

Chapter 7

FUNCTION AS A TEAM

Have you ever played a game of tug-o-war? Several years ago while I served on staff at Real Life Ministries we had an incredible event during which an epic tug-o-war took place. Let me set the stage for you. The event was called Battle on the Bluff. It was an all day event where men from all our small groups gathered to spend the day competing, eating, and enjoying an incredible northern Idaho summer day. A man in our church owned a great piece of property overlooking the beautiful Lake Coeur d'Alene. The field of play was a huge park-like field interspersed with evergreen trees.

We had massive amounts of all kinds of barbequed meat. That, of course, is the primary checklist item for any successful men's event. Along with great food we had all kinds of games ranging from horseshoes to archery target competitions. Throughout the day's events we would pass by this huge tug-o-war pit. It was going to be the climactic event of the day. We were divided into teams based on the region where we lived to compete for being the manliest men in northern Idaho. The smack talk started early in the day, and tension rose with the temperature as the day progressed.

One team had most of the largest guys who outweighed most of

the other participants by at least 200 pounds. That was not *our group*; they were our competition. So I put my brain and sports know-how to work. My group of guys was the smallest, but we had some solid athletes among us. We huddled up and developed a strategy.

“It’s all about unity, guys,” I told them. I knew if we worked in unison we could win.

We began the contest. Soon, two teams emerged on top as they mowed through the competition to the final round—my team and the heavy-weights. The final battle came down to our two groups. One team would be taking a huge mud bath.

I rallied my guys again. By this point, we had perfected our strategy. I called out our cadence of unity, *1 – 2 – 3- pull, 1 – 2 – 3- pull, 1 – 2 – 3- pull....* Like a well-oiled machine, we drug those big boys into the mud, despite their massive weight and strength advantage. It was our strategy that kept us together, creating a powerfully united team. When we pulled, we all pulled together, and when we rested, we all rested together. Our coordinated, consistent effort as a team helped us accomplish our goal.

The same strategy works in the church. God calls us to work together in unity so that we will be able to defeat the evil forces around us. He tells us that when we do, nothing can stand against us. In fact, Jesus’ prayer in John 17 says that when we are unified, the world around us will be drawn to Jesus.

Christian, did you know that our greatest evangelistic tool is unity? Our seventh and final guardrail principle for being a disciple making church is to function as a team. The greatest way to reach our communities is to be unified as we love and care for those in our church body. So often we think our first step toward evangelistic outreach is to produce a big event in our community, yet we forget that we must first be unified within our churches. It’s no wonder the church today

struggles to reach a lost world when we are so internally disjointed. We must function as a unified team in order to be effective at making disciples. We must fight for relationships and work together toward a common goal, or it will only be a matter of time before we find ourselves knee deep in mud, losing our spiritual tug-o-war against the Enemy for the souls of men.

Looking back on my time at Real Life, senior pastor Jim taught me such important lessons about leadership and frankly, biblical relationships. He always said that it's a fight; we have to fight for unity and remain together. During those days I did not always feel like being unified with my team! If it wasn't my personal feelings being hurt, it was some other issue threatening to drive us apart. Yet we remained committed to the cause of Christ and committed to each other. How can we ever hope to have true biblical success in the church if we are not walking in unity? How can we ever expect God to bless what we are doing if we are not in relational or organizational unity with those closest to us?

Jesus tells us to love our neighbor. That does not just mean the person living in the box next to us. He really means those closest to us. Regrettably, many churches want to reach the world and have "decisions for Christ," yet do not decide to fight for the relationships with other co-laborers on a church staff or in church leadership.

You will recall that our first guardrail is about abiding in Christ. Jim Putman often says, "If the church is the body of Christ, then part of abiding in Christ is relationship within the body of Christ." Functioning as a team means that we abide in the relationships closest to us. We must fight for and be in relationship with each other if we are to accomplish anything significant for the Kingdom of Christ.

So how do we do that? We must choose to put relationships first. We must view those with whom we work as God's children and not

as barriers or people “we have to put up with” in order to accomplish our work in ministry. We have to lay down our pride to put others before us. I would encourage you to find ways to get to know and minister to those with whom you serve, regardless of the distance between you and others on your “org chart.” Find ways to build relational unity so that your journey together is a joy, not a task you accomplish as a team.

READ

Open your Bible and read John 17.

REFLECT

Ask yourself these questions.

1. What relational rifts with a team member do I need to reconcile?
2. How can I support and encourage someone in another ministry area in my church this week?
3. How do my relationships with my team members demonstrate the love of Christ to the unsaved people around us?

ACT

Pay close attention to Jesus’ prayer of unity for you and for me. Seek a closer relationship with someone on your team this week by spending intentional time with them.