Building A Successful Team Ministry

A Biblical Approach to Enhanced Ministry Effectiveness

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A Ministry for Equipping the Saints
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Introduction

Ministry is spelled T-E-A-M! In spite of protests to the contrary, no one does ministry alone. Even the Lone Ranger had his famous sidekick, Tonto as well as his horse, Silver. They were both part of his crime-fighting team that battled the desperadoes of the Wild West.

If you are involved in any type of ministry, you are involved with a ministry team of some sort. It may be just you, your spouse, and the kids. It may be a group of lay people who teach Sunday School, care for babies in the nursery, sing in the choir, greet visitors, type bulletins, sweep the floor, and a zillion other things that help you carry on ministry in your church.

Or, like the author, you may be part of a larger team of church planters, campus workers, missionaries, administrators, and Council members who make up a mission agency. Within that team, you may find yourself as a member of several other teams such as a field council, a ministry group, and a local ministry team.

The focus of this manual will be on the local ministry team that you are either participating in or leading. It may be a campus ministry in which you are partnering with other team members, a Jewish outreach that involves someone other than yourself or it may be a church planting effort of which you are a part. Much of the material is geared to those involved in the latter since that is the focus of the majority of the missionaries in our mission agency. Many, if not most, of the principles are applicable to other types of ministry teams, although some adjustments would need to be made.

T-E-A-M is supposed to stand for Together Everyone Achieves More, but sadly, that is not always the case. Horror stories abound of teams marked with strife, discord, anger, and disunity. The author remembers witnessing two co-workers angrily shaking their fists and yelling at one another with reddened faces. Some have left teams vowing that they would never be part of another one as long as they live.

Too often, teams are put together without adequate forethought and planning. Personalities, ministerial philosophies, skill sets, and goals may not be given proper consideration. Sometimes people are put together simply because they want to be part of a team. Such teams seldom live up to their expectations.

It doesn’t have to be that way. While it may be true that teams can be difficult to create, tougher to motivate, challenging to lead, and impossible to predict, they can be a source of great blessing and enhanced effectiveness. Ecclesiastes 4:9 tells us “two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labor.” Healthy teams are more effective and generally produce healthy churches.

A ministry team can be defined as a manageable group of diversely gifted people, who hold one another accountable, and serve joyfully together for the glory of God. They share a common mission, embody the message of Christ, accomplish meaningful ministry, and anticipate transformative results.

Team ministry is not just a fad that is sweeping the country. Rather, it is the primary New Testament model. Some would say it is the New Testament model. When it comes to church planting, it is the only New Testament model. Every church established in Scripture was the result of a team ministry. When Jesus said, “I will build my church” (Matthew 16:18), he chose a team of twelve men to help him do it. Barnabas had Saul of Tarsus as his team partner when he sailed to Cyprus. The Apostle Paul had Timothy, Titus, Luke and multiple others on his ministry team.

At its core, ministry is nothing more than relationships. The same is true of teams. It is putting people together in harmony with each other, and with common goals, objectives and philosophies. It is working through the tough times. It is learning to forgive, to communicate, to submit your personal agenda to the
higher good of the team. It is confronting your own pride and arrogance, and learning to get along when things aren’t going your way.

If what you are doing is significant, it takes a team to do it.\(^5\) It is not always easy to work along side someone else, even though he may be very talented. There is always a price that must be paid for whatever we do. We live in a sinful world, with sinful people, in sinful bodies. They can be stubborn, bullheaded, prideful, self-willed, and totally frustrating just like we can be. But they can also be wonderful, helpful, brilliant, energetic, faithful, and supportive.

Teamwork is work. It takes time, effort, and commitment to develop a successful ministry team. John Maxwell reminds us that coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress, and working together is success.\(^6\)

Not all teams are successful. The reasons for this are many. Sometimes it is because team members lack the skills needed. They may not have a workable strategy. Team members may be pursuing personal goals at the expense of the team. They may not have a good coach.

Arguably, the worst team in the history of the National Football League (NFL) was the 1976 Tampa Bay Buccaneers. They were terrible. They were shut out five times and only averaged nine points per game. Their margin of defeat was twenty points for each outing. Their quarterback only threw seven touchdowns all season long with his longest pass being just thirty-eight yards.

Why do I introduce the worst football team in history into a book about how to build successful team ministries? Simply because we can learn from the mistakes of others. By watching them we can identify some of the pitfalls that lie in front of most ministry teams. The ’76 Buccaneers serve as a wonderful example of how NOT to function as a team.

You are about to enter on a journey that will expand your vision, increase your faith, and challenge you to develop a team of co-workers that love and respect each other, work diligently toward a common goal, and resolve their differences biblically as they carry out the Great Commission command of our Lord.

Enjoy your trip.

Your Servant in Christ,

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Chapter 1

Battling It Out in the Trenches
(Reasons Why Team Ministries Sometimes Fail)

It was a perfect season. Never before in history had an NFL professional football team assembled such a prestigious record of wins and losses. As the ’76 season drew to a close, the raucous fans in the stands cheered their illustrious Buccaneers on toward a perfect record. On the final game day, more than forty thousand fans crammed into the bleachers with placards imploring their team to “GO FOR 0!”

They were looking for a shutout, not of their opponents, but of their own team. If the Buc’s lost that final game of the season they would have the distinction of becoming the first team ever to have a perfect record of 0-14. Yes, you read that right - zero wins and fourteen straight losses. Not only did they achieve that goal, but they went on to lose the first twelve games of the next season as well for an underwhelming total of twenty-six losses in a row, and no wins.

Following the last game of the ’76 season, insult was added to injury when the players and the team bus departed for the airport prematurely. The team owner and his wife were left standing in the stadium parking lot frantically waving their arms. The ensuing fallout from those two seasons was not a pretty sight to behold.

Too Much Debris to Ignore

Sadly, the same thing is sometimes true of ministry teams. The landscape is littered with the debris from far too many ministry teams that started out so well and ended up so poorly. Feelings have been hurt. Ministries have failed. Friendships have been ruined and testimonies have been lost.

One Christian worker vowed he would never be part of a team ministry again after the treatment he received from his team leader as a missionary newly arrived on the field. His is just one of the many similar stories that could be told involving missionaries, church planters, pastors, campus workers, and others.

In Genesis 13:7 we read that “there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram’s cattle and the herdmen of Lot’s cattle: and the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land.” While Abraham and Lot were battling it out with each other in the trenches, their unsaved neighbors were looking on wondering why these two family members couldn’t get along. The world looks at the church today and wonders, “Why can’t these people who are supposed to be so godly get along with each other?” No wonder we have so little credibility with them.

When we view the carnage, we cannot help but think of James 3:10 where we are told: “My brethren, these things ought not so to be.” And yet they are. It does happen far too frequently. Team members get offended. They refuse to forgive. They launch grenades into each other’s lap, and sometimes sabotage the entire mission they are supposed to be carrying out.

The easy thing to do is to simply ignore the problem, and like the proverbial ostrich, stick our head in the sand and pretend it doesn’t exist or hope that it will go away. We can always say, “Well, that’s just the price of ministry” and go on our merry way.
But that doesn’t solve the problem. It only perpetuates it. Just as the Buccaneers couldn’t solve their team problems until they diagnosed what they were doing wrong, so those of us in ministry can’t solve our team problems until we examine the causes for them, and then take steps to correct them. An honest appraisal is the first step toward building healthy teams. Like Nehemiah, you have to clear away the rubble before you can begin to build.

The causes for dysfunctional team ministries are many and varied. Every team is unique in its own right. The personalities, gifts, objectives, and ministry philosophies differ from team to team. What afflicts one team will not be an issue for another group. That team will have its own special set of situations with which to deal.

If you list all the different scenarios that lead to the failure or demise of teams, they would fall into five basic categories. Some of these will be dealt with in greater detail later in this manual. For now, we want to look at each group and some of the attitudes that accompany each one. No team, not even the ’76 Buccaneers, will be guilty of all the missteps we will explore. Sometimes, however, it only takes a single strategically placed shot to bring down the entire team. An interception late in the game can quickly turn a win into a loss.

**Leadership Issues**

Dr. Lee Roberson was well known for his statement, “Everything rises and falls on leadership.” That maxim is often true even though many of us in leadership don’t like it. We squirm and try to avoid the spotlight of responsibility it directs toward us. We point to people’s lack of commitment, the failure to follow through or the shortcomings of others as the reason for not achieving whatever we were trying to do. If people don’t follow, if they don’t do what they are supposed to do, then its not our fault that we don’t succeed.

Sorry, but that argument doesn’t hold water. The team leader is the one out in front. He is the point man. He sets the pace. He casts the vision. He selects the team players. He provides the training. He hosts the meetings. He is responsible to see that communication takes place, that everyone knows where they are going, how they are going to get there, what they are supposed to do, and what it will be like when they arrive. If the team fails, he is the one who is held accountable. As Harry Truman said, “The buck stops here!”

There is an interesting verse in Genesis 39:22 that describes the leader’s role in whatever is done. It says, “And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph’s hand all the prisoners that were in the prison; and whatsoever they did there, he (Joseph) was the doer of it.” Because he was in charge, Joseph was held responsible for whatever any prisoner throughout the prison did. It didn’t matter whether he knew about it or not. It didn’t matter whether he approved of it or not. If it happened, it was on Joseph’s shoulders. The same thing is true of team leaders. Their primary job is to see that the team functions well and achieves its objectives. They are responsible for assembling the team, seeing that everyone is onboard and moving in the right direction, and dealing with whatever issues come up. They are responsible for whatever their team players do. Everything really does rise or fall on leadership.

A person’s leadership effectiveness can be undermined in a number of ways:

*The need to control* - Some people think that because they are in a leadership position they have the right to be in charge of everything. They make the decisions. They decide the issues. They micromanage whatever the team does. In effect, the team leader becomes the bottleneck through which everything must flow. In so doing, he creates disunity, hinders growth, and fails to use the energy and creativity of the other team players. Without realizing it, he is undermining his own ministry as well as that of the team.
Building a Successful Team Ministry

A lack of trust - Some leaders are insecure. They simply don’t trust other people. They may have been let down by others in the past, and have determined not to put themselves in a vulnerable position again. They may have grown up in a single parent home where their dad walked out on the family and was never there for them. For whatever reason, they don’t trust their fellow teammates and are reluctant to delegate to them.

Usually two things happen when this occurs: First, the skills and abilities of some very talented people that could help the team are not utilized. They are either not asked to help at all or they are assigned to jobs far below their skill level. As a result, people feel unappreciated and unwanted, and end up leaving the team.

The second thing that happens when leaders do not trust their team players is that responsibilities are assigned without the authority to carry out the assignment. Team players are given a job and can strategize how best to achieve it, but they must go back to the leader for permission to implement their plan. This leads to tremendous frustration that can result in the failure of the team.

How teams are put together makes a huge difference when it comes to building trust among teammates. Ideally, especially when putting together a church-planting team, the team leader is the one who should select the players and have the final approval for who serves on the team. It doesn’t always work that way, especially in mission circles. It is not unusual for someone to be assigned to an existing church-planting team simply because he/she wants to be on a team. The church planter may feel “pressured” into working with someone he neither knows nor wants. This can lead to major trust issues and less than desirable results.

Other times, the team leader may need people to flesh out his team. Rather than searching for the right people and waiting until he can find them, he accepts people onto the team that do not have the skills needed or who have a different agenda. Trust rapidly evaporates after the leader locks horns a few times with his teammates.

Inflexibility - Some leaders insist on doing things their way. It is “my way or the highway.” They can be stubborn and arrogant insisting that they know best. They don’t consult with teammates and may not be open to input from others. Any time someone seeks an explanation or questions a decision, they feel threatened. Rather than being open and flexible, they simply dig in their heels and refuse to entertain other people’s suggestions or recommendations.

Healthy teams are built on open communication, exchanges of ideas, and a willingness to consider a variety of ways to reach the goal. Team leaders need to have a clear vision of where they want to go and what the ultimate goal is. They need to realize that plans and strategies for getting to where they want to go are variable and need frequent adjustment. Being staunch is sometimes a good thing in leaders. It enables them to reach the team’s objectives when others would have turned back. But, they need to be careful not to be so inflexible that they end up destroying the very thing they are working toward.

An unwillingness to do the hard work - Teamwork is work. It can be a hassle and time consuming. You have to constantly deal with people and their problems. That is just part of the process. As a result, some leaders would prefer to do it themselves rather than rely on a team of co-workers who may not be as talented as they are. In some cases, the leader can do it quicker, easier, cheaper and more effectively than other members of the team. He doesn’t need the team. In his view, it takes too much effort to recruit people, train them, supervise them, communicate with them, and to keep them working harmoniously together. If the team leader is unwilling to invest the time and effort needed for the team to succeed, it may well falter and fail.
In some cases, it is true that the leader can do things quicker, cheaper, and more efficiently than giving that responsibility to someone else. He forgets, however, that while he is doing the job that someone else could do, he isn’t doing the things that others on the team cannot do. There are some things which only the leader can do. If he is doing someone else’s job, most likely he is not doing his own job.

Having a team multiplies what can be done. More people can be reached, more people can be discipled, more workers can be trained, and more ministry can take place when you have a team of well-trained, highly motivated co-workers than when you work by yourself. Smart leaders do the hard work of developing a cohesive team to help them achieve their objectives.

Ignorance - Some leaders simply don’t know how to lead a team. They don’t understand what leadership is or what the role of a team leader ought to be. They may think that leadership has to do with position and authority when it actually is about vision and influence. They may not know how to resolve conflict within the team and may be reluctant to confront people who are not doing their job. They may not understand the difference between managing and leading. The first deals with efficiency while the second focuses on effectiveness. The former is concerned with doing things right while the second seeks to do the right things. Poor leadership leads to poor team performance. Everything really does rise and fall on leadership.

Relationship Issues

I am being facetious when I say that ministry teams would be wonderful things if it weren’t for the people who comprise them. Somehow, there must be a way to have “peopleless” teams. For years, it has been a well-known fact that interpersonal relationships are a major cause for Christian workers leaving the ministry. There’s no doubt about it – people can be difficult to work with. They can be stubborn, opinionated, uncooperative, lazy, and self-centered, just like you and I can be. Man is a rebel at heart. He wants his own way. He wants what he wants when he wants it, and how he wants it.

Unfortunately, being a Christian doesn’t change human nature. We all still have an old Adamic nature that is bent toward sin and selfishness. In the close proximity of team ministry, those pre-conversion attitudes and actions are bound to manifest themselves in a variety of ways.

Fragile Egos - Some people are more sensitive than others. They are easily hurt. They are in frequent need of encouragement and validation. A mild rebuke or a simple correction can leave them devastated. If their suggestion is not fully accepted, they feel rejected. They tend to be feeling oriented and function more on the basis of what is happening to them or around them than on biblical principles. Everyone else on the team has to walk on eggshells for fear of hurting or offending them.

While we want to be as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves (Matthew 10:16), and want to treat each other kindly and with Christian love, we need also to realize that ministry is tough, demanding work. We are not going to get our way all the time. Some of our ideas will be accepted while others will be turned aside. We must be careful about thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to think (Romans 12:3). We must work at developing that humble, servant attitude of Christ Jesus spoken of in Philippians 2:5-7. Fragile egos can be a problem in team ministries, but with time and the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we can learn to toughen our skin and moderate our opinions so as to become useful team players.

Temperament Differences - We all look through different colored glasses. Some see pink while others see blue. Still others look through a green prism while a co-worker wears yellow eyewear. God has equipped us all differently with separate backgrounds, gifts, and personalities. First Corinthians 12 reminds us that God has uniquely designed us and gifted us to see different needs, and to fulfill different ministry roles within the Body of Christ.
One person is a happy-go-lucky sanguine whose mission in life is to spread sunshine everywhere he goes. He sometimes is irresponsible. He may make promises that he intends to keep, but which slip his mind later. Another team player has been crafted by God to be a hard-driving, objective-oriented, take-no-prisoners choleric. He gets things done, but may leave a chaotic trail of hurt feelings and injured teammates in his wake.

Then there is the quiet, steady, reliable phlegmatic who prefers to work in the background quietly doing his thing while others bask in the sunlight. And let’s not forget the kind, tender, loving, creative and moody melancholy member of the team who can be plunged into the depths of despair by a callous remark from another teammate. The gifts and temperaments, the backgrounds and life experiences we all have undergone, combine to make us who we are. Because we tend only to look through our own set of colored glasses, our perspectives differ and sometimes clash. It behooves us to remember that our view is not the only one and may not even be the best choice. Team players must be willing to consider other points of view, if they are to survive.

A Lack of Servant Mentality - The highest designation, the greatest honor that can be bestowed upon a Christian is to be a servant. Who among us does not want to hear the Lord Jesus say to us one day, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21)? When Christ came to earth he was the Lord of glory, but he humbled himself and took upon himself the form of a servant (Philippians 2:7). He taught his disciples that whoever would be chief (a leader), “let him be your servant” (Matthew 10:27).

Servants do one thing - they serve. They give of themselves freely and sometimes completely. Their only desire is to please the master by doing whatever he asks them to do, and to do it with a humble, willing attitude. The mark of a real servant is seen in the way he/she responds when treated like a servant. In Luke 17:10, a servant came in from working all day in the field and was immediately commanded to prepare supper for his master. He was given no chance to rest. He simply proceeded to do as he was instructed. When asked about that, he responded the way a servant would be expected to respond, “We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.” A lack of servant mentality can lead to hard feelings and conflict within a ministry team. Each player needs to see himself or herself as a servant who willingly cooperates with the rest of the team to achieve the objectives that have been set for them.

Changing Commitments - Teams are assembled with the best of intentions. Team players are committed to the same vision and goals. There is agreement on what is to be done and who is to do what. Promises are made and commitments are given to be in it for the long haul. But with the passing of time things change. Expectations are not realized as quickly as anticipated. Promises are broken. The work is more demanding. Nerves get rubbed raw. People grow weary. Hurts occur and gradually the level of commitment recedes as the vision of the future fades.

When that happens, people you are depending on to do a job begin to slack off on their commitments. Personal agendas begin to appear. Discontent begins to surface and team members become more distant. There is an eight hundred pound gorilla in the room and no one wants to acknowledge it. In the meanwhile, communication grinds to a minimum. The warm, friendly relationships that were there in the beginning have slowly evaporated and are now almost non-existent. Unless action is taken quickly, the team will splinter and people will leave for greener grass on the other side of the fence.

Family and Moral Failures - Church ministry can be hazardous to your family and to your marriage. According to research done by H.B. London and Neil Wiseman, eighty percent of pastors believe that pastoral ministry has a negative impact on their families, and thirty-three percent believe the ministry is an outright hazard to their families. Thirty-seven percent admit to having had inappropriate sexual
contact with someone in the church. Numerous missionaries, pastors and church planters have had to leave the ministry because of a moral failure in their family.

Ministry is stressful. Most pastors and church planters do not have a close friend with whom they can share their struggles, fears, and temptations. There is often a reluctance to turn to teammates for help. As the pressures of ministry increase, the husband/wife relationship sometimes suffers as a result. Rather than the home being a refuge, it can be marked by anger, frustration, depression, yelling, silence or even physical abuse. Rather than being a team working together for the glory of God, spouses go their separate ways, each pursuing their own agendas. Coldness and silence replaces the love that was once there.

The frustration at home can easily spill over into tension within the ministry team. The strain can be palpable. Because he is not in right relationship with his wife, the team member may be short and speak curtly to other team members. Ideas are shot down before they can be explored. Anger may flare in team meetings. Rather than helping each other, team members undercut one another. Communication breaks down and cooperation grinds to a halt.

Healthy teams have healthy families and healthy marriages. When things are right at home, people are more relaxed, more open to ideas, and more willing to cooperate with each member of the team. Maintaining a healthy marriage relationship needs to be a top priority for anyone going into ministry, especially if they are going to be part of a ministry team.

Avoidance of Accountability - Mutual accountability is a hallmark of successful team ministry. We all need someone looking in on us from time to time to ensure that we are still focused on the goal and doing what we are supposed to be doing. Ephesians 5:21 tells us that we are to “submit yourselves one to another in the fear of God.” James 5:16 says we are to “confess your faults one to another.” Galatians 6:1 teaches we are to hold each other accountable and seek to restore one another when we stumble or fall. Yet, many bristle at the idea of someone questioning them about what they are doing.

Mutual accountability binds a team together whereas individual independence tears it apart. Pride (“No one has the right to question me.”) must be replaced with a humble spirit and a servant heart that recognizes one’s own potential for self-deception, and the need for someone else who can help keep us on track. We will have more to say about accountability later in the manual, but for now, we simply note that an unwillingness to be mutually accountable will eventually lead to the demise of the team.

Vision Issues

Proverbs 29:18 tells us “where there is no vision, the people perish.” The “vision” spoken of there referred to the biblical revelation God gave to his servants, the prophets, who in turn declared those divine messages to the people. Without a word from God, the people would fall back into sin and would perish.

Today, the word “vision” is used in a different way. It can be defined as a clear and compelling picture of the future, as we believe it can and must be. While a church planter’s vision does not have the same authority as an Old Testament prophet’s vision, it still plays a critical role in the success of a team’s ministry. Without it, the team will almost always be ineffective.

A Lack of Vision - Yet, in spite of that, many teams do not have a clearly defined vision of where they are going, how they are going to get there or what it will look like when they arrive. Consequently, like the children of Israel in the wilderness, they go round and round in circles and fall short of their potential. If you don’t know where you are going, you can’t get there from here. When there is no agreed upon vision for the future, team members can end up pulling in opposite directions to achieve competing objectives.
Normally, the vision is the responsibility of the team leader, especially if he is the one who is forming the team. He must be able to articulate what he believes God is calling him to do and what that will look like when it is accomplished. Vision is what attracts people to his team and holds them together throughout the ensuing journey. Like Moses, he must keep that vision in front of his teammates so they don’t lose sight of where they are going.

There are times, however, when a mission agency (or a local church) may assemble a group of people who have a common burden for a particular area of need. The goal is to form these individuals into a cohesive team that will address that area of concern. Each person comes to the team in its formative stages with a different opinion of what is to be done, how it is to be done, and who is to do it. If the team is to succeed, it must reach a consensus on what its objective is and what that objective should look like when it is reached. If the team cannot agree on its vision for the future, it is going to struggle and is unlikely to succeed.

Loss of Vision - A vision created by consensus (the lowest common denominator) often lacks the passion of the vision that has been burned into the heart of an individual by the Spirit of God. Consequently, people lose sight of the vision or they lose interest in it. When that happens, people settle for achievement of something less than the original vision. They become satisfied with activity rather than production. A lot of things are happening, but they do not move the team toward its objective. Like Nehemiah, team leaders must keep “casting the vision” in front of their people, reminding them of where they are going, and what they are seeking to accomplish.

Unrealistic Expectations - When people join a team, they often come with preconceived ideas of what the group should be doing and how it should be done. They bring expectations with them of how the team should function, and what should be expected of them as well as the other members of the team. They may anticipate that their ideas will be readily accepted (or at least given serious consideration) by the rest of the team. Some of their ideas about timing, roles, methodologies, and results may be unrealistic. When things don’t turn out the way they thought they should, they may feel hurt, become discouraged or quit the team.

Personal Agendas - Everyone has them. Whenever we join a team, we bring them with us. There are certain things we want to see the team accomplish as well as things we want to do personally. If there is no clearly-defined vision or if it fades with time, then personal agendas begin to replace the vision. Instead of working together as a team, team members focus on their own area of interest doing those things that they want to do. For a team to function well, the players must lay aside their own personal preferences in order to fulfill the vision (objective) of the team.

If a person is not willing to lay aside his personal agenda and buy into the team vision, he should not be on the team. Team members understand that their particular area of ministry must always fit into and be secondary to the achievement of the primary vision of the team. Each spoke in the wheel must support the rim or the wheel will collapse.

Vision issues can lead to wrong priorities, wasted energy and resources, dysfunction and ultimate failure. In contrast, commitment to a clearly defined vision that is kept in focus can lead to unity and harmony, to greater effectiveness, and ultimately, to the achievement of the dream. We’ll have more to say about vision later in the manual.

Communication Issues

Communication is not only a skill, it is an art. Most of us never fully master it. As a result, feelings are sometimes hurt, instructions are misunderstood, and plans go astray. To put it plainly, team members
MUST work hard at communicating with one another. They need to be sure they understand what is being said. Miscommunication and the lack of communication are significant problems for some teams. Sometimes teams fail to meet together on a regular basis. As a result, communication breaks down between members. Feathers may get ruffled resulting in limited communication. The communication may be a one-way flow, from the top down with little opportunity to give feedback to the leader.

If a person does not feel he is being listened to, understood or heard, he may stop communicating and withdraw to pursue his own agenda even though he is still on the team. If ideas are shot down before they can be discussed, if they are dismissed out of hand, it will not be long before that person stops offering ideas. There must be give and take within the team.

For a team to function well there must be a free flow of words and ideas between the members of the team. That may mean being challenged or voted down. That happens sometimes. Because of our tendency to jump to conclusions and to put our foot in our mouths, there will be times when we will need to seek out another team member to ask for forgiveness. We may need to make things right after uttering a less than complimentary thought or using an unloving tone of voice.

The words we use will either promote openness and healing or they will injure and divide. Failure to address communication issues is one reason so many teams dissolve and never reach their goal.

**Conflict Issues**

Conflict is inevitable. You cannot put two or more sinners together in a team relationship without them eventually rubbing each other the wrong way or offending one another in some manner. Jesus said, “It is impossible but that offenses will come” (Luke 17:1). We need to realize that we are selfish, self-centered people. We want our own way, and when we don’t get it, we tend to be offended. People will let you down. They will not fulfill their promises. They will say and do inappropriate things that will disappoint or hurt you. That is life.

Entrenched Habits - We all have entrenched habits that irritate others. There are just things that we do that people find offensive. We tend to rationalize our behavior by saying, “Well, that’s just the way I am.” Rather than dealing with the problem, we sweep it under the carpet and ignore it. We don’t want to deal with it.

**Failure to Follow Biblical Principles of Conflict Resolution** - God knew human beings would sin against each other and be at odds with one another. To help us deal with these offenses, he gave us clearly defined principles for resolving these interpersonal conflicts. Matthew 5:23,24; Matthew 18:15-17 and Ephesians 4:29-32 are but a few of the many passages he has given us for this purpose. The problem is that Christians sometimes refuse to follow those principles. It is humbling to admit you were wrong. It is painful to release the hurt when we forgive someone who offended us.

**Putting Off Dealing with Problems** - We know it doesn’t work, but we do it anyway. We don’t want to make a scene. We don’t want to pour gasoline on the fire and so we smother it and let it bubble and boil beneath the surface until it erupts like a geyser. Offenses are like a burr under the saddle. The longer you leave it there, the more painful it becomes. When you ignore problems, they generally get worse.

**An Unwillingness to Forgive** - We human beings like to hold grudges. We actually enjoy replaying the offense over and over in our minds. Somehow, the pain gives us pleasure. We hug it to us and hold it close to our heart like a little child. We are reluctant to let go of the hurt, to release the anger, to grant a pardon to the offender. We forget that God has freely forgiven us for much worse sins that we have committed against him. We choose not to remember that we are to “forgive one another, even as God for
Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13). Failure to forgive will drive a wedge between team members that will eventually lead to the breakup of the team.

There are many reasons why teams fail. We have touched on a few of them. When a team ministry fails it almost always is because there was a flaw in setting up the team, in the leadership of the team or in the functioning of the team. The fault does not lie with the concept of teams, but with the execution of the team.

The ’76 Buccaneers went down in history as the worst team ever, not because they didn’t know how to play the game, but because they didn’t execute according to what they knew. The same is true of ministry teams.

We’ve said enough negative things about why teams sometimes don’t work. Let’s turn the page in the next chapter and take a look at some positive examples of how teams can and should work when the players function together the way a team should.

**Things to Do:**

1. Make a list of some of the issues you have seen or experienced that had a negative impact on your ministry team or that of someone else.

2. How were those issues handled?

3. What biblical principles could have been applied to resolve the problems more equitably or in a manner that would have been more productive?

4. What steps can you take to provide a stronger foundation for a healthier team ministry in the future?
Chapter 2

The View from the Grandstand
(The Biblical Basis for Team Ministry)

Talk about extremes. The ’76 Tampa Bay Buccaneers were arguably the worst team in the annals of professional football. They hold the record of twenty-six straight losses before they finally won a game. It seems a little ironic, but the ’76 Oakland Raiders have been voted as the best team in NFL history. The best and worst teams ever to play the game came from the same year.

Led by coach John Madden and quarterback Ken Stabler, the Raiders assembled at 16-1 winning season on their way to the Super Bowl Championship over the Minnesota Vikings. Their only loss came to the New England Patriots early in the season. They redeemed themselves from that single loss by beating the world champion Pittsburgh Steelers twice and trouncing the Patriots in a return match later in the year.

The Raiders had seven Hall of Famers playing for them that year (if you include Madden) and scored 350 points. They averaged 5.5 yards per play, ran up a total of 5,190 yards on offense, and scored forty-seven touchdowns. Stabler completed sixty-six percent of his passes. These guys were a team both on and off the field. They knew how to execute their game plan.

The Buccaneers could have learned a thing or two about being a team if they had studied the Oakland Raiders. The same is true of those who seek to serve the Lord in team ministry. We can learn from the examples of others. By examining what they do, we can improve our own effectiveness and success.

The best and worst ministry teams in history have been preserved for us in an infallible record book called the Bible. Scripture gives us numerous examples of how team ministry should function as well as a few samples of how they should not work. While it is true that God often uses individuals to accomplish his purposes, it is equally true that those same individuals often were associated with a team of other people who enabled them to be successful. We would advocate that team ministry is the preferred approach to ministry in Scripture.

Throughout the remainder of this chapter, we will examine a number of the ministry teams found in the pages of Sacred Writ. They give us a biblical basis for developing ministry teams of our own to help us be more effective in carrying out our Lord’s Great Commission command.

Two are Better than One

While the word “team” does not appear in our English Bibles, it is taught by example throughout Scripture. The fundamental principle of team ministry is found in Ecclesiastes 4:7-12 where the Preacher observed:

*Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun. There is one alone, and there is not a second; yea, he hath neither child nor brother: yet is there no end of all his labour; neither is his eye satisfied with riches; neither saith he, For whom do I labour, and bereave my soul of good? This is also vanity, yea, it is a sore travail.*
Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will help up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

The writer of Ecclesiastes says there are five distinct advantages to partnering with others in a team ministry.

**Team ministry can reduce stress** - People who have been in a dysfunctional team ministry might argue with this point, but the inspired author points out the vanity of being a “Lone Ranger.” In verse 7, he says he saw a “vanity under the sun.” He saw something that was a waste of time, something that was useless, something that didn’t make sense. He then proceeded in the next verse to describe what it was that he saw that was so foolish.

What he saw was a man working alone with no one to help him. He didn’t have a second person, a helper, a son or a brother to share the load he was carrying. Consequently, he says that “there is no end of all his labour.” Many a missionary, pastor, church planter and campus worker runs himself ragged trying to do everything himself. The stress of doing so is tremendous. He is constantly tired, worn out, irritable, and angry because he has to do it all himself. He doesn’t have time to relax and has trouble shutting down at night. All he can think about is what comes next and how much he still has to do. In too many cases, he ends up discouraged and depressed, wondering like the man in verse 8, “for whom do I labour, and bereave my soul of good?” It is easy to quit when you are all alone and stressed out.

A well-formed, compatible ministry team spreads the load around. The workload can be divided among team members. Many hands make for light work. No one person has to do it all. People can relax and schedule time off, even take a vacation without feeling guilty. Oftentimes, just talking things out can significantly reduce the stress level. Problems can be discussed and solutions found. Team members can share a different perspective and make suggestions that we didn’t think about. Teams that work well together reduce the stress level for all involved.

**Team ministry increases our effectiveness and productivity** - In verse 9, Solomon tells us flat out that two are better than one. He then tells us why he says that - because they have a good “reward” for their labor. The word “reward” can be translated as “return.” In other words, they are more effective, and because they are more effective, they are more productive. Two people can do more than one person alone can do. They don’t have to work as hard, but they are able to accomplish more through their combined efforts.

Together, they have more time, more skills, more money, and more hands to get things done. Not only that, but by working together they actually increase what they can do. It is called “synergy” and is defined as the interaction of two or more agents so that their combined effect is greater than the sum of their individual efforts. The energy and creativity of a well-structured team will almost always exceed that of the individuals working alone. Churches can be planted quicker, better, and stronger. Campus ministries can be expanded and made more productive. Outreach ministries to ethnic groups can be more effective if you develop a ministry team that has good chemistry among its members.

**Team ministry provides encouragement and support in tough times** - Verse 10 reminds us of the importance of team ministry when the going gets tough and times are hard. Sooner or later, those times will come in your ministry. There will be times when you will be discouraged and will feel like quitting. People will abandon you just when you need them. Results will be less than what you anticipated. At some point, you will want to throw in the towel and move on.
It is at times like these that you need someone to intervene and hold out a helping hand to lift you back onto your feet. We all need someone to remind us that things are not as bad as they seem. We need someone to tell us to stop feeling sorry for ourselves and to get back into the game. Team members can do that for us. When we are alone we only have one perspective. Our tunnel vision keeps us from seeing the big picture. At times like that, a coworker or a teammate can offer an encouraging word, a better perspective or even a mild rebuke to help us get back on track.

**Team ministry supplies what is lacking** - None of us have all the gifts, skills, insights, and intelligence needed to do the job we have been assigned. No matter how talented we are, we can’t supply everything that is needed. This is illustrated in verse 11 where we are told that if two lie together, then they have heat. By themselves, they have a hard time staying warm. They can wrap up in their quilts and turn on their electric blankets, but that isn’t nearly as effective as snuggling down together with your spouse on a cold winter night. What the one is lacking, the other one supplies.

The same is true of team ministry. A well-organized team will have complimentary gifts and skills. One person will be gifted in one area and the other in another area. Neither has all that is needed, but by working together they are able to bring a full package to the table. Many things go into making an effective team, but one of the critical points is to choose people who bring those things that we ourselves are lacking. By combining our resources and abilities, we can be far more effective than by working separately.

**Team ministry gives us a united front against opposition** - Make no mistake about it - you will face opposition in ministry. People will disagree with you. Satan will oppose you. The city fathers may frustrate you. The very people you are ministering to may turn against you. Opposition is simply a fact of ministry.

It is always better to have a united team standing with you in times of opposition than it is to stand alone. The Apostle Paul knew what it was like to be out on the point by himself (II Timothy 4:16), and he didn’t like it very much. Church plants tend to attract a disproportion of disgruntled people who want to highjack the vision and control the direction of the ministry. Sometimes they can influence others to follow their lead.

These devastating attacks can be more easily nullified if you have a team of leaders who back you and stand with you. Verse 12 tells us that standing alone invites disaster whereas a threefold cord (a united front) cannot be quickly broken.

There is no doubt about it. Scripture makes it plain that team ministry is the preferable approach to doing God’s work rather than going it alone. This truth is illustrated over and over throughout Scripture as we shall see.

**The First Ministry Team**

The greatest example of a team ministry found in Scripture is located in Genesis 1:1 where we read that “in the beginning GOD created the heaven and the earth.” The word “God” is *Elohim*, which is the plural noun form of *El*. This is the most common word used to describe the Creator God of the Bible. It is plural in form suggesting that even though “the Lord our God is one Lord” (Deuteronomy 6:4), there is a plurality (or a team) to who he is. This is further evidenced in Genesis 1:26 where God says, “Let US make man in our image, after OUR likeness.” Similar plural expressions also are found in Genesis 3:22 and Isaiah 6:8.

Genesis 1:2 adds weight as a second member of the “God team” is introduced to us when we are told that “the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.” A third member of the creation team is
highlighted in Colossians 1:13-17 where we are told that it was the “Son” (Jesus Christ) who created all things that are in the heaven and in the earth, and that by him all things consist.

Thus, we find that the creation of the heaven and the earth, and everything in them was the result of a team effort involving God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. What a marvelous team they were and are. They worked together in perfect harmony to accomplish everything they set out to do. If you want an example of how a team ministry ought to work, look no further than God himself.

Not only was the creation a team effort, but our redemption from sin, our reconciliation to God, our sanctification, and eventual glorification are accomplished through the marvelous teamwork of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The teams we may form will never reach the level of harmony and cooperation that exists within the Godhead, but our hearts should be encouraged to strive to function as much like them as is humanly possible.

**Biblical Examples of Team Ministry**

There are numerous examples of team ministries throughout Scripture. Team ministry is not an isolated anomaly that pops up now and then. It is the preferred *modus operandi* for getting things done. The following are but a sample of the many examples of God’s servants functioning together to carry out God’s work.

**Abraham formed a team to rescue Lot** - When Abraham’s brother Haran died, Abraham took his young nephew in and provided for him (Genesis 11:27-31). When Lot grew up he moved his family into the city of Sodom. While there, war broke out between some of the neighboring tribes and Lot was captured along with some of the other inhabitants of the city.

When news of Lot’s capture reached Abraham, he knew he had to act quickly if he was to rescue his nephew. There was no time to waste, so he called together all the male servants in his household and armed them. Genesis 14:13 tells us that Abraham did not act alone. Rather, he formed a confederation that involve at least three other tribal leaders - Mamre, Eshcol, and Aner. Working together, they pursued after the enemy forces, overtook them, and liberated the captives. By himself, Abraham could not have done that, but by forming a team, he was able to do that which he could not do alone. Upon his return, he refused all the gifts that were offered to him, but saw to it that his teammates were handsomely repaid for their participation (14:24).

**Moses, Aaron, Hur and Joshua worked together as a team** - When God called Moses to return to Egypt to liberate his people, he didn’t want to go. He offered one excuse after another why he wasn’t qualified for the job. “I’m a nobody. I can’t do that” (Exodus 3:11). “I don’t even know who I would be representing” (3:13). “The people will not believe me” (4:1). “I’m not eloquent. I can’t speak in front of people” (4:10). “Why don’t you send someone else?” (4:13). At that point God assigned Moses to work together in team ministry with his older brother Aaron (4:14). Moses would be the team leader, but Aaron would be his spokesman and the second in command. Together, as a team, they confronted Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, and succeeded in leading the children of Israel out of their bondage to freedom. The liberation of Israel from Egyptian bondage is one of the greatest accomplishments in history, and it was achieved by a team.

Later, Moses attempted to go it alone when it came to judging the people and deciding civil cases. Exodus 18:13 tells us that Moses sat from morning to night hearing arguments, listening to disputes, and settling disagreements among the people. He was the sole judge and jury for the entire country. When his father-in-law, Jethro, came for a visit and observed Moses’ hectic lifestyle, he rebuked him sharply.
and told him that what he was doing was not right. Moses considered himself indispensable. In his opinion, he was the only one capable of doing the job. He was wrong, however, and his father-in-law told him so (4:17).

Jethro instructed Moses to train a group (team) of men who could take over many of the responsibilities he was caring for on his own. They were to set up a team structure that divided the nation into thousands of “cell groups,” each with a team leader who was accountable to someone assigned to help him stay on track (18:20-22). Moses would handle the big stuff and the rest of his team would handle the small stuff.

Leading hundreds of thousands of people through a wilderness is no small task. Although they were passing through a barren land, it seemed like someone was always disputing their right to be there. Within a short time after leaving Egypt, Moses encountered a problem he could not solve by himself. A fierce tribe of Amalekites blocked their path and began to take aggressive steps to drive the Israelites back the way they had come (Exodus 17:8). Moses was a shepherd, a man of peace who spent much of his time settling disputes rather than getting into fights.

It was at this point that a man named Joshua, a former slave himself, joined Moses’ leadership team. He was fearless and courageous, and knew how to lead men to feats of great bravery. Joshua was a born leader of men. Together, Moses, Aaron and Joshua met in a team meeting to plan their strategy for the impending battle (17:9). In keeping with their plan, Joshua led his men into battle and Moses stood atop a nearby hill with his arms outstretched to God holding the rod of God in his hand. As long as Moses held up his hands, Joshua and his men prevailed in battle.

But when Moses’ arms grew weary and he could no longer hold them up, the enemy prevailed. It was at this point that the advantage of team ministry is so evident. As Moses sat wearily upon a rock with aching arms, Aaron and Hur came along side of him and held up his arms for hours until Joshua won the victory (17:12,13). Because they worked together as a team they were able to accomplish a great victory that they never would have been able to achieve by themselves.

David, Joab, and Abishai formed a powerful team - David was a team player. After killing Goliath, he joined King Saul’s army and quickly rose through the ranks to become the commander of the military forces (I Samuel 18:5). Jealousy on the part of the team leader (Saul) forced David to abandon the team and to flee for his life (19:10). Although in exile and on the run from Saul’s security forces, David attracted a team of like-minded men who followed him gladly (22:1,2).

One of those men was David’s cousin, Abishai (26:6). Later, Abishai’s brother, Joab, would join the team as well. All three men were capable military leaders in their own right. Each ascended to become top commanders in the Jewish army. Their partnership would last for nearly forty years. By working together as a team, they established a national capitol (Jerusalem), vastly expanded the borders of the country, and ushered in a period of peace and prosperity that lasted for nearly half a century.

Now, it is true that their relationship was not always as harmonious as it might have been. Like most teams, David and Joab had their moments when they argued, debated, and got upset with each other. After all, Joab was a self-willed man who crossed the line on several occasions, even committing the murder of anyone he considered a rival. It was only in the waning years of David’s life, when Joab committed treason by backing Adonijah to be David’s successor (I Kings 1:7,19), that David finally ordered the execution of his former teammate and friend (2:5,6).

Elijah and Elisha formed a ministry team - Elijah was God’s spokesmen during the days of King Ahab in the northern kingdom of Israel. James 5:17 tells us he was a man of like passions to many of us. He was also a mighty man of prayer who saw his prayers answered when he prayed that it would not rain. He
was fearless in his opposition to the pagan Baal worship introduced by Ahab and his wife. Single-handedly, he stood against the eight hundred and fifty prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel. He called down fire from heaven to prove that Jehovah God was the true God of Israel (I Kings 18:20-39). Elijah was a fearless fighter for God and accomplished much.

But when Jezebel threatened to kill him, he fled for his life into the wilderness afraid, discouraged, and defeated. Because he was alone and had no one to pray with him, no one to stand with him, no one to encourage him, he prayed that he might die (19:1-4). In the words of Ecclesiastes 4:10, when Elisha fell he had no one to lift him up. Therein lies the danger of “Lone Ranger” ministry. You are out there all by yourself and when the hard times come, there is real danger that you will succumb to your feelings of fear and discouragement.

God is a marvelous God. He knew Elijah was hurting and discouraged. God sent his angel to minister to his weary servant. The angel prescribed rest and nourishment, thus allowing him to recharge both his physical and spiritual batteries. In time, God confronted his servant, corrected his misguided thinking, and instructed him to form a team ministry with a young man named Elisha (19:16).

Elisha was a farmer with a heart that was sensitive toward God. When Elijah came and placed his mantel upon his shoulders, he knew he was being invited to join Elijah’s team. He left his parents, his farm, and everything that was dear to him to partner with the man of God. He chose to minister unto him and with him throughout the remainder of Elijah’s life-long ministry (19:21).

We don’t know how many years that was, but wherever Elijah went, Elisha went. When Elijah confronted Ahab about the murder of Naboth and the theft of his vineyard (I Kings 21:17-24), Elisha would have been there with him. When Elijah confronted the messengers of King Ahaziah and predicted the king’s death (II Kings 1:3-6), Elisha would have been at his side. When the king sent fifty armed men to arrest Elijah and he called down fire from heaven upon them (II Kings 1:9-12), Elisha would have been present. As a good team leader, Elijah was mentoring Elisha, preparing him to succeed him and to form his own team ministry.

Their service together was wonderful, but the thing Elisha enjoyed most were those times when they were alone talking about ministry and the things of God. Elijah was getting old and the time of his departure from this life was growing near. He had one last journey to take, and one last test to administer to his teammate. That journey and test are recorded in II Kings 2. Carefully, Elijah tested his partner’s faithfulness. Would he turn aside or remain true to his calling. Elisha passed the test with flying colors and got to see something that no one else has ever seen. He saw Elijah translated from earth to heaven in a chariot of fire (II Kings 2:11). Interestingly, Elijah never became discouraged again after forming a ministry team with Elisha. The companionship they shared helped keep him on an even keel throughout the rest of his life.

Jesus and the disciples formed a ministry team - Jesus Christ was the most dynamic person who ever lived and walked upon this earth. He was knowledgeable and innovative. Compassionate and kind. He could hold crowds spellbound for hours and calm a raging sea. He was powerful and influential. He could heal the sick, restore the fallen, make the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the lame to walk, the dumb to speak, and the dead to live. He was a visionary leader. He set out to “build my church” and changed the world in the process. If there was ever anyone who was self-sufficient and didn’t need a team to help him, it was the Lord Jesus.

And yet, we find just the opposite. Rather than going it alone, he chose to work with a team. From the time he began his public ministry, he assembled a group of co-laborers to work with him. He invited James and John along with Peter and Andrew, Philip and Nathanael and others to leave their nets and their livelihoods to join his team (Matthew 4:19; 9:9; John 1:43). He walked and talked with them, he
took them with him wherever he went. He shared his vision for building the church with them (Matthew 16:18) and dealt with their petty differences (Mark 19:35-41). He gave them assignments and sent them out in teams of two (Luke 10:1). When they returned he debriefed them and held them accountable (Luke 10:17). He taught them that leadership was servanthood (Matthew 20:25-27) and that ministry was done in a team setting.

Following his resurrection Jesus assembled his ministry team of disciples and commissioned them to go into all the world and preach the gospel to everyone they met (Mark 16:15). They were to make disciples from among all people groups (Matthew 28:19) starting at Jerusalem. From there they and their team partners were to carry the gospel into Judaea, Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8).

He promised that he would always be on their team with them (Matthew 28:20) and that the team would be expanded to include the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit to empower them (John 14:16,17). God can and does use individuals to accomplish his will. But when he wanted to change the world, he chose to do it through a team.

Peter and John worked together as a team - Peter and John were accustomed to working together as a team long before Jesus invited them to join him. They were both fisherman who made their living by harvesting large (and sometimes not so large) quantities of marine life from the waters of Lake Gennesaret (also known as Lake Tiberias or the Sea of Galilee). This was the largest freshwater lake in Israel (13 miles long, 8.1 miles wide) as well as the lowest freshwater lake in the world. By working together they could circle their nets and catch more fish than if they worked alone. Luke 5:10 tells us that James was also in partnership with Peter and John. They fished together. They mended nets together. They shared the labor and the profits alike. They made a good team.

Thus, it is not surprising that when Jesus called John to join his team he also invited Peter as well. These men had a proven track record of teamwork. Experience in working together is a valuable asset if you want to change the world. During the next three and a half years we find Peter and John (along with James) teaming up together. They were there on the mount when Jesus was transfigured before them (Matthew 17:1,2). They were there when Jairus’ daughter was raised from the death (Mark 5:37-42). They were there in the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus prayed prior to his arrest (Matthew 26:37). These two men (Peter and John) were the ones who served as the advance team responsible for preparing the last Passover meal Jesus shared with his disciples (Luke 22:8).

Following the resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus we find Peter and John still working together as a team. They often went to the temple and prayed together (Acts 3:1). God used their team to heal the lame man at the gate of the temple (Acts 3:4-11). When confronted by the Jewish Sanhedrin and ordered to cease and desist their gospel ministry, Peter and John both boldly spoke up in defense of what they had done (Acts 4:13,19). They did what teammates do - they stood shoulder to shoulder defending each other and encouraging one another. When revival broke out among the non-Jewish Samaritans under the preaching of Philip, it was the team of Peter and John that was sent to investigate and validate what God was doing among the Gentiles (Acts 8:14).

Peter and John were as different as night and day. Peter was loud and boisterous while John was quieter and more thoughtful. Peter was obviously the leader and spokesman for the team, but it was John who stood beside him and behind him. He encouraged him and worked along side of him to accomplish so much for the Lord. They were a highly effective team and serve as an example of how beneficial team ministry can be.

Barnabas and Saul formed a missionary church-planting team - Barnabas was ideally suited for team ministry. His real name was Joses, but the apostles called him “Barnabas” which means “son of consolation” because he was such an encouragement to them. He was a godly Levite from the island of
Cyprus who loved God and had put his faith and trust in the Lord Jesus as his Messiah. He was both gracious and generous (two good qualities for team ministry). He shared both his wealth and his wisdom with his brothers in Christ (Acts 4:36,37). He was a gentle and kind man.

Saul was just the opposite. He was a Pharisee and proud of it. He lived a meticulous life in which he sought to abide by every jot and tittle of the Jewish Law. He was filled with anger and hate toward anyone or anything he felt did not measure up to his understanding of the Law. Thus, he soon became the lead persecutor of Christians and the church. He gave his consent to the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58; 8:1). He made havoc of the church, broke up their meetings, and imprisoned both men and women in jail until they could be put on trial (8:3). He even went so far as to travel to foreign lands in search of Christians (9:2). It is doubtful you could find two more unlikely candidates to work together on the same ministry team.

When God intervened in Saul’s life and he was glorious saved, none of the Christians wanted anything to do with him. They had heard about him and his dastardly deeds (Acts 9:13). They thought his “profession of faith” was just a trick to lure them out into the open so he could arrest them. But his conversion was so real that his life was transformed. The fierce persecutor became a fearless preacher of the gospel. With his intimate knowledge of the Word of God, he confounded the Jews in Damascus with his preaching. Enraged by his conversion and preaching, the Jews sought to kill him. Only through the providence of God and with the help of a handful of believers, he was able to escape with his life (9:24,25).

When Saul returned to Jerusalem, he attempted to contact the very believers he had persecuted. Like their brethren in Damascus, they wanted nothing to do with him. They didn't trust him. Barnabas, with his sensitive nature, detected the sincerity in Saul’s voice and testimony. He did what mentors do. He befriended Saul and persuaded the church to give this new convert a chance (Acts 9:26,27). Saul, however, was brash, bold, and confrontational. He was a spiritual lightning rod that attracted a lot of animosity toward himself and the church as well. Finally, when death threats were made against him once again, the church fathers shipped him home to Tarsus in the hope that time would mellow him somewhat.

In the meanwhile, the gospel continued to spread in all directions. The door was opened to Gentiles to hear the gospel when a Roman centurion named Cornelius got saved in Caesarea, along with several members of his family (Acts 10:44,45). In addition, those who fled the persecution in Jerusalem shared the gospel wherever they went. Soon there were believers and churches popping up in Cyprus and the city of Antioch. Multitudes were being saved and the apostles were having a hard time keeping up with all that was happening.

It was decided that Barnabas should travel to Antioch and check out what God was doing in that city (11:22). He was so impressed by what he saw that he realized he needed help. He knew just the man to ask. He made his way to Tarsus and enlisted Saul onto his team. Together they ministered in the church in Antioch for a year and saw the work stabilized and growing. Others including Niger, Lucius, and Manaen were added to the team as well (13:1).

There was a whole world to be reached and to its credit, the church in Antioch responded to the prompting of the Holy Spirit by releasing their best leaders from their local responsibilities, and commissioning them to carry the gospel into the western world as the very first missionary team (13:1-3).

Initially, Barnabas was the team leader and Saul (called Paul) was the junior partner. Initially, Scripture placed Barnabas’ name first, indicating that he was the team leader (Acts 13:21,7; 14:12,14; 15:12). There were still some rough edges in his character that needed molding, and Barnabas, with his patience
and encouraging manner, was just the man God used to do it. Saul was a quick learner and with his outstanding leadership skills, he soon took over the leadership of the team (Acts 15:35,36).

Together they crisscrossed Cyprus. Then they launched into a truly amazing and productive time of evangelism and church planting throughout Asia Minor (modern Turkey). These two opposites worked so well together that hundreds of people were won to Christ and dozens of churches were planted. By working together as a team they were able to be far more effective and had much more influence than would have been possible if they each had solo ministries.

Paul, Timothy, Silas, Titus, and Luke formed team ministries – On the human level, all ministry teams are temporary. Sooner or later for a variety of reasons, people will transition off the team and into other ministries. This is normal and natural, although sometimes it can be painful. Paul and Barnabas’ team ministry came to an abrupt end because of philosophical differences over the composition of their team (Acts 15:36-38). Barnabas, ever the encourager, wanted to give his nephew John Mark a second chance to be part of their team. Paul, the hard-charging choleric, refused to have the young man on his team because of his past failures. So, after a heated argument, they went their separate ways.

The thing that is missed sometimes is the fact that they both formed new ministry teams. They didn’t try to do ministry by themselves. Barnabas chose John Mark as his team partner and sailed to Cyprus to follow up with the churches he and Paul had started there. Paul chose Silas and headed west toward Asia Minor to strengthen the churches he and Barnabas had planted in that region. In spite of the contentious words between them and the dissolution of their ministry team, the work of the Lord was stronger than before because they expanded the number of teams and the number of people involved in them.

Paul understood that he could multiply his effectiveness through team ministry. He did this by bringing new people onto his team, training them, and then sending them out to reproduce what they had seen him do. Timothy was added to the team in Lystra (Acts 6:1-3). Doctor Luke joined the team in Troas (there is a change of pronoun from “they” to “we” in Acts 16:10). Timothy and Silas worked together as a team on special assignments (Acts 1:14,15; 18:5). Later, others were added to Paul’s ministry team, men like Titus (II Corinthians 8:23), Artemas (Titus 3:12), Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius, Tychicus, Trophimus (Acts 20:4), Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:25), and Aquila with his wife Priscilla (Acts 18:2), along with many others.

There can be no doubt about it. Throughout Scripture team ministry is presented as the preferable, if not the primary and most effective, means for carrying out God’s work here on earth. There is a solid biblical basis for developing a team ministry regardless of whether you are planting a church, engaging in campus ministry or attempting to reach a particular religious or ethnic group. If we are to reach our generation with the gospel message we must lay aside our pride and rugged individualism to give serious consideration to replacing the “Lone Ranger” mentality of the past century with the more biblical approach of team ministry.

Ministry is not a one-man show. It takes a team to win. The positives of team ministry far outweigh the negatives. We have looked at some of those negatives in the first chapter. Now, it is time to look at the other side of the coin and see some of the wonderful benefits of a team ministry. We’ll cover these in the next chapter.

Things to do:
1. Make a list of all the ministry teams you can find in Scripture.

2. For each ministry team found, determine who the team leaders were and what roles each member of the team fulfilled.

3. Briefly describe Jesus’ example of team ministry and how he used his team of twelve apostles.

4. What can we learn from the break up of Paul and Barnabas’ ministry team in Acts 15:36-41?
Chapter 3

Quarterbacks Don’t Win Games Alone!
The Benefits of Team Ministry

Quarterbacks are the thoroughbreds of the National Football League. You can’t win games without them. They are the gold standard of major league sports. The ’76 Tampa Bay Buccaneers had Heisman Trophy winner Steve Spurrier as their starting quarterback. He had a long illustrious history as a superstar. In high school, he won two consecutive state championships as the starting pitcher on the baseball team and never lost a game in three years. In addition, he starred in basketball, and was selected as All-American high school quarterback in football.

Spurrier won a four-year athletic scholarship to the University of Florida where he became a premier passer when most teams were still focusing on the running game. He was a sensational player and became known as “Super Steve” and as “Steve Superior.” He went on to win the Heisman Trophy in 1966 beating out Bob Griese for the honor. He was picked third in the overall draft that year and was the number one draft choice for the San Francisco 49ers. He played for them for the next nine years.

The fans expected Spurrier to perform miracles when he became the Buccaneer’s quarterback in 1976. But quarterbacks aren’t much good unless they have good receivers on the other end of their passes. That was something Tampa Bay didn’t have. The coach often played his own son as the primary pass receiver, but he was mediocre at best, and sometimes made little effort to catch the ball, especially if there was a chance of getting hit by an opposing defender.

Spurrier was a huge disappointment in Tampa Bay. He lasted only one year before retiring and going on to a great career as a college coach. Even though the Buccaneers had a full roster of players, they didn’t have a team, and without a team, quarterbacks can’t win by themselves.

The same is true of ministry. Teams can be far more effective than solo ministries. We have already seen that Scripture says, “Two are better than one” (Ecclesiastes 4:9). Why does Scripture say that, especially in light of all of the negative experiences some people have had in team ministry? In what ways is team ministry better than going it alone? What are the benefits of team ministry that outweigh the alleged negatives?

The results of team ministry often transcend those of individual efforts – Like a quarterback, one person can only do so much. By joining forces, people can combine their talents, resources, and energy to do more, to produce more, and to accomplish more than they could by working individually. It is known as synergy and can be defined as results that are greater than the sum of the parts. More ministry gets done, and often gets done better and quicker, when there are multiple people involved.

Research done by church-planting consultant Stephen Gray compared fast-growing churches (reached 200 within three years or less) with an equal number of struggling churches (new churches that have grown little since their founding). He found that 88.3 percent of the fast-growing churches were started by a church-planting team whereas only 12 percent of the struggling churches were started by a team.

In contrast, 88.5 percent of the struggling churches were started by individuals without the help of a team! The results are polar opposites. It is true that some church-planting teams produce struggling
churches. Most, however, do not. They are much more likely to produce growing churches. It is also true that some “Lone Ranger” planters produce fast-growing churches. Most, however, do not. They are much more likely to produce struggling churches. The principle of synergy and the research findings agree that teams are more beneficial when it comes to planting churches.

There is strength and safety in numbers – This principle is taught both in Scripture and in nature. Proverbs 11:14 says, “In the multitude of counselors there is safety.” You have multiple perspectives when you have a team ministry. In comparison, the lone church planter has only his own perspective. Many eyes can see what the single eye sometimes fails to see. Good leaders are not intimidated by multiple opinions. Rather, they discuss and evaluate those opinions with their teammates to come up with the best option possible.

Ecclesiastes 4:10 warns, “Woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up.” Discouragement is a problem we all face from time to time, especially if we are working alone. When things don’t go as expected, it is easy to feel like quitting, especially on Monday mornings. Having teammates provides us with built-in encouragers who can pick us up when we are down. They can support us and help us through the tough times that are an inevitable part of ministry.

A lone soldier, a lone sheep, and a lone church planter all have something in common. There are in great danger of being lost to the enemy simply because they are by themselves without the protection afforded by being in a group. We must not forget that we are involved in a spiritual warfare. “Lone Rangers” make an easy target for Satan. Countless men have been lost to the cause of Christ because they did not have someone else holding them accountable in their marriages and their ministries.

Team ministry provides for greater accountability – Accountability gets a bum rap. Many people, both in and out of ministry, rebel against the concept. That is most unfortunate because it is taught repeatedly throughout Scripture (Matthew 28:20; 24:19; I Corinthians 5:10; Hebrews 13:17). We are to be accountable not only to God, but to those he has placed in authority over us and to those with whom we have entered into a team agreement. Teammates help each other stay focused and on course toward the mutually-agreed-upon goal.

Mutual accountability is a sign of a healthy church and a healthy team. Wise leaders, as well as strong leaders, seek out accountability partners who are not afraid to ask the tough questions. They know the noetic affect of sin makes them susceptible to self-delusion. They understand they cannot trust their own hearts (Proverbs 28:26). For this reason, they willingly make themselves accountable to other members of the team. Teams that practice accountability tend to produce stronger, larger, healthier, and faster-growing churches than those who lack this protection.

Team ministry maximizes a leader’s potential while minimizing his weaknesses\(^\text{14}\) - All leaders have strengths and weaknesses. One man will have considerable preaching skills, but be weak in administration. Another may be an outstanding soul winner, but a weak discipler. Wise leaders recruit a team of people who are strong in the areas in which they themselves are weak. This allows them to focus on those areas of ministry for which they are best equipped. Everyone wins when this happens.

If a person chooses to go it alone, just the opposite can happen. He will have to spend a disproportionate amount of his time compensating for his weaknesses, in which case he will neglect his strengths. Or, he will ignore those areas of weakness and leave a lot of things undone or done poorly. Regardless of which way he goes, his ministry is likely to suffer as a result.

Team ministry allows members of the team to do what they do best. They don’t have to compensate for their weaknesses because someone else on the team covers those areas for them.
Building a Successful Team Ministry

Team ministry compensates for the lack of superstar leaders – Most of us are not as talented as we think we are. None of us has all the gifts, talents, insights, and skills needed to plant a church or build a ministry. There are relatively few dynamic, high-energy, driven, charismatic, compelling, superstar pastors and church planters who become icons in ministry. Most people just aren’t that talented.

It is for that very reason that team ministry is more beneficial than solo ministry. The lack of superstar leaders all but requires the development of teams. By combining their talents and skills, they can accomplish more than the most talented individual can working alone.

Team ministry enables you to offer a more diverse ministry menu – Many ministries try to do too much. They don’t have the staff, resources or space to be a “full service” group, but they try. Often, the church-planting husband and wife are the staff. They try to do it all, but in spite of their best efforts there is only so much they can accomplish.

In contrast, a team of two or three couples brings more talent, more resources, more time, and more ideas to the table. They can offer multiple ministries that the solo worker can only dream about. Because each one is not trying to do everything, they have more time to focus on those specific areas of ministry in which they are most gifted. This normally produces better quality ministry as well as an expanded ministry menu. Ministry is somewhat like fishing – the more hooks you put in the water, the more fish you are likely to catch.

Team ministry often facilitates numerical growth – Growth is one of the goals of ministry. We want the people we serve to grow spiritually, but we also want to see an increase in the number of people to whom we minister. Numerical growth is not a bad thing. It is a desirable objective. It is mandated in Christ’s Great Commission command to “make disciples” as well as in his visionary statement that he would “build my church.” Neither of those are possible without numerical growth.

To be effective, church planting, campus ministry, Jewish outreach, and prison ministry all require that we share the gospel with numerous people and win as many of them to personal faith in Jesus Christ as possible. When that happens, numerical growth occurs, and there is rejoicing in heaven. By working alone we limit how much we can do, how many people we can reach, and how much growth we will see. But a ministry team, because it has more workers, more time, more opportunities, can reach more people with the gospel. It can disciple more people. It can offer more ministries to attract more people. As a result, the ministry grows spiritually and numerically. A church plant that does not reach “critical mass” (the point of sustainability) within two or three years will often end up as a small struggling church that eventually succumbs to the inevitable. Numerical growth is critical to reaching a ministry’s “critical mass” point. Teams get you there quicker and stronger than solo ministry possibly can.

Team ministry allows for greater innovation – Regardless of how much reading you do or how many seminars you attend, you will still end up with just one person’s perspective – your own. You can only read, hear, experience, learn, and do so much. Because of your limited background, your view of everything is skewed to some extent. Ever-changing circumstances require innovative responses. Far too many people are doing ministry the way it was done fifty years ago because that is all they know. This in turn undermines the effectiveness of their ministries.

The team brings varied experiences and perspectives to the table. Other members of the team see what we miss. They have experiences we have not had. They have read and seen things that we haven’t. They are able to make suggestions that never crossed our minds. Proverbs 11:14 says there is safety in a multitude of counselors. That is especially true when dealing with problems or when developing more effective means of ministry. A wise team leader listens to the opinions of his team players. He understands that they have insights he doesn’t possess.
Team ministry serves as a positive example to the congregation – Modeling is a powerful force for developing disciples and growing people to maturity. Jesus often used the “with him” method of discipling (Matthew 26:37; Mark 3:14; 9:2). The Apostle Paul encouraged the believers to follow his example of ministry and godly living (Philippians 3:17; II Thessalonians 3:9). They each used modeling as a means for encouraging others to grow spiritually and to get involved in ministry.

Most ministry is team ministry. You cannot plant a church or develop a campus ministry without involving lay people in a team effort. Sadly, far too many Christians sit back and do little because they think the pastor is the “hired gun” they pay to do ministry for them. They don’t know they are supposed to be part of the team. They don’t understand how they fit on the team. They don’t know how a team functions. They need to see a positive role model of a biblical team in action. That can only be provided in a team setting. If you want your people to be involved, you have to provide them with role models to follow. A well-designed ministry team does exactly that.

Team ministry allows the leader to focus on the big picture – Sometimes leaders make the mistake of getting bogged down in the details. That happened to Moses in Exodus 18:13-16. It also often happens to those in ministry. They get so involved in the daily routine of ministry that they lose sight of where they are going or what they are trying to accomplish. They stand so close to the trees they can no longer see the forest.

One of the secrets of good leadership is delegation. You have to give away ministry in order to expand ministry. You have to allow others to handle many of the details that you would like to handle yourself. Good leaders learn to trust their teammates. They give them both the responsibility and the authority to take care of the details so they can focus on the big picture. This was the lesson Jethro taught Moses when he visited him in the dessert. It is a lesson all of us need to apply to our own ministries.

Team ministry allows you to share both the blame and the credit – In ministry, some things work and others don’t. There are times when things take longer to accomplish than expected. Sometimes they simply turn out differently than anticipated. One thing is sure, you will have a number of victories as well as some defeats along the way. If you are working by yourself you can take the credit for whatever success you have, but you must also shoulder the blame for the failures that occur. You can blameshift all you want, but since almost everything rises and falls on leadership, the fault lays at your feet. Be certain of this, the people won’t take responsibility for something you led them to do.

Team ministry, on the other hand, tends to spread the responsibility around among the members since it was a team effort that produced the results you have, whether good or bad. It is easier to say, “We missed the boat on this one” than it is to say, “I missed the boat on this one.” A good leader, however, will take most of the blame for something that doesn’t work, and give most of the credit to the team for what does work. Because the productivity of a team is generally higher than that of individuals, there are likely to be more successes than failures, and more credit than blame to be shared.

Team ministry allows for more equipping and greater involvement of more people – If you and your spouse are the sole workers in a ministry, then your ministry will be limited to what two people can produce. But if you have a ministry team, then you increase your productivity potential several times over depending on how many people are on your team. The more people you have on the team, the more people you are going to have involved in the work of the ministry.

In Ephesians 4:11,12 we are told that one of the primary responsibilities of the pastor/teacher is to “perfect” the saints. The word means to outfit, equip, train, prepare or coach someone so as to hone his skills to the highest degree possible. It envisions an athletic coach training his runners for the big race. It also describes a drill sergeant running his recruits through their paces so they can become a viable fighting force.
And what is the purpose of this training? It is to prepare them (the people) to do the work of the ministry. The result is that the body of Christ (the church) is edified or built up. Far too many pastors try to do the work of the ministry themselves, but that isn’t their job. Their job is to enlist people for their team and to give them the job skills they need in order to do the work of the ministry. In the process of doing that, the individual believer grows spiritually as he/she gets involved in ministry. In addition, the church itself grows both spiritually and, most likely, numerically as well because more people are being ministered to and their needs are being met.

Team ministry is often less stressful and more satisfying – Nothing breeds contentment and joy more than success. Seeing a job done well, reaching a goal together, looking at the finished product, and knowing that you did it together brings tremendous satisfaction. Super Bowls, World Series, and National Championships are won by teams, not by individuals. John Maxwell reinforces this concept when he observes that individuals play games, teams win championships. On a team, everyone has a job to do. They all pull together. It is a joint effort that enables them to do something they could never do alone.

When everything depends on you alone, you are going to be under tremendous stress. But when you have a team, the other members of the team help carry the load. The stress level is reduced significantly when teams work well together.

Team ministry has a biblical endorsement – We have already touched on this in the last chapter. While God uses individuals at times to accomplish his will, most of the time those individuals have a team that is working with them. When Jesus began his public ministry, he formed a team to help him. When he returned to heaven, he left behind a team to carry on his work in his absence. The Apostle Paul seldom went anywhere without a team of companions who helped him in the ministry. As far as we can tell, every church plant in the New Testament was the result of a team ministry.

No matter how good of a player Steve Spurrier was, he could not, and did not, win a single game with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers in 1976 because he didn’t have a team behind him. Quarterbacks don’t win games alone. Tampa Bay had a roster and they had players, but they didn’t have a team. You have to have the right players in the right position in order to have a team. We’ll talk about that in the next chapter.

Things to do:

1. What benefits have you experienced in a team setting?

2. If you are not part of a ministry team, how could your ministry be strengthened if you had one?
3. If you had a ministry team, what responsibilities that you are currently caring for would you delegate to someone else?

4. If you had a ministry team, what things would you be able to do that you are not currently able to do?
Chapter 4

Recruiting Position Players
Roles within the Ministry Team

You can’t win if you don’t know what you are supposed to be doing. After losing every game of the season, it could be argued rather convincingly that the ’76 Tampa Bay Buccaneers didn’t know what they were doing. Perhaps they should have taken a page from the ’59 Green Bay Packers who had a seven and five mediocre season.

Head coach, Vince Lombardi, gathered his team together and held up the oblong pigskin. He then uttered what many consider to be the most memorable quote in football history: “Gentlemen, this is a football.” He proceeded to explain the fundamentals of football in detail and what each position player was supposed to do.

There are eleven position players on the offensive team: center, right guard, left guard, right tackle, left tackle, tight end, two wide receivers, two running backs, and the quarterback. The defense also has eleven position players: two tackles, two ends, two cornerbacks, two safeties, two outside linebackers, and one middle linebacker. Each position player has a specific job to do. If he doesn’t know what he is supposed to do or if he doesn’t do it well, his team is not likely to win.

Tampa Bay had players playing who didn’t know what they were supposed to do or at least didn’t do what they were supposed to do. In their defense, they had twenty-one players on the injured reserve including eighteen who had knee surgery that year. Good players were hard to find and so the Bucs ended up with a construction worker and a truck driver playing at the tackle position. They recruited a guy named “Psycho Sims” off the streets of Watts (Los Angeles) to play linebacker. No wonder they had a losing season. Players didn’t know their roles, and if you don’t know what you are supposed to do, you are unlikely to win many games.

The same is true in ministry, especially in team ministry. If you don’t know what positions are needed for the team to succeed, if you don’t know what each position is supposed to do, if you don’t know what you are supposed to do personally, the team is likely to fail. That is especially true when it comes to church-planting teams.

The Need to Clarify Team Roles

In his book, Sticky Teams, Larry Osborne observes that one of the best ways to cut off disharmony and dysfunction at the pass is to clarify roles before someone joins the team. Team members have to know (and agree) what the purpose, mission, vision, values, goals, and strategy of the team are if they are to achieve them. They have to understand what is expected of each position and each player on the team. If they don’t know what role they are supposed to play or what they will be expected to do, they cannot possibly do it.

Too often people join a ministry team simply because they want to be a member of a team. They want to be where the action is. They want to work with someone else in ministry without having all the responsibility that goes with being a “Lone Ranger.” They may actually believe that team ministry is the
best approach to doing God’s work, but at the same time, they may lack the skills needed to fulfill the role they are given on the team.

Sometimes mission agencies assign missionaries to teams with little or no thought of what position they will play on the team. Too often people are assigned to a team who do not have the necessary skills to fulfill the role they are given. The chemistry between team players may be lacking. The players may have different goals, visions, values, and philosophy of ministry. Such teams almost never work well. Much of the ensuing heartache could be avoided by simply defining the roles, clarifying the positions, and putting round pegs in the right holes.

It all starts with clarifying the goal of the ministry team – The goal of forming a team is not to develop a particular administrative structure, but rather to build relationships and ministry skills that lead to effective ministry. Roles are important, but relationships are more important. It doesn’t matter how skilled a person may be, if the chemistry isn’t right, if the personalities don’t mesh, if a team mentality doesn’t materialize rather quickly, the effectiveness of the team will suffer and may come unglued altogether.

It is critically important that potential team players spend time together, get to know each other, and grow to like one another before forming a team. This cannot be done in one or two visits or through a couple of phone calls. The best intentions can be shattered by differences in style, philosophy of ministry, work ethic, values, goals, and strategies. Relationships can become strained quickly when expectations are not met.

The most effective team ministries often come together when people have already formed a friendship or have served together in some capacity previously. They already know each other and are acquainted with the other person’s strengths and weaknesses, idiosyncrasies, and preferences. Perhaps they attended college together, worked for the same employer, served on the same staff or were part of the same field council. Scripture tells us that Paul and Barnabas knew each other and had even worked together for a short time prior to forming their church-planting team.

This doesn’t mean that successful ministry teams cannot be formed by people who have no previous history together. It only means that it is likely to be more difficult for them to make it work.

Clarify that everyone on the team has a specific role to fulfill – Position players are there for a reason. Each one has a specific role or task he is expected to perform which contributes to the goal set before the team. A problem arises, however, when people don’t know what their role is. This happens more often than it should.

Several things can occur when people don’t know what their assigned role is: 1) They may just sit back and contribute little to the team effort; 2) They may look around and find some type of ministry activity to do that does not move the team forward toward its goal; 3) They may attempt to fulfill someone else’s role rather than their own task. This lack of communication concerning role responsibilities can lead to frustration, resentment, anger, conflict, ineffectiveness, and even the demise of the team.

People have to know what their role is and what they are supposed to do if they are to live up to those expectations. It is the team leader’s responsibility to see to it that everyone knows what his task is on the team. Mission agencies, local churches, campus ministries, and field councils must do a better job of facilitating communication between potential team members when assembling ministry teams.

Ministry is very similar to football. Each player has to know, not only what he is supposed to do, but also what every other player is going to do. Otherwise, they will be in the wrong place doing the wrong thing at the wrong time. In the same way, each member of the ministry team needs to understand what the
other players are doing as well as what he/she is supposed to do if they are to function as a winning team. Communication, and lots of it, is the key to clarifying roles.

Clarify that roles differ – Although there may be some overlap, no two roles on the team are the same. Running backs can catch the ball, but that is not their primary responsibility. Tight ends can block, but that is not their main job. Members of the team can cover for each other, but their primary task will be different than those of other members of the team.

Function defines the role. In the verbiage of the Apostle Paul in First Corinthians 12, some members of the team are “eyes” while others are “ears.” Some function as a “hand” while others serve as a “foot.” Each one has different requirements, different responsibilities, and different things that are expected of him. Rather than focusing on what someone else does or doesn’t do in comparison to ourselves, we need to recognize that each person is gifted differently and serves in a different capacity than we do. Different is good rather than bad. It enables a team to function in harmony to achieve its objectives.

Roles within the team will change as the ministry grows and circumstances develop. This happened with Paul and Barnabas. When the team began, Barnabas was the team leader. But as the ministry expanded Saul transitioned into the leadership. In the course of ministry new people may be added to the team while others drop off the team. Each change will require team members to adjust to accommodate the new circumstances. As with Paul, people may transition into new roles as their skills develop. Teams are not static. They are alive and ever changing.

Clarify that teams are not democracies – John Maxwell calls this the “Myth of the Roundtable.” It is the belief that everyone on the team is equal, all opinions count the same, and everyone has an equal voice and vote. Some would argue this is the way teams should function. The problem is that teams that function as democracies seldom win.

Governments (America is a representative republic, not a democracy), businesses, sports teams, and churches have all learned this lesson. Democracies tend to be cumbersome, ineffective, and often settle for the lowest common denominator that can be agreed upon. They tend to lose sight of the goal and are subject to the whims of the people. Can you imagine a football team taking a vote on which play to call throughout a game?

We would agree that each member of the team is important and each should be free to express his or her views in team meetings. They have equal standing with their sending agency and in their field councils. But ultimately, just as with their sending agency and with their field councils, someone has to lead. That someone is the team leader. He encourages communication, discussion, and interaction between team members, but he keeps them focused on the goal and moving toward it.

Clarify that roles come with the authority to do it – The worst thing you can do is to assign a role to someone without the authority needed to achieve it. You want to empower people rather than boxing them in. You do that by trusting them. If you don’t trust them, if you don’t think they can or will do the job right, don’t invite them to be on the team. When assigning roles and tasks, be sure the person understands what needs to be done, how it is to be done, and when it is to be done. Give people the right to be innovative, to recruit people, and to spend the money needed to do the job. Clarify which things need to come back to the leader and which do not. You can ask for progress reports along the way and you can debrief people at the end, but let them exercise their gifts and skills as they carry out their responsibilities.

Clarify that the goal is more important than the role – Every team player is vital to the success of the team. Each player is a talented individual who was chosen because of what he/she can contribute to reaching the goal. Good players throw themselves into their ministry, doing everything they can to hold
up their end of the bargain. There are times, however, when players may be asked to move to a new role, to take on a new task or to do something in addition to what they are already doing.

The first reaction is often, “That’s not my job. I didn’t sign on for that. I can’t do my job, if I have to do that.” Team players, however, need to understand that the team goal is more important than their personal objectives. They may be asked to do things they are not particularly interested in doing, but they do them because they need to be done in order to reach the goal. Ministry is not about us, it is about HIM, and so good players adjust and contribute wherever is needed in order that the team might win.

Position Players that make up the Team

The number of team players and the positions they play will differ from team to team depending on the purpose for which the team was formed. A team of campus workers will be different than a church-planting team, and an inner-city ministry team might be different from a suburban team. Our goal here is not to talk about the position players on an administrative team such as chairman, vice chairman, secretary and treasurer. That is not the focus of this document.

Rather, we are interested in the roles and functions within a ministry team, especially as it relates to the area of church planting. Baptist Mid-Missions, the organization with which I work, is a church-planting mission agency. Every team within BMM has as its objective to strategically advance the building of Christ’s church. In one way or another, they are tied into developing churches for the cause of Christ.

Since church planting is the primary focus within our mission organization, we will concentrate on the roles and position players that go into making up an effective church-planting team. Not everyone will agree with all the roles mentioned. Moreover, it is conceded that teams can function (to some degree) without all the players recommended. The goal, however, is to develop teams that have the best chance of achieving their objective of planting healthy churches. Some of the roles can be combined and filled by the same person. Theoretically, this is what the “Lone Ranger” planter attempts to do. He just doesn’t do it as well because he doesn’t have all the time, skills, and resources that a team has. The more players and resources you have at your disposal, the stronger and better the result should be.

In his book on Planting Missional Churches, Ed Stetzer recommends the following modified list of roles that need to be filled by lay leaders or those on the planting team:21

Role #1 – Team Leader – The role of team leader is the most important position of the team. He is the one with the vision. He chooses the players and assembles the team. He is the one who motivates, mobilizes, resources, and directs people to fulfill the vision.22 Almost everything will rise or fall based on his leadership. It is his leadership that will either energize or demoralize all the other gifts of his teammates.23

There can only be one team leader. That leader will usually be the pastor or the lead church planter. No one person has all the skills needed to pull off a successful church plant by himself. He will need, like Moses, to recruit other people who can compensate for his weaknesses. His role is so critical, however, that we will spend an entire chapter later in this manual talking about his responsibilities as team leader.

Role #2 – Music/Worship Leader – Music and worship are critical factors in any ministry, but especially in church planting. People do not come to church just to hear a sermon. They come to meet with God. The music portion of a service ought not to be a mere prelude to the message. It should capture peoples’ hearts and minds, and lift their thoughts to God. It should soften attitudes and focus attention on who God is and what he has done for us so people are ready to receive and respond to the message.
Building a Successful Team Ministry

Good music that is well done and sung enthusiastically will attract people to your ministry. The value you place upon your music ministry will be reflected in the time and effort you spend planning, preparing, and presenting it. You don’t want to get caught flipping through the hymnbook just before the service starts picking out the songs the congregation is going to sing. Like many pastors and planters, you may be musically challenged. If that is the case, find someone to help you. A music/worship leader is one of the most valuable position players you can recruit.

Your music program doesn’t have to be elaborate or complicated, but it does need to be done well. A good worship leader can draw music out of people and greatly enhance the effectiveness of your services. Ask the Lord to give you a musically talented couple who can play the piano/keyboard, sing, and lead music. They will be worth their weight in gold.

Role #3 – Preschool/Nursery Director – Children are important, especially to parents. People often select a church based upon the quality of the childcare afforded to their little ones. Parents will not leave their children in a poorly lit, smelly, dark, cluttered room with a cranky old grandmother who hates kids. Your preschool director must love children, be friendly, and be willing to spend countless hours with little ones so others can enjoy the worship service. It takes a special type of person to oversee the childcare ministry of a church.

Make sure this person understands the importance of child safety guidelines and has undergone both criminal and sexual offender background checks. A single accusation of misconduct can destroy your church. Since the preschool ministry will be among the first ministries you will start, and since it is so vital in attracting young couples to your church, you will want to make the filling of this role a high priority when putting your team together. In many cases, it may be the team leader’s wife or the wife of another team member.

Role #4 – Children’s Ministry Director – When trying to start a church, church planters sometimes make the mistake of focusing their energy on children’s ministries as a way to reach adults. The hope is that parents will be attracted to the church because the children like the programs. While this does sometimes happen, the result is often negligible. More often than not, the church planter and his wife get bogged down in ministering to several children’s groups while other aspects of ministry go undone.

Children are important and they need to be reached while their hearts are young and tender. It is for this reason you need a Children’s Ministry Director to develop and oversee this important aspect of ministry. It is recommended, however, that the focus be on developing a quality Children’s Church ministry during the worship time rather than starting a Sunday School program. This will greatly enhance the quality of your worship service, attract more adults, and provide children with the opportunity to worship on their own level. Sunday Schools require large amounts of time, space, finances, and personnel. Delay starting this ministry until you have parents asking for it, workers available to teach it, resources available to finances, and space enough to accommodate it.

Role #5 – Outreach/Evangelism Networker – We must not forget that the main reason for launching a church plant is to “make disciples.” To be successful, a church or church plant must be intentional in reaching out to and serving the unchurched to whom it is called. The days of the “attractional church” are largely over. The methods that worked in the past are not nearly as effective today as they once were.

While most churches start out with a focus on outreach and evangelism, many lose that focus shortly after reaching a few people in the community. There is a subtle shift from evangelism to edification and from multiplication to maintenance. The outreach/evangelism networker works with the team to keep the focus on outreach in balance with the other ministries of the church. He recruits, equips, and motivates people to build relationships with their unsaved friends and neighbors, and to share “their story” (testimony) with them.
Building a Successful Team Ministry

Role #6 – Discipleship/Spiritual Gift Mobilizer – If “making disciples” is what we are supposed to be doing, then, discipleship must be a priority of our ministry teams. Sadly, that is not the case in many ministries. Discipleship involves far more than making a profession of faith and sitting in church listening to sermons. Discipleship is one believer helping another believer make biblical change toward Christlikeness. It doesn’t just happen. It is usually intentional when someone gathers new, and sometimes not so new, believers together and teaches them what to believe, how to grow spiritually, and how to make changes in their lives so they are functioning more like the Lord Jesus.

Part of that process involves helping them to discover their ministry S.H.A.P.E. (Spiritual gifts, Heart, Aptitudes, Personality, Experiences), and then plugging them into ministry. Discipleship is a full-time ministry that requires enormous time and effort. Most pastors and team leaders don’t have the time to give to this ministry that it deserves. Thus, it becomes a priority to recruit someone to the team who can facilitate this ministry. The future health and growth of the church is dependent upon developing a strong discipleship ministry.

Role #7 – Welcome/Assimilation Coordinator – First impressions are important. You only get one chance to make a good first impression, and in many cases that impression will be made within four to eight minutes after a person arrives at the church. You need to put your best foot forward for your guests. The welcome/assimilation coordinator organizes a team of greeters, hosts, ushers, doorkeepers, and welcome center workers, and teaches them how to greet people, befriend them, and answer their questions. In addition, he goes out of his way to help guests and newcomers connect with other church families. He knows that building relationships is one of the secrets of shutting the “back door” of the church. New members are likely to leave the church within the first six months if they don’t develop at least seven significant relationships with the congregation in that time.

Role #8 – Financial/Stewardship Director – Honesty and integrity are hallmarks of biblical ministry. Nowhere is this seen more clearly than in the handling of the ministry’s finances. Too many ministries are careless in the way they conduct the finances of the church. Good business practices, careful record keeping, and clear paper trails need to be implemented. It takes several people to count, deposit, spend, and track the finances of the church.

In addition, the financial director oversees the annual stewardship ministry of the church. People need to be taught biblical principles of management including how they use their time, their talents, and their treasure. Without a stewardship program, the church is likely to struggle financially, but with such a program finances will increase, families will have less debt, and the church will be healthier.

Each of the above roles represents an important part of the structure needed for a healthy church plant. The church can survive without having some of them in place, but it will be weaker and more likely to struggle. You want to develop the systems that support the life of the church before launching public services. A baby undergoes months of prenatal preparation developing the systems it will need to thrive after birth. In the same way, ministries need to develop the systems that enable them to experience a healthy birth and sustained growth thereafter.

Can’t one person fill more than one of these roles at a time? The answer is, “Absolutely, yes!” They just won’t be able to do as good of a job because of all the other things demanding their time. It is far better to build a team of co-workers (full-time, part-time, volunteers, etc.) who can focus on their particular role and give themselves fully to it.
Things to do:

1. There are many kinds of ministry (church planting, campus, prison, Jewish, etc.). Make a list of all the leadership roles that are needed for your kind of ministry to be successful.

2. What skills are needed to fulfill each of those roles?

3. What training do you need to provide in order for people to develop the skills needed to fulfill each of the above roles?

4. Do you intend to recruit people from the outside to join your team or will you find them from within your ministry? How will you identify and recruit them?
Chapter 5

Picking the Right Team Players
Building Your Ministry Team

If there was one lesson the ’76 Tampa Bay Buccaneers learned (or should have learned), it was that if you don’t have the right players on your team, you can’t win. Their team was made up of aging veterans, mediocre players, and poor draft choices. Many of the players they recruited were past their prime and prone to injuries. The NFL draft (in which they had the Number 1 and Number 2 picks) was one of the worst in history with only eight quality players compared to the normal twenty-seven or twenty-eight outstanding performers. There simply were not a lot of quality players available, and the ones that were, played for other teams.

Head coach, John McKay, described his team’s play as “unaggressive, uninspiring, lethargic, and unacceptable.” How pathetic were they? In their first game of the season against the Houston Oilers, they almost missed the opening kickoff because the team got lost for twenty minutes in the Astrodome trying to find their way from their locker room to the playing field. Things are really bad when a team doesn’t even know where the field of play is located.

Understanding Team Dynamics

George Barna points out that effective ministry teams typically have three to five players. If you have more than six, the team becomes unwieldy and degenerates into comprises that reflect the lowest common denominator. If you have less than three players, you will not have the horsepower to get the job done. The size of your ministry team will vary depending on its purpose and the complexity of its goals. Ideally, a church-planting team would consist of two or three couples on the leadership team with one of them serving as the pastor and lead planter. The launch team might be somewhat bigger depending on how many people it takes to fill the roles discussed in the last chapter. It would most likely include a number of lay people.

Teams are unique – No two teams will be alike. The composition of each will be different from all others. Each team consists of different people with different temperaments, backgrounds, skills, experiences, and viewpoints. What works for one team will not necessarily work for another team. What you experienced in one team setting may be entirely different from what you experience on your next team. Having had a bad experience on a previous team does not mean the same thing will happen if you join another team. The dynamics are simply different for each team.

Not only is the team composition different, but the team complexity is different as well. Some people are easier to get along with than others are. Some personalities mesh while others clash. When you have two diverse people working together on a team, the interaction between them is fairly simple, although they can butt heads from time to time. The complexity level grows exponentially each time you add a player to the team. The more people that are on the team, the harder the leader must work to keep all the players focused on the same goals, and the lines of communication open.

All players are flawed – You’ll not have any perfect people on your team. Instead, you will work with flawed human beings who lose focus, develop different visions, and get confused, angry or simply tired. Each one (including you) will have strengths and weakness, but they all have value. There will be times
when they may be irritating and hard to work with, but the same may true of you as well. Learn to accept each other’s faults. Make allowances for one another. Remember, you are on the same team working toward the same goals. You’ll either get there together or you won’t get there at all. So make the adjustments you need to make and get on with the game.

_When building a team, the players are everything_ – You can have great vision, a precise plan, plenty of resources, and excellent leadership, but if you don’t have the right people, you’re not going anywhere. Quality players produce quality teams. If you want to succeed, you need to have the right players on the team. This is where many ministry teams go wrong. They invite people onto the team that have different objectives, philosophies, and agendas. You can have two good players, but if they are pulling in opposite directions, the team is likely to come up short of its goal.

We must be careful about inviting or assigning someone to a team simply on the basis that they want to be on a team or because a team wants additional players. They may be very good at what they do, but if they don’t mesh, if the chemistry isn’t right, if they have a different vision, they may well hinder the team rather than helping it.

_Look for the right people and put them in the right place_ – Joe Gibbs knows what it takes to make a winning team. He coached the Washington Redskins to Super Bowl wins in 1982, 1987, and 1991. He then turned his talents to NASCAR and built winning teams in 2000, 2002, and 2005. In his book, _Racing to Win_, he said the secret to building a winning team is to look for the right people and put them in the right place. John Maxwell goes a step further by saying that in addition to having the right people in the right place, those people must have the right attitude as well.

He points out that there are four possibilities every time you add a player to the team. You can have:

- The wrong person in the wrong place – this leads to regression
- The wrong person in the right place – this leads to frustration
- The right person in the wrong place – this leads to confusion
- The right person in the right place – this leads to progression

The selection of the right players and the placing of them in the right places (roles) is crucial to the success of the team. If a player feels he is not valued or that his skills are not being utilized fully, both he and the team will suffer, and he will eventually leave the team.

_There is strength in diversity_ – Anyone who has a retirement plan knows the value of diversifying his investment in stocks, bonds, and real estate. You don’t want your entire nest egg in one basket. The same is true of teams. If everyone on the team has similar skills, it will lack the tools needed to get the job done. Uniformity is not the same as unity. Teams need to diversify so they have multiple skills and perspectives available to them.

Good team leaders look for people who have strengths they don’t have. They want someone who can do the job they can’t do or don’t have the time to do. Some team members will have strong people skills while others will have strong project skills. Some will be introverts. Others will be extroverts. Some will be gifted in one area while others will be gifted in other areas. Diversity is good. It is needed in order to do the disciple-making task God has assigned to us. So, look for people who can do what you can’t do. Build a diverse team of players.

_Each player will function differently_ – No two people are alike. They think, act, and relate differently. One person is result oriented. He will get the job done if you give him the tools and the appropriate authority. One person may be aggressive and strong willed while another team member is passive and...
laid back. One goes by the book, the other flies by the seat of his pants. One is an idealist while another is a realist. One may be an optimist while another may be skeptical. Team members can get on each other’s nerves and rub one another the wrong way. It takes a lot of grace to recognize that God creates people with different styles of leadership and teamwork. Each has something to contribute to the team that is unique and that helps the team move toward its ultimate goals. Be patient with one another and accommodate each other. There is a reason why that other person is on the team.

*Your team will only be as strong as its weakest link* – This is true of chains, cables, ropes, relationships, and teams. Some members of the team will be more capable, more energetic, more committed than other players on the team. Some of this has to do with personalities, backgrounds, training, and spiritual maturity. These differences should be recognized at the beginning before adding a person to the team, and compensations made to allow for those differences.

But sometimes people join a team and just don’t pull their own weight. Often this will become evident fairly quickly. When this happens, you have two options: You can train them or you can trade them. The preference, of course, is to provide them with the training they need. People can grow spiritually and hone their ministry skills. You always want your leaders growing and becoming better at what they are supposed to be doing. If that is not happening or if a person is unwilling to be trained, then you have no choice but to remove them from the team and replace them with someone who can do the job. This should be done carefully, and only as a last resort.

*Conflict is inevitable* – In Luke 17:1, Jesus said that it is impossible but that offenses will come. Any time you put two sinners together in a team relationship, they will eventually rub each other the wrong way. That is just part of life. We are all selfish to a certain extent and want our own way. Conflict, however, is not necessarily bad. It exposes weaknesses. It can clarify goals and roles. It can stimulate spiritual growth as we respond biblically to it, and it can actually strengthen relationships.

Whether conflict is healthy or harmful depends on how the members of the team handle it. They can respond biblically and grow from it or they can respond sinfully and make things worse. We will address conflict resolution in a later chapter in this manual. But don’t be surprised when conflict raises its ugly head, because sooner or later it will.

*Understand that there are four types of team players* – These include the *enthusiastic beginner* – he needs direction; the *disillusioned learner* needs coaching; the *cautious completer* needs support; and the *self-reliant achiever* needs responsibility. Team ministry is a little bit like getting married – you don’t find out who you married until after the honeymoon. People tend to put their best foot forward when applying for a position on the team. Once they have been accepted, then you begin to find out what they are really like. Of course, the same is true for them concerning you. They also will find out what you are like after they join the team. Some people will be more dependable, more skilled, and more productive than you expected. The opposite may be true of others.

One of the responsibilities of team leadership is to evaluate which of the above categories best describe each team player, and how best to help him/her to mature and to become more productive. Jesus knew each of his disciples and what they needed to become strong team players. We need to follow his example.

*Look for leaders, not representatives* – Good teams are made up of leaders who have bought into the same vision. They are not there with their own agenda or to represent a particular constituency or alternative point of view. They are thinkers and doers. They are not afraid to take responsibility for seeing that tasks get done. They function together to help the team achieve the goal and vision set before them by the team leader when he asked them to join the team. Leaders get things done. Representatives talk about what needs to be done.
Assimilation takes time – Assimilation is a process that occurs over time as teams grow in trusting relationships and empower each other to become all that God intends for them. It takes time for teams to mesh, for players to get to know and trust each other. This is why it is important for players to spend time with each other before joining the team. It is important for them to meet together regularly, to discuss the goals and what each is bringing to the table. The strategy needs to be reviewed frequently. People need time to feel comfortable with each other. Teams that win learn to function together as a unit. The others simply go home hoping for a better future somewhere down the road.

Good players set aside personal agendas – Sports history and church ministry are filled with numerous examples of teams that couldn’t win even though they had very talented players on their side. In some cases, individual players hogged the ball and wanted the glory for themselves. They mistakenly thought the team existed for their benefit rather than the other way around. Good players ask, “What’s best for the rest?”

Team players can express their opinions, but when consensus is reached and the leader calls a signal, the rest of the team must put aside their own ideas of how things should function and fully support the play that has been called. They understand that for the team to win, they can’t pull in opposite directions. They all have to work together to move the ball across the goal line. It takes an entire team to win, but only one player not doing his job to lose.

What to Look For in Team Players

Great teams are the result of intelligent recruiting. Bryce Harper and Stephen Strasburg were sensational rookie players who are transforming the Washington Nationals into a championship ball club. Rarely has a team ever had two young players of their caliber. How did a team like the lowly Nationals get them? Recruitment was the key. They knew what they were looking for and they kept looking until they found it. Too often teams settle for something less than what they need. If you don’t have talented players, you’re not going to win.

Unfortunately, in the Lord’s work you don’t always have the freedom to choose your teammates. Mission agencies, anxious to put more workers into the harvest fields, accept candidates and assign them to field councils and ministry teams with little input from those teams. It is assumed that both the established players and their new teammates will adjust to make things work. In the majority of cases, this is what happens. But in some cases, especially on the local level, the team is looking for a particular type of player or someone with a desired set of skills, but ends up with someone different. This can have a negative impact on the team as well as on the individual members of the team.

Recruitment is the answer to this dilemma – Rather than waiting for volunteers to appear, an aggressive program of recruitment must be undertaken. It starts with concerted prayer. In Matthew 9:38 Jesus instructed us to “pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.” Prayer is the first step in finding players for your team.

In addition to your own personal prayer times in which you ask the Lord to send you the right people for your team, you should ask others to join you in praying for the workers you need. This can be done during your local church prayer meeting, in your conversations with friends, and if you are a missionary, through your letters to your prayer partners. The Bible says, “Ye have not because ye ask not” (James 4:3), so, ask.

Talk to friends, family, acquaintances, and pastors you meet. Let them know you are looking for a particular kind of person to join your ministry team. Make a point of being on college and seminary campuses where you can meet students and share your passion and vision.
If you want people to join your team, you have to take personal responsibility for getting the word out and for finding them. No one else is going to do it for you. If you are part of a missionary team or a field council, you cannot sit back and expect someone else to do the recruiting for your team. Each member of the team needs to be involved personally in the recruitment effort for attracting new personnel.

Determine what you are looking for – If you don’t know what you are looking for, you are unlikely to find it. You’ll be satisfied with whatever you can find. Winning teams know what they are looking for and keep looking until they find it. If you are going to build a church-planting team or any kind of ministry team, sit down and decide what roles you want to fill. What skills do you want people to have? What do you want them to be able to do? What strengths do you want them to bring to the table? Too often, churches, church planters, and mission teams are forced to settle for whoever comes along. Instead of sitting back and waiting for someone to show up, we must be proactive and go looking for them. We have not because we ask not. It is time that we started asking.

Ten “C’s” to consider when looking for players – The following list is not exhaustive, but it may be helpful as you evaluate potential team members. Some items will be more important than others. You will have to decide which ones are most important to you and your team. Just remember, there are no perfect “tens” out there.

- **Character** – Someone has defined character as what you are when no one else is looking. It involves an inner set of core values that guide a person’s thoughts and actions, and is evidenced in our relationships with God and others. One author defines it as the ability to follow through on a worthy decision long after the emotion of making that decision has passed. While other skills and qualities are important, the Bible makes it clear that integrity and godly character traits are absolutely essential. Of the twenty qualifications Paul listed for godly leaders, eighteen have to do with character.

  Start by looking at the prospective teammate’s spiritual qualifications. Is the person born again? Is he growing spiritually? Does he have regular times of Bible reading and prayer? Is he spiritually mature? Does he witness and share his faith effectively with others? Does he evidence a servant heart and teachable spirit? Is he overly critical? Is he truthful and honest? Does he carry through on commitments in a timely fashion? How does he treat his spouse and children? What is his/her work ethic like?

  A person’s character governs everything he does. So ask the hard questions. Probe for the answers. Don’t assume that because a person is a Christian that he has a sterling character. Insist on finding people who are “above reproach” and who have a good track record.

- **Cooperative** – Attitude is everything. It is more important than skills, experience or money. Nothing is worse than having talented people who can’t get along with each other. It is for this reason you hire attitude and train skill. John Maxwell points out that right attitudes do not guarantee success, but bad attitudes do guarantee failure. The last thing you want on your team is someone who is constantly complaining, finding fault, or pursuing his own agenda.

  In *The Winner’s Edge*, Dennis Waitley states, “The winner’s edge is not in a gifted birth, in a high IQ or in talent. The winner’s edge is in the attitude, not aptitude.”

  Attitude is so important because it is contagious and self-fulfilling. Both good and bad attitudes are infectious. They spread. Habitually negative individuals will arouse negative feelings among other players. They tend to be pessimistic and assume the worst. This can have a devastating
effect on team morale and productivity. Negative people rarely put forth the effort required to succeed, and thus contribute to the failure they envisioned to start with.

Bad attitudes are the result of selfishness. Rather than being cooperative and buying into the vision and program of the team, individuals focus on their own agendas, ideas, and opinions. The best time to deal with people’s attitudes is before they join the team. If there is any question about a person’s attitude, don’t invite them onto your team.

It is critically important that you review your philosophy of ministry, mission, values, vision and strategy with prospective team members. They must buy into what you want to do and the way you want to do it. You are looking for people who will be supportive and cooperative, willingly accountable, and flexible enough to adjust to the ever-changing situations found in ministry.

- Competence – Do the people you are considering for teammates have the know-how and the ability to do the job? Do they have the gifts, talents, and job skills required to fulfill the task they are being asked to do? Do they have a proven track record? Do they have a teachable spirit? Do they read and seek to grow in their area of expertise? Are they getting better at what they do? You don’t have to have the best, but you do want people who can perform well in the areas in which they are asked to serve.

Excellence in ministry should be the goal of every member of the team. You should not and must not settle for that which is mediocre or poorly done. Good enough is never good enough.

Scripture demands that whatever we do, we do heartily as unto the Lord (Colossians 3:23). He deserves our best. For your team to do its best you need to look for people who have the capabilities required to do the job well.

- Chemistry – “Chemistry” has to do with how well a person fits in with a particular group of people or circumstances. Can this person work well with the rest of the team? Can they be friends and work together in spite of their differences? If the chemistry isn’t right, the team is going to be plagued with tension and disunity. Chemistry is affected by people’s personalities, view of ministry, giftedness, cultural background, work ethic, and many other things.

Some team leaders try to attract people like themselves with similar interests and skills. Others will load up the team with their friends. In some cases, this weakens the team because it is based on who you know rather than who you are and what you can do. What teams need is diversity that compliments.35

Chemistry is hard to gauge in just one or two face-to-face meetings. For this reason, it would be wise for potential team members to work together for a brief time (a trial bases or internship) to see if they can work together. You can invite someone to join you for a six-week short-term assignment during the summer or over a winter break. This gives the team an opportunity to evaluate each other and to determine the degree of compatibility. Yes, it can be expensive and perhaps a little inconvenient, but it is far better to find out beforehand that you are pursuing the wrong team or the wrong team member than it is after the fact. It is better to break off the engagement before getting married, than to get married and then find out you are incompatible.

- Committed – Ministry is tough and demanding. People get tired and sometimes grouchy. Results are not always as forthcoming or spectacular as expected. There will be setbacks. Money may get short. Conflicts will arise. These are just part of ministry. Are the people under consideration committed for the long run? Are they willing to work through the hard times? Will
they follow biblical principles to clarify misunderstandings and to resolve conflict with other team members? Can they forgive offenses and still work alongside the one who hurt them.

Team members have to be committed, not only to the Lord, but to the team and to each other. They have to put the welfare of the team ahead of their own preferences and hurts. They need to be committed to the team’s vision and to carrying it out regardless of the difficulties encountered. Team ministry is built on commitment and trust. Admittedly, it is easier to make a commitment than it is to keep it, but every member of the team must drive down a stake, an “Ebenezer” (I Samuel 7:12), whereby he says, “Here I stand. I won’t give up until we reach the goal.” Faithfulness is the mark of a good steward (I Corinthians 4:2).

- **Compassionate** – There is no substitute in ministry for loving people. It is important to love the Lord. That should be our first priority, but it is also important to love people. This extends both to your teammates as well as to the people you are seeking to serve. Matthew 9:36 tells us when Jesus saw multitudes he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. The things that move the heart of God ought to move our hearts as well. Does the person you are thinking of inviting onto your team love people? Is he/she a “people person?” Does he go out of his way to build relationships with the unchurched and those who do not know Christ as Savior? Does he show genuine concern for them?

The way we spend our time and our money reveals what is important to us. Does the prospective team member like to hang out with the rest of the team? With neighbors? With the strata of people in your focus group? If he is a loner, if he avoids relationships with the unsaved, you may want to reconsider your choice. There is no substitute, no talent, no other thing that can replace genuine compassion for people. The members of your team ought to become best friends as they labor together.

- **Culturally adaptable** – We live in a multi-cultural world composed of an array of languages, cultures, skin tones, and social differences. Can the person being considered for team ministry adapt to the people and the setting that is the team’s focus? Sometimes people who are raised in rural or small towns have difficulty adapting and feeling “at home” in the big city. Can the person function in a setting where the people are more educated than himself? Will he fit in if the opposite is true? Is he/she willing to learn the language, eat the food, invest in the culture of the host community?

Can the person adapt to the different leadership styles of the team leader and other members of the team? The dynamics of life and relationships change with every relocation and every addition of a new member to the team. How well is the prospective teammate able to handle these changes? If at all possible, try to observe him and how he reacts when he is placed in the culture in which the team will be working. Again, it is better to find out early rather than later that there is not a “fit.”

- **Confident** – Hesitancy, insecurity, and doubt undermine ministry. People will not follow us if we are unsure of ourselves. Players and teams that question their ability to win seldom do. You want people on your team who have the skills to do the job and who believe that God has led them to your team. You want people who believe God is going to use them to fulfill their role on the team. They must believe that they are the right persons, in the right place, at the right time, doing the right thing.
Confidence is not the same thing as arrogance. Confidence is a strong assurance based on humility, good preparation, and trust in the Lord. Arrogance is a haughtiness based on a wrong view of self. Confidence must be focused on the Lord (Proverbs 3:26; 14:26) and what he is going to do in and through us. Confidence leads to boldness and serving without fear (Philippians 1:14). You want people on your team who believe the team vision can become a reality, and who are not afraid to use their skills and talents enthusiastically as they pursue that goal.

- **Courageous** – Courage is the determination to do right when it is not popular, simply because it is the right thing to do. It takes courage to confront a teammate who is not pulling his weight or who is not functioning as he should. It takes courage to keep the focus on the goal when others lose sight of it. It takes courage to stand alone when others are giving in. It takes courage to love people without needing them. Jesus did that. He loved people without expecting or needing them to love him in return. He didn’t look for their applause, approval or accolades. He simply loved them unconditionally.

  It takes courage to say “no” to sinful temptation when it arises. It takes courage to forgive a hurtful comment from another team member. It takes courage to side with the team when the congregation becomes critical or confrontational. It takes courage to believe that God will yet bless your efforts even though you are not seeing any evidence of it at the moment. It takes courage to speak the truth in love. It takes courage to hang in there when you feel like quitting. In time, however, courage will win the respect of others, especially when they see the positive outcome of your steadfastness (I Corinthians 15:58).

- **Called** – While all believers are to be active in serving the Lord, some are called to specific areas of ministry. Moses was called by God to leave his sheep and to go into Egypt to deliver his people from slavery (Exodus 3:4-10). Samuel was called by God to be his spokesman to the nation of Israel (I Samuel 3:4-10). Saul and Barnabas were called to carry the gospel to and plant churches among the Jews and Gentiles in Asia Minor, Macedonia, and beyond (Acts 13:1-3). The Apostle Paul spoke of being “called” to be an apostle (Romans 1:1).

  Do the people being considered for team ministry sense that God is leading (“calling”) them to the form of ministry your team is seeking to do? Do they believe the Lord has called them to be part of a ministry team? Does their home church recognize and confirm that call? It is that “call” that will keep people focused on the team objectives. It is that “call” that will keep them from quitting when things don’t go as expected. The sense of a “call” keeps the grass from appearing greener on the other side of the fence and provides the proverbial “knot at the end of the rope” that keeps a person going until he reaches the goal.

### Asking People to Join the Team

Teams come together in a variety of ways depending on the particular circumstances involved. In a mission setting, a person may express a desire to be part of a team ministry. This possibility is then explored with his or her field administrator. In some cases, a third party coach or coordinator will also be involved in the process. Depending on the particular type of ministry the person wishes to pursue, a variety of possibilities will be discussed. If a potential team partner is identified, that person is then contacted to see if he is open to forming a team ministry with the individual in question.

If the initial response is favorable, the potential team players will need to explore such things as what the team might look like, the roles involved, responsibilities, and various leadership issues. This would most likely involve a series of visits and phone calls.
If the situation continues to look positive, it would be wise to arrange a trial period during which the prospective team members work together to see if they truly can be a team. A phone call and a quick visit are not sufficient to determine the compatibility of the team players. It is better to find out up front that the team relationship isn’t going to work than it is to go through months of clashes and disunity.

If the players are deemed compatible, then the appropriate steps required by the mission agency for approval of the team will be taken. In some cases, individuals will already have formed a team before joining the mission organization. They may have been roommates in college or possibly served on the same church staff. They join the mission as a team, go through the candidature process together, and are appointed as a team from the start. These teams usually work well since the people involved are already friends and have worked together previously.

A third possibility arises when a church planter, campus worker or individual says he wants to put together a team to help him plant a church or to conduct some other type of ministry. In this case, the individual in question is going to recruit people to his team. There are a number of steps he should take into consideration as he does so.

Bathe everything in prayer – There are several reasons for doing this. First, you will need godly wisdom in finding the right people to serve on your team. It is not always easy to discern which ones will fit and which won’t. James 1:5 tells us that “if any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.” It is always a wise thing to do what God’s Word advises us to do.

Second, Jesus instructs us in Matthew 9:38 to “pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.” Ultimately, it is God who brings teams together. He is the One who creates the desire and the willingness to serve in ministry and to be part of a ministry team.

Third, prayer makes us more sensitive to God’s leading in our choice of teammates. As we bring our hearts more in tune with the heart of God, we are more likely to make right choices. Make prayer your constant companion as you move through the team building process.

Clarify your mission, values, vision, and strategy – You need to be clear in your own mind what God has called you to do, what things will be emphasized, where you are going with the ministry, and how you are going to get there. If you cannot clearly articulate these things, people will be reluctant to join your team. Take the time to review these things and clarify them in your own mind so you can share them succinctly with potential team players.

While each of these is important, vision is the key that motivates people to join your team. Vision is a mental image of the future as you believe it can and must be. It is the finished product you are looking to achieve. It may be a local church, a well-functioning campus ministry, a language translation project or any number of other things. You must be able to describe it in detail and be passionate about it if you expect others to buy into it. You are not selling the team concept, but rather the vision of what the team plans to accomplish.

Teams without dreams lack direction and have only limited success. Teams with a single dream are focused and often highly productive because everyone is pulling in the same direction. Thus, it is important that you be able to articulate your dream to perspective members. Dream teams are made up of people with the same objective in mind.

Consider asking for an assessment - Assessment is the process of discerning whether a potential church planter (or other type of team player) is called to plant a church and whether the person is right for a specific new work. The desire to be in a particular type of ministry does not mean the person is
qualified or equipped to serve in that type of ministry. Some people desire to plant a church, but lack the training, skills, and determination to do so successfully.

Larry Osborne, in his book *Sticky Teams*, makes the astute observation that the best time to remove a problem player is *before* he has a place on the team. This may seem harsh, but the future of the team is dependent on the quality of the players selected. If you don’t have the right players, you are unlikely to achieve your goal. Assessments can help you pick the right people.

From the moment you have contact with a potential teammate you are assessing him. What is he like? Will he make a good teammate? Does he have the skills to do the job? Is he a “fit” for your team? Most assessments are subjective in nature and tend to be based on rather preliminary knowledge of the person in question.

A great deal of research has been done in the field of church planting over the years and a growing body of information has become available by which to evaluate a person’s potential as a church planter. Various evaluation forms have been developed. A growing number of mission agencies and church planting organizations send prospective church planters to assessment retreats and camps to evaluate their potential. A variety of tools are sometimes used. These may include personal interviews, a spiritual gift test, the Myers-Briggs Temperament Indicator test, the DISC personality profile or the Charles Ridley Assessment Tool which highlights thirteen key characteristics to look for.

Are they infallible? No, but research indicates that people who go through such an evaluation process have a significantly higher rate of growing churches than those who do not undergo such assessments. Each organization and each team leader will have to determine how they choose to assess their potential players. Some will continue to do it subjectively while others move toward a more formal way of doing it.

*Get to know your potential players* – There is no substitute for spending time with them. Invite them to your home on several occasions, even if it means they have to make several trips. Find out who they are, what their dreams are, what ministry experience they may have. What qualities do they bring to the table? Do they have the skills and temperament to do the job? Do you get along well with them? Is there an openness about them? Do they seem nervous or uptight? Could you be friends with them? How do they relate to their spouse? How does their spouse relate to your spouse? It is extremely difficult to learn those kinds of things without spending time together.

This is one of the major reasons teams don’t work. Teammates don’t get to know each other before committing to the team. Then they find out that they have different objectives, incompatible personalities, and no chemistry between them.

It is during this time that you share your vision, values, and strategy with them. Let them see your heart and your passion. Describe for them where you are going and what it will be like when you get there. Explain why you want a team and what role they might play on it.

If things look positive, invite them to come and work alongside of you for a few weeks to see how well you mesh. Take the time to get to know each other before making commitments to one another.

*Ask for a big commitment* - If you want people to join your team you have to ask them to do so. Don’t sit back and wait for them to approach you. If you want a particular person on your team, take the initiative, arrange to meet with him, and extend an invitation to join you.

Don’t assume that because a person is busy he won’t be interested in being a part of what you are doing. Peter and James were busy fishermen, but when Jesus invited them to follow him, they jumped at the
opportunity. If you believe in what you are doing and are passionate about it, others will want to be a part of it as well.

People are no less committed today than they have always been. They are just committed to something other than serving the Lord. In many cases, it is simply because no one has presented them with a vision that captures their hearts and imaginations. Give people something worth pursuing and they will follow you to the ends of the world.

Elijah asked Elisha for a big commitment. He had to give up his farm, his folks, and his financial security in order to follow Elijah (I Kings 19:19-21). Jesus asked Peter, James and John for a big commitment as well. They left their nets, their fishing boats, and their families to follow him (Matthew 4:18-22). He asks each of us to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow him (Matthew 16:24). That is a big commitment.

A big vision requires a big commitment and a big commitment requires a big vision. So make sure your vision is big enough and clear enough to warrant the commitment you are asking folks to make. One reason people are unwilling to join a team is because the vision is too small, unknown or even non-existent. When you ask individuals to join your team you are asking them to give up their vision in favor of your vision. You are asking them to fit into a team setting rather than working independently by themselves. You may be asking them to leave their jobs, give up their homes, move away from loved ones, and raise funds to support themselves while they work on your team. Don’t be afraid to make that request. Just be sure your vision is big enough to justify what you are asking them to do.

**Ask confidently when asking for a big commitment** – Once you have decided you want a person on your team, go to them confidently and ask them to join the team. Don’t beat around the bush or hedge your invitation. Don’t worry about them turning you down. In some cases, a “no” might be the best thing that could happen. If God is leading you to invite this person to join you, go in the confidence of the Lord. Put the proposal in front of them and see what happens. The way you handle the invitation to join the team conveys to people what you will do and how you will lead the team in the future. You can shoot yourself in the foot and lose a valuable team player by being hesitant and unsure of yourself. Who wants to follow that kind of leader anyway?

**Be specific when asking for a big commitment** – What is that you want them to do? What roles do you want them to fill? What tasks do you want them to do? What authority will they have? Don’t just ask them to join the team. Spell it out for them. Give them a job description. Define the parts they will play on the team. Explain how the team will function. Share the milestones and critical mass points that have to be met before the team can move on to the next step of development.

People hate surprises. They feel misled when they expect one thing, but get something different. The more detail you can share with people when asking them to join your team, the better off you will be. Thus, it is important to talk about team meetings, the number of hours each person is expected to contribute, financial issues, goals, objectives, strategy, and values. Don’t expect people to sign a blank check. Fill it for them first so they know what they are committing themselves to do.

**Explain the benefits of making a big commitment** – People seldom do anything for nothing. There is always a reason for what they do. There is some reward, benefit or payback that they expect to receive from their investment. It may be the pure joy of serving, the smile on the face of a child, the satisfaction of a job well done or the blessing of seeing a new church established or a soul won to Christ.

Why do you want this person on your team? How is he going to help the team? In what way will the project be better off with him than without him? How will his contribution strengthen the ministry and move it forward more rapidly?
Share the benefits that will accrue to the ministry through his participation on the team. Depending on what the person will be doing, this might include a stronger start, more people reached, additional workers trained, a better music program, achievement of the vision sooner, etc. Describe some of those benefits in detail. Let them visualize them in their mind’s eye. In addition, share how they will benefit personally from joining your team. This might include making a greater impact on people’s lives for eternity, the personal satisfaction they will receive from serving others, the joy of using their training for something valuable, the opportunity to hear the Lord say, “Well done” one day.

**Give people the opportunity to weigh their decision to make a big commitment** – Encourage people to take a few days to think their decision over and to pray for the Lord’s direction before saying “yes” or “no.” Some will want to accept immediately, but ask them to weigh the options and to seek the Lord’s will before giving their answer. Decisions that are made in haste or on the spur of the moment tend to be based on emotions. Yes, we want people to be excited about joining the team, if that is what they decide to do, but we don’t want them to wake one morning and think, “I’ve made a mistake.”

Before choosing the twelve disciples, Jesus spent all night in prayer seeking God’s will in the matter (Luke 6:12,13). There were lots of good men from which he could choose, but he didn’t rush it. He took the time to think and pray, and then made his decision. Encourage your prospective teammate to do the same.

**Ask for an answer within a reasonable time** – While you want people to take enough time to make an informed decision, you cannot allow time to drag on without an answer. A week to ten days should be enough time for them to discuss the opportunity with their spouse, pastor, and other godly individuals in their lives. Sometimes people are reluctant to tell you they are not going to accept your offer, and they just let things slide because they don’t want to disappoint you.

Set an agreed upon date when they will give you a definite answer. If the answer is “no,” thank them for considering your offer and ask them to uphold you and the team in prayer as you continue the team building process and get ready to launch your new ministry.

If they say “yes,” talk through what needs to be done to incorporate them into the team and establish a target date for having it all done. They may have to join your mission agency, raise funds, sell a home, move across the country, find a job, and countless other things before actually being on site to begin their ministry.

**Consider making a team covenant** – A team covenant is simply a paper that spells out how the team will function. It might include such things as the team’s vision, goals, and objectives, the relationship between team players, and what is expected from each member of the team. It might also include how often the team meets, how decisions are made, and how conflicts will be handled. What report procedures will be followed and who is accountable to whom. Vacation times and provision for sickness and/or reporting to supporting churches will need to be considered. Strategy and policy procedures might also find a place in the team covenant.

The problem is, we are forgetful people. With the passing of time, promises and commitments become a little foggy. Circumstances change and we forget what was said at an earlier date when we joined the team. We make ourselves accountable to one another by having an agreement of this kind that serves as a yardstick to measure how we are doing.

This doesn’t mean the covenant cannot be changed as the team matures and the ministry grows. Any change can be made that is agreeable to the group. In the process of time some people will hive off of the team and others will join it. When that happens, the team covenant will need to be reviewed and adjusted accordingly.
Good teams win games, but a team is only as good as the players it recruits. So, it is vital to select the right players with the right skills and attitudes, and then play them in the right place at the right time.

As important as the team players are, there is one position that is more important than all the others. That is the team leader – the quarterback. Without a good quarterback the team will seldom win regardless of how good the other players are.

In the next chapter, we’ll explore what is involved in being a team leader and how to be a good one.

**Things to do:**

1. Recruitment is a major key to building a successful team. If you are a member of a mission agency, list the things you can do to help locate new recruits.

2. If you plan to participate in a team ministry, what are your plans for recruiting others to your team?

3. Review the “Ten C’s” in this chapter and evaluate how well they are reflected in your own life? Which ones do you need to work on?

4. The way you ask people for a commitment is important. How do you plan to ask others to join your team? What will you say to them?
Chapter 6

Calling the Signals
(Leading a Ministry Team)

Make no mistake about it – quarterbacks are the team leaders on most football teams. They call the signals in the huddle and are responsible for leading the team to victory – at least, that is what they are supposed to do.

It didn’t turn out that way for Steve Spurrier and the ’76 Tampa Bay Buccaneers. He was a superstar and a Heisman trophy winner in college, but he never lived up to the hype as a professional player. Drafted by the San Francisco 49ers, he spent nine years sitting on the bench as a place kicker and back up to the starting quarterback. He was traded to the Tampa Bay Buccaneers at the start of the ’76 season where he became the starting quarterback for his first and only season with the team.

From the start, Spurrier and head coach John McKay butted heads, with Spurrier taking public potshots at his boss. He especially resented the fact that the coach made his son a primary receiver even though he was only a mediocre player. It is alleged that Spurrier purposely threw passes over the middle to McKay in an attempt to get him injured. Spurrier’s performance as the team leader was dismal at best. He only completed seven touchdown passes all season long.

While there were a lot of negative factors that contributed to the ’76 Buccaneers being the worst football team in history, the lack of leadership on the part of both Spurrier and McKay were major reasons behind the failure of the team. Spurrier was let go after just one season. He simply wasn’t the kind of team leader that was needed in order to win.

Ministry teams need good leaders. You can’t win without having one. Dr. Lee Roberson was famous for saying, “Everything rises and falls on leadership.” That is often so true. You can have good team players, but if you don’t have the right person in the lead, the team is unlikely to reach its goals.

The Importance of Leadership

In any organization, the most important factor in a team’s performance is the team leader. He sets the direction and determines the pace. He is the keeper of the vision, the promoter of the strategy, and the mediator of conflict within the team. Anyone can steer the ship, but it takes a leader to set the course.

Leadership is more of an art than a science. It is based on influence rather than power, and is built more on credibility than on position. Assembling a team and fashioning it into a cohesive unit that works in unison with each other takes skill, patience, and time. Having the right person as team leader is critical to the success of the team.

Some churches and ministry teams rotate their leadership every couple of years. If a church is unhappy with the pastor’s leadership, they simply dismiss him and hire a new man. Many field councils (ministry teams) mandate a change in leadership every two to four years so “fresh blood” can be brought onto the team. Fairness and equity are high priorities. Rotating the leadership position serves as a safeguard against anyone acquiring too much power and influence.
In some cases, teams function without having any one person being the leader. Each member of the team has equal voice and vote. Decisions are made by consensus. Vision is determined jointly. Strategy is developed by the team. They move forward together without a leader.

Teams can and do function both as democracies and with rotating leaderships. Players within those teams seem to be quite happy with that arrangement. The problem, however, arises in the area of effectiveness. Churches that change pastors frequently are often small and have only limited success in reaching out to their communities. Their lack of growth is due in part to the frequent changes in leadership. There is no continuity of vision or direction. In effect, they keep reinventing the wheel rather than moving forward under the leadership of a long-term pastor.

Democratic teams often (but not always) settle for something less than what they could have because they have to reach agreement on what to do (goals), who will do it (personnel), and how it will be done (strategy). Like the U.S. Congress, they settle for the highest common denominator they can agree on. The lack of leadership hinders both types of teams.

In reality, when everyone is in charge, no one is in charge. When God wanted to deliver the children of Israel from bondage in Egypt, he sent them a man who could lead them out of slavery. When he wanted the temple rebuilt in Jerusalem, he sent them a man who galvanized them to action and kept them focused on the task. When he wanted to launch his church on the day of Pentecost, he raised up leaders who were not afraid to break new ground.

A person should not be chosen to be the leader because “he is a nice guy.” Neither should he be chosen because “he hasn’t had a chance to be the team leader yet” or because no one else wants the job. That is a recipe for mediocrity at the best and disaster at the worst.

If a team is to succeed, it needs good leadership. Good leadership is not based on popularity, but on results. Can the person do the job and do it well? Does he/she have the skills, the personality, the insights to move the team forward toward its objectives? Is he a leader or just a manager?

A leader is someone who sees more, sees further, and sees before others do.\(^{50}\) He is not afraid to be out in front showing the way. Leadership is about working with people, inspiring them, helping them to hone their skills, to buy into a common vision, and to work together in order to achieve it. People buy into the leader first, then the leader’s vision.\(^{51}\)

Managing and leading are not the same things. Management involves doing things right whereas leadership involves doing the right things. We manage things, but we lead people. Many teams are led by managers rather than by leaders. Their teams run smoothly and work gets done, but what gets done may not have any significant impact on the achievement of the goal. This is one reason that some church-planting teams make little progress after years of effort. What they do, they do well. They just are not doing the right things. Good team leaders say “no” to good things in order to focus on the right things that will get the team to where it wants to go. Whatever is accomplished will be restricted by the team leader’s ability to lead others.

No two leaders will lead in the same way. There are different styles of leadership such as:

- The **visionary leader** – has a clear picture of what the future could hold and enthusiastically encourages everyone to get on board to achieve the vision.
- The **directional leader** – has an uncanny ability to choose which path the team or organization should go when it reaches a crossroad or critical mass achievement.
• The strategic leader – is able to break the big picture down into smaller, more manageable objectives with step by step procedures for attaining them.

• The managing leader – has the ability to organize people, processes, and resources to achieve the team’s mission.

• The motivational leader – has an uncanny ability to inspire, motivate, and encourage people so they stay focused on the task at hand and enthusiastically work to achieve it.

• The shepherding leader – builds his team slowly, nurtures them gently, supports them consistently, listens to them patiently, and prays for them diligently.

• The team-building leader – has the special ability to attract and develop the right people with the right skills, and to put them in the right positions so as to produce the right results.

• The entrepreneurial leader – is in perpetual start-up mode and loves the thrill and excitement of starting new things. He always has his eye on the next big challenge.

• The reengineering leader – thrives on resurrecting and fixing things, breathing new life into dying organizations and projects.

• The bridge-building leader – is highly flexible, patient, and diplomatic. He can bring together a diverse group of people with competing agendas and get them to work together for a common cause.52

It is important that team players recognize that leaders have different styles of leadership. There is no right or wrong style, just different ones. Each can be effective, if he assembles the right players. The objective of every team ought to be to do a better job, more effectively, and quicker than would be possible by working alone. In order for that to happen, you need to have the right person at the helm.

The Attributes of a Team Leader

God bestows different endowments of his grace (Greek: “charismatons”) upon his people to enable them to perform certain functions within the Body of Christ. Among these gifts of his grace is the gift of “governments” (I Corinthians 12:28). It is referred to as the gift of “ruling” in Romans 12:8. Although a different Greek word is used in each case, most commentators agree that these two passages refer to the same gift. The word translated “governments” comes from a word meaning “to steer” and refers to one who pilots a ship. It is translated as “shipmaster” or “master of the ship” in Acts 27:11 while First Thessalonians 5:12 refers to those who “are over you.”

Today, the gift of governments is often referred to as the gift of administration or the gift of leadership. It refers to one who leads, guides or directs using the wisdom and insights God gives him. Surprisingly, many people in positions of leadership do not have the gift of leadership. According to a study done by Barna Research Group, only twelve percent of pastors believe they have the gift of leadership.53 Most see themselves as teachers or preachers rather than leaders. Only about ten percent of them can articulate a clear vision for the ministry they lead.

If this is true, then it stands to reason that most churches and ministry teams are lead by managers rather than leaders. The good news is that leadership skills can be learned, even if you don’t have the spiritual gift of leadership. You may not be able to function with the same degree of ease and effectiveness as someone God has gifted in that area, but you will be able to do a better job than you would without any training at all.

The desire to learn is one of the marks of a leader. No leader in history ever became one simply because he was a “born leader.” Leadership is not a talent, but a discipline that is forged through years of
Leader are constantly honing their skills, looking for ways to improve their effectiveness. They read books, attend seminars, and talk with other godly leaders. They learn from their mistakes. They frequently pray and seek wisdom from God to do the job God has given them.

Most leaders understand they can never stop growing if they are to be effective. They know they live in a constantly changing world. Ministry ebbs and flows. Things that used to work are no longer as effective as they once were. New methodologies must be developed. It is the job of leaders to stay abreast of what is happening in their field of service so they can best lead their team to the goal before them. They know they can never stop learning because if they do, they will gradually lose their effectiveness as servants of God.

Servanthood, humility, and teachability are also marks of a leader. Jesus made it clear in Matthew 20:27 that leadership and servanthood go hand in hand. Leaders are primarily servants rather than bosses. They use their influence to help others grow, mature, and succeed in their areas of responsibility. They come alongside their teammates to encourage, teach, guide, and inspire them to do better.

Good leaders give instructions rather than commands. Leadership is not about power, but influence. Heavy handed leadership may be the world’s way of leading, but it is not God’s way (Matthew 20:25,26). First Peter 5:3 warns against “being lords over God’s heritage.” Instead, God’s kind of leader leads by example. Humility rather than arrogance should be the attitude of team leaders. God places a high value on a quiet and meek spirit (I Peter 3:4). Both Moses and Jesus were great leaders who were known for their meekness as well as their accomplishments. Brian Bloye is right when he says, “It’s not about me.”

Godly leaders understand that it is the grace of God, and not their abilities, that elevated them to the place of leadership.

Effective leaders are learners. They are open to new ideas, new ways of doing things. They willingly listen to their teammates. They welcome their input. They understand that they don’t have the corner on knowledge. People who will not listen to those around them will soon find their team functioning at a slower pace and a lower level than desired. Players need to feel that they have access to the team leader. They need to know that he will listen to them and value their opinions. This doesn’t mean he will do everything they suggest, but he at least is open to them and is willing to consider their ideas.

Those in positions of leadership who “know it all” do not belong there. None is so blind as the man who refuses to see what others can see. Teachability is not only essential in followers, but in leaders as well. Be a reader. Be a learner. Be a listener. You will be a better leader as a result.

Credibility and integrity are marks of a leader – In their book on Launching a Leadership Revolution, Chris Brady and Orrin Woodward make the very astute observation that “credibility is the currency of leadership.” You can teach what you know, but in the end, you will reproduce what you are. People have to believe in you before they will follow you. Truthfulness, openness, honesty, and transparency are essential ingredients to gaining people’s confidence and cooperation.

Promises have to be kept. Questions have to be answered. Behavior has to be above reproach. Openness has to be practiced. People have to buy into the leader before they will buy into the dream.

Leading a ministry team requires that people trust you. They have to believe that you value them and have their best interests at heart. They have to be convinced that you see them and the skills they bring to the table as valuable parts of the team. This is why open communication and a willingness to listen to them is so important in a team setting.
Be careful about making outlandish remarks, boisterous statements, and promises that you cannot keep. Take responsibility for mistakes, even if it is not your fault. Be gracious and generous in your praise of others. Give credit where credit is due. What you say and what you do will either build people’s confidence in your leadership or tear it down. So, be sure that your walk and your talk agree with one another.

Leaders are visionaries – As already pointed out, leaders see more, see further, and see sooner than others do. They see the big picture. They can see what others do not see. They see potential and possibilities where others see little or nothing. They can visualize the finished product and can often describe it in detail. In their mind’s eye they see the lives touched, the souls saved, the buildings built, the programs instituted, and the people trained. They have a dream, a vision of the future that God has laid upon their hearts. They are passionate about it. They eat it and sleep with it. It galvanizes them to action.

One of the marks of a leader is that he knows where he wants to go, and in many cases, he has already mapped out the road - the strategy for getting there. He may not have all the details worked out, but he knows where the milestones and critical mass points are along the way, and has a pretty good idea of how to get from one point to the next in order to make his vision a reality.

A team leader without a vision is really a manager. He will often do a good job and the team will function quite well under his leadership. Things will get done and objectives will be met. That is all many teams want. But if you are going to lead a church-planting team, more is required. Every church plant begins as a dream in the heart of some individual or group of people. It takes more than a manager to make that dream a reality. It takes someone who looks into the future and can visualize it as he believes God would have it to be.

Good leaders seek godly counsel – Scripture teaches us there is safety in a multitude of counselors (Proverbs 11:14; 24:6). Some people only seek counsel when they are in trouble. That is a mistake. The time to seek godly counsel is before you get into trouble. Good leaders know they don’t know everything. They understand that other people have insights they don’t have, but need. They are cognizant that others have been down that road before them. And so, they are open to ideas, suggestions, and warning about what to do and not to do.

Counsel provides us with learning opportunities, different perspectives, and feedback that can be very valuable. Every ministry and every church plant will exist within a fluid situation. Adjustments will need to be made along the way. Things will not materialize as expected. Unanticipated things will happen. Key people will step away. At times like this, it is helpful to have someone else you can share the situation with and get advice from.

No one is so blind as the person who thinks he doesn’t need counsel from anyone else. Statements such as “No one understands my situation” or “No one has ever worked with people like these” simply are not true. Others have been down that road, and even if they haven’t, they can see things that you may not see because you are so close to the situation. To refuse to seek counsel or to listen to godly counsel is a mark of arrogance rather than leadership. You do so at your own risk.

Wise church planters seek out a coach or mentor to advise them along the way. When making major decisions, they will call other pastors and/or church planters for advice. Most mission agencies will provide their church planters with coaches and advisors to help them chart the course ahead.

Wise team leaders will seek counsel from their teammates as well. Communication is one of the keys to successful ministry. Communication is a two-way street. The leader must communicate to his players on a regular basis, but it is equally important for his teammates to be able to communicate their insights, concerns, and ideas to him as well.
Some pastors and church planters seek advice only from a very small circle of friends who think like they do. This is a mistake. In many cases, those people will tell you what you want to hear. In contrast, a good counselor will tell you what you need to hear even when it hurts. Seek more than one or two viewpoints when seeking advice. Listen to people who may have a different perspective than you do. You just might learn something that will make you a better leader.

**Good leaders are secure and gracious** – Self-doubt and hesitancy will undermine any team. If you don’t believe you can, you won’t. Leadership is built on confidence. If you don’t have confidence in yourself (and God’s ability to use you), other people won’t have confidence in you either. This is so critical to leading a team or a church.

Uncertainty, in part, is the result of not having a vision or a plan for achieving the vision. If you don’t know where you are going or how you are going to get there, people are not going to follow you. If you doubt your own abilities to lead, others will too. In reality, if you doubt yourself, you are doubting God’s ability to enable you to do what he has called you to do. Moses didn’t think he was capable of leading the children of Israel out of their bondage. But when the time came for him to go to Egypt, he did so confidently because he was convinced that God would use him to achieve the goal set out before him.

If God has called you to plant a church or to lead a ministry team, then be confident and go in the strength of the Lord. Trust him to empower you and to use you to do whatever it is that he has laid upon your heart to do.

Secure leaders are gracious to other members of the team as well as to those they encounter. They are kind and patient, gentle in the way they treat the rest of the team and those to whom they minister. Their speech is seasoned with salt (Colossians 4:6) and like the Lord Jesus, their words are gracious and kind (Luke 4:22). Rather than using derogatory speech, they speak gracious words that edify and build up the hearers (Ephesians 4:29).

Team leaders cannot afford to be negative people. Negative people are good at finding fault and tearing others down, but it takes a positive person to be a good team leader. They understand that the way they treat people is the way they will be treated in return. Threats and intimidation do not make for good team dynamics, but encouragement and positive reinforcement do.

**Good leaders make themselves accountable** – Contrary to what many think, accountability is a good thing. It is needful and helpful. It helps us to perform at a higher, more consistent level. Wise leaders invite other people into their lives to hold them accountable. The book of Proverbs contains numerous exhortations to make ourselves accountable and to listen to the advice of others:

- “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes; but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.” (Proverbs 12:15)
- “The ear that heareth the reproof of life abideth among the wise. He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul; but he that heareth reproof getteth understanding.” (Proverbs 15:31,32)
- “Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end.” (Proverbs 19:20)

God has built accountability into almost every level of our lives simply because we need it. Children are to be accountable to their parents (Ephesians 6:1). Students are to be accountable to their teachers (Galatians 4:2). Husbands and wives are to be accountable to each other (Ephesians 5:21). Employees are to be accountable to their employers (Ephesians 6:5). Citizens are to be accountable to their
government leaders (Romans 13:1). Believers are to be accountable to their spiritual leaders (Hebrews 13:7). Ultimately, we are all accountable to God (II Corinthians 5:10).

Accountability is being answerable to another person for our words, actions, and attitudes. It is having someone else looking over our shoulder from time to time and asking, “What are you doing?” We don’t like that because we, like all people, are rebels at heart. It is part of our sinful human nature. But God’s kind of person voluntarily makes himself accountable to the authority figures God has placed in his life. He realizes that if he does not make himself accountable to those in authority over him, he is not being accountable to God either.

According to First Thessalonians 5:14, accountability (nouthetically “warning”) helps us in three ways:

1) It helps us to avoid being idle, neglectful or rebellious in not doing the things we should be doing (“unruly”);
2) It helps us to avoid being timid, fearful or reluctant to do the things we should do (“feebleminded”);
3) It helps us to avoid becoming spiritually, emotionally or physically weak by not living a disciplined life (“weak”).

Sometimes, those of us in ministry are our own worst enemies. We drive ourselves relentlessly. We go day and night. We refuse to take a day off because there is so much to do. We don’t take vacations because we consider ourselves indispensable. If you do those things long enough, you are going to crash. Your mind, soul, body or spouse is going to say, “Enough is enough” and your life and ministry are going to come to a screeching halt.

Everyone needs an accountability partner, someone who can ask us the hard questions about how we do ministry, how we treat our spouse, how we take care of ourselves, how we treat others, what we are looking at on television and the Internet. Usually, that will be someone outside the team, someone who doesn’t have a vested interest or an ax to grind. It can be your coach, another missionary, pastor or Christian leader.

That doesn’t mean, however, that team leaders are not accountable to their teammates. They are and they should be. There is a mutual accountability between team members. The leader is not exempt from it. When he is not fulfilling his responsibilities as a leader, anyone on the team should be able to inquire as to why this is. This, of course, should be done privately and with as little fanfare as possible.

Some leaders bristle at the idea of being held accountable, but the team can progress no further than the leader can lead it. If he is not providing the leadership needed, he must be held accountable for the sake of the team, the project, and the leader himself.

The Attitude of a Team Leader

Attitude is critically important to both leaders and to airplanes. The author discovered this as a young student pilot learning to fly. When you release the brakes and give the engine full throttle, the plane will race down the runway until it reaches a critical speed that enables you to gently pull back on “the stick” and the plane lifts into the air. The first six hundred feet of altitude will reveal whether you will crash or fly. The thing that determines that is your “attitude.”

“Attitude” is the position of your nose. If the nose of the plane is too steep (too high in the sky), the plane will stall and crash. If the nose of the plane is too low, you will not clear the trees, hills and power lines
that are at the end of many runways, and you will crash. You have to have the right “attitude” that allows
the plane to climb and to gain the right altitude so you can fly safely.

The same thing is true in leading a ministry team. The leader (as well as the players) needs to have the
right attitude toward himself and toward his teammates if the team is to “fly.” Good leaders understand
that “this is not about me.” The team does not exist for their benefit and is not there to serve them.

Leadership is not about power, pride, possessions, and perks – It is true that leaders exercise influence
and a certain amount of authority. They get to set agendas, decide times, and make decisions that others
don’t. They get to be up front and in the spotlight more than others do. Sometimes they have access and
receive special privileges not available to others. But that is not the reason for being there. Wise leaders
will share as many of those things as possible with their teammates. They will take the blame for failures
of the team and give credit for successes to other members of the team rather than keeping it for
themselves. Good leaders do not say, “Look at me. I’m the boss. Do what I tell you.” That’s not
leadership. That is dictatorship. There is no place for that attitude in team ministry.

Leadership is about serving – Stephen Macchia points out that leadership is about being a servant, a
steward, and a shepherd.38 Jesus taught that we should always take the lowest seat rather than the highest
one (Luke 14:10). He said that if we want to be the “chiefest,” we should seek to be the servant of all
(Mark 10:44). He girded himself with a towel, took a basin of water, and performed the duty of a servant
by washing the feet of his teammates (John 13:4,5). He set the example for each one us in leadership and
then told us, “If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them” (John 13:17).

Whatever leadership is, it is essentially serving.59 It is about serving people. That is true of both your
teammates and your focus group. A servant attitude is essential if you are going to be successful in
leading your ministry team. Leaders know that the fastest way to the throne is through the servant’s
entrance.

Leaders understand that being in charge is a stewardship, a sacred trust has been given to them. Leading
a team is a privilege. It is an honor bestowed upon a person. He or she has been given resources of
people, money, and opportunities, and is expected to use those things to accomplish the goal set before
him. He knows he must not abuse the privileges given him lest the master return unexpectedly and find
him so doing (Matthew 24:48-51). He understands that the leadership position and the things given to
him are to be used to further the Master’s affairs and that one day he will have to give an account to his
Lord (Matthew 25:16-21). He doesn’t view leadership as “my right,” but as “my privilege.”

Good leaders are shepherds, not just of the flock, but of the team that works alongside of them. Good
shepherds expend themselves for the team. They put the welfare of the team ahead of their own interests.
They go out of their way to help teammates fit in, understand their responsibilities, and fulfill their tasks.
They listen, talk, and counsel them. They show interest in them and seek to help them succeed in their
endeavors. They know that for them to succeed as a leader, and for the team to reach its goals, they must
help each player on the team succeed in what they do. People in leadership positions who spend little
time with their teammates and show little interest in them except for what they can get from them are not
really leaders. Jesus referred to them as “hirelings” who are only interested in what they can get from the
sheep rather than what they can do for the sheep. Good leaders understand that leadership begins and
ends with being a servant.

Leadership is about sacrificing – There is no success in life without sacrifice. Basketball players spend
hours at the free throw line practicing their shots rather than hanging out at home. Medical students spent
tens of thousands of dollars and countless hours in internships learning to become doctors. Singers
rehearse over and over to get the notes right, and servants of God deny themselves and give up many of
the privileges of home and career to follow the Savior.
Successful team leaders understand there is a price to be paid for being the leader. In an army patrol the point man is usually the first one to be shot. Leaders take more flak than any other member of the team because they are out front. Sometimes, it is “friendly fire” from a teammate that hurts the worst. Leaders understand that more is demanded of them than of anyone else on the team. They will have to work harder, get up earlier, stay up later, and do more than they expect of their co-workers. The notion that the leader gets to sit back and take it easy while everyone else does the work is totally erroneous.

It doesn’t matter whether you are the president of the nation, the CEO of a corporation, a pastor of a church or a church planter just starting out, you are going to have to sacrifice, if you hope to succeed. Good leaders don’t gripe and complain about the amount of work they have to do nor about how much more they do compared to other members of the team. The work goes with the position. If you are going to be in the lead, you have to be pay the price, and do so willingly.

Leadership is about sharing – Leaders know they cannot do everything, although they sometimes try. At some point, they must learn to give away ministry in order to expand their ministries. The person who refuses to share his ministry with others limits what he can do, and all but guarantees that his ministry will not succeed. Good leaders triage. They have to make three decisions in doing so. They must decide

1) The things that they must do.
2) The things that they must delegate to others.
3) The things that must be left undone.61

By sharing the load with the rest of the team a leader not only multiplies himself and expands the scope of his ministry, but he frees himself up to do the things that only he as the team leader can do. It is the team leader’s job to think, to coordinate, and to plan ahead. He doesn't have to do everything nor does he have to be consulted on everything. If he has done a good job putting his team together, many things can be delegated to other members of the team who may actually be more qualified than he is in that particular area of expertise.

It is important that the team leader also share the rewards and the praise that comes with success. Wise leaders give their team the credit for whatever is accomplished. They are always “accusing” people of being responsible for something that worked right. They compliment people for a job well done and for the effort made on behalf of the team. A little sharing of praise with the team goes a long way in gaining future cooperation from them.

The one thing you don’t ever want to share with the team is the blame. Good leaders take on that responsibility alone, even when it isn’t their fault. If someone isn’t pulling his or her weight, meet with that person privately. Seek to find out why and determine how to correct the situation. Ultimately, if a teammate isn’t performing up to snuff, it is your responsibility as the leader. You chose him and brought him onto the team. It is your job to communicate the team vision to him and to make sure he knows what he is supposed to do. Harry Truman used to say, “The buck stops here.” He understood that if something went wrong, he was responsible for it. The same is true of all leaders.

Leadership is about succeeding – There is only one reason for being a leader, and that is to accomplish whatever task you have undertaken. The leader must keep his eye, and the eyes of his teammates, on the goal. He must not be hesitant or insecure, because insecurity and hesitancy translate to the rest of the team. Don’t be afraid of failure – it is the tuition you pay on future success.62 Failure is a learning opportunity in which you learn what not to do. In the process of time, and through elimination, failure will teach you what to do.

Good leaders have often failed repeatedly. Edison failed hundreds of times before he found the right metal for his light bulb. The same is true in ministry. Failure often precedes success. Hopefully, you
have failed often enough in the past so that you know what to do to lead your team to success in the future. A positive, confident attitude will take you and your team far down the road toward your goal.

The Responsibilities of a Team Leader

Leaders have a multiplicity of responsibilities. Some are more important than others. Some require more effort and greater tenacity than others. Rarely, however, are the really important things urgent if you have done your job. Leaders cannot do everything that needs doing, much less all the things people expect them to do. They have to choose between the things that are good and the things that are right. Too often, leaders get bogged down doing good things that bless people, but do not move the team forward toward its goal. Leaders must remember what their primary responsibilities are.

It is the responsibility of leaders to lead – They set the pace and the direction for the team. They stay fixed on the goal and keep reminding everyone of where they are going, how they are going to get there, and how they will know when they arrive. This is called “vision casting.” Above all else, the leader is the keeper of the vision. It is his responsibility to keep the vision in front of the team. If he doesn’t, someone else will inject a new vision and redirect the team in a new direction.

As people get involved in ministry, they can develop tunnel vision. Regardless of whether they are working with infants, children, teens, adults, seniors, music, finances, upkeep or community outreach, that which they are doing will take on a life of its own. Other things (including the team vision) fade into the background. Good leaders keep reminding their teammates of the vision and the part the player is contributing to reaching that objective. This not only helps keep the team focused on the goal, but it also enables leaders to say “no” to good things that come along, but which would take away resources, personnel, and focus from the primary objective.

Without a “guardian of the vision,” teams are prone to settle for less than they were aiming for. This happens too frequently, especially in the field of church planting. Instead of continuing to focus on the planting process and its objective, planters sometimes settle into pastoring the people already reached. This is a huge mistake that can result in a small, struggling church that never reaches the goal of being a healthy, growing, self-sustaining congregation.

It is the responsibility of leaders to build momentum – Momentum is like a snowball rolling down hill. It picks up speed and size as it traverses the slope. It takes on an energy of its own until it cannot be stopped. Team ministry is something like that. Your team needs momentum if it is to succeed. Otherwise, it is like trying to float a sunken oil tanker stuck in the mud.

There is a certain amount of enthusiasm and excitement generated when a new project is undertaken. There is an air of expectancy, an anticipation of what will transpire. This is especially true in the fields of church planting and campus ministries. It is assumed that people will come, lives will be touched, and monies will come in. If those expectations are realized, then more enthusiasm is produced and more people get involved. Momentum is being created.

In church planting, that window of opportunity generally lasts from one to three years. If you cannot keep the momentum moving forward, your ministry will grind to a halt. Once halted, momentum is hard to recreate.

Vision and ongoing successes are the keys to generating and maintaining momentum. It is the leader’s vision and passion for that vision that attracts people to his ministry in the first place. Once the team is assembled, he must keep that vision fresh in their minds. Nehemiah found he had to remind the people of their goal half way through the process of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. It only took fifty-two days to complete the task, but after three or four weeks, the people had lost sight of where they were going and
why they were doing what they were doing. He had to remind them of their objective and what it would be like when they achieved it. He found that vision has to be recast every three to four weeks.

In addition to that, victories have to be won. Progress has to be made. Successes have to be achieved, if momentum is to be maintained. If there are few successes along the way, your people will grow weary and discouraged, enthusiasm will wane, and momentum will die. So, it is important for the leader to ensure that there are victories along the way.

Victories are the result of God’s blessing coupled with a well-defined ministry plan that breaks down the vision into manageable goals, objectives, and action steps that are doable by the team. We cannot expect God to do his part if we do not do our part. Wise leaders and their teams, make sure they have multiple, achievable objectives planned so they can experience ongoing victories along the way. Celebrate those victories as they occur. Congratulate people for jobs well done. Keep the ship moving forward.

It is the responsibility of leaders to communicate – Communication is the key to successful team ministry. There must be open, frequent, two-way communication within the team, and between the team leader and the other members of the team. It is the team leader’s job to see that communication takes place and that everyone knows what is going on. He understands that whatever people are not up on, they will be down on. He has to keep his team in the know.

It is the team leader’s responsibility to create an atmosphere in which players feel free to communicate with him. A gruff remark or a dismissal out of hand can cause people to be reluctant to share their ideas, recommendations or concerns. It sows the seeds of discontent. The leader must have an “open door” policy and encourage discussion and input from his team if he hopes to stay on top of what is happening.

Because he is the team leader, he has to take the initiative in going to people when he senses that communication is not taking place or that there is a reluctance to communicate on the part of another member of the team. A kind word, a compliment, an acknowledgement of responsibility by the team leader can go a long way in promoting communication between himself and other players on the team. This subject (communication) is so important that an entire chapter will be devoted to it later in the book.

It is the responsibility of leaders to transfer ownership – To expand ministry, you must give away ministry. Leaders need to learn that they cannot do it all. They have to delegate a variety of ministry responsibilities to other members of the team so they (the leaders) can focus on the big picture and the things that only they can do. Not only must they give away responsibility, but they must give away authority as well. They have to give people the power to make decisions related to their own areas of ministry.

This was the lesson Jethro taught Moses in Exodus 18. Moses was to select a team of helpers to whom he taught the Law. He then delegated to them the responsibility to judge the people and to resolve the legal disputes between them. He conferred not only the responsibility, but the power to make decisions that were binding upon all concerned. Only the cases that were too complicated or too difficult for the judges to decide were brought to Moses for resolution.

It is at this very point that many pastors and team leaders struggle. They are reluctant to trust their people, and end up keeping them on a short leash. This is short sighted and harmful to the team and to the ministry. If you pick good people to be on the team and provide them with good training, then there is no reason not to give them the authority to do the job you are asking them to do. Good leaders seldom restrict their teams; they release them. To perform well in ministry, people need to own that ministry. That only happens as the leader gives ownership to them.
It is the responsibility of leaders to train teammates – Leaders are teachers. They set the course and show the way. They remind the team of the goal and the strategies they are pursuing. They encourage their teammates to develop their skills to a higher degree of efficiency. They arrange for players on the team to attend seminars, go to retreats, and to read books that will strengthen their ministries. No matter how skilled a person is, there is room for improvement.

Training is especially important if you have a team of lay volunteers. You may have to teach them biblical truths they need to know, skills they need to possess, and methodologies they need to master in order to do the job assigned to them.

The best way to teach people is by example. Let them see you reading books, attending seminars, going out on visitation, discipling new believers. Your team will function at the level you demonstrate for them.

It is the responsibility of leaders to evaluate progress – Ministry often requires adjustments along the way. Someone has to be in charge of sounding the alarm and making the corrections when a ship (team) gets off course. Because he is the team leader, it is his responsibility to keep the goal in focus and the team moving toward it. Thus, it stands to reason that he should be the one to take the lead in periodically evaluating the team’s progress. A wise leader will involve his team in the evaluation process. Members of the team will have information and insights about particular aspects of the ministry that can be very beneficial to the leader as he assesses the team’s effectiveness.

The most important question a leader can ask is, “How are we doing?” Follow up questions might include, “Are we moving forward, standing still or going backward?” “What is the next milestone?” “How close are we to making it to our next critical mass marker?” “Where are we bogging down?” “What changes do we need to make?” “Where are the choke points?”

Leaders must not fall into the trap of simply charging ahead at full speed regardless of changing circumstances. They cannot keep doing the same things if they are not working. This is where having a well-designed ministry plan comes in handy. Timelines, critical mass points, milestones, goals, objectives, and action steps all provide a tangible measuring stick by which to evaluate progress. Otherwise, they are in the middle of the ocean without the benefit of a sextant.

It is the responsibility of leaders to resolve conflicts – Conflict is inevitable in team ministry. Teammates will rub each other the wrong way. People will disagree with decisions and evaluations. People get hurt feelings. Misunderstandings occur. Husbands and wives may get out of sorts with each other. Even the best of teams can experience serious conflict (Acts 15:37-40). Interpersonal relationships are a significant problem in many team situations.

It is the team leader’s job to deal with problems and disagreements early before they get out of hand. First, he has to keep his own plate clean by going out of his way to treat everyone fairly, and with kindness and consideration. If someone isn’t performing up to his expectations or if someone has let him down in some way, he needs to take the initiative to go to them and seek to rectify the situation. The same is true if he senses he may have done something to offend another member of the team. He cannot help others resolve their conflicts if he is not handling his own conflicts biblically.

If there is a problem between members of the team, he must act quickly to resolve the issue before it spreads further. He should meet privately with the parties involved and seek to bring about reconciliation between them. He must not show favoritism to one party or the other. He should be as impartial as possible when dealing with these matters. More will be said about this in a later chapter.
It is the responsibility of leaders to take responsibility – A good leader takes responsibility when things go wrong, even when it is someone else’s fault. Perhaps a teammate drops the ball, shows up late or fails to carry through on a commitment, and as a result, some aspect of the ministry comes up short. The team leader accepts responsibility for the performance of his team. Ultimately, it goes back to the decisions he made as the leader. He may have chosen the wrong player, failed to communicate clearly or didn’t provide adequate training. He understands that the “buck stops here.” The captain takes the shot for his crew. Doing so greatly enhances his standing with his team.

He also takes responsibility for seeing that everyone on the team is treated fairly and is given the opportunity to contribute freely to team deliberations. If a player thinks the leader doesn’t value his opinions and contribution, that player may not perform the way he/she should. Being a leader is hard work. It takes time and effort to keep your players happy and on an even keel, but it is well worth the price.

The Actions of a Team Leader

Actions speak louder than words. What a team leader does is much more important than what he says. Someone has said that the proof is in the pudding. The way he functions as a leader is going to determine to a large degree the success of his team and the obtaining of his objective. He cannot tell his team one thing and then do something different himself. He loses credibility as a leader if he does.

Good team leaders lead by example – The day when the leader sat on top of Mount Olympus and issued commands is a relic of the past. Leaders are doers. They show the way. They get their hands dirty. Paul and Peter each encouraged their protégés to lead by example (I Timothy 4:12; I Peter 5:3). This doesn’t mean a leader has to do everything other members of the team do. But he does have to be active doing the things that leaders are supposed to do. He should not expect more of them than he expects of himself.

If evangelism is a high priority for his team, he should be out there evangelizing the lost as well. If he expects his workers to put in a certain number of hours each week, he should put in at least as many hours himself. If he expects a certain level of expertise from his players, he should seek to attain at least that same level of expertise in his field of service. Good leaders don’t give all the dirty work to the other members of the team. They do some of it themselves.

If he wants his teammates to communicate with him and each other, he has to communicate with them. If he wants a positive team environment, he has to be positive and avoid being negative. His influence is all that he has available to get people to do what he wants them to do. That influence is based in large part on his example and his actions.

Good team leaders create an environment of trust – There is only one way to develop an environment of trust, and that is for the leader to exercise trust in his teammates. You do that by making good choices when selecting team players, by providing them with the training they need, by maintaining clear lines of communication, and by giving them both the authority and the responsibility to do assigned tasks. If you do not trust them, they will never trust you.

Good leaders build confidence in others. First, they build confidence among their teammates in their (the leaders) ability to lead. Teams must be convinced their leaders know what they are doing, where they are going, and how they are going to get there. In part, this is the result of the leaders’ ability to articulate the team vision, execute the team strategy, deal fairly with team problems, and to garner team successes along the way.

Second, good leaders build the confidence of their teammates in themselves. People get discouraged. They question themselves. They wonder if what they are doing is really God’s will for them. Leaders
come along side their people to listen to them, to encourage them, and to provide them with advice and training as needed. They let their coworkers know that they (the leaders) have confidence in them (the coworkers) and in the abilities to do the job well.

*Good team leaders celebrate the accomplishments of their team* – Everyone likes to be recognized. People enjoy a sincere “thank you” or an occasional pat on the back for a job well done. There is nothing wrong with giving credit where credit is due. Even the humblest of believers want to hear the Lord’s “well done” one day.

Celebrating the accomplishments of people is one of the secrets of motivating them to do a good job. Nehemiah chapter three consists primarily of a list of people who helped to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. We are told where they worked and what they did. There wasn’t a lot of fanfare involved, but each one was rewarded for his faithful service by being included in the biblical record that is still being read centuries later.

When individuals do well, stop by to say “thank you” or drop them a text message. Give them a Starbucks gift card to show you appreciate their effort. When the team does well or reaches a milestone, recognize its accomplishment. Whatever you do, do not take the credit for yourself as if you did it all alone. Be generous with your praise of people. Share the spotlight with them. Give the credit to them and they will reward you with loyal service and greater productivity in the future. It is amazing how much can get done when leaders don’t care who gets the credit.

*Good team leaders avoid micro-managing* – This was Moses’ problem in Exodus eighteen – he had his hand in everything and was getting bogged down in the details. A leader cannot do his job if he is doing everyone else’s job for them. You don’t need a team if you are going to do it all yourself. The leader’s job is to think, dream, see the big picture, motivate, guide, and direct. He is the point man, the one up front, the helmsmen, and voice for the team. He oversees, evaluates, thinks about the future, and the team’s next steps. He can’t do those things if he is checking up on everyone else and immersing himself in the details they are supposed to be handling.

Not only will he not be able to do his job, he can’t do everybody else’s job either. He will only succeed in creating resentment, strife, and division by so doing. Team ministry is built on trust. He has to trust his team and they have to trust him. If he is micro-managing, he’s not trusting his people. A leader who micro-manages can easily run his ministry right into the ground. People will quit on him. They will not do their jobs well because they know whatever they do will be changed by the leader.

The leader’s job isn’t to do the work for people, but to provide them with the instruction, training, and supervision they need in order to do the work well. If he picked his teammates, then he has the responsibility to provide them with the equipping required to do the job.

Almost everything rises and falls on leadership. The team will succeed only as far as the leader enables it to do so. It is his vision for the future, his choice of team players, his provision of training, his ability to communicate clearly, and his leadership skills that determines the success of the team. Winning teams have winning leaders.
Things to do:

1. Describe in detail your view of leadership. What does a leader do?

2. List your leadership attributes. What qualities do you bring to the leadership table?

3. What have you done in the past year to enhance your leadership skills? What books have you read? What seminars have you attended? What resources have you accessed?

4. To whom do you make yourself accountable as a leader? How often do you check in with your accountability partner?

5. What do you do to built greater trust within your ministry team?
Chapter 7

Prospects for a Winning Season
(The Importance of Vision in Team Ministry)

In retrospect, ’76 Tampa Bay Buccaneers prospects for winning the Super Bowl that year were just about nil. The word “prospects” refers to likelihood, expectations, chances, probability, anticipation, outlook or potential. Regardless of how you define the word, the probability of that team winning the “big one” was so remote that no one but their hardiest fans thought they had any chance at all.

1976 was an expansion year when the National Football League added two new teams: the Seattle Seahawks and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. The expansion draft that year was one of the smallest in memory and had few quality players. The team ended up with a disproportion of older players and aging veterans past their prime. Medical records were not readily available resulting in a number of players being drafted that were either ineligible to play or prone to injury. A construction worker and a truck driver were recruited to fill two positions for which they could not find more qualified people.

Salaries were almost as low as the morale. The team flew in an old Boeing 707 rented from the McCulloch chainsaw company. The color of the team jerseys and the players’ numbers blended together so no one in the stands knew who was on the field.

Sometimes the head coach, John McKay, refused to speak to his players before games. The team hired an overrated, but under performing quarterback from the San Francisco ‘49er bench. There was infighting among team players as well as between the coach and the quarterback. Everyone wanted to do their own thing. No wonder they lost every single game that season.

You can’t win unless you have qualified people working together to achieve a common goal. Regardless of whether it is church planting, a campus ministry or whatever, the team and its players have to agree on where they are going, how they are going to get there, and what it will be like when they arrive.

That is known as “vision.” It is the missing ingredient in many, if not most, of the team ministries that come up short of their goal. Proverbs 29:18 tells us “where there is no vision, the people perish.” The same thing is true of most team ministries – without vision, their prospects for success are no better than those of the ’76 Buccaneers.

The Defining of Vision

The word “vision” in Proverbs 29:18 refers to biblical revelation. God communicated to his servants, the prophets, truths he wanted proclaimed to his people. In some cases, it included a prophetic element concerning future events. Other times, it did not.

The term “vision” as used today is different. It is still futuristic in its focus, but it is not predictive in nature and lacks the divine authority of biblical revelation. Instead of focusing on what will be, it focuses on what can be. One author defines it as having an acute sense of the possible. 65

Aubrey Malphurs has perhaps the best definition of vision when he says, “Vision is a clear, challenging picture of the future of the ministry as you believe it can and must be.” 66 Vision is a mental picture born...
in the heart and mind of a man on a mission for God. Through Bible study, prayer, and consultation with
godly counselors, a burden begins to form in his heart that eventually turns into a passion so real he can see
the finished product in his mind’s eye. It is not a vague idea, but a clear, compelling picture of the
future as he believes God would have it to be.

An example of “vision” is found in Exodus 3:8 where God commissioned Moses to return to Egypt to
deliver his people from more than four hundred years of bondage. He was to bring them into a land
“flowing with milk and honey.” That phrase so gripped the heart of Moses that he used it again and again
when communicating with people. It is mentioned fourteen times in Scripture.

Moses’ vision of the land “flowing with milk and honey” wasn’t a vague concept or wishful thinking. It
was detailed and specific. He could see it in his mind’s eye and was able to describe it in minute detail. He
described the land this way in Deuteronomy 8:7-10:

“For the Lord thy God bringeth thee into a good land,
A land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills:
A land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates;
A land of oil olive, and honey;
A land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack any thing in it;
A land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass.
When thou has eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the Lord thy God for the good land which
he hath given thee.”

John Maxwell points out that only people who can see the impossible can do the impossible. God was
asking Moses to do something that was humanly impossible, but in his mind’s eye he could see it as an
accomplished fact. With that vision burning in his heart he set out on “mission impossible” and did (with
God’s help) what others said could not be done.

The same is true of church planters, campus workers, and other team ministries. There must be a vision
around which the team gathers and toward which it works. It must be real and palpable in their hearts and
minds. It cannot be some vague notion such as “planting a church” or “reaching students.” It needs to be
detailed and specific. The team (or at least the team leader) should be able to describe it in living color.
What kind of ministries will it offer? How large will the congregation be? What kind of buildings,
programs, training, and services will it offer? If they don’t know, they are unlikely to ever get there.

It is at this very point that so many church planters and church-planting teams falter. They don’t have a
vision, at least not one they can describe in any detail. It doesn’t grip their hearts. They speak in
generalities and non-specific terms. They hope and wish, but they don’t dream and see the end product
plainly. Without a vision there is no destination, no terminus point toward which they are working.
There is no need for a ministry plan or a detail strategy because they are not going anywhere in particular.

Vision is the responsibility of the team leader. He is the one who wants to plant the church, start the
campus ministry or engage in a particular type of ministry. He must get alone with God and with his
Word to decipher what it is that God wants to accomplish through him and the team that he will assemble.
This vision of the future should come from God and not be something he conjures up on his own. It may
take days, weeks, months or even years of prayer and Bible study, but it should come together in his heart.
and mind prior to building the team or launching the ministry. After all, it is vision that draws people to
the team and to the ministry.

This is not to say that if you are already involved in a church plant or team ministry of some sort, and do
not have a clear vision of where you are going, that you cannot acquire a vision for the future. You may
have been very active in ministry for some time, and like the children of Israel in the wilderness, you have
had a lot of activity, but not much progress.

Get alone with God. Pour out your heart to him in prayer. Ask him to create his vision in your heart of
what he wants your ministry to look like when it reaches maturity. If you are working with a team, ask
them to join you in this prayerful pursuit. Then dream and think about the possibilities of what God could
do through you and your team. Begin to build a picture of the finished product in your mind until you can
see it clearly and describe it in detail. Communicate it to your team, your church, your students, and
anyone you meet.

Vision is not only helpful, it is essential, not only for church planters, but for anyone in ministry. Don’t
leave home without it.

The Difference between Vision, Purpose, Mission, Values, Strategy, and Timelines

Some folks are confused by all the terminology floating around in church-planting and ministry circles
today. Some writers use terms interchangeably while others differentiate between them. Similarities
exist, but distinctions are important. Every church planter and every ministry team should understand and
be able to explain the following six terms:

Vision answers the question of “where?” Where is this ministry going? What is its objective? What will
it look like when it gets to its destination? It is a clear and compelling picture of the future as the team
leader believes it can and must be.

Purpose answers the question of “why?” Why does this ministry exist? Why are you planning to start
this ministry? What is its ultimate purpose for being? Many people confuse the church’s purpose with its
mission. They tend to focus on what the church does rather than why it exists. In reality, there is only
one purpose for planting a church, starting a campus ministry or reaching out to a particular ethnic group,
and that is to glorify God (I Corinthians 10:31).

Mission answers the question of “what?” Biblically, what is this ministry supposed to be doing? What
assignment has God given us in his Word that we are to be focused on doing? Churches and church
planters sometimes get sidetracked into doing “good things” that take them away from the main things
outlined in God’s Word. In Scripture, God outlines a five-fold mission for the church that includes

Values answer the question of “importance.” What is important in this ministry? What gets emphasized?
What are the non-negotiables - the bedrock beliefs for which these people will fight? They may be
convictions or mere preferences, but they are the things that attract and hold a congregation or a team
together. Make sure, however, that the values you embrace are biblical values, and not just personal
preferences.

Strategy answers the question of “how?” How do you plan to get from where you are to where you want
to be? It is the roadmap which gets you to your destination. It is the blueprint the architect draws that
enables the builder to finish the project. It should be specific and detailed with milestones and critical
mass points built into it along the way as well as start and completion dates. Few ministries will ever
reach their goal without a workable strategy.
Timelines answer the question of “when?” Timelines deal with scheduling, starting dates and completion deadlines. When will you move to the target area? When will the first public service be held? When will particular ministries be launched? When do you envision the project being completed? Of necessity, all timelines are tentative and subject to change. Circumstances change. Things do not materialize as quickly as expected. There are setbacks along the way. While timelines may not be exact, they generally enable us to accomplish more and to do so more quickly than if we had none.

In reality, vision incorporates each of the other elements. It includes purpose, mission, values, strategy, and timelines. Each part is distinct from the others, and yet is part of the whole. Understanding the differences enables us to clarify our vision while utilizing its distinctive parts as we seek to carry out the vision.

What Vision does for You

Vision is a valuable part of team ministry. The benefits far outweigh any negatives that might be associated with it. Here are a few things vision can do for you.

*Vision provides you with direction and confidence* - It is not unusual for churches and church plants to be pulled in different directions by competing interests. Energy, personnel, and resources become diffused as they seek to support an array of activities that can undermine one another. A clear, compelling vision focuses everyone’s attention on the same objective so the team can work together toward achieving the same goals. Vision gives the ministry a sense of direction and builds confidence among the people as they see progress being made.

Without vision ministries are disjointed. They tend to offer new programs, new initiatives, and new gimmicks in an effort to galvanize the people to action. When one thing doesn’t work, another is offered in its place, then another and another. This seldom works because the people don’t know where the ministry is headed or what it is trying to accomplish. What is needed is a compelling vision of the future that captivates people’s hearts. It should not only be possible, but probable, if they work together to make it happen.

*Vision keeps the focus on the main thing* - Would the people associated with your ministry be able to give you the correct answer if you were to ask them what the “main thing” is in your ministry? Would they come back with a multiplicity of answers? Would they be stumped altogether? Do they know?

Vision is laser-like. It focuses on a single set of objectives and gears everything toward achieving those things. Multiple action steps may be involved in achieving those objectives, but those objectives should be kept in mind at all times. Vision provides you with focus and keeps you from being detoured into other activities that hinder you from achieving your goal. Vision enables you to say “no” to good ideas and suggestions that will sidetrack your ministry.

*Vision increases energy and moves people to action* - Nearly every pastor, church planter, and campus worker longs for people to get involved in ministry. They keep asking for volunteers, but few respond. People are tired and weary. Life has beat them up all week long. They just want to come and sit, and be ministered to rather than taking on another responsibility. They are running on empty and need their batteries recharged.

A compelling vision can do that. It catches people’s imaginations. It energizes them. It motivates them to action. They want to be a part of what God is doing. Rather than being boring and energy sapping, ministry suddenly becomes a joy. Instead of being reluctant participants, they become willing volunteers ready to take on any task. There is a vibrancy that is produced when people buy into a vision of what God wants to do in their midst.
Vision increases ownership - For a ministry to succeed, it needs people who “buy into” the vision presented by the leader. They have to take ownership of the vision. The church has to become “our church” rather than “Pastor Bob’s church.” The campus ministry has to become “our ministry” rather than “his ministry.” The only way for this to happen is for the vision to be clear enough, big enough, specific enough for the people to understand it, believe in it, and be energized by it.

Leaders need to keep the vision before their people. Don’t allow them to forget where they are going, how they are going to get there, and what it will be like when they arrive. At least once a year, encourage people to recommit themselves to the Lord and to the vision he has laid upon your heart.

Vision encourages unity, provides purpose, and fosters risk-taking - A shared vision changes people’s relationships with each other. They have something in common toward which they are working. Rather than competing for attention, resources, and personnel, they labor side by side sharing with each other, encouraging one another, and praying for all involved. Ephesians 4:13 speaks of the “unity of the faith” that results from people doing the work of the ministry together.

Vision gives meaning to people’s lives. It gives them a reason for being here. It provides them with a purpose for their existence, something to work toward and to accomplish. It gets their attention off themselves and onto the things of God. It becomes energizing and life-changing. Instead of being a drudgery, ministry becomes a joy because there is a purpose behind it and an objective in front of it toward which they are moving.

Ministry is risky business. There is always a chance of failure. We are asking people to invest money, time and energy in a task where the odds are stacked against us. It is not easy to plant a church, start a campus outreach or launch a prison ministry. Satan opposes it. The world is hostile to it. Elected officials are reluctant toward it. Neighbors don’t want it. It will take blood, toil, and tears to make it happen. You are going to have to step out of the boat and walk on water for it to become a reality, and you are going to ask your team and your people to come with you.

People will follow you to the ends of the earth if your vision is big enough to make it worth the risk you are asking them to take. Jesus proved that when he gave the task of preaching the gospel to every creature.

Vision enhances leadership, promotes excellence, and sustains ministry - People have to believe in the leader before they will believe in his vision. They will not follow nor sacrifice for someone who is hesitant, fuzzy, and indistinct. They will not buy into your ministry unless they discern that you have a passion and a vision from God to do whatever it is that you claim you are there to do. People are looking for someone who knows where he is going, what he wants to accomplish, how he is going to get there, and what it will be like when he arrives. That kind of person will lead with confidence, and this instills confidence in the people. As you share your vision repeatedly, people “buy into” it because they believe in you and your leadership.

Anything that is worth doing is worth doing well, especially if it involves the Lord’s work. Colossians 3:23 tells us, “And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord.” First Samuel 12:30 tells us we are to serve the Lord with “all your heart.” Throughout Scripture, anything that was to be done for God was to be done with excellence. We are always to give our best to the Lord. A challenging vision asks people not to give less than their best to the Lord regardless of whether it involves constructing a building, preparing a lesson to be taught or making a sacrifice of time, energy, and finances.

How did Moses sustain his ministry through forty long years of wandering in the wilderness? He used vision. He kept reminding people of the “land of milk and honey” to which they were going. He drew the picture for them again and again. You will need to do that also. Your ministry may take longer than
you expect. The costs will be greater and the sacrifices more demanding. That is just the way it often is. Your team and your people will become discouraged unless you keep reminding them of where you are going, why you are making the sacrifices you are making, and what it will be like when you arrive. Vision sustains ministry. Don’t let your people lose sight of it.

**Vision loosens purse strings** - It takes money for ministry to happen. Often, church planters and campus workers underestimate the financial costs involved. This isn’t done intentionally, but it does happen frequently. Rentals are higher than expected. Supplies and building materials are more expensive. Land values go up. The cost of planting a church can run into the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Those funds are available, but God usually channels them through the tithes, offerings, and special gifts of his people. Teaching biblical principles of stewardship and hosting an annual stewardship emphasis will help your people become regular givers to your ministry, but it is vision that leads your people to give sacrificially. After being in slavery for four hundred years, the Israelites gave vast sums to build the Tabernacle. Rather than hoarding the resources God had given them when they left Egypt, they gave gladly and generously to finance the Lord’s work. Part of the reason for that was the vision Moses kept in front of them of where they were going and what it would be like when they got there.

Vision is one of the most valuable tools God has placed in your toolbox. It is your friend and is one of the keys to successful ministry as you build your team and develop your ministry. Every member of the team needs to buy into your vision and work together to make it a reality.

**Vision must be Communicated Repeatedly**

Moses is an outstanding example of how leaders use vision to motivate their people. At the burning bush, God burned a vision of a “land flowing with milk and honey” into his heart (Exodus 3:8). That vision became the driving, motivating force in his life. It consumed him. He couldn’t keep quiet about it. He talked about it everywhere he went and to everyone he met.

On his way to Egypt, Moses encountered his brother Aaron who was coming to meet him. Together, they would form a dynamic duo - a ministry team that changed the course of history. Exodus 4:28 tells us that “Moses told Aaron ALL THE WORDS of the Lord who had sent him.” Surely, that included his vision of the “land flowing with milk and honey” since that was a prominent part of the Lord’s commission to him.

Moses and Aaron, now functioning as a team, made their way back to Egypt and arranged to meet with the elders of the children of Israel (4:29). What did they tell them? Verse 30 informs us that “Aaron spake ALL THE WORDS which the Lord had spoken unto Moses.” Again, this surely included Moses’ vision of the “land flowing with milk and honey.” That phrase appears more than a dozen times in the account of the exodus and wanderings of the children of Israel.

Moses had to communicate his vision before the people bought into it. A vision hidden in the heart of the leader is of little value. It needs to be communicated again and again to prospective team members, to team players, to donors, to members, to the people you meet on the street. It needs to be repeated over and over, and kept fresh in the minds of the people. Moses did exactly that. As the people marched out of Egypt toward their new-found freedom, Moses reminded them where they were going and what it would be like when they got there (13:5). Throughout the years of wandering in the wilderness, he continued to remind them of the “land flowing with milk and honey.”

Nehemiah was another leader who galvanized his people to action by sharing his vision with them. People said it couldn’t be done. The city walls of Jerusalem had lain in ruin for decades. The destruction was too great. The task was too large. But when Nehemiah met with the people and revealed why he had
come to Jerusalem, what he planned to do, and how God’s hand was upon him, the people “bought into” his vision and joined the effort.

Vision has to be communicated. People have to be informed. They need to be reminded often of why they are doing what they are doing and what it will be like when they finish the task. Communicating vision is the leader’s job. No one can do it as well as he can. God burned it into his heart, and he has to keep it fresh in his own mind and in the minds of his teammates.

Good leaders communicate their vision clearly, creatively, and continually. They can describe it in detail. They find a myriad of ways to communicate it through sermons, classes they teach, video, announcements, personal conversations, and other ways. They have to be confident, enthusiastic, and infectious if they expect others to catch their vision. Vision casting is extremely important when recruiting, guiding, and working with a team.

**Keep your Vision in Focus**

Vision leaks. It dissipates. It fades from memory. People forget unless they are reminded. Time blurs the objective. Nehemiah found he had to refresh the vision half way through his building project. After just three weeks, the people lost sight of where they were headed. That is easy to do in the midst of ministry. We get so wrapped up in what we are doing, that we lose sight of the goal. We need someone to remind us of the big picture. That someone is the team leader.

Teams succeed only when the players have a unified vision. Each one has to “buy into” the team’s vision, and yet for that to happen they often have to give up their own vision. That is not easy to do. There is a tendency to change the vision so as to incorporate other objectives into it. That is not always bad, but care needs to be exercised that the vision doesn’t morph into something less than was originally envisioned.

When the work gets hard and the going is tough, when things don’t materialize as expected, there is a tendency to compromise, to settle for less, to adopt someone else’s agenda. Brian Bloye, in his book, *It’s Not Personal, Surviving and Thriving on the Journey of Church Planting*, points out that once you begin making compromises, you’re no longer following a vision; you’re following a political course, and that’s never good.

The leader must not lose sight of the vision God has laid upon his heart. He must stay focused on the objective and not allow himself to be pulled into ministry activities that either change the goal or keep him from achieving it, regardless of how good or how needy those other activities are. Many a church planter has gotten sidetracked from his goal of developing a fully-functioning local church capable of standing on its own feet because he lost sight of why he was there. Too often, he settles for pastoring the small group of people he has gathered, rather than leading them to fulfill the vision he had when he first started the work. The same thing can happen to other teams as well.

Vision is the catalyst, the guiding star, the plumb line that keeps the leader, the team, and the church on course. It keeps the team unified and working toward the same objectives, and by God’s grace, it will one day become a reality.
**Things to Do:**

1. Describe in detail your vision for your ministry. What will the finished product look like?

2. Vision can often be boiled down to a single descriptive statement such as “the land flowing with milk and honey.” Write out the vision statement for your ministry or your ministry team.

3. List all the ways you have communicated your vision to your team or people in the last six months.

4. Evaluate your current ministry. How have people sought to change (hijack) your original vision for the work? What have you done to counteract this? Is the original vision still in tact?
Chapter 8

Building Team Spirit
(Promoting Unity within your Ministry Team)

The fans were the one bright spot in the ’76 Buccaneers opening season. Loyal, enthusiastic, and united, they never gave up hope and never wavered in cheering their team on to the worst record in professional football history. They loved their team and did everything they could to help the team succeed. Sadly, the same could not be said for the players and coaches. Unity was conspicuously absent.

Coach John McKay was scathing in his sarcasm and constantly berated the team’s performance. He and quarterback Steve Spurrier had a tempestuous relationship with each criticizing the other in the media. After the third game, the coach refused to even talk to his players. The team resented the fact that McKay played his son while passing over more qualified players. It is little wonder the team ended up losing every single game that year.

Unity is essential to a team’s success in every area of life, especially when it comes to ministry. Regardless of whether you are planting a church, conducting a campus ministry, evangelizing inmates or serving as part of a musical team, there has to be agreement among the team members about who the leader is, what the goals are, how ministry is to be done, and who is to do what.

Disagreements, differences of opinion, and a critical spirit have undermined countless ministry teams. Paul and Barnabas’ ministry team dissolved because of a lack of unity over whether or not to invite John Mark to rejoin their team (Acts 36-40). God wants his people to work together in unity. Psalm 133:1 observes: “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.” Ephesians 4:3 admonishes us to endeavor to “keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

Team Unity is Intentional

Unity doesn’t just happen. It is not an automatic response. At our core, we are all selfish and self-centered. We want our own way. We often think our way is the best way, the most logical way, and certainly the most reasonable course of action to follow. Other members of the team may not see it that way. Each member of the team comes with his or her own perspective of how things should be done. When things don’t materialize as expected, team members are sometimes offended and may refuse to cooperate with the other members of the team. Disunity undermines the effectiveness of the team and places its objectives in jeopardy.

As human beings, we sometimes forget who we are. We see ourselves as individuals with rights, opinions, insights, and ideas that are just as valid as those of others. We expect to be heard and to have our ideas at least considered, if not adopted. But we are not simply human beings. We are Christians and part of a team of Christian workers. As such, we are to follow in the Savior’s footsteps (I Peter 2:21) and adopt his attitude (Philippians 2:5).

And what was his attitude? We are told that, although he was God, he “made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant” (vs. 7). He laid aside his rights and his privileges for the benefit of others. He said he “came not to be ministered unto, but to minister” (Matthew 20:28). He understood
that servants have few, if any rights, and that the will of the master always takes precedent over the interests and plans of the servant.

Above all else, as members of a ministry team, we are to see ourselves as servants (Matthew 20:27). We are not there to demand our own way. We are there to help the team to succeed in its stated goals. It is critically important for each member of the team to put the good of the team ahead of his/her personal preferences and ideas. This is done intentionally so that the team may move forward.

We may not always agree with what is being proposed, and we may even have an idea that would work better. But for the sake of unity, we acquiesce and wholeheartedly support the course of action that is decided upon. This isn’t always easy to do, but it is done because we have a servant heart and want to maintain the cohesiveness of the team.

**Team Unity is Built on Trust**

Trust is the foundation of all team ministry. If there is no trust, there is no team - just independent contractors. The absence of trust leads to suspicion, lack of cooperation, and division. The team leader must believe in his team, and they must have confidence in him, and in each other. When there is trust, people work together, harmony prevails, and objectives are achieved.

Trust has to do with confidence, reliance, and dependability. It is based on the belief that whatever is being said is truthful and right, and what is being done is the best course of action. Trust is knowing that when team members push or oppose you, they are doing it because they care about both you and the team. We have to believe that people are not out to get us or to make us miserable. They are only trying to help.

*To build trust, be growing spiritually* - Our relationship with God affects our relationship with everyone around us. A growing, vibrant prayer life coupled with regular nourishment from the Word of God normally produces a happy, positive outlook on life and ministry. When we are experiencing a close walk with God we will naturally be more trusting both of him and of others. Every member of a ministry team has a responsibility to maintain a healthy devotional life and a vibrant relationship with the Lord.

When we are growing spiritually, we are more likely to take disappointments and setbacks in stride. Minor offenses are overlooked and covered by love (Proverbs 10:12). We have a more positive attitude and are more cooperative. We take our co-workers at face value and accept them as they are. We give the benefit of the doubt and make allowances for one another. Spiritual growth is one of the keys to developing a healthy, trustful team relationship.

*To build trust, be realistic* - Sometimes people join a ministry with unrealistic expectations. Because everyone on the team is a Christian, we assume they will always be agreeable and will see things the same way we do. People are generally well-intentioned. They normally keep their word. They are reliable most of the time. But that doesn’t mean there won’t be times when they fall short just as we do. Team ministry can be stressful. We forget that our teammates are human and can be grumpy and sharp tongued. Team players can get out of sorts with each other. Tempers can flare. When entering a team relationship, come with a balanced view that makes allowances for people. Expect the best from people, but be realistic as well.

*To build trust, be open* - Members of a ministry team are more than members of a ministry team - they are brothers and sisters in Christ. They have a responsibility to each other that goes beyond the workplace. They are to encourage, support, share, and be accountable to one another. They are to bear one another’s burdens (Galatians 6:2), and pick each other up. We all like to wear a façade that says, “I’m doing fine” even when we are not.
As believers, we need to be open and transparent with each other. When we are struggling, fearful or unsure of ourselves, we need to reach out to others for help. There is nothing wrong with asking people for counsel, advice, and prayer. The Apostle Paul lived a transparent life in which he shared his troubles, fears, and concerns with others and asked for their help. Being honest and open means being vulnerable. Sometimes that can result in getting hurt, but more often it genders a deeper sense of love and camaraderie that leads to greater trust in one another.

To build trust, be available - Team members grow to trust each other as they spend time together, not only doing ministry together, but spending non-ministry time with one another. Successful teams hang out with each other. They occasionally go out to eat together, the wives may go shopping from time to time, and the fellows may watch ballgames or go fishing together. They become friends who like each other, and do things together, not because they have to, but because they want to.

Team ministry is more than a business relationship. It is a family where there is give and take, and where sharing takes place. You get to know each other in a team setting. You become aware of each other’s strengths and weaknesses, and you learn to accept one another with all your warts and shortcomings.

No one wants to spend all their time with other people. We all need our privacy. We want to do our “own thing” without having team members hanging around. But neither should we isolate ourselves from other members of the team. There needs to be a healthy balance here. Because people are so different, each person will have to determine what that balance is for himself.

To build trust, be celebrative – The Bible teaches that we are to rejoice with those that rejoice (Romans 12:15). This is especially important in team ministry. Whenever the team reaches a milestone, achieves a critical mass or has a good response to some ministry outreach, the team needs to celebrate the victory together. It should be seen as a team effort in which everyone contributed to the outcome. Some may have been more visible or more involved, but everyone on the team should rejoice in what has been achieved.

When an individual team player completes a task, reaches a goal or does a good job, he or she should be recognized and commended by the team leader and other members of the team. Jesus said the laborer is worthy of his hire (Luke 10:7), and a job well done deserves to be commended. We all need encouragement as well as recognition. People learn to trust each other when they share the credit and celebrate each other’s accomplishments.

To build trust, be communicative – Communication is critical to building trust. People who don’t talk to each other seldom trust each other. Team leaders must go out of their way to communicate with the rest of the team, and team players must feel they have access to the team leader and will be heard when they speak with him. There must also be interaction between the members of the team.

To be effective, communication must be consistent, clear, and courteous. Honesty in communication is vital to building trust. Maintain your commitments. Keep your promises. Treat each other with respect. Misunderstandings will occur, and can cause deep resentment unless dealt with in a timely, biblical manner. If you don’t understand what you are supposed to do, ask. Seek clarification. It takes two people to communicate, but only one to disrupt it.

To build trust, be consistent – Team players are selected because of their character and their competency. People learn to trust them because they are reliable and dependable. They can be counted on to be where they are supposed to be and to do what they are supposed to do. They show up on time for team meetings, they put in the hard work required to produce quality ministry, and they are true to their word.
When a person consistently does a good job, people trust him. When a person consistently handles problems well, people place their confidence in him. When a person keeps confidential information to himself, people will seek him out. Being consistent, keeping your promises, and doing your job well are important factors in building trust within a ministry team.

To build trust, be courageous – Many competing forces come to bear upon those in ministry. Pressure will be placed upon those in leadership to make changes in order to keep people happy. People will want to change the worship style, the goals, and the methodologies you follow. Sometimes those changes can be helpful. Other times they are not.

As spiritual leaders, we are not to be tossed about by every wind of doctrine, not by other people’s agendas. We want to give people’s ideas a fair hearing, but that does not mean we will implement everything that is suggested to us. It takes a person of courage to hold the course steady while saying “no” to a teammate or to a family threatening to leave the church if they do not get their way.

Stepping out by faith to implement a carefully developed ministry plan also requires courage. Not wavering when results are slow in coming or when the way gets difficult is another way in which courage is displayed. People’s trust in you will grow over time as you go through the storms of ministry, make the tough calls, and stand firm for that which is right.

To build trust, be loyal – Every member of the team needs to “have the back” of the other members of the team. They need to be supportive of one another. Sometimes people in a church will criticize one member of the team when talking to another member of the team. This should never be allowed and should be immediately corrected. Stop the person and remind him that if he is unhappy with what is being done, he has an obligation to go to the responsible individual and tell that person, not you. You might offer to arrange such a meeting for him.

Sometimes there may be differences of opinion within the team that are discussed within team meetings. On occasion, these discussions can become quite animated, but once a decision is made each member of the team needs to be supportive of that decision. One team member should never criticize another team player in the presence of someone outside the team. People will tolerate and forgive honest mistakes, but trust that is violated is very difficult to rebuild. So, work hard to build trust between yourself and other members of the team. If you do, unity will be much more likely to characterize all that the team does.

Team Unity is Built around Values

Lyle Schaller argues that the most important single element of any corporate, congregational, or denominational culture is its value system. In his book on Values-Driven Leadership, Aubrey Malphurs points out that values determine ministry distinctives, dictate personal involvement, communicate what is important, embrace positive change, influence overall behavior, inspire people to action, enhance credible leadership, shape ministry character, contribute to ministry success, and determine ministry vision. He points out that values are more important than vision since vision is based on one’s values.

Values are certainly a key factor in developing and maintaining unity within a ministry team. Values are defined as the constant, passionate, biblical core beliefs that drive ministry. They are the fundamental, bedrock core beliefs that form the foundation for all we do. They are the things that distinguish one church from another and determine why each one does what it does.

A church-planting team should have a number of values undergirding its ministry. For example: a belief that all people are hopelessly lost in sin and destined for a Christless eternity apart from saving faith in Christ; a belief that the Great Commission of Christ requires it to evangelize and disciple believers in its area; a belief that new churches are more effective in winning people to faith in Christ than established
churches, etc. Values can include a preference for a particular worship style, special ministry programming (such as for children, teens or shut-ins) or an emphasis on missions as well as many other things. Values drive ministry and determine what gets emphasized through the team’s ministry.

While vision energizes people and galvanizes them to action, it is the team’s values that attract the players to the team and bind them together. You can have a great vision for the future and what you plan to do, but if people disagree with your values, they will not join your team. If they do, they won’t stay. People are attracted to those whose values are similar to their own. That is true of every congregation, every mission agency, and every ministry team.

Maxwell points out that values set the standard for the team’s performance. A team that has excellence as one of its values will strive to do the best job possible. It will invest the time, money, and effort required to be effective. A different team may spend countless hours in evangelism and pre-evangelism activities because it values those things. As long as there is agreement on the team’s values, the team will be unified and move forward together.

Values determine what is right, desirable, and worthwhile for each ministry team. Each team’s values will differ, but to a large extent they will define how that team will function and where its emphasis will be. As long as the team is committed to the same values, it will experience unity. But if one member begins to express a core belief that differs from the rest of the team, then disunity and a parting of the ways is all but certain. This can be witnessed in the break up of Paul and Barnabas’ ministry team in Acts 15. Paul held as one of his core beliefs that a soldier of Jesus Christ should be disciplined and always at his post. To abandon one’s post is tantamount to treason. Such a one should never be trusted again. Barnabas, held as a core belief that people should be given a second chance. Everyone messes up and learns from so doing. Thus, John Mark needed to be encouraged and taken with them on their next missionary trip. Their ministry team dissolved because of these conflicting core values.

A team’s culture can be defined as the way the team members interact with each other. Their interactions will be based in large part on the values they each hold. Sadly, values are rarely taken into consideration when putting a team together. Sometimes team players have difficulty identifying their core values. They haven’t taken the time to think through the process of determining what is really important to them. Other times, mission agencies simply assume that all of their missionaries hold the same core values. They do not. Even within a mission agency, there is a wide variety of values held, which in some cases, can be quite at variance with those held by other members of the mission.

Thus, it behooves mission agencies and those desiring to participate in a team ministry to carefully evaluate the values of potential team players to be sure they are compatible with other members of the team. Doing so significantly enhances the probability of the team being unified, and ultimately successful.

**Team Unity is Built around Vision**

Vision and values go hand in hand. Both are essential to building unity within a ministry team. Vision answers the questions of what and where while values provide the why. It is possible for a team (or a church) to be in total agreement about values and still not succeed. Without vision one of two things is likely to happen: either the team will lack the energy and enthusiasm needed to sustain the ministry over the long haul, or members of the team will pull in different directions trying to achieve a variety of conflicting goals. Either way, the team will lack the unity necessary to be successful.

Vision is to the team as air is to a human being. It is essential because without it you will die. It is the glue that holds the team together as it moves toward the same objectives. It is the umbrella under which all the components work. Without compatible visions there is no unity within the team.
One of the main jobs of the team leader is to clarify the team vision and to keep it in front of the players at all times. Doing so provides guidance to the team. Like guardrails along the highway, it keeps them on track and moving in the right direction. There is a natural tendency to turn aside, to lose focus, to become weary as we move through a project. The recasting of the vision counteracts these tendencies and helps to keep the team united and moving forward together.

**Team Unity is Built on Team Dynamics**

Team dynamics are extremely important when it comes to developing unity within the team. Three major areas are involved: development, relationships, and expectations.

*Team development* – Every team goes through four stages of development: forming, norming, storming, and performing. The *forming* stage occurs as players are recruited and the team is put together. Everybody is trying to figure why they are there, how they fit into the team, and how they relate to the other members of the team. What role does each member play and how will decisions be made? To whom is each person accountable? What are the goals of the team and how will people know when those objectives have been achieved? How will ministry be conducted and how much freedom (authority) will each person have to perform his/her tasks? If there is to be unity within the team, these and a myriad of other questions need to be addressed during the forming stage of the team. Otherwise, conflict is all but inevitable.

The second phase of team development is the *norming* stage. This occurs as the team settles into a routine. People become familiar with their role, ministry bugs are worked out, teammates learn what to expect from each other, and regular team meetings are held. Procedures are developed and guidelines are agreed upon as the team implements its ministry. There may be some “hitches” along the way, but things are moving along at a somewhat steady pace and things are going well.

The third phase of development is the *storming* stage. Things that start well do not always stay that way. Initially, people will acquiesce to one another and to whatever is asked of them. Being new on the team, they will defer to each other. But with the passing of time, people begin to express ideas and preferences that were not mentioned previously. They may voice disagreement with the team’s vision, strategy or the tasks assigned to them. They may feel they have not received the recognition they deserve. Habits and idiosyncrasies formerly tolerated may become a source of irritation. Philosophy differences may surface as they did between Paul and Barnabas.

The storming stage can either strengthen the team or tear it apart depending on how the issues are handled. In some cases, the team leader may be able to resolve the issues by interacting with the unhappy team player and listening carefully to his/her complaints. At other times, the situation may need to be discussed in a team meeting with the entire team present. Adjustments may need to be made to alleviate the pressure and to address the grievance in a biblical fashion. Openness and honesty are critical to developing and maintaining unity within the team. Problems need to be brought up and addressed sooner rather than later so they do not get out of hand.

The fourth phase of team development is the *performing* stage. This occurs as trust is built, communication flows freely, issues are resolved, and ministry assignments are carried out in joint cooperation with others. The team begins to function as a well-oiled machine with each part doing his/her assigned task in unison with the other members of the team. Unity is evident to all at this stage.

*Team relationships* – Team ministry is about relationships. The team will only function as well as the members interact with each other. Contrary to what some think, teams are not groups of independent contractors who come together a couple of times each week to perform a ministry task together. They are families who care about each other and interact with one another on a regular basis. It is important that
each member of the team invest heavily in building relationships within the team. This is done through
both individual effort and team experiences.

Meals are great ways to build relationships. The team leader and his wife can meet one or more of
the other team members at a local restaurant or invite them over to the house for supper occasionally. The
team might go on a picnic or attend a ballgame together. The goal is not to conduct business, but to
socialize and to get to know each other on a personal basis. It is important for teams to do fun things
together that allow them to “be themselves” and to learn to enjoy each other’s company. The goal is to
form friendships. People who like each other tend to work well together.

It is important that team members respect and believe in one another. Each one was (or should have
been) chosen because he had something to contribute to the team’s success. Each player on the team has
an important role to fulfill and is committed to doing his very best. Just as the human body functions best
when all of its parts are performing well, so the team functions best when each member recognizes the
contribution of the other members of the team. A positive and complimentary outlook goes a long way in
maintaining unity within the team.

There are times when one area of team ministry will receive greater emphasis and recognition than other
areas. One member of the team may have a more prominent role to play than others do. There may be
times when team members are asked to do things they did not sign up for initially. A self-centered player
may rebel at this and become a source of discord. The right response, however, is for each member to put
the good of the team ahead of his own personal ambitions and desires. Doing so not only preserves the
unity of the team, but shows the caliber of his relationship with both the Lord and the other members of
the team.

Relationships are strengthened when the team players make themselves accountable to each other. The
“flesh” rebels against the concept of accountability. We don’t like other people looking over our shoulder
and telling us what to do. We want to be independent and do what we want to do, when we want to do it,
and in the way we want to do it. Accountability, however, is built into God’s creation.

Accountability is part of every stage of life and every relationship, including team ministry. We give up
some of our independence when we join a ministry. We agree to function together, to consult, to make
adjustments, and to be accountable.

Accountability helps us to do what we ought to do. It helps us to perform better. It enables us to be better
servants of Christ. George Barna points out that every great team holds itself accountable to standards of
behavior as well as to performance goals. He notes that you can only improve that which you can
measure. Accountability isn’t a problem if we do our jobs well and if we build strong relationships
with the other members of the team.

Relationships are built in part on performance. Team members learn to respect and trust each other when
they do a good job. Good leaders help their teammates perform well by empowering them. This is done
by setting clear goals and standards of performance, and then giving people control and decision-making
power. Some leaders are reluctant to do this because they are afraid they will lose control. Actually, just
the opposite occurs. When we hold onto the power and seek to control everything, we undermine the
player’s ability to perform well. We are saying, “I don’t trust you.” This creates a strained relationship
that further undermines his/her ability to perform well. But when we delegate both control and decision-
making to the person we empower them to do well. We are saying to them: “I trust you. I have
certainty in you.” When people feel trusted, they do a better job, and the relationship between you and
them is strengthened.
Team relationships are further strengthened by rewarding achievement. Sometimes it is just a text message or a note. It may be a sincere handshake or pat on the back. It may be a “good job” directed toward a teammate during a team meeting. In some cases, a public recognition may be called for.

Relationships are funny things. They can be both fragile and enduring. They are one of the keys to building unity within the team, and will contribute significantly to the success or failure of the team. Therefore, work hard at building healthy relationships with your fellow teammates.

**Team expectations** – Expectations are those unwritten rules that are present in every organization and ministry team. They govern how things are done, and what is acceptable, and what is not acceptable. They are seldom written down and are learned primarily by violating them. One team may encourage thinking outside the box while doing so in another group might get you kicked off the roster.

Every player and the team itself has unexpressed expectations that will impact the unity of the team. A player who consistently violates those expectations may find himself at odds with his teammates or on the outside looking in. Expectations need to be managed. This is done by reminding the team that conflict, disappointments, and change are all inevitable. They are part of team life. No one is going to be entirely happy with everything that happens within the team. Cooperation is the only acceptable option in these situations. No member of the team has the luxury of being offended, uncooperative or failing to pull his own weight. Those behaviors do not promote team unity and are contrary to Scripture.

Each member of the team must be protective of his/her teammates and must not be the source of dissent within the ministry. If a member has a problem with another member of the team, he should follow the principles laid out in Matthew 5 and Matthew 18, and take the initiative to resolve the issues so peace and harmony can continue. Every member of the team will have to make allowances for other members of the team. The tipping point comes when a team player becomes a source of disunity. The team leader must then step in and confront the divisive member, and seek to resolve the problem. Hopefully, this can be done in a fashion satisfactory to all. If not, the person may have to be uninvited to be on the team. While that should always be a last resort, it may become necessary in order to preserve the unity of the team and to ensure that the team keeps moving toward the fulfillment of its vision.

**Team Unity is Built around good Team Meetings**

Team meetings are another critical factor in developing and maintaining unity within the ministry team. The team needs regular face to face time together for fellowship, communication, evaluation, prayer, and planning. This is where trust is built, the vision is renewed, problems are solved, and plans are developed. The team meeting is to the ministry team what the circulatory system is to the human body. You can’t live without it.

It is the responsibility of the team leader to ensure that open communication is encouraged and issues are dealt with in an fair, biblical fashion. The team meeting should not be viewed as a business session, but as a team get together and a time of fellowship. All members of the team (including the wives) should be present for these weekly sessions. Having a set day and time for team meetings enables everyone to more easily arrange their schedules to be present.

In his book, *A Vision of the Possible*, Daniel Sinclair observes that one way to develop “teamness” and unity in a group is to pray and study the Word together. A different member of the team can be designated each time to bring a brief devotional followed by a season of prayer in which each member of the team can join in praying for wisdom, blessing, and guidance. Prayer softens the heart and makes people more cooperative.
Reporting and evaluation are major reasons for regular team meetings. Each member of the team should be encouraged to share the ministry activities he has been engaged in during the past week, progress made, and problems encountered. In doing so, he is making himself accountable to the rest of the team and is building unity between himself and his teammates. How close is the team to reaching a particular milestone? What has to be done to achieve the next critical mass point? What will it take to get there?

Problems are a part of life and teams are not immune from them. A key family will drop out. The school may suddenly notify you that they will no longer rent space to you. Offerings will drop and expenses will increase. Moral problems may arise. Team meetings allow the team to share problems in the ministry that need to be resolved so that the ministry can continue to move forward. The team meeting allows you to draw on the wisdom of all present rather than relying on your opinion alone. The Scriptures teach that there is safety in a multitude of counselors. Presenting a united front is always preferable to standing alone when dealing with problems in the ministry.

The team meeting is a time for strategizing and planning. What is on the agenda for this week? What is coming down the pike in the next month or two? What does the team need to be doing now to achieve a particular goal later in the year? Everyone on the team needs to know what is coming, what they need to do, and what others are going to be doing as well. Communication and coordination are keys to good team ministry and to maintaining unity within the team.

Team Unity is Built around Open Communication

Teams that work well together talk with each other on a regular basis. This doesn’t just happen, they are intentional in making it happen. They schedule times to talk. They bend over backward to make sure that people are “in the know” about what is happening and what is being planned for the future. While every person on the team needs to be committed to keeping other members of the team informed, it is the team leader who leads the way. He sets the standard for openness and the free exchange of information.

The team leader has to keep his people informed. He can do this through e-mail, texting, phone calls, postings, and face to face communication. He understands that he must communicate well in advance using a variety of means. He understands that his team will be “down” on anything they are not “up” on.

Information flows both from the leader to the team members, and from the team players back to the leader as well as to the other members of the team. If members stop talking to each other, misunderstandings will multiply and the team’s effectiveness will decline. Communication should be consistent, clear, and courteous at all times.

Communication is so important to the success of the team that the entire next chapter in this manual is devoted to the subject. Let it suffice to say for now, that unity is built around open communication within the ministry team. How important is unity to the team? Well, if you have it you just might win the “World Series” of ministry. Without it, you are likely to end up like the hapless ’76 Tampa Bay Buccaneers who lost every game of the season.
Things to Do:

1. On a scale of 1-10, with “10” being excellent and “0” being terrible, how would you rate the unity factor among your leadership team?

2. Unity is intentional. What have you done in the past six months to promote unity within your team?

3. What common values hold your team together?

4. How often does your leadership team meet? What could be done to strengthen the team’s unity and enhance its effectiveness?
Chapter 9

Inside the Team Huddle
(The Importance of Communication to Team Ministry)

Anyone who has ever seen a football game is familiar with “the huddle.” Before almost every play, the offensive team players will form a circle a few yards behind the line of scrimmage. Usually, they will be bent over with their heads close together. The “huddle” has one purpose only – to communicate the next play the team is going to run. Good communication in the huddle is vital to the success of the play, and ultimately to the success of the team. Without good communication, players won’t know where to block, what route to run or where to throw the ball.

Huddles don’t take place just on the playing field. They occur on the sidelines, in the locker room, and throughout the week as the team prepares for each game.

Poor communication certainly contributed to the dismal performance of the ’76 Buccaneers. It is the team leader’s job to see that communication takes place and that everyone knows what his assignment is, and how he is to do it. John McKay, the Buccaneer’s coach, came into the League with a chip on his shoulder. He didn’t like the League, he didn’t like the media, and he didn’t like some of his players.

His style of communication was sarcastic, belligerent, and angry. Rather than teaching and encouraging his players, he often lambasted them in the media by pointing out their shortcomings and failures.

Defensive lineman, Pat Toomay, told the Columbus Dispatch in 2001 that “the coach stopped talking to us after the third game.” McKay and his quarterback, Steve Spurrier, had a tempestuous relationship that was often played out in the newspapers rather than sitting down and talking with each other to resolve problems. With communication like that, it is no wonder the team lost every single game that season.

The same thing can happen with ministry teams as well. The contention between Paul and Barnabas was so sharp and heated that they could no longer work together (Acts 15:39). The author has witnessed similar things on the mission field and within church-planting teams when communication breaks down or is non-existent.

Communication is the Key

Communication is defined as the process of sharing information with another person in such a way that the other person understands what you are saying. That sounds simple enough, but it is actually quite complex. We often think we are communicating clearly with our teammates when we’re really not.

Dr. Lee Roberson and Dr. John Maxwell both are well-known for saying that everything rises and falls on leadership. That may be true, but it is communication upon which leadership really rises and falls. Good leaders are effective communicators. They understand the value of good communication and the importance of keeping people informed. It is the leader’s ability to communicate his vision, values, and strategy that attracts people to his team and to his cause. He must be able to articulate where he is going, how he is going to get there, and what it will be like when he arrives. He will generally be successful to the degree he is able to do that. His success or failure in ministry will be tied in part to his ability to communicate effectively.
Communication is at the root of all relationships, both good and bad ones. God designed man with the capacity to talk and to communicate ideas, thoughts, and feelings. Man began communicating with God almost from the moment he became aware of his surroundings. When God gave Adam a wife, he also began communicating with her as well. Sweet fellowship followed between Adam and Eve, and between them and God. Their relationships began to break down when they stopped talking to God and to each other. Instead of communicating to resolve problems, they started pointing fingers at each other and blaming the other person for what happened. Ministry teams that struggle often do so because communication has broken down between teammates.

While every member of the team needs to be committed to open and honest communication, it is the team leader’s job to ensure that this happens. He is responsible for creating an atmosphere where teammates feel welcome to express their opinions, and to have their ideas and concerns heard without being dismissed out of hand. He does this through his own example of listening, sharing, and speaking. If he comes down harshly on people or discounts the opinions of his co-workers, he will soon find that people will be reluctant to communicate with him.

John Maxwell points out that communication increases both commitment and connectedness. If you want people to support your ministry, you must keep them informed. People tend to be down on anything they are not up on. But when people are kept informed, they have a sense of security and freedom. They feel they share ownership of whatever has been proposed. People don’t like to be kept in the dark or to have things dumped on them at the last minute. That lack of communication will all but guarantee a poor response.

Leaders who talk with their teammates often and openly find people to be much more cooperative. If they show interest in the members of their team, if they take time to listen to them, if they send text messages of encouragement and appreciation to them, they will have a much happier and more productive team. Successful church plants and campus ministries are almost always marked by good communication between the team players.

**Communication is often Complex**

Someone has said that communication is more of an art than a science. There are some written rules, but most of the time it just involves common sense. Communication, however, becomes increasingly more complex as the number of people grows. This is the exponential element. The following chart shows this complexity:

- 2 people = 2 lines of communication
- 3 people = 6 lines of communication
- 4 people = 12 lines of communication
- 5 people = 20 lines of communication
- 6 people = 30 lines of communication

Thus, we can see how complex communication can be when just three couples form a team to plant a new church. It takes a lot of communication to keep everyone onboard and heading in the same direction.

Every time we open our mouths to communicate with a teammate, there are six messages that can be exchanged:

- What we meant to say
- What we actually say
- What the other person hears us say
- What the other person thinks we said
It is easy to see how teammates can misunderstand each other. We are not always as clear as we should be when communicating, and others do not always hear what we meant to say. In addition, there are a number of “communication killers” that lurk along the way. They can wreak havoc in any team.

**One-way Communication** – Leaders sometimes think they have communicated if they inform their team of plans for coming events. That isn’t necessarily so. Information is not the same as interaction. A mere announcement may not be sufficient to garner people’s support and cooperation, especially if they have no input into the proposed action.

For communication to occur there must be an exchange of ideas. People need to ask questions and seek clarification. They need to understand the reasoning behind any proposed action, how they fit in, and what it will cost them in terms of money, time, and effort. Strong leaders encourage two-way communication and welcome questions whereas weak leaders sometimes get upset if people question their ideas.

**Ambiguity** - Lack of clarity, uncertainty, fuzziness, and inadequate detail can leave people wondering what you are talking about. People are reluctant to make commitments or they will make commitments that they will not carry through on if you are not clear. They may feel duped or mislead, and consequently shut down and be non-committal. Often, this is not an indication of a lack of commitment, but of a lack of communication on the part of the leader.

**Assuming rather than Clarifying** - Making assumptions is another way to turn off the communication faucet. Every team player makes certain assumptions about how the team will function and what his or her part on the team will be. When those assumptions turn out to be inaccurate, it is not unusual for people to shut down or be less open in future communication. This only serves to exacerbate things and further hinder communication.

**Deceptive Communication** - Deceptiveness and dishonesty are also communication killers. You cannot mislead people or make promises that you do not keep. Don’t tell people one thing in public and another thing in private. If you make a commitment, keep it. If you oppose a plan, say so. Don’t be two-faced or as our Hispanic brethren say, “el hable de los dientes para afuera” – “he speaks from his teeth outward.”

Never assume that your teammates know and understand what you want them to do. You may have told them, but that doesn’t mean they understood. You may have communicated with them, but that doesn’t mean they are in agreement even though they may have said they were. Don’t assume people know when and where they are supposed to be at a certain time. What was perfectly clear to you may not have been nearly as clear to them. It has been observed that when we leave blanks to be filled in, Satan is often the one who does the filling in, sometimes with great harm.

Take the time to check and verify. Make sure everyone is onboard and understands what is supposed to happen, how it is supposed to happen, when it is supposed to happen, and by whom it is supposed to happen. This can usually be done with a simple phone call, text message or e-mail.

Make sure everyone on the team knows what is going on. Communicate with them individually and as a group. Simply making an announcement in a team meeting just doesn’t cut it. Just because something has been said doesn’t mean it has been heard or understood. You need to communicate with people repeatedly at every level and through every available means. You have to communicate the message multiple times before people hear it. Put it on the agenda for the team meeting, print it in the bulletin, announce it from the pulpit, send text messages and e-mails to remind people what is coming.
It sounds like a lot of hard work, and it is. But that is what leadership is about. It is about communicating clearly, constantly, consistently, and supportively. Leaders do not have the luxury of leaving their people in the dark or communicating haphazardly. If you want your church to grow, if you want your ministry to succeed, then you must communicate, communicate, and communicate.

The Four Laws of Communication

Ephesians chapter 4 contains four “Laws of Communication” that facilitate open honest communication between individuals, married couples, ministry teams, and congregations. Much of the tension, disunity, and aggravation found in some ministry teams needs to be removed and replaced with loving, caring, healthy words.

The First Law of Communication – Be honest and speak the truth in love. Verse 15 tells us we are to “speak the truth in love.” There are two extremes to be avoided here. One is to be brutally honest and tell it as it is. The other is to conceal how we really feel. The biblical balance calls for us to make an honest evaluation and then to share it in a loving manner and tone. Love should be the motivating factor behind all that we say to or about our teammates. Verse 25 further emphasizes the need to be truthful with each other. On the one hand we put up with poor performance because we don’t want to hurt the other person while at other times we exaggerate the situation to make the other person look or feel bad. We want to stay out of both ditches when communicating with our teammates.

The Second Law of Communication – Keep current and deal with today’s problems today. Verse 26 tells us to “be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath.” It is almost inevitable. Sooner or later teammates get irritated and upset with each other. Sometimes they get verbally angry with each other and even raise their voices at each other. When this happens, they sometimes say things they later regret. There are times when anger is appropriate. Christ became angry when he saw the hardness of men’s hearts (Mark 3:5). Psalm 7:11 tells us that God is angry with the wicked every day.

Anger is God-given energy designed to help us solve problems biblically. It is supposed to galvanize us to action to correct a wrong or to resolve an issue between ourselves and someone else. It becomes sinful when it is selfishly motivated, when it distorts God’s goal in the matter, when it attacks the person rather than the problem or when it is allowed to linger.

When teammates get angry with each other, they tend to bring up the past. They remember past wrongs, harsh words or slights that have occurred. The proverbial “hatchet” they supposedly buried is dug up and pressed back into action to bolster their accusations. Wrongs that were forgiven are resurrected and brought back up for trial once again. Failure to deal with past problems biblically allows those problems to fester until they erupt in angry words, finger pointing, and exaggerated accusations.

God’s answer to this is to deal with problems as they come up. Resolve them when they are fresh, and relatively small and easy to resolve. A simple “I’m sorry. Please forgive me” followed by “I forgive you” can do wonders for our relationships. Once forgiven, we have no right to bring up that incident to anyone ever again. We are to forgive each other the same way God has forgiven us. To bring up that incident again in the heat of battle is sin and a violation of biblical principles.

The Third Law of Communication – Attack the problem, not the person. Verse 29 admonishes us: “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.” In many cases, we do just the opposite of what this verse says. We attack the person rather than the problem. Our favorite attack word is “you,” and it is often accompanied with a slashing finger pointed at the other person like a dagger. “YOU said thus and so.” “YOU did this.” “YOU didn’t keep your promise.”
The words “corrupt communication” refer to any form of cutting, slashing, harmful or derogatory speech. It refers to speech designed to inflict pain or injury to another person or to his reputation. It refers to words that tear down and humiliate someone. A negative attitude tends to produce negative feelings and words that fuel feuds.

We get to choose our attitudes, outlooks, actions, and the words we speak. Verse 29 tells us we are to choose to speak words that are good, and helpful. Words that edify or build up the other person. We are to speak words that minister grace to the other person. He may indeed be guilty of letting you down, saying something nasty about you or causing you harm, but God wants you to be as gracious to him as he has been to you. Rather than attacking the person, we are to look for the real problem and work together to resolve it in a way pleasing to the Lord.

The Fourth Law of Communication – Act, don’t react. God wants us to be proactive rather than reactive. Verse 31 lists six reactive actions (bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, evil speaking, malice) that often characterize people’s speech when they are upset with one another. We are to “put them away” much as you would remove and discard a suit of clothes that is no longer suitable to wear. When we react we are functioning under the “old man” and our sin nature. But as believers, we are to “put off” the “old man” along with his “deceitful lusts” (4:22).

Rather than seething and erupting in anger, we are to intentionally choose to act biblically by being kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving of the one who we think opposes us or has injured us (4:32). What a difference it would make in some ministry teams if each member of the team followed these four simple rules laid out in God’s Word.

Communication’s Content

Words are powerful. They have the power to heal and to inflict pain. They can uplift and encourage or deflate and cast down. They can remove burdens, restore relationships or be the straw that breaks the proverbial “camel’s back.” The words we use and the tone with which we speak them is critically important in team ministry.

Proverbs 18:21 tells us that “death and life are in the power of the tongue.” A little further on in the book we are told that the words spoken can be like wounds that go down to the innermost parts of our being (26:22). Job experienced no comfort at all from his friends’ words. Instead, he said they had broken him in pieces with their words (Job 19:2).

On the other hand, words that are fitly spoken are like “apples of gold in pictures of silver” (Proverbs 25:11). When members of the team speak to each other, they should be courteous, kind, and controlled in their speech. We are told that our words are to be gracious (Colossians 4:6) and uplifting (Ephesians 4:29).

What we say is critically important to fostering good communication within the team. Each person needs to work on communicating warmth, friendship, openness, honesty, and respect to each other. There is no place for anger, hostility, sarcasm, resentment or divisiveness on a ministry team. Attitude is everything when it comes to team ministry. Each member must work on guarding his/her own heart and attitude to ensure the best possible outcome for the team.

Communicate your Vision - The team’s vision and objectives should be communicated frequently and discussed often. Otherwise, the team will lose sight of where they are going and what they are supposed to be doing. Their progress toward their stated objectives needs to be evaluated on a regular schedule lest they detour onto a side path that will lead them away from their goals. Failure to evaluate, clarify, and
communicate the team’s vision and goals is a significant contributing factor to the slow progress of many
county and ministries.

Communicate Critical Information - Critical information must be communicated to all members of the
team well in advance so people know what is planned and what is expected of them. Reports need to be
distributed in a timely manner. Announcing team meetings or special events at the last minute is
unrealistic and unfair to the members of the team, especially if they are expected to present or to give a
report at the meeting. Agendas, times, and plans need to be communicated multiple times and in multiple
ways so people can arrange their schedules and be prepared to participate. No one likes to show up at a
meeting and find out he was expected to give a report that he knew nothing about.

If you are involved in a campus ministry or a church plant, plan your schedule of events and services well
in advance. Then communicate it often to the students and people. Remind them of upcoming events.
People are busy. Their lives are full of activity and it is easy for them to forget what they have been told.
So, keep it in front of them, and be careful about putting too many things into the schedule. Some
churches pack the schedule full with one event right after another and then wonder why the attendance is
so poor. Usually, it is because of poor planning and poor communication.

Communicate Victories - Communicate the team’s successes. When something goes well, when a
milestone is achieved, when a critical mass point is reached, publish it. Let people know. Celebrate your
successes. Express appreciation for jobs well done. Thank people for their contribution and hard work.
You add value to people’s lives by recognizing them for what they do. You let them know that you
appreciate them and support them in their ministry.

Learn to Listen - Communication is a two-way street or at least it should be. Proverbs 18:13 warns us,
“He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him” and James 1:19 tells us
that we are to be “swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath.” Actually, if we would listen more and
speak less, there would be fewer disagreements within teams. So often, people jump to conclusions
before hearing the other person out or they sit there thinking about how they are going to respond rather
than listening to what the person is saying.

Pastors, planters, and team leaders need to have an “open door” policy that encourages people to share
their ideas and concerns with them and the rest of the team. Good leaders and good communicators are
not threatened when alternative suggestions and ideas are presented or when someone questions a
proposed policy or activity. They don’t feel threatened by opposing viewpoints. Instead, they welcome
them as part of the interaction of teams. In the end, the team will often be strengthened and will be more
productive as a result of this.

Good teams communicate. Bad teams often don’t. Good teams help their players know what is coming,
where each player is supposed to be, and what they are expected to do. Bad teams don’t. Good teams
work off the same playbook while bad teams don’t. The difference between good teams and bad teams is
communication.

Things to Do:

1. With the advent of technology, communication can take many different forms. List the ways in
which you communicate with the members of your leadership team.
2. On a scale of 1-10 (1 = poor, 10 = excellent), how effective is the communication within your leadership team?

3. List several things that could be done to enhance communication within your team or at your church.

4. Like Paul and Barnabas, teams sometimes have heated debates. Is there someone you need to go see to “clear the air” so that your relationship can be restored and open communication can resume? If so, jot down his name and then go see him.
Chapter 10

Working Off the Same Playbook
(The Importance of Team Goals and Strategies)

To someone who knows little about football, a team’s playbook might look like a bunch of meaningless x’s, o’s and squiggly lines. To the players on the team they represent a blueprint for victory.

Playbooks are crucial to the success of any team. Each page represents a particular play the team can run in a given situation. There are running and passing plays, short and long-yardage plays, plays that depend on which “down” is coming up, and how much time remains on the clock. Each play has a number or code assigned to it so all the quarterback has to do is call a particular number and everyone on the team knows which play is next.

The x’s and o’s represent the individual players and where they are to line up. The squiggly lines tell the player what he is supposed to do and where he is supposed to go during each play. Some teams have playbooks that have only twenty or thirty pages long. Others have playbooks with as many as four hundred pages in them. Each player must memorize all the plays in the playbook and know what he and each of the other players is supposed to do on each play. That’s a lot of x’s and o’s to keep straight.

Playbooks are designed by the head coach and his assistants. John McKay coached football at the University of Southern California. His Trojans won seventy-five percent of their games under his leadership including national championships in 1962, 1967, 1972 and 1974. His playbook popularized the power sweep. Dubbed the “Student Body Right,” McKay used it to perfection. His teams dominated their opponents for more than a decade.

McKay brought his playbook with him when he accepted the job as head coach of the 1976 Tampa Bay Buccaneers. He would be severely criticized in the media for doing so. Saddled with older players who had seen multiple playbooks over the years, McKay’s playbook proved all but useless. Players dropped the ball, fumbled snaps, missed tackles, and couldn’t score. The power sweep that had worked so well in college football was much more difficult to execute in the NFL where the players are bigger and faster.

A team’s performance is only as good as its execution of the playbook. If the players are not on the same page, the plays will go nowhere. That is a prescription for losing, and that was exactly what happened in Tampa Bay. To be successful, teams have to work off the same playbook.

The “playbook” for church planters and ministry teams consists of the goals and strategies the team has drawn up for winning. Players have to know where they are going, what they are supposed to be doing, and how they are going to execute the “plays” if they are to succeed. Without a playbook, the team is not likely to succeed.

The Ministry Team’s Playbook needs to be based on Vision

Winning in football and in ministry begins with understanding the basics. Vince Lombardi used to hold up a football at the beginning of the season and tell his players, “This is a football.” He would then proceed to review the simplest elements of the game, things that all the players should have known, but
which may have slipped to the back of their minds. Week after week, he reminded them of the same thing - the purpose for playing football was to win! That was the ultimate goal.

Sometimes, church planters and those in ministry forget why they are there and what the goal is. The goal is to win - to achieve the objective for which the team was formed in the first place. The goal is to fulfill the dream that brought them together. That dream may have been to “plant a church” or to “establish a campus ministry.” It could be to “establish a prison ministry.” It could be any number of things. That goal is what is known as “vision” today.

Vision is a mental picture of the future as the team believes it can and must be. It is a detailed description of where the team is going and what it will be like when it arrives. The sharper the image, the more detailed the description, the clearer the picture will be.

“Planting a church” and “starting a campus ministry” are like “winning the Super Bowl.” They are wonderful ideals, but they lack the detail needed to achieve the objective. They need to be “fleshed out” with clarifying details so people understand what is to be done. Just as a coach needs a playbook to guide the team through each game on their way to the Super Bowl, so the servant of the Lord needs a playbook that outlines how he is going to achieve his vision.

To be useful, playbooks need to be detailed. Coach “Bear” Bryant of the University of Alabama said that in order to win:

“You have to have a plan for everything. A plan for practice, a plan for the game. A plan for being ahead, and a plan for being behind 20-0 at half time, with your quarterback hurt and the phones dead, with it raining cats and dogs, and no rain gear because the equipment man left it at home. That plan must be put into writing - the playbook - and distributed to everyone on the team. But it doesn’t stop there. Everyone on the team must memorize everything about the plays.”

Byrant made two very critical points: 1) You can’t win without a detailed playbook; 2) Everyone on the team must know each play and what he/she is supposed to do.

It is at this very point that many teams fall short. Their vision is fuzzy, hazy, and indistinct. They have not taken the time to think through the process and thus have never developed a playbook. As a result, players are not sure where they are going, what the real objectives are or what is expected of them. When this happens, each member of the team does whatever he/she thinks is best, and the team ends up being pulled in different directions.

A similar problem occurs when players join the team with their own agenda (playbook) or are unfamiliar with the team’s playbook. The result is chaos. Teams have to function from the same playbook and be on the same page if they are to be successful.

It takes a good playbook to win football games. It also takes a good playbook to plant a church or to establish an effective ministry of any kind. To be effective, that playbook needs to be built around a particular objective (vision). If that vision is non-existent or indistinct, the playbook will be all but useless. So, the first step toward winning is to define a clear, distinct, and detailed vision for your ministry, and then to develop the plays that will enable you to fulfill that vision.

The Ministry Team’s Playbook needs to focus on Goals

A little boy posed a question to his friend: “How do you eat an elephant?” The second little boy pondered the question for a moment without coming up with an answer. “Simple,” said the first boy.
“One bite at a time.”

The same is true of ministry except the question might be: “How can we achieve our vision?” The answer is as simple as that of the little boy, “One step at a time.” Visions need to be broken down into smaller, more manageable parts. This is where the playbook comes into the picture. It breaks down the vision into smaller segments that can be achieved one after the other until the vision becomes a reality.

Your playbook is the ministry plan you develop for achieving your vision. It consists of three major parts: goals, objectives, and action steps.

Goals - Goals are simply smaller pieces of your vision. They are future accomplishments - the “big ticket” items that when combined result in the accomplishment of your vision. They are intermediate steps that need to be achieved in order to fulfill your dream. Goals energize people and unite them around a common cause. Typically, they look into the future and identify specific things to be achieved in the next three to five years or longer.

To be effective, goals need to be S-M-A-R-T.

- S - Specific
- M - Measurable
- A - Attainable
- R - Relevant
- T - Time Sensitive

If you are going to plant a church, begin a campus ministry or start some other type of ministry, stop and ask yourself, “What are the big ticket items we need to achieve along the way?” What milestones or critical mass points need to be achieved before we move to the next stage of development? Always start with the end in view (your vision), and then break it down into its constituent parts (goals).

For a church planter this might include identifying a target location and focus group, assembling a team of like-minded teammates to help you, building a core group to a particular size, training specific lay leaders before launch, etc. The campus worker might divide his vision of a campus ministry into smaller, specific goals that include identifying a particular college campus, locating a host church to sponsor the ministry, gaining permission to meet on campus, and assembling a core of student leaders to guide the group.

Care needs to be taken to avoid the same problem with goals that sometimes afflicts people’s visions - the problem of haziness and impreciseness. People tend to speak in generalities rather than specifics. This is often the result of not taking the time to think through the process needed to achieve the goal. What is it that you are trying to do? Be specific. Write it down. Review it. Mull it over in your mind. Discuss it with your pastor, mission administrator, coach, and teammates. Nothing becomes dynamic until it becomes specific; and nothing becomes specific until it comes out of the tip of a pencil.

Objectives - Just as one’s vision needs to be broken down into its smaller constituent parts (goals), so each of those parts needs to be broken down into still smaller pieces. These smaller pieces are called “objectives.” Because goals are “big ticket” items, they are generally too large to be accomplished by themselves. They need to be broken down into smaller pieces that are more manageable.

For example, both the church planter and the campus worker might have “identifying a target location” as one of their goals. But, how is that done? What criteria will be used to make that determination? How will one location be chosen out of thousands of possibilities? What research will be done? What information will be gathered? What visits will be made?
Each goal should be broken down into three to five smaller pieces (objectives). Remember to use the S-M-A-R-T acronym as you do so. Each objective should contribute to the achievement of the goal of which it is a part. In order to do that, they must be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time sensitive.

**Action Steps** - Action steps are where the rubber meets the road. This is where ministry gets done. They tell who does what, when they are to do it, and in some cases, even how it is to be done. Just as the vision is broken down into goals, and goals are broken down into objectives, each of the objectives is broken down into individual action steps.

Action steps answer the five “W” questions:

- What - What needs to be done?
- Who - Who is to do it?
- Where - Where is it to be done?
- When - When is it to be done?
- Which - Which requirements and constraints need to be met?

These action steps are like the “x’s,” “o’s” and squiggly lines you see in the football player’s playbook that identify what every player is expected to do on each play. It is detailed and specific. Without action steps, without someone being assigned to do specific things, objectives will not be achieved, goals will not be realized, and the vision will never become a reality. They are built one upon the other.

This is one of the major reasons why so many church plants and ministries fail to materialize. Their playbook is either non-existent, non-specific or unstudied by the team players. It is almost impossible to win that way.

**The Ministry Team’s Playbook contains your Strategy for Winning**

No team wins without a playbook. The playbook lays out the team’s strategy for winning. Without it the players will not know what play to call, where to go or what to do. They will be like the ’76 Tampa Bay Buccaneers who didn’t score a touchdown in their first five games. People weren’t on the same page.

Before launching his church plant in suburban Boston, Bill Edmonston developed a detailed playbook. It was his doctrinal thesis, and in it he laid out his strategy for planting a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-national church among the elite university grad students in that city. His playbook called not only for winning these future leaders to Christ, but discipling them and sending them back to their countries of origin to plant daughter churches. In addition to discipling these students, his playbook strategized about such things as leadership development, internships, mentoring, and recruitment.

Bill had a big vision. It was clear, concise, and detailed. He broke his vision down into goals and then divided each of them into a series of objectives that in turn were reduced into action steps. The result has been steady progress toward the fulfillment of his vision. Students are being won to Christ and discipled. The church is well on its way toward maturity. Leaders are being trained. Interns are being equipped, and graduates are returning to their homelands to start new churches. It is working because he has a playbook he is following.

Sometimes church planters and ministry teams will develop a ministry plan (playbook) and then file it away without using it. They prefer to play “street ball” in which there are few rules rather than do the hard work of following the playbook. That is about as successful as football players who fail to memorize their playbooks. They end up losing.
Not every play in the playbook works. It looks good on paper, but the execution is not always what it should be. Perhaps the player turns the wrong way. The pass rushers may force the quarterback to throw the ball prematurely. The receiver may drop the ball. The opposing players may tackle the running back behind the line of scrimmage. Lots of things can go wrong. That is why the playbook contains several plays or contingencies in it. If one thing doesn’t work, then you try a different play until you find the one that works.

“But why can’t you do that without a playbook?” You can. It just takes more time and you will have fewer options. You don’t have the luxury of stopping the game while you concoct new plays. In the fluid situation of the game you need to have one play ready as soon as the previous one is run. The game is constantly changing along with your position on the field. The coach and players have to know what their options are as they move down the field.

Church planters and ministry teams get bogged down without a playbook. They start doing the same things over and over. Before long, the opposing team figures out what you are doing and undercuts your efforts. The drive breaks down and you end up punting the ball away. The same thing happens in ministry. Without a playbook, the team bogs down and keeps doing the same things over and over even though they are not working. Eventually, they “punt” and end up losing the game.

Successful teams have playbooks. Everyone on the team familiarizes himself with the various plays (goals, objectives and action steps). Then the team goes out and executes the plays as designed. The end result is a check mark in the “win” column.

Things to Do:

1. Give a detailed description of what you hope to accomplish (your vision) through your ministry.

2. Break down your vision into five or six component parts (goals) that need to be achieved in order for your vision to become a reality. List them here.

3. Take each of the above goals and break each one down into three to five smaller, more manageable segments (objectives).
4. Under each of the above objectives, list the action steps you will need to take in order to reach that particular objective.
Chapter 11

Coaching a Winning Team
(The Role of the Team Coach/Mentor)

John McKay was a great college football coach. His USC Trojans were the most dominant college football team during the 1960’s. But it was a different story when he moved to the National Football League (NFL) to become the first head coach of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers in 1976. He managed to set an all-time record of losing his first twenty-six games in a row.

Professional football is a lot different from the college game. The players are bigger, faster, harder hitting, and more temperamental. McKay knew something about being temperamental. He had an unpredictable personality. He was often aloof from his players and sometimes refused to talk with his team before games. He was often sarcastic, angry, and ill-tempered. He tore into players in the media and held them up to endless ridicule. The word “tumultuous” might well describe his relationship with the team. That first year, McKay was everything that a coach should not be and his team’s performance showed it.

Coaches are extremely important to the success of teams. Good coaches produce winning teams. Don Shula, Tom Landry, Joe Gibbs, Tony Dungy, and Bill Belichick are prime examples of great coaches that led their teams to repeated victory.

Coaching is important in team ministries as well. Teams with coaches do better than teams without them. The concept has been around for a long time, and has been known by a variety of names such as consultant, mentor and coach. Today, some people differentiate between coaching and mentoring. A coach is seen as someone who encourages, guides, and develops the performance of another while a mentor is someone who helps mold and develop the makeup and character of another. In other words, the coach deals with the ministry aspects of the team while the mentor deals with the personal lives of the team players. For our purposes, we are using the word “coach” to include both concepts.

It is not unusual for church planters and ministry teams to consult with their home pastors and field administrators when facing problems, but the concept of having a coach is relatively new in independent Baptist circles. We have always been “gung-ho” independent contractors who functioned as “Lone Rangers” most of the time. We depended on God for direction and seldom thought that we needed anyone to “coach” us. So, why do we need a coach now?

Why Teams need a Coach

Coaching is biblical – The words “coach” and “coaching” are not found in the Bible, but neither are the words “rapture” and “trinity.” The concepts, however, are found there. Jethro coached Moses and taught his son-in-law the invaluable lesson of delegation (Exodus 18). Moses coached Joshua and prepared him to lead the children of Israel into the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 31:7,8). Elijah coached Elisha and prepared him for a life of ministry (II Kings 2:1-14).

In the New Testament we find Barnabas coached Saul of Tarsus and helped channel his energies into more productive ministry (Acts 9:27-30; 11:22-26). Paul in turn coached Timothy, Titus, Silas and a host of other promising young men. In II Timothy 2:2 he encouraged Timothy to coach other faithful men by
teaching them the things he had learned from Paul. So, the idea of coaching has a long biblical history behind it. It was the primary way of training new workers and helping them to be productive in ministry.

*Coaching helps teams be more effective* – This is readily recognized in the sports arena. Teams with good coaches win while teams without coaches don’t even make it onto the field. Research in recent years demonstrates that church-planting teams with coaches are more productive than those without a coach. Ed Stetzer gathered data from over six hundred church planters covering a four year period. Some of the planters met with coaches weekly, others monthly or quarterly, and some had no coaches at all.

Throughout the four-year study, those church plants that met weekly with a coach did consistently better than any of the other church plants. The greatest difference, however, was with those who planted alone without having a coach. By the end of the fourth year, the churches that met weekly with a coach were TWICE the size of those that did not have a coach. Churches do better if they have the benefit of outside advice and counsel than they do without it.

*Coaching provides churches with another perspective* – It is not unusual for planters and teams to come together around a particular idea or method for doing ministry. They are young, enthusiastic, and sure that what they are doing will produce the results they are anticipating. Sometimes it does. Other times it doesn’t. Sometimes they do dumb things that end up hurting the ministry rather than helping it.

Having a coach provides the team with another perspective – one that comes from outside the team. A little distance can change the entire picture. Coaches tend to be older, more experienced men who have traveled this road before. They have learned a few things that young folks haven’t yet experienced. They have insights and wisdom that the team lacks, but desperately needs. A lot of heartache, delay, and frustration can be avoided by gaining the perspective of someone who is standing far enough away from the trees to see the forest.

*Coaching allows the team to learn and improve its skills* – Skill development is one of the primary tasks of a coach. Players are in constant need of improvement. Even the best quarterbacks need to hone their skills and improve their effectiveness. No one is as good as he should be or could be. A player who thinks he has arrived or doesn’t need to improve is headed for disaster and will soon be on a losing team or off the team entirely.

The same is true of everyone in ministry. There is no place for mediocrity in ministry. “Getting by” and “good enough” don’t cut it. We are servants of Christ, and as such, we are to be our best and to give him our best. Everything we do should be done with excellence (Colossians 3:23). Everyone in ministry should be constantly learning, reading, listening, and looking for ways to be more effective. A coach is a valuable resource that can provide the team with new ideas, suggestions, and ways to improve its effectiveness.

*Coaching can help teams through the early stages of development* – The first year of ministry is critical to the success of the team. Ministries are often started with little more than a wing and a prayer. Most teams lack the resources, personnel, and facilities needed to do the job right, but they take a leap of faith and launch anyway, trusting God to bless their efforts. Most ministries would never get started if it were not for these valiant risk takers.

All kinds of unexpected developments will occur, however, during the early stages of development. Key people will drop out. Funding will be less than expected. There may be a moral failure in the core group. The meeting place will be more expensive than expected. During these turbulent times it is helpful to have the steady hand of a coach there to encourage, instruct, and recommend possible solutions to the situation you are facing. Ministry is a little like white-water rafting – exciting and turbulent. It is always good to have an experienced rafter in the boat with you.
Coaching helps keep the vision in focus and the team on track - It is easy for planters and teams to develop tunnel vision. They are so engrossed in what they are doing that they can lose sight of where they are and where they want to go. Many teams get sidetracked by “good things” that present themselves along the way such as new ministry opportunities, an invitation to add an outreach program or members requesting additional programming.

In reality, most teams are pulled in multiple directions. The temptation is to pursue these ministry opportunities when they arise, but in doing so, the team unwittingly turns aside from its stated objective. The coach is there to remind the team why it exists and what it is supposed to be doing. He keeps it focused on its vision and on track. He reminds the team of its ministry plan. Sometimes, in order to succeed we have to say “no” to wonderful opportunities that come along. If a “blessing” turns you aside from your objective, it may not be a blessing at all. Coaches help us stay focused.

Coaching provides the team with encouragement and advice – Ministry is tough. Sooner or later, every player is going to get knocked down. Let that happen a few times, and its not as easy to keep getting up. There will be disappointments and heartaches along the way. Ministry will be harder, slower, less rewarding than expected. Discouragement lurks in the shadows, and sometimes comes roaring out to devour even the most optimistic players. More than one servant of Christ has ended up under a juniper tree with Elijah.

The coach can help the team take the “long look” and thus often avoid the discouragement that comes from focusing too much on the present. Having been down the ministry road himself, he knows that “this too shall pass” in due time. His words of encouragement, the scripture passages he points out, and the friendship he offers, can make all the difference between renewing one’s faith and throwing in the towel. We all need someone to lift us up when we fall (Ecclesiastes 4:10).

Coaching provides teams with a healthy model to emulate – Coaches are generally people who have years of experience in ministry. They have been down the church planting road, the campus ministry road or whatever road you are on. They have been through the battles. They have toughed it out and stayed during the hard times. They have been knocked down and have gotten back up. They have stayed the course and persevered until they won the victory. They have shown the way through their own personal example.

Like the Apostle Paul, they can say “follow me” (Philippians 3:17; II Thessalonians 3:9). You can’t clone a church planter or ministry worker, but you can learn from them. Modeling is a great way to help others to succeed in ministry. Their example helps us avoid some of the potholes along the way while providing us with a positive blueprint of how to do ministry more effectively.

Coaching provides teams with accountability – Everyone needs someone looking over their shoulder from time to time and asking; “What are you doing?” In Scripture, accountability is seen as a good thing. It helps us do what we should be doing. It keeps us on track. It causes us to stop and evaluate where we are in comparison with where we want or ought to be. It keeps us focused on where we are going.

Accountability is a reality check that leads to greater productivity. There is a natural tendency for teams (as well as individuals) to assume that activity equals success. But often that is not true. Walking on a treadmill produces a lot of activity, but little progress. A coach can help the team evaluate its activities in light of the results it is getting from what it does. Are people being saved, discipled, equipped, and involved in ministry? If not, then the coach can assist the team in replacing some of the things it is doing with other things that are more productive. Without outside assistance, it is very difficult for teams to accurately assess what they are doing and make the changes needed.

Coaching provides the team with a safe, confidential place to share their “wild” ideas and to vent their frustrations - Innovation and creativity are hallmarks of successful teams. They are not afraid to try new...
ideas and new methodologies. Over time, old ways of doing things lose their effectiveness as the culture changes. When that happens, new approaches to ministry need to be implemented. This is not to say, however, that anything goes. Just because you could do something doesn’t mean that you should do it. Being able to bounce new ideas off of a wise confidante can help teams explore possibilities without taking a misstep that could cause them to fall flat on their face. A wise coach will listen, ask questions, give counsel, and point out possible flaws in the proposed course of action. In some cases, he may need to grow himself and expand his horizons. In other situations, he can help church planters keep from making a serious blunder.

Ministry can be exceedingly frustrating at times. Pastors, planters, and teammates get frustrated with the slow pace of progress, the faults and failures of others, and setbacks that are often part of ministry. There are times when these folks feel like throwing in the towel to go flip hamburgers at McDonalds. If left to themselves, they will sometimes do this. It is much more beneficial to have someone with broad shoulders they can unload on and trust with their deepest feelings.

The coach needs to be a good listener. Simply letting people vent their frustrations often helps them recalibrate. It lessens the pressure and anger they are experiencing. The author has found in his counseling ministry that just listening to people as they share their concerns, fears, frustrations, and hurts brings about an amazing change in their outlook. An occasional nod of the head, a quiet “I see” does wonders for them.

Venting doesn’t work too well in a team setting. People tend to get hurt if one member perceives that another teammate is venting about them. The coach can meet individually with team members as well as with “Lone Rangers” who have no one else with whom they can talk. The coach makes a good safety valve for all concerned.

Coaching can help the team work through conflicts and problems - Make no mistake about it - there will be conflicts and problems in team ministry. Even when there is general agreement on the team vision, goals, objectives, and action steps, people will have differences of opinion. People will be late for meetings. People will misinterpret what is said. People won’t fulfill their responsibilities properly or on time. The list of potential conflicts is almost endless. Jesus said it is impossible but that offenses will come (Luke 17:1). Teammates do get out of sorts with each other. People clam up. Sometimes they blow up. Tension rises and harmony dissipates.

In times of stress (and distress), the coach can step in as a mediator to help everyone step back and work through the issues in a biblical fashion. Yes, mature Christians should be able to do this on their own, but sometimes the conflict is so intense they cannot or will not do so (ex. - Paul and Barnabas). The coach serves as an impartial facilitator. He listens to all sides. He points out where attitudes are wrong and what changes need to be made. He gives biblical counsel on how to resolve the problem so that forgiveness is sought and granted, and harmony is restored to the team.

Coaching can help balance the demands of ministry upon team players and their families - Eighty percent of pastors and those in full-time ministry report that ministry has affected their families negatively and thirty-three percent say ministry was an outright hazard to their families. The stress of ministry takes a frightening toll upon church planters, campus workers, and teammates. The landscape is littered with broken marriages, wayward children, and strained husband-wife relationships stemming from involvement in ministry. Depression, moral failure or ineffectiveness can result from not handling the hardships of ministry in a biblical manner.

There are far too many casualties in ministry that could have been avoided if those involved had just had someone to guide them through the choppy waters. Men in ministry tend to become married to their ministries at the expense of their wives and children. They are committed to serving God, but in the
process they forget to maintain a balance between ministry and home. Communication breaks down. Frustration and resentment build as the husband and wife grow apart. The coach can periodically remind the team of the need to maintain balance and to spend time with their wives and families. Sometimes the coach will become aware of a strained relationship before the planter or campus worker is aware of it. In serious cases, intervention can take place, counseling can be implemented, and both the ministry and the marriage can be strengthened.

Coaching provides the opportunity to ask the questions no one else asks - Proverbs 27:6 tells us, “Faithful are the wounds of a friend.” Everyone in ministry and everyone in leadership needs someone who will tell him the truth, no matter how much it hurts. Everyone has blind spots. We all make mistakes. No one in ministry is above reproach or beyond questioning. True, sometimes people are just being “nick-picky,” judgmental or negative. That is seldom true of a wise and experienced coach.

A coach, if he is worth his salt, will point out those things that the worker doesn’t, can’t or won’t see. It may be an attitude, a weakness, a flaw in planning, a careless practice that can undermine the ministry. The goal is to help the person make appropriate biblical changes so as to correct the problem or avoid it altogether. A well-timed, carefully-crafted question can focus the person’s attention on the very area that needs addressing. Teammates may be reluctant to bring up the issue because of the tension it may cause within the team. The coach has no such constraint. His goal is simply to help the person be the very best he can be, even if he has to ask tough questions in the process.

Coaching sharpens the team’s skills and abilities - Coaches are resource people. They tend to have had more experience in ministry and have had greater opportunities to “see what’s out there” than do many involved in the daily grind of ministry. They can recommend books, seminars, and training opportunities of which team members may not be aware. They can share ministry insights, new concepts, and give seasoned advice that enables people to be more effective in what they do.

Even the best athletes, those who perform at the highest levels, have coaches who help them improve their skills even more. Church planters, campus workers, and team players need to take a page from these athletes’ playbook and seek out coaches who can help them become even better at what they do.

Coaching helps to protect the flock and the team from a leader’s mistakes and bad decisions - Make no mistake about it - all leaders make mistakes and mess up from time to time. They would not be human if they didn’t. Some mistakes made by the team leader can be irritating, but relatively benign. Others can be catastrophic.

Coaching makes serious mistakes much less likely. Two sets of eyes are always better than one. The coach can point out hidden dangers. He can help leaders clarify their vision, solidify their goals, and enhance their planning. He helps them think through the options, weigh the consequences, and make better choices. The result is that many of the mistakes are never made, the problems are avoided, and the calamity never occurs.

There is a reason why churches, church plants, and campus ministries that have coaches do better than those who do not. Good coaches make a difference.

Why Teams Don’t have Coaches

A quick survey of ministry teams as well as individual church planters and campus workers reveals that most people involved in ministry do not have a coach to guide them. They may consult with another pastor, worker or administrator from time to time, but they have no one with whom they are meeting on a regular basis for counsel and guidance. If coaching is so valuable, then why don’t more people have them?
That is a fair question, which deserves an answer.

In some cases, coaches simply are not available - Sports teams have understood the value of coaching for over a hundred years, but churches, mission agencies, and ministry teams are only now beginning to recognize the value of coaching. Consequently, they don’t have anyone in place who can fulfill the role of a coach. Coaching is time consuming. It requires tenacity and attention to detail. The coach literally pours his life and soul into the people he is coaching.

In these tough economic times, when churches are struggling to keep missionaries, church planters, and campus workers on the field, they find it difficult to see the importance of supporting a coach. They haven’t yet seen the benefit that coaching provides to those very people they are helping to support. The number of available coaches is relatively small, although “coaching ministries” are being developed to increase the supply of coaches and to enhance their effectiveness.

In some cases, the cost may be prohibitive - It can be expensive to hire a coach. This is especially true of those who work for a coaching agency. They usually charge a fee for their services. In independent mission agencies, such as Baptist Mid-Missions, there are travel costs involved, housing and related expenses to be considered. Sometimes, the ministry team can help defray these costs, but if they can’t, these coaches will often pay the expenses out of their own funds in order to help the team.

Of course, you can always ask a pastor or another church planter who lives in your area to coach you. This virtually eliminates the cost factor except for an occasional meal.

In some cases, ignorance is a factor - Some people don’t understand the value of coaching. They have never seen it take place and have not been exposed to a ministry where coaching was part of the program. From their perspective, there is no benefit, no reason for doing so. Just as a blind person cannot appreciate the beauty of a sunrise, so some people in ministry fail to appreciate the value of having a coach to advise them. They simply do not know how much better things could be if they had one.

In some cases, insecurity may be a problem - A significant number of people in ministry are unsure of themselves. Ministry, after all, is a walk by faith. We try to project confidence to our people, but in our hearts we know there are no guarantees that what we are doing will work. We are reluctant to bring in a coach who might expose the weaknesses in our ministry. Sometimes leaders who are insecure, are afraid their leadership will be weakened if they have a coach. In their view, they are admitting a weakness by doing so.

Other times, people do not want the extra work involved. The review process is work. The remedy process is work. The continuity of having a coach involves work. They know that having a coach will demand more of them than they want to give, so they avoid the coach as much as possible.

In some cases, pride and arrogance may be a problem - Some people in ministry think they know it all. Their opinion is the only one that counts. They don’t want or need anyone else’s insights. They have it all figured out and they don’t want a second opinion. Scripture warns against this overconfident attitude in Proverbs 16:18 when it says, “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.”

In some cases, people don’t want to be held accountable by anyone. They are independent contractors, “Lone Rangers,” who are going to do their own thing regardless of what anyone else thinks or says. No amount of coaching will help them unless they change their attitude.
Coaching is like so many other things in life. It benefits us if we avail ourselves of it, but it is useless if we do not. Research indicates decisively that those who have been coached do decidedly better than those who have not.

The Role of the Coach

Coaching is an art rather than a science. There are no set rules, no standards, no “cookie cutter” approach that fits all. Every situation is peculiar to itself. Each ministry team will have circumstances that are unique to their setting. The coach comes along side the team as a friend rather than a boss. He is there to listen, encourage, and advise rather than to direct. He remembers that the ministry is not his, but theirs. They (the team) will ultimately decide what they will do and how they will do it. Hopefully, they will heed the wise counsel he gives them along the way.

The coach brings with him a bag of tools filled with his own life experiences as well as those of others. He never knows for sure which ones he will need until he gets there. Brian Bloye points out that the coach fills four basic roles:

1. The coach is a designer - He comes along side the team or the planter to help them think through the process they will follow in order to achieve their dream (vision). Too often, church planters and those in ministry are like the man in Luke 14:28 who started to build a tower without first sitting down and counting the cost. He got the project started, but he was unable to finish the job because he hadn’t developed a plan that would carry him all the way through the building process.

2. The coach is a developer - He is a teacher and a trainer. He teaches the team players how to be more effective in what they do. He introduces them to better methodologies, he encourages, and uplifts them when the going gets tough. He seeks to hone their skills and improve their productivity. He helps them to grow spiritually and counsels them about their marriages as well as their ministries. He helps them to resolve problems biblically. He is counselor, confidante, confessor, and encourager all rolled up into one. Just as the Apostle Paul sought to encourage and strengthen Timothy, so the coach is ready to help members of the team in any area where one of them says, “I’m struggling in this area.”

3. The coach is a disturber - Mediocrity is the curse of some ministries. People become satisfied with where they are. They become homesteaders rather than pioneers. They settle into their comfort zones and lose sight of why they are there or where they are going. This happens to some church planters and some ministry teams. They think they are doing great when they actually are making little progress at all. Faithfulness rather than fruitfulness becomes their motto.

4. Eagles build their nest high up on rocky cliffs and in the tallest trees. They provide a safe and secure environment for their young to hatch and grow. The eaglets are content to stay in the nest while their
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parents bring them food. But the day comes when the mother eagle stirs up her nest and sends the young eagle tumbling out of it into a frightful free fall. She then swoops down to catch them on her wings, returns them to the nest, and does the same thing again until they learn to spread their wings and fly on their own.

There are times when the coach rocks the planter’s (or team’s) boat. He asks the hard questions. He confronts wrong attitudes, laziness, and any unwillingness to resolve team conflicts biblically. He says what needs to be said simply because it needs to be said. This is not a role he cherishes, but he knows that on rare occasions it is a necessary part of helping the individual or the team to succeed in ministry.

The coach is a discerner - Above all else, the coach is an observer. Because his perspective is different and is outside the team, he can see what others don’t see. He can discern the holes in people’s lives and seeks to fill them. In effect, he functions as an accountability partner. This involves a higher level of intimacy than that of the “disturber.” The discerner operates more in the personal arena rather than on the ministry level. He is going to ask about your relationships with the Lord, your devotional time, your marriage, and your family.

Many in ministry suffer silently because they have no one to whom they can turn. They are reluctant to share their problems with field administrators because they might get “canned.” They can’t talk to other members of the team lest they “lose face.” They can’t go to another pastor or church planter - they talk too much. So, to whom do the team players go when they are struggling? The coach is the ideal person to be that friend who listens, encourages, and believes in them.

Wise coaches give tons of encouragement, but only small amounts of advice. If you tell a fellow how to run his ministry when he is not ready to listen, you will shut the door to any opportunity to influence him in the future. People learn over time. Even if they don’t listen, they will learn by banging their heads on the wall long enough. So, the coach seeks to encourage while he waits for the opportune moment to share a much needed insight that will be accepted.

Listener, facilitator, confidante, encourager, advisor, character builder. These are but a few of the hats worn by coaches. Often progress is measured in inches rather than miles, and is seen over months and years (rather than in days). There is a noticeable difference over time between those ministries that regularly consult with a coach and those that do not. The first group tends to be bigger, stronger, more vibrant, and healthier. It pays to have a coach.

Where do you Find a Coach?

Coaches are everywhere, if you just look for them. In Scripture, coaching was the primary means for producing additional workers to carry on the ministry. Older men generally taught young men what they knew. This was true in business and in ministry. Moses coached Joshua. Elijah coached Elisha. Barnabas coached Saul of Tarsus. Paul coached Timothy, Titus, and others. Many men in ministry would welcome the opportunity to have a “Timothy” to coach. The trick is getting the right one. Not all men in ministry make good coaches.

Consult the Lord about a coach - Prayer should be our first resource rather than our last resort when seeking a coach. Go to the Lord in prayer and ask him to direct you to someone with the experience and wisdom to be your coach. You want someone who has been down that road in front of you, someone who will listen to your hopes, dreams, and fears. It should be somebody you trust and with whom you will be honest. Just as God gave Joshua a Moses, and Elisha an Elijah, and Timothy a Paul, so God can bring you and the right person together to serve as your coach.
Consult your pastor about a coach - Certainly, you want his godly input as you search for this person. Ask him who he would recommend. Does he know a church planter or a team leader who would make a good coach? Run any names you have past him. Does he know them? Would he recommend any of them? Perhaps, your pastor himself would make a good candidate.

Consult an older, experienced co-worker about being your coach - If you are going into the field of church planting, then consider possibly asking a more experienced church planter to serve as your coach. If you are going into campus ministry, consult with other campus workers to see who they might recommend. You want a coach who is familiar with the particular area of ministry you plan to enter. Look for someone with a proven record who is willing to invest his life in you.

Consult your mission agency about a coach - Mission agencies are beginning to recognize the value of providing coaches, mentors, and consultants to their team players. Experience has taught them that “Lone Rangers” sometimes shoot themselves in the foot. Because of this, they are now channeling some of their more experienced people into the role of coaching younger men in ministry. This is welcome news to both older and newer workers who want help.

Consult the Internet about a coach - A simple Google search using phrases such as “church planting coach,” “church planting mentor” or “church planting consultant” will bring up a myriad list of groups, organizations, and individuals who provide coaching expertise to those who want it. Not all of these are good or reliable. Great care should be taken when looking for a coach online. Be sure to check them out. Ask for a list of references, and then inquire about them carefully before agreeing to anything. Run names of prospective coaches and coaching groups past your pastor and/or mission agency.

The Coaching Agreement

At its heart, coaching is about relationships. Two or more people are entering into a mentoring relationship in which one person (the coach) agrees to do certain things to help others (the team) become more effective at what they do. Sometimes this may involve only an occasional call. Other times it can involve a great amount of time and effort involving regularly scheduled meetings.

All the parties will come to the table with certain expectations. These are often unspoken and may not even be fully realized by the person holding them until certain situations arise. This can lead to misunderstandings and even the cessation of the coaching relationship.

A growing number of people involved in coaching have found it beneficial to enter into a covenant, contract or agreement that spells out what each party is expected to do. Doing so avoids possible misunderstandings down the road. Covenants are found throughout Scripture. God himself enters into covenants with mankind in which he makes a variety of commitments. Sometimes those covenants are conditional (dependent on man doing something) while at other times they are unconditional (based solely on what God promised to do).

The coaching agreement lays out a common purpose, outlines the roles of the people involved, identifies key elements of the relationship, clarifies expectations, establishes a timeframe, and provides for evaluation at key points along the way. Both the coach and the team are making major commitments to each other whenever someone is asked to serve as a coach. Each side wants to be sure their investment of time and effort will be valued.

A coaching agreement is not a legal document. It is a moral commitment, a promise to listen, to give advice, and to receive counsel. It is voluntary in nature and generally can be terminated at any time by either party. Sometimes, church-planting organizations and parachurch ministries will ask their people to enter into more binding agreements when dealing with situations that require more intensive coaching.
A coaching agreement might look something like this:  

**Coaching Agreement**

**Purpose:**

Recognizing the powerful potential of a coaching relationship, we enter into this agreement with the goal of “iron sharpening iron” (Proverbs 27:17) through godly counsel and advice, and thus helping the ministry team achieve its God-given potential.

**Roles:**

The coach promises to be available to meet with the team or its leaders at least once a month (or more frequently) for regular times of coaching. He will also be available to listen and advise at other times when issues arise that need special attention. The coach will listen, advise, keep confidences, and pray for the team and its members.

The ministry team and its leaders agree to meet with the coach at regularly scheduled times, to share honestly their plans, struggles, and setbacks. The team will be open to the advice and counsel given by the coach, and will prayerfully evaluate the recommendations he makes. They will make themselves accountable to their coach and to each other for the implementation of ideas agreed upon.

**Values:**

- **Honesty** - All members of this agreement commit themselves to speak the truth in love.
- **Confidentiality** - Issues and concern will not be shared outside this relationship without the agreement of those involved.
- **Openness** - We will openly share both life and ministry issues with each other.
- **Dependable** - Out of respect for each other, we will be on time for appointments and calls.
- **Preparedness** - We will be prepared in advance of each coaching encounter.

**Expectations:**

- It is expected that we will communicate . . . (face-to-face, e-mail, texting, phone)
- It is expected that we will communicate . . . (daily, weekly, monthly)
- It is expected that we will review this coaching agreement in . . . (6, 9, 12 months)
- It is expected that we will pray for each other . . . (daily, weekly, monthly)
- It is expected that this coaching relationship will end . . . (with launch of public services, a certain number of months, ministry becomes self-sustaining, etc.)
Agreement:

Before God and each other, we commit ourselves to abide by this coaching agreement.

__________________________  ______________________________
Coach’s Signature and Date   Team Leader’s Signature and Date

Things to Do:

1. List several benefits you might receive from having a coach for your ministry.

2. Make a list of people who might make a good coach for you.

3. What drawbacks do you see to having a coach? Why might you not want a coach?

4. If you are convinced that having a coach would be a good thing, then contact some of the people you listed in #2 and ask them if they would be willing to coach you.
Chapter 12

When the Bench Clears
(Conflict Resolution within the Ministry Team)

Fights are not uncommon in sports, especially in football. Opposing players commonly take cheap shots at quarterbacks, running backs, and tight ends. Hard hits can result in retaliation, and sometime the benches clear as players from both sides engage in a pushing, shoving, tackling, fist-swinging brawl. Flags fly, penalties are assessed, and yards are marked off, but the game goes on with little harm done.

Far more destructive are the internal battles that sometimes afflict teams when players and coaches can’t get along with each other. The ’76 Tampa Bay Buccaneers were plagued with discord and internal strife. Quarterback Steve Spurrier deeply resented the coach’s son, a receiver of questionable talent. The coach and Spurrier kept up a running battle in the locker room and in the media that poisoned the atmosphere. The coach, John McKay, often refused to speak to his players. When he did speak, he often spoke derisively of them and heaped loathing sarcasm on them. With such discord and animosity within the team, it is little wonder they lost every game of the season. Disunity in the ranks spells disaster for the team.

Conflict is Inevitable

Ministry teams are not immune from conflict. Jesus said it is impossible but that offenses will come (Luke 17:1). People in ministry get crossways with each other from time to time. This happened in the church in Philippi with Euodias and Syntyche (Philippians 4:2). Paul and Barnabas had a major falling out that destroyed their team (Acts 15:36-41). Thus, it shouldn’t surprise us when disagreements and conflict arise within our own ministry teams. We are fallen human beings living in a fallen world with other fallen people. That “fallenness” is going to manifest itself sooner or later within the team.

Conflict arises from having an unclear vision - If the team leader or the members of the team do not have a clear picture of where they are going and what they are trying to accomplish, they will pursue their own vision, goals, and strategy. Fuzzy visions inevitably lead to conflict because team members will develop their own agendas. They will be working in opposition to each other rather than pulling in the same direction. Vision is a picture of the future as the team mutually agrees it can and must be. It is the glue that holds the team together and produces the unity needed to make it a reality.

It is the team leader’s responsibility to articulate and clarify that vision for the team on a regular basis. If he fails to establish the vision at the start or does not keep it refreshed in the minds of his teammates, the team will splinter and conflict will ensue.

Conflict arises from differences in philosophy of ministry - One’s philosophy of ministry includes his understanding of why the team exists (purpose), what it is supposed to be doing (mission), where it is going (vision), how it is going to get there (strategy), and when it will arrive (timeline). It describes how we do things around here. It is the team’s approach to ministry.

While there can be considerable latitude within the team about how to do ministry, conflict can arise when individual members of the team take hardened positions. Some things are non-negotiable, and when one person insists on things being done his way, conflict can occur. This happened with Paul and
Barnabas in Acts 15. Their disagreement was a philosophical one related to how ministry was to be done. Paul didn’t want any “quitters” on his team. Barnabas believed in giving people a second chance. Each was convinced that his position was right. Neither was willing to accommodate the other. The result was a heated argument and the dissolution of the team.

Conflicts arise from mismatched expectations - Everyone comes to the team with his/her own set of expectations. They each assume things will be done in a certain way. The leader may expect people to be punctual for team meetings while some members of the team may assume that stated times are approximations. One person may expect to “go by the book” while someone else thinks he should operate as an independent contractor.

Expectations are really assumptions based upon our own experiences and preferences. They are often unexpressed. They can easily lead to hurt feelings, disillusionment, and conflict. For this reason, it is important that both the team leader and the prospective members of the team discuss their expectations prior to joining the team. Even then, some things will not surface until particular situations arise in the course of ministry. Open communication needs to be encouraged so teammates feel free to express their viewpoints without fear of being rebuffed.

Conflicts arise from differences in personality - No two people are alike. Everyone has a different personality. People are labeled as introverts and extroverts or as cholerics, sanguines, phlegmatics, and melancholics. Some are thinkers while others are doers. Some are “people persons” while others are project oriented. Some are loud and some are quiet. People come in all sorts of sizes and shapes with a wide variety of backgrounds, upbringings, and cultural heritages.

The potential for conflict is significant when you form a ministry team with its unique blend of personalities. Cholerics can be overbearing. Phlegmatics can get irritated at the happy-go-lucky (and sometimes irresponsible) sanguines. Melancholics can get moody and irritated when people don’t measure up to their expectations. They all bring their own unique strengths (and weaknesses) to the team. As they do so, they need to remember Paul’s admonition in Romans 12:10, “In honour preferring one another.”

Conflicts arise from unwise decision making – One issue teams need to wrestle with early in the formation process is how decisions will be made. Not all decisions are of equal value. Some affect only one or two persons on the team and can be made by those individuals. Other decisions impact the entire team and require input from the members of the team. There may be times when the team leader will need to make a particular call. Ultimately, he is responsible for the decisions that are made within the team, even if someone else makes the actual decision.

Some team leaders assume they should make most of the decisions simply because they are the team leaders. While strong leadership is often a good thing, it can lead to serious conflict if the rest of the team is not consulted or at least informed of pending decisions. There is value in consensus. People need to feel heard. They need to know that they have some influence in the process. This type of “participative leadership” can go a long way toward staving off possible tensions within the team.

Conflicts arise from selfishness – James 4:1 says, “From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members.” Selfishness and self-centeredness lie at the heart of much of the conflict teams experience. People want their own way. Self-interest lies buried deep within the hearts of all of us. Scripture warns us not to think more highly of ourselves than we should (Romans 12:3). The problem is, that is exactly what we often do – we think our opinion is not only the right one, but the best one, if not the only one worth considering.
Team players need to recognize the almost infinite capacity they each have for self-deception (Isaiah 17:9). They need to guard their hearts against the compulsion to insist on doing things their way regardless of what others think. The Apostle Paul expressed it this way in Philippians 2:3,4 when he said:

> Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

Good team players put their personal agendas on hold and work to achieve the vision and goals of the team. The team’s success is more important than doing things “my way.” Conflict will come to all teams. It is only a matter of time. The issue is, how will it be handled when it arrives?

**Conflict can be Destructive**

The human saga is filled with stories of the destructive force of conflict. It began in eternity past when Lucifer rose up in rebellion against God declaring, “I will be like the most High” (Isaiah 14:14). It erupted in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit. The annals of history overflow with death and destruction resulting from the barbarism of human conflict. Ministry teams are not immune from the destructive force of conflict either.

**Conflict can lead to distrust among members of the team** – It is important that the members of ministry teams have confidence in each other and trust one another. They must be convinced that the other members of the team “have their back” and have their best interests at heart. Failure to trust each other causes people to be suspicious of their teammates’ abilities and intentions. Distrust leads people to question each other’s motives. They begin to hedge their commitments. They may become reluctant to volunteer because they don’t trust those in charge.

In Genesis 32:6,7, Jacob didn’t trust his brother’s intentions when he heard that Esau was coming to meet him with four hundred armed men. He thought his brother might be coming to settle scores with him. In Genesis 50:15, Joseph’s brothers didn’t believe Joseph had really forgiven them for selling him into slavery. The result was that they lied about what their father said on his deathbed. In Acts 15:38, Paul didn’t trust John Mark because of his past failures. He didn’t want him on his team any more.

When there has been a conflict that was not handled biblically, the result can be a distrust among teammates that undermines the effectiveness of the team. The joy of ministry, the camaraderie, the oneness that was once there disappears and is replaced with suspicion, tension, and hesitancy.

**Conflict can lead to disunity within the team** – Unresolved conflict inevitably leads to division and disunity. Until problems are resolved biblically, they serve as a barrier separating the members of the team. Sweeping issues under the carpet leaves a burr under the saddle that continues to irritate until it erupts in more conflict.

Disunity is evidenced in a variety of ways. It may be evidenced by a spirit of uncooperativeness, by an unwillingness to make adjustments or by being too busy to take on additional responsibilities. In some cases, it may be manifested by taking opposing viewpoints, contesting decisions, and raising objections. Disunity leads to dissention, disruption, and delay. It brings disharmony to the team and it must be dealt with in a loving, but firm manner.

Grace should always mark our dealings with each other. Patience and long-suffering should be evident in all we do. Differences of opinion are tolerable, but disunity is a tipping point that demands action. To ignore disunity frustrates the other members of the team and can lead to further strife. Pastors and church
planters who avoid confronting disgruntled team players do themselves and their teams a disservice by not addressing the issue biblically. We will see how to do that later in this chapter.

Conflict can delay the fulfillment of the vision of the team – God imparted to Moses a vision of a “land flowing with milk and honey.” That was Israel’s destination when they left Egypt. It was a journey that should have taken just a few weeks or months at the most, but it ended up taking forty years. The fulfillment of the vision was delayed for four decades because of the conflict, the complaining, and the fault-finding among the “team.”

Because of internal conflict, it took the Tampa Bay Buccaneers almost two years to win their first game. Conflict can also delay ministry teams in achieving their vision and goals. In some cases, the team simply dissolves with the dream unfulfilled. Other times, they settle for something less than they envisioned at the beginning. Conflict saps the team of its vitality. It robs it of its vision. It diminishes the cohesiveness needed to reach the goal.

Conflict can lead to the dissolution of the team – We only need to look at Paul and Barnabas in Acts 15 to see the ultimate outcome of conflict within the team. The disagreement between them was so significant they dissolved the team and went their separate ways. They were both at fault for being so intransient. They put their own personal preferences ahead of the team’s welfare.

The same thing has happened to numerous other teams since then. Friendships have been destroyed. Churches have failed to be planted. Ministries have been closed. Souls have not been won to Christ and the testimony of Christ has been irrevocably harmed. Only God knows how much might have been accomplished if teams had handled their differences biblically and resolved their conflicts scripturally.

Conflict can be Good

God will not be thwarted. He will accomplish his will in spite of man’s failure to function as he should. He works all things “according to the good pleasure of his will” (Ephesians 1:5). He can take the abduction of a young boy and his subsequent enslavement, and turn it into the deliverance of his people as he did with Joseph. He can take the horrific beating and resultant crucifixion of a lowly carpenter, and turn it into the redemption of a lost mankind. And he can take the internal conflict within a ministry team and use it for good.

Conflict is an opportunity to grow spiritually – Scripture clearly instructs us to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (II Peter 3:18). Every conflict provides us with the opportunity to do exactly that – to grow in grace. We get to choose how we respond. We sometimes hear people say, “Oh, he makes me so angry,” but that isn’t true. We can choose to respond sinfully in the energy of the flesh and lash out at the other person or we can choose to respond biblically through the power of the Holy Spirit. The attitudes we display and the responses we exhibit are the result of the choices we make.

Ephesians 4:31 contains a partial list of sinful reactions to conflict. It mentions such things as bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, evil speaking, and malice. These are all sinful responses based on the choices we make. We get angry because we choose to get angry. We speak evil of people because we choose to do so, not because someone is holding a gun to our head threatening to shoot us if we don’t. Sinful responses such as these and others hinder our spiritual growth. They keep us from becoming more like Christ.

On the other hand, verse 32 also contains a partial list of choices and responses to conflict, but this time they are biblical choices that will help us to grow spiritually and to become more like Christ. We can choose to be kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving toward those with whom we disagree. When we do so we
are emulating God himself who “for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.” When we apply biblical truths to our lives in the midst of conflict, that conflict becomes a good thing because it results in us growing spiritually and becoming more like Christ.

Conflict brings leaders to the forefront – Conflict is never enjoyable, especially within a team or a church. Yet, it has benefits. One of those benefits is found in First Corinthians 11:19 where we are told,

*For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.*

The word translated “heresies” can refer to either false teaching or to divisions and differences of opinion. The latter was in view in the Corinthian passage above. It was also the case with Paul and Barnabas. They had a difference of opinion about John Mark that led to angry conflict. The same thing can happen within ministry teams. Most conflicts in ministry are the result of differences of opinion rather than differences over theology.

The good news is that conflict often brings leaders to the forefront. It causes the cream to rise to the top. Leadership isn’t based on who gets the most votes, wins the argument or out shouts his opponents. Leadership is demonstrated by the person who steps forward at a time of crisis, clarifies the issues, helps to restore the peace, and refocuses the team’s attention on the things that are important.

Conflict gets problems out into the open where they can be dealt with – Small grievances that are swept under the carpet and are not addressed biblically can lie buried beneath the surface where they ferment into bitterness and resentment. While love can cover a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8), it is the “little foxes” that spoil the vine (Song of Solomon 2:15). The little things that “don’t matter” do matter. The pressure of unresolved conflict can build and build until it explodes in anger and fierce accusations.

It is never pretty when this happens, but it does get the issues out on the table where they can be discussed and resolved in a fair and equitable way. Often times, other members of the team are not even aware that one of their teammates has been hurt or feels slighted. Once this becomes known, steps can be taken to address and resolve the issues involved. The result is that harmony can be restored and the team can continue working towards its goals.

Conflict clarifies the team’s vision, goals, and priorities – Ministry is a little bit like flying an airplane. The flight plan lays out the destination, flight path, and check points along the way. Cross winds, however, can blow the plane far off course unless the pilot keeps his destination and course in mind. He has to constantly check his heading and may need to “crab” the plane (turn the nose slightly into the wind) to keep it on course. He periodically checks in with the controllers at the tower and keeps his radio tuned to the beacon signal that is constantly being transmitted to the plane. From time to time, he may need to make a mid-course correction to make sure he will arrive at his destination.

It is easy for teammates to “get off course” as they move through ministry. They get involved in so many things that they sometimes lose sight of where they are going. “Good things” present themselves, opportunities open up, personal preferences surface, and before you know it they are off course. This can lead to conflict within the team when someone questions why a particular ministry activity is being undertaken or when they point out that other members of the team are detouring off course.

It is important for teams to examine what they are doing so as to keep their destination (vision) in focus and their priorities in order.

Conflict can strengthen the team and make it better – External conflict can have a bonding effect upon a team. Opposition from without can draw the team together. But the same can be true of internal conflict
as well. Through times of stress and disagreement, team members learn to appreciate the unique strengths and weaknesses of their teammates. They learn to pray together and for each other. They clarify what is really important to themselves and to the team.

Two people who have battled each other over some team issues can become best friends when they each respond biblically to the conflict. “I’m sorry. I was wrong” can go a long way in restoring a relationship and turning an enemy into a comrade. Conflict results in people having a better understanding of each other, and that’s a good thing.

There are other benefits to conflict. Conflict can “clear the air” and heal broken relationships; it is an opportunity to display the love of Christ. It is a chance to show a watching world how Christians act when they function biblically, and ultimately it can glorify God. No, conflict is never pleasant, but it can have a positive impact if we learn to respond biblically to it.

**Conflict Needs to be Addressed Biblically**

Conflict can take many different forms and can be evidenced in many different ways. It may be demonstrated through a coolness, a reluctance to talk, a tension in the air, snide remarks, derogatory words, hostile remarks or angry outbursts. People know when they are at odds with someone else on the team. Too often, disappointments, hurts, and offenses are swept under the carpet and not dealt with in a biblical fashion. This creates a barrier within the team that hinders its effectiveness and can lead to further conflict, and even the eventual demise of the team.

As believers, we ought to be committed to resolving our conflicts biblically. But, as sinful human beings we don’t always do that – not even in Christian ministry. So, what does that look like? How are we to resolve conflict biblically?

As believers, we are to make pleasing God our goal – Conflict often results from having wrong goals in life. More often than not, pride (Proverbs 13:10), self-centeredness, and selfishness (James 4:1,2) are behind the sullen attitude and the angry words we express. These things are of the flesh and are not pleasing to God (Romans 8:8). Over and over in Scripture, the Apostle Paul admonishes us to please God rather than ourselves or others (Colossians 1:10; 3:20; I Thessalonians 2:4; I John 3:22).

In Second Corinthians 5:9 the Apostle tells us . . . “Wherefore we labour, that whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.” The word “labour” is an athletic term describing two runners stretching toward the finish line. It speaks of a goal toward which they are striving. The word “accepted” means to be pleasing to the one who judges the race. It is again an athletic term that pictures the Olympic official presenting the award to the winner of a race. The goal is to please the one judging the race. We could translate the verse this way, “So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it.”

The idea of this and other texts is that we should have “pleasing God” as our goal in life rather than pleasing ourselves. Animosity, hard feelings, and angry words are not pleasing to God. As long as we are focused on ourselves and our “rights” we will be reluctant to take steps to resolve the conflict between ourselves and others. But, if our motive is to please God in all we do, then we will be motivated to take the necessary steps to resolve the conflict between ourselves and other members of the team.

As believers, we are to let love cover a multitude of sins – First Peter 4:8 is not advocating that we sweep things under the carpet and ignore them when it tells us that “charity shall cover a multitude of sins.” Rather, it is telling us not to be so touchy. Sometimes we get miffed over nothing. We go around with an inflated view of ourselves and a chip on our shoulder waiting for someone to bump into us. We are too sensitive and too easily offended. We are offended when we shouldn’t be offended. We are to be
gracious, kind, and loving to one another. Jesus said that love is supposed to be the defining characteristic of our relationships with each other (John 13:35). The great “Love Chapter” (I Corinthians 13) tells us that love “seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil” (vs. 5). Berkley translates these words this way: “(Love) is not self-seeking nor irritable, nor does it take account of a wrong that is suffered.”

We need to ask ourselves, is this incident really worth being offended, upset or hurt over? A lot of conflict could be eliminated or avoided all together if we adopted a more loving attitude toward our teammates. Even when the issue involved is serious enough to cause conflict, we should nevertheless seek to be loving, and to use loving tones and words when we speak to each other. Ask the Lord to help you to love the person with whom you are at odds.

As believers, we are to put the good of the team ahead of our personal feelings and preferences – This biblical principle is taught both negatively and positively in Scripture. Romans 12:3 warns us not to “think more highly” of ourselves than we should, while Philippians 2:4 admonishes us to “look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.” In other words, I am not to insist on “my way” to the detriment of the team.

When we join a team we commit ourselves to cooperating with the team and working harmoniously with our teammates to reach the stated goals and objectives. That means putting personal preferences aside in order to help the team fulfill its vision. It is perfectly all right to express your views during team meetings, but once decisions are made, then you have an obligation to support and cooperate with those decisions. Failure to do that inevitably leads to conflict.

As believers, we are to seek reconciliation – Differences do arise. Feelings do get hurt. Offenses do come, and conflict does occur. Words are spoken. Barriers go up. Tension fills the air. People have difficulty being civil with each other. That is life, and sometimes, that is team life. It happens. When it happens we need to remember that God was in Christ Jesus reconciling the world unto himself (Romans 5:10; II Corinthians 5:18; Colossians 1:21). God took the initiative to remove the barriers that separated us from him, and then initiated the process of bringing us into fellowship with him.

He expects us to do the same by being reconciled to those with whom we are in conflict. In Matthew 5:24 Jesus placed tremendous importance on believers being reconciled to each other. He went so far as to teach that reconciliation is more important than prayer, personal devotions or worship. He said that if we bring our gift to the altar (an act of devotion) and remember that there is ought (something, a barrier, hard feelings) between us and someone else (possibly another team member?), we are to leave our gift at the altar, and go to seek reconciliation with the one with whom we are at odds. Reconciliation with our co-workers is to take precedent even over time spent with God. We cannot be in right relationship with God if we are not in right relationship with our fellow believers.

The First Step in Resolving Conflict

As believers, we are to take the initiative – Matthew 5 and Matthew 18 are key passages in resolving conflicts within ministry teams. Whenever tensions arise or offenses occur, the natural tendency is to assume that the other person should come to us and apologize for whatever he said or did. Jesus, however, took a different position.

In Matthew 5:23,24 he focused on a situation in which “thy brother hath ought against thee.” In other words, we are the offender. We said or did something that hurt another member of the team. It caused tension between us. We are the culprit. We’re the guilty party. When we are at fault, we have the responsibility to take the initiative to seek out the other person and to try to make things right.
In Matthew 18:15 the situation is just the opposite. Now, it is “if thy brother shall trespass against thee.” This time we are the innocent party. The other person is the guilty party. Someone on the team has said or done something that hurt us. They are the cause of the problem. In this case, it is the innocent party that is to take the initiative to seek out the offender in an effort to rectify the problem.

In Matthew 5 it is the guilty party that is to take the initiative while in Matthew 18 it is the innocent party that is to go first. Wait a minute! That makes ME responsible to take the initiative in both situations. That is exactly right. What Jesus taught was that the person who is aware of the problem has the responsibility for taking the initiative to fix the problem.

The reason for this is that sometimes people do not know they have caused an offense. One member of the team may be seething over an alleged offense while the “guilty” person doesn’t even realize he has done anything wrong. Thus, the most biblical way to handle conflict within the team is for the person who is aware of the problem to take the initiative to go to the other person involved. Ideally, if they both sense there is a problem, they will meet one another on the way to each other’s home. Romans 12:18 tells us that as believers we are to do everything possible to live peaceably with all men. So, regardless of what the other person does or doesn’t do, we are still responsible to do our part by taking the initiative to go see him.

Before you go, there are some things you should do in preparation for meeting the person with whom you are at odds. First, spend some time in prayer to get your own heart right. Instead of focusing on your hurt, focus on God’s purpose for allowing this problem into your life. What is he trying to teach you? Ask him to quiet your heart and your emotions. It is hard to act biblically when you are hurt and upset. Ask him if the “offense” warrants being hurt over it. Are you making a mountain out of a molehill or should love cover it?

Second, Jesus said we should remove the “log” from your own eye before trying to remove the “speck” from our neighbor’s eye (Matthew 7:3-5). We often magnify the sins of others while minimizing our own shortcomings. Jesus set the record straight here. He described the offense done to us (the “speck”) as something that was relatively minor while our response to it (the “log”) as huge and often more problematic. We are to deal with our own attitudes, reactions, and contribution to the problem before we confront a person about their part in the conflict. We are to be ready to admit our wrongdoing as we go to talk to the other person involved in the dispute.

Third, we should check our motives. Why are we going to the other person? Is it to express our anger? Is it to give him a piece of our mind? Is it to make him grovel in the dirt in an effort to gain our forgiveness? Our motive for seeking to resolve our problems biblically should be two-fold: 1) Our primary motivation should be because we want to please God by handling the situation in a biblical fashion. Doing so honors God. 2) Our second reason for going is so the problem between us can be resolved and the relationship can be restored. These should be our motivations for resolving conflict.

Fourth, pick the right time. The best time to talk to a person probably isn’t while emotions are running high and feelings are lying bruised on the floor. Give yourself and the other person some time to cool off, but don’t delay too long. Ephesians 4:26 tells us, “Let not the sun go down upon your wrath.” Pick a time that is mutually agreeable to both of you when you can meet with him or her privately without other people being around. Offer to take him out to lunch, go to his home, invite him over for coffee or meet him at the church.

Fifth, go with the right attitude. Philippians 2:5 admonishes us, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” What was Christ’s attitude? Verse 7 tells us that he came in the form of a servant. As you go to meet the person with whom you are in conflict, go with a servant attitude, one that seeks to minister to the other person. Your goal is to help him/her to function biblically in resolving the problem.
between you. Go with a spirit of love, forgiveness, and humility. Keep God’s perspective in Second Corinthians 4:17,18 in mind as you go:

“For our LIGHT AFFLICTION, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and ETERNAL weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are TEMPORAL; but the things which are not seen are ETERNAL.”

So, the first step in resolving conflict biblically is for YOU to take the initiative to solve the problem regardless of whether you caused the problem or not.

The Second Step in Resolving Conflict

There are three key words in the middle of Matthew 18:15 that are crucial to resolving problems biblically. First, is the word “alone.” Jesus said we are to “tell him his fault between thee and him alone.” The word “alone” means ALONE! The implication is that we are to deal with our differences privately. We are not to hang our dirty wash out in public. When we have an argument or a disagreement with another member of the team, we are not to get on the telephone, the Internet, Face Book or Twitter and broadcast it to the world.

Neither are we to confront the person in public in an effort to embarrass them. We are not to try to make them “look bad” in front of others. Problems are best dealt with in the privacy of a home, an office or a classroom where others won’t see, hear or know what is happening. The goal is to resolve the problem in a fair and equitable way that is pleasing to God, and to do so in private.

The second key word in verse 15 is the word “tell” where it says, “and tell him his fault.” Notice it doesn’t say “tell him off.” The word “tell” can be translated in a variety of ways. It can mean “to convict,” “to tell,” “to reprove,” “to show” or “to rebuke so as to bring conviction.” It also carries the idea of approaching a person in a spirit of Christian love and humility.

The goal is to attack the problem rather than the person. Ephesians 4:29 warns us: “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers” (see chapter 9). Angry or accusatory words are to be avoided and replaced by gracious, kind, edifying words that address the problem.

Philippians 2:3 says, “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves.” Rather than being accusatory, we are to be tentative when we bring up the problem area. We are not to start out by saying, “Its all your fault. You owe me an apology.” Instead, we should say something like this:

I’m not sure I fully understood you when you said (whatever was said),
and I may have misunderstood your intentions when I took offense,
but I’ve come to see if we can resolve the problem between us.

Always give the other person the benefit of the doubt. You may have misunderstood what was said. You may have taken offense when you shouldn’t have been offended. Avoid using provocative words like “always” and “never.” Speak courteously and avoid slashing remarks (Ephesians 4:29). Share your feelings and opinions without attacking or accusing the person.

Be specific and get to the point quickly. Don’t beat around the bush and don’t expect the other person to know what you are thinking or why you are there. Be honest. Speak truthfully and remember that people recall things differently. Stick to the subject at hand and avoid bringing up other past “sins.” Keep your
emotions under control. Your attitude and tone of voice will make a huge difference in resolving the problem biblically.

The third key word in Matthew 18:15 is “fault.” This word refers back to the “trespass” committed against us earlier in the verse. It comes from the Greek word “harmartia” and literally means to “miss the mark.” The “mark” is God’s holy law. Jesus used it here in the aorist tense which indicates a specific act that violated God’s Law. We could paraphrase the intent of the original language this way:

“If a Christian brother clearly misses the mark, so that his conduct toward you is a violation of God’s holy law, go and tell him his fault.”

Many of the things we get offended over are differences of opinion, personal preferences, and cultural distinctions. They are not sins at all and do not rise to the biblical standard of a “trespass” or a “fault.” We have no right to be offended because of them. Sometimes we are just too sensitive and too easily hurt. It is not unusual when people get together to resolve their differences, for them to learn that the thing they were “offended” about was really nothing more than a misunderstanding over what was said or done.

As believers, we are to confess our faults one to another – This biblical counsel is found in James 5:16 where it is coupled with praying for each other. The reason for doing so is that we “may be healed.” James was referring to physical healing, but the same thing is often true relationally as well. When we take the initiative and humbly go to the person with whom we are in conflict, when we approach him tentatively, when we acknowledge that we may have misunderstood, when we ask for forgiveness for our part of the problem, the other person often reciprocates the same way. He may confess his part of the problem and ask for forgiveness as well.

Confessing is different than apologizing. An apology is often a defense that seeks to justify our wrong behavior. “I’m sorry for getting angry. If you hadn’t done what you did, I wouldn’t have responded the way I did” or “I was having a bad day when I got upset with you. I’m sorry.” In both cases, the wrong behavior is justified and the blame is placed upon someone or something else.

In Scripture, we are told to “confess” our faults. Confession is to “say the same thing” about our behavior as God says about it – that it was wrong. When we confess we are taking responsibility for what we did without any rationalization, justification or explanation. It might look something like this:

“I’m sorry for taking offense and being angry with you. I was wrong. I sinned against God and I sinned against you when I did that. Will you please forgive me?”

Usually, we want the other person to confess that HE was wrong in what he said or did, but in reality WE are often the ones who need to do the confessing. In Matthew 5:23 we are the ones who have done something that caused the offense to a brother or sister. The responsibility for confessing certainly lies with us in that case. In Matthew 18:15 we are the ones who have taken offense, possibly because we misunderstood what the other person said or did. If that is the case, we are still the ones who need to confess our wrong reaction. As believers, we ought to willingly shoulder the responsibility for any misunderstandings that may arise between ourselves and other members of the team.

As believers, we are to forgive each other – Forgiveness is not natural. It is an intentional act of the will that is contrary to our fallen, sinful nature. Normally, we want our “pound of flesh.” We want to get even. We want the other person to feel as hurt as we do. To forgive them goes against our grain, but it is the right thing to do because God said so. In his Word, God repeatedly instructs us to forgive those who sin against us or hurt us in some way (Luke 17:3; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13).
Forgiveness doesn’t seem fair to us because the “guilty” party has not paid his dues for what he did. That is often true. Forgiveness, however, is an act of grace. It is extended to those who do not deserve it. Isn’t that exactly what God does for us when he forgives us? He releases us from our culpability for sin even though we do not deserve it. He tells us in Ephesians 4:32 to do the very same thing when he says, “Forgiving one another, EVEN AS GOD for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.”

We ought to forgive each other simply because we are the recipients of God’s grace and have been forgiven in spite of our guilt. The sins we commit against God are far greater than any “sin” a teammate may commit against us. If we refuse to forgive those who offend us, we are no different than the unjust servant in Matthew 18:23-30 who refused to forgive the minuscule debt owed to him by his fellow servant after he himself had been forgiven a debt of ten thousand talents. Recipients of God’s grace are obligated to extend the same grace to others as well.

Forgiveness means to absolve a person of the responsibility for what he did. We release him from culpability. We no longer hold it against him. Instead, we bear the cost (the hurt, the pain, the loss) ourselves. That is not always easy to do. Sometimes we replay the incident over and over in our minds. When that happens, we need to take that thought captive and bring it into obedience to Christ (II Corinthians 10:5), and remind ourselves that we have forgiven the person for what happened.

Refusal to forgive is a sin. It is contrary to what God teaches in his Word and can lead to bitterness and animosity toward your teammate. It will stand as an impediment to your relationship and a hindrance to your team ministry until it is removed. Two cannot walk together unless they are agreed (Amos 3:3).

When you forgive, say so. Tell the person you forgive him. When someone asks for forgiveness, don’t say, “That’s o.k. Forget about it.” Don’t sweep it under the carpet. People need to know they are forgiven. They need to be released from the guilt they feel. The words “I forgive you” are powerful. They are healing. They are life-giving. They have the power to wipe away the hurt, pain, embarrassment, and guilt that goes with conflict. They wipe the slate clean, so tell people that you forgive them. Otherwise, they will wonder if you have.

As believers, we make a four-fold promise when we forgive – When we forgive a person, we are in essence making a promise to the person we are forgiving. We are committing ourselves not only to release him from responsibility for what he did, but we are making a four-fold promise as well.

First, we are promising that we will never bring up the incident to him again. Remember, we are to forgive him “even as God” has forgiven us (Ephesians 4:32). When God forgives our sins, he does not keep bringing them up to us again and again. He doesn’t throw them back into our face the next time we sin against him.

Instead, Psalm 103:12 says, “As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.” Regardless of how far east you travel, you will never reach a point where you are going west. The converse is true as well. No matter how far west you go, you will not suddenly find yourself going east. That is not true of the north and south. They meet at the North and South Poles, but the east and west never meet. They are separated infinitely from each other.

That is the way God deals with our sins, and that is how we should deal with those we forgive. Even if the person sins against us again in the future, we are not to bring up the past and use it against them. That is the promise we make when we forgive our teammates or anyone else.

Second, when we forgive a person we are promising we will never again bring up that incident to anyone else either. God doesn’t sit around heaven discussing our sins with the angels or the other members of the Godhead. He doesn’t review our misdeeds with the saints who have gone to heaven. In Isaiah 38:17 we
read these wonderful words: "For thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back." In other words, our sins are out of sight and out of mind.

God doesn't discuss our wrongdoings with other people, and neither should we discuss the faults of those we forgive with the people to whom we talk. To do so is to commit a far more grievous sin than was committed against us.

Third, when we forgive a person we are promising that we will never bring up the incident to ourselves again. In Psalm 79:8 Asaph prayed, "O remember not against us former iniquities." God answered that prayer in Jeremiah 31:34 when he said, "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." That same promise is found in Hebrews 8:12 and Hebrews 10:17 as well.

God is omniscient. He knows everything there is to know and everything that has ever happened. Because he is God he can never forget. Otherwise, he would not be omniscient, but he CHOOSES not to mull over and over in his mind the things we have done. He doesn’t replay them or examine them again and again in detail. He chooses instead to see us in the light of his forgiveness just as we are to do toward those we forgive.

This isn’t always easy for us to emulate. Human nature is such that the incident will pop into our minds in the middle of the night, when we are standing at the kitchen sink or even while we are praying. When it does, we need to take that thought captive, bring it into obedience to Christ, and replace it with a different thought. In time, as we remind ourselves that we have forgiven the person and have promised not to bring it up to ourselves again, the thought will gradually recede into the back of our memories and be forgotten.

Fourth, when we forgive a person we are promising that we will not let the incident be a barrier between us. Matthew 5:23 tells us that the goal of forgiveness is to be "reconciled" to our brother. It means to be brought back into a harmonious relationship with the person being forgiven. We can never say, "Well, I'll forgive you, but I never want to see you or speak to you again." If we do, we have not forgiven the person.

When God forgives us, the incident (our sin) is put aside and is placed under the blood of Christ. It is no longer an impediment between us. Instead, our fellowship with God is reestablished and we continue on with our relationship with him just as if nothing had ever happened. Forgiveness is a four-fold promise that we will not bring up the incident again to the offender, to others or to ourselves, and we will not allow it to be an obstacle in our relationship with him.

As believers, we get to enjoy the consequences of forgiveness – Often, we are the main beneficiaries when we forgive someone who has offended us. The first consequence of forgiving is emotional, physical and spiritual relief. When we forgive someone, our anger and resentment dissipate. They disappear and cease to be. We’re not angry any more. We can sleep at night. We don’t feel agitated. We don’t get upset every time the incident crosses our mind, and we don’t have feelings of animosity toward the person any more.

Our blood pressure goes down, our heart beats more rhythmically, and we’re not as cranky as we were. We have a better outlook on life. We are more pleasant and easier to get along with, and the list goes on and on. There is a little ditty that goes something like this:

I was angry with my friend;
I told my wrath, my wrath did end.
I was angry with my foe;
I told it not, my wrath did grow.
The second consequence of forgiving is restoration to fellowship with God. The goal of forgiveness is not to make us feel better, although that is often a side benefit. The goal of forgiveness is to please God and to be restored to fellowship with him and the person with whom we are at odds. We cannot hold a grudge and be sinfully angry with our teammate, our spouse or someone in the church without being out of fellowship with God.

We are sinning against God when we become sinfully angry and refuse to forgive. We are taking the gift of emotional energy that God gives us to solve problems biblically (anger), and we are using it to get even with someone we think has sinned against us. God repeatedly says we have no right to do that. Holding a grudge, refusing to forgive, allowing a barrier to exist between us and a fellow teammate are all forms of sinful anger. In effect, we are seeking vengeance, and that is something that belongs to God alone (Romans 12:19). We are usurping the power and the place of God. We are setting ourselves up as little gods in God’s stead. That is a terrible sin that destroys our fellowship with God in an instant.

When we confess our sin of anger and unforgiveness to God, and forgive those who have sinned against us, our fellowship with God is restored just as God said it would be in I John 1:9.

The third benefit we receive from forgiving is the reconciliation of friendships. At one time, you and your teammates got along well. You enjoyed being together and working as a team. But somewhere along the line something was said or done, something happened that caused a rift between you. Your relationship is now strained, your friendship is broken, harmony has been replaced with suspicion and distrust.

When we forgive, the offense disappears, the animosity dissipates, the tension dissolves and the relationship is restored. You are able to pick up where you left off before the offense occurred. Sometimes your relationship will be stronger, sweeter, and better than it ever was before. Psalm 133:1 expresses it this way: “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”

The fourth benefit of forgiveness is that harmony and tranquility return to the team enabling it to function more effectively. Teams are powerful entities for good when all involved function well together. They are like fine-tuned race cars in which all the cylinders need to be in sync with each other in order to be effective. The whole team suffers whenever two or more of its players are out of sorts with each other. Ignoring the problem only makes it worse and can lead to the demise of the team.

Good team leaders will seek to reconcile the warring members of their teams. The welfare of their teams is at stake. They know that forgiveness must be granted if they are to move forward. The words, “I’m sorry. Please forgive me” and “I forgive you” can energize and transform the team. Unity is restored. Effectiveness is enhanced and the team can once again move toward the fulfillment of its vision.

**Things to Do:**

1. Make a list of grievances, offenses or irritations that exist between you and someone on your team or in your church.
2. How have these irritations or disagreements affected you personally? How have they affected your relationship with the other person?

3. Do a heart check. Is your heart right with God if you have ought against another person? Are you thinking more highly of yourself than you should? Are you willing to acknowledge your part of the problem?

4. Take the initiative and request an opportunity to meet with the person with whom you are at odds. Do your best to make things right by asking for clarification, acknowledging any wrongdoing, and granting (or seeking) forgiveness.
Chapter 13

Crossing the Goal Line!
(Finishing the Task You Set Out to Accomplish)

It was inevitable. It had to happen sooner or later. No football team, not even the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, can go on forever without eventually winning a game. They had managed to lose every single game during their initial season as an expansion team in 1976. The following year wasn’t going much better. They lost their first twelve games of the second season as well for a combined record of 0-26 – a record that still stands today.

But on December 11th, 1977 the unthinkable happened. The Buccaneers defeated the New Orleans Saints 33-14 at the Super Dome in Louisiana. That in itself was an amazing accomplishment. They had only scored seven points in their last four games and fifty-three points all season long. But six interceptions, a couple of field goals, and a fumble recovery gave them the victory. It wasn’t pretty, but a win is a win.

Opposing quarterback, Archie Manning, had said that it would be a “disgrace” to be the first team to lose to Tampa Bay. His prophecy was self-fulfilling and became a rallying point for the Buccaneer players. The humiliation of losing to the lowly Bucs was so great that Saints fired their head coach, Hank Stramm, following the game.

It took the Buccaneers nearly two years and twenty-seven games to figure out that crossing the goal line is what football is all about. Winning is the name of the game.

The same is true for ministry teams as well. Regardless of whether we are involved in a church-planting, campus, prison or other type of ministry team, the goal is to cross the goal line and to finish the task we set out to do. Moving the ball back and forth between your own and your opponent’s twenty yard lines may involve a great deal of activity and effort, but it doesn’t win ball games unless you cross the goal line.

To win – you need to know where the Goal Line is

How many times have we seen it happen? It is late in the game. Time is running out and our team needs to score in order to win the game. There is time for one last play. When the ball is hiked, the pass receiver streaks down the sideline, makes his “cut” and leaps high in the air to haul in the pass thrown his way. In that split second he is immediately hit and knocked to the ground by the opposing player, but holds onto the ball only to discover that he is half a yard shy of the goal line. He forgot where the goal line was and made his “cut” too soon. As a result, his team lost the game.

The same thing happens far too often in ministry as well. If you are going to build a successful team ministry, everyone on the team must know at all times what the goal line is, what it looks like, and where it is located. There can be no ambiguity, no fuzziness about what “winning” looks like. The first step in building a successful team ministry is to define the purpose (vision) of the team, and to define it with ruthless specificity. If you don’t know where you are going, you can’t get there from here.

Throughout this manual, we have sought to emphasize the importance of defining your vision clearly and distinctly. “Planting a church” or “launching a campus ministry” doesn’t cut it. That is too fuzzy. It is
Building a Successful Team Ministry

It is indistinct. It is nebulous. It is like eating cotton candy - it tastes good, but there is no substance to it. You can’t tell where the goal line is located. When teams don’t know where the goal line is, they have already lost the game before the starting whistle blows. Without a clearly defined goal line, players will run different patterns, block in the wrong places, and generally defeat themselves.

This is why it is so important for the team leaders to define their vision for the team clearly from the very start. Everyone needs to know what they are trying to do, where they are going, how they are going to get there, and what it will be like when they arrive. They need to know where the goal line is and what constitutes “success.”

Can you imagine a football team that makes up its own rules, moves the goal line around, and develops its playbook as it goes through the game? It would be disastrous, and yet that is what ministry teams sometimes do. They redefine the goal line. After all, it was never very clear where the line was in the first place, so redrawing it is seen as no big deal.

The original goal line may have been “planting a church,” but with the passing of time this mutated into “doing ministry” (equally fuzzy) or some other surrogate activity that became an acceptable substitute. Instead of hitting the target, we redraw it and declare victory. We have not won at all. We have only moved the goal line so we can claim to have “won” the game.

We need to understand that activity is not the same as accomplishment, and busyness does not equal productivity. Because we lose sight of the goal line (our vision) or because we never had it clearly in sight to start with, we end up with small, struggling churches that are far less than what we envisioned in the beginning. Whatever “planting a church” or “launching a campus ministry” means to those starting that process, it envisions something more than a small, struggling group of believers striving for survival.

If you are going to win, if you are going to build a successful team ministry, you must know where the goal line is, and what crossing it looks like.

To win - you need a Good Coach

John McKay was a great college football coach, but he admitted half way through his first season with the Buccaneers that he had made a mistake in joining the NFL. He was the wrong man for the job. That doesn’t mean that the team would have been better off without any coach at all - they just needed someone different. No team can be successful without a good head coach.

This is also true of ministry teams. Earlier in this manual (p. 98) we cited research done by Ed Stetzer that shows church-planting teams with coaches are healthier, stronger, and larger than teams without a coach. Scripture tells us that there is safety in a multitude of counselors (Proverbs 11:14; 24:6). A counselor (coach) brings an additional perspective to the table. He can see things the team or individual player may miss. He has years of experience that they may not have. He has exposure to other teams and other ministries that can shed light on the team’s goals and ministry. Without a coach, a team has a more limited perspective.

Romans 12:3 counsels us not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to. Wise planters and campus workers know they don’t “know it all.” They welcome outside coaching. They want all the insights, suggestions, and ideas they can get. They have a teachable spirit. They know that having a good coach can make the difference between winning and losing, so they readily accept coaching when it is offered. They know that a good coach can make a huge difference in their ministry.

There are people who are ready to help you. Some are paid professionals. Some are retired pastors, missionaries or church planters. Some mission agencies provide coaches to their campus and church-
planting workers. Seek them out. Ask for their advice. Listen to their counsel. Be open to new ideas and insights. You will have a much better chance of reaching the goal line and achieving your vision if you do.

To win - you need a Plan

Every team has a game plan and winning teams have winning game plans. Before the game starts, they have developed a detailed plan of what they will do in any given situation during the game. They have scripted a certain number of running and passing plays. Their plans typically have several options available to them depending on the situation on the playing field. Each of the players knows what the plan is and what his role is in each play. The game plan is their strategy for winning.

The same is true of ministry teams and individuals involved in ministry as well. Those teams with good game plans tend to win while those without game plans tend to struggle. Vision is critically important to the success of the team, but vision by itself isn’t enough - it needs a step-by-step explanation of how to move from vision to reality. Without a strategy, vision is little more than a daydream.

Aubrey Milhurs defines “strategy” as the process that determines how your ministry will accomplish its mission. It answers the “how” question. Making it up as you go along is not very effective. Doing so is like a man building a house without a blueprint. Walls are not straight, doors don’t shut tightly, and windows don’t open. Jesus warned against attempting to build anything without first doing adequate planning beforehand (Luke 14:28-30).

If you want to build a successful ministry team, if you want to “plant a church,” if you want to “launch a campus ministry,” take the time to clarify your vision and to develop your game plan. Strategize, set goals, and break them down into objectives and action steps complete with milestones, critical mass markers, and timelines.

Sure, it will take time and effort, and adjustments will need to be made as you go along. Contingencies will need to be exercised as circumstances change, but if you do your prep work well, and follow your game plan, you will be in position to cross the goal line with the winning score. Teams that strategize together do better than teams where everyone does that which is right in his own eyes.

To win - Keep your Eye on the Ball

You see it again and again. The opposing teams line up over the football. The center has his hand on the ball waiting to snap it to the quarterback. Everyone is ready to jump as soon as the ball moves. Then without warning one of the players will jump “off side” before the ball is snapped incurring a penalty for doing the very thing he knows he shouldn’t do. Why? What happened? The problem is he took his eye off the ball. He started focusing on something else (the snap count) and lost sight of what he was supposed to do.

The same thing happens in ministry. Many a church planter, campus worker or prison witness starts out with the goal line clearly in focus, he has a good game plan, and assembles a team of coworkers to help him. Somewhere along the line, however, he takes his eye off the ball and gets sidetracked into other activities that may be good in and of themselves, but which keep him from crossing the goal line.

John Maxwell points out that just because we can do something doesn’t mean we should do it. People will want us to start ministries, provide counseling, help hurting people, serve on committees, teach classes, and do all kinds of “good things” that need to be done. Because we have servant hearts and want to help people, the temptation is to say “yes” when we should say “no.”
It is humanly impossible to do everything that is asked of us. Every open door is not necessarily an opportunity and may not be sent by the Lord. Each “opportunity” needs to be evaluated and prayerfully weighed in light of why we are there and what we have been sent to do. We cannot do everything. We have to make choices. The choice we need to make is to keep our eye on the ball. Will this activity help us move toward the goal line or will it slow us down and maybe even sidetrack us so that we end up losing the game?

This is where the input from a coach can be invaluable. Because he is removed from the situation, he has a different perspective and often can see the goal line more clearly than those on the field. The human heart has a great capacity for self-deception. Those serving in ministry can convince themselves that they ought to take on a responsibility that is going to hurt their ministry rather than help it. A coach can come along side and remind them to keep their eye on the ball.

To win - you need to make Adjustments

Nothing ever goes exactly the way we plan it. You can script the most beautiful ministry plan imaginable only to discover that circumstances have changed. The rent goes up unexpectedly, permission to use the school is withdrawn, land costs escalate, a key family drops out, sin enters the camp. The possibilities are endless. The one thing you can count on is this: something will go wrong. It happens all the time in football, and it happens in ministry as well.

When things go wrong (and they will), people in ministry are tempted to do one of two things. Either they abandon their plan entirely and start grasping at straws or they rigidly hold to their plan and keep paddling even though their boat is sinking. Both situations can lead to disaster. We want to stay out of the ditch on both sides of the road.

There is a third alternative – change your play selection within your plan. A good plan has contingencies built into it. There are multiple running and passing plays from which to choose depending on circumstances. If one thing doesn’t work, a back up option is available. Teams that win make multiple adjustments throughout the game, but they stick with their basic plan. If you have done your homework, you should be able to do the same thing.

To win – you need to Cross the Goal Line

Football teams have only one objective – to win! That is the reason for their existence. They are not there to provide entertainment to the fans, although that happens. They do not exist so talented young men can play games instead of working in a factory. They are not created to make their owners huge sums of money, although that sometime happens. They are there to win – to push the ball across the goal line and to score more points than their opponents. Coaches and players who don’t do that soon find themselves unemployed.

Ministry teams exist for a similar purpose – to cross the goal line set before them at the beginning of the “game.” This is why knowing where the goal line is located and what it looks like is so important. You can only win by crossing over that line, but you can only do that if you know where the line is. Some church-planting organizations and campus ministries have clarified goal lines in recent years. For example, under Baptist Mid-Missions, church planters are expected to plant churches that:

- Are biblical in doctrine and practice, and Baptist in name
- Are stable and growing both spiritually and numerically
- Are financially able to sustain their ministry
- Have sufficient members who are adequately trained and actively serving
The goal line is clarified further by stating that a church is ready to graduate from mission status when:

- It is functioning under a doctrinal statement and constitution that are biblical and baptistic in polity and practice.
- Its members clearly understand and embrace the biblical mission, ministry philosophy, and vision of the church.
- It has a solid group of active, committed men, at least two of whom are biblically qualified and available to serve as deacons.
- It has legally established its existence according to applicable laws so that it is able to function effectively and protect itself adequately (the congregation must be adequately insured).
- It has a membership that is adequately prepared and actively involved in ministry.
- It is regularly reaching out to the lost and purposefully helping believers move toward spiritual maturity and involvement in ministry.
- It has demonstrated spiritual, numerical, and financial growth over a period of time.
- It has sufficient income to adequately support a pastor, provide a meeting place, and sustain its ministry.
- A godly servant-pastor is available to lead the congregation.

The goal line here is clearly defined. There is no ambiguity. Church planters and teams know why they exist, where they are going, and what it will look like when they cross that line to victory. Such specificity enables teams to develop effective ministry plans for achieving each of the elements mentioned above and thus cross the goal line.

To win – teams need to function like teams

Winning teams play as a unit. Each player is a unique, talented individual who brings something positive to the team. Each understands that the team is not about him and his individual talents. It is about the team and putting the welfare of the team ahead of his personal goals. Each of the players has an assigned role. He knows what he is supposed to do as well as what the other members of the team are supposed to do. He knows who the team leader is and is committed to working under his direction to fulfill the plays that are called.

Teams that win have members who are friends. They engage in open communication and exchange ideas. They can disagree without being disagreeable, but when all is said and done, they pull together to move the ball toward the goal line. They know where the goal line is located and what crossing it looks like. They have a game plan they have memorized and seek to execute. They make adjustments along the way while keeping their eye on the ball and on the goal line. They listen to their coach and heed his advice. They work through their differences to reach equitable solutions to their problems. Teams that win function like teams. It is that simple.

Regardless of whether you are part of a church-planting team, a campus team or some other type of ministry team, you must think and act with a team mentality if you are to win. Teams are the preferred approach to ministry in the Bible. They work and can be highly effective when the players don’t care who gets the credit.
Things to Do:

1. Describe the “goal line” for your ministry. What does “winning” look like? Be specific.

2. Do you have a coach to assist you? If not, why not?

3. Have you taken your eye off the ball? List the activities that have distracted your ministry from pursuing its main goals.

4. What adjustments do you need to make in your ministry to get back on track toward crossing the goal line successfully?
3 Ibid., p. 41.
6 Ibid., p. 215.
9 www.thefreedictionary.com
13 Ibid., p. 137.
14 Maxwell, p. 6.
15 Barna, p. 74, 75.
16 Maxwell, p. 7.
19 Maxwell, p. 187.
20 Macchia, p. 73.
22 Barna, p. 41.
27 Barna, p. 24.
29 Maxwell, p. 20.
31 Maxwell, p. 94.
32 Ibid., p. 32.
34 Maxwell, p. 58.
35 Ibid., p. 47.
36 Osborne, p. 51.
37 Macchia, p. 96.
38 Maxwell, 20.
39 Barna, p. 118.
42 Peter Schultz, former president of Porsche as quoted by Chris Brady in *Launching a Leadership Revolution*, p. 199.
43 Maxwell, p. 96.
44 Ibid., p. 97.
47 Calling/Assessment (http://www.newchurches.com/calling--assessment/)
48 Osborne, p. 48.
51 Ibid., p. 147.
52 Hybles, p. 141-154.
53 Barna, p. 17.
55 Bloye, p. 137.
56 Brady and Woodward, p. 160.
58 Macchia, p. 149-150.
59 Sinclair, p. 172.
60 Cordeiro, p. 74.
61 Sinclair, p. 162.
62 Brady and Woodward, p. 126.
64 Cordeiro, p. 100.
65 Sinclair, p. 163.
68 Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, p. 136,137.
70 Bloye, p. 61.
72 Macchia, p. 65.
75 Ibid., p. 34.
78 Barna, 158.
79 Ibid., p. 37.
80 Adapted from an article by Gary McIntosh, *Effective Teams in the Twenty-first Century*, at www.Christianity.com (December 20, 2000).
81 Barna, p. 123.
82 Sinclair, p. 43.
85 Osborne, p. 71.
86 Wright, p. 54
87 Powell, p. 191-196.
89 Brady and Woodward, p. 133.
90 Ed Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches*, p. 102-103.
91 Ibid.
92 London and Wiseman, p. 22.
93 Bloye, p 161-162.
94 Adapted from Early Stage Church Planter Mentor Selection Guide (www.churchplantingvillage.net/WorkArea/linkit.aspx?)
95 Sinclair, p. 50.
96 Hybels, p. 80.
98 Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, p. 156.