.

SELF-TEST

After studying the lesson, please read each study question carefully and circle the correct response. There is only one correct response for each question.

1. *In choosing the disciples—His team members—Jesus*
 - a) *sought for the greatest thinkers of His time.*
 - b) *called uneducated men.*
 - c) *consulted with the religious leaders of His time.*

2. *Who originated the team concept?*
 - a) *The disciples*
 - b) *Today's business leaders*
 - c) *God*

3. *The law of reciprocity suggests that*
 - a) *we will reap what we sow.*
 - b) *there is no consequence to our actions.*
 - c) *people will treat us badly no matter what we do.*

4. *Teamwork is important because it*
 - a) *completely eliminates the hardships of serving God.*
 - b) *increases everyone's stress.*
 - c) *makes the work manageable.*

5. *Some people are not good team players because they*
 - a) *have learned to submit to authority.*
 - b) *lack motivation.*
 - c) *are visionaries.*

6. *Teamwork impacts the individual*
 - a) *in that he or she is no longer the center of attention.*
 - b) *by making the individual more selfish.*
 - c) *in that it makes the individual a dictator.*

7. *Which is not a characteristic of good teams?*
 - a) *Shared vision*
 - b) *Unmanageable, large numbers of people*
 - c) *Commitment to one another*

8. *In managing conflict, it is important to*
 - a) *cast blame.*
 - b) *ignore other people's concerns.*
 - c) *attack problems, not people.*

9. *Which of the following helps create trust in teams?*
 - a) *Inconsistency*
 - b) *Loyalty*
 - c) *Dictatorship*

10. *Proverbs 18:15 states that the wise person*
 - a) *has no need of others.*
 - b) *has a clean heart.*
 - c) *seeks out knowledge.*

ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS

Note: If you answered a study question incorrectly, you can find the objective it was drawn from by looking at the reference in parenthesis.

1. *b* (9.1)
2. *c* (9.1)
3. *a* (9.2)
4. *c* (9.2)
5. *b* (9.3)
6. *a* (9.3)
7. *b* (9.4)
8. *c* (9.4)
9. *b* (9.5)
10. *c* (9.5)

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