

A Biblical Analogy for Teamwork

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What is teamwork? Is it thinking the same? Being the same? Doing the same?

Some people believe that to have teamwork, everyone on the team needs to be the same. I beg to differ. Teamwork is being different but pulling in the same direction. It's being different but harmonizing. It's being individuals but being part of a bigger group.

The dictionary describes teamwork as the "combined efforts or actions of a group, to achieve a common purpose or goal."¹ As a team, we are in it together pulling in the same direction. Good things can happen when we work together as a team, but if the good results of teamwork are interpreted as merely coming from our goodness and self-effort, such teamwork becomes self-centered and denies the true source of teamwork. Instead, teamwork is an expression of the body of Christ and as such points to Christ and the glory of God.

The analogy of the body

First Corinthians 12:12-26 uses the analogy of the body to demonstrate teamwork. The human body has 206 bones,

9 major organs,² and 5 senses in one body. Yet when you think of a human body, you don't focus only on the bones, organs, or senses; you focus on the whole being. "If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body;

is it therefore not of the body?" Of course not! The body wouldn't work if it were only an eye or only an ear. God put all the members together as it pleased Him. He made the body perfect.

The eyes, head, and voice might get more focus than the toes or feet, but they are all important. The eye can't say to the hand, "I don't need you." That's not teamwork; we need each member—all 206 bones, 9 organs, and 5 senses that make up

one body. Some members are more "feeble," but they are still necessary. Those members we think are less important deserve the same respect as everyone else. The focus is the whole body, the whole team.

Woven into the body analogy are the themes of oneness, cooperation, respect, friendship, love, and help. All members should care for each other. If one member suffers, all suffer. And if one member receives honor, we all rejoice.



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¹ <http://www.yourdictionary.com/teamwork>

² The human body has more than nine organs, although the exact number is debatable.

The human body is God's vivid example of teamwork.

In the Bible, Joseph is seen as a special person, but why is his story so special? Yes, he interpreted Pharaoh's dream, but he acknowledged that it was God who gave him the interpretation.¹ If Joseph would have said, "I have the answers, it's about me," would he have gotten the blessing? Would he have been made the ruler over Egypt? We don't know for sure, but we do know that Joseph was used by God, and he pointed everything back to God. Even following a horrible betrayal by his own brothers, he was able to see that God used it to His glory.²

Unwise assumptions

Comparing is unwise. Theodore Roosevelt said, "Comparison is the thief of joy." First Timothy 6:6 says, "But godliness with contentment is great gain." I've been an employee for thirty-six years. I'm not an owner and probably never will be. There are blessings and responsibilities of ownership, and the same is true for working as an employee. I am satisfied with my calling. If you think the grass is greener on the other side of the fence, it's probably not, and unfavorable comparisons to what others have can lead to envy and discontentment.

Instead of comparing yourself with someone else, do the best where you are. In fact, the most valuable thing you can do is to be someone who gets along with others and pulls in the same direction. That is so important that employees often get paid more for how well they get along with others than for how well they do their job (unless your work is performance-based only and you're not working with anyone around you).

Don't wish to be where someone else is. At the same time, don't think yourself better than someone else because of where you are. Comparing yourself to others fuels individualism, not teamwork.

¹ Genesis 41:15-16 "And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, I have dreamed a dream, and *there is* none that can interpret it: and I have heard say of thee, *that* thou canst understand a dream to interpret it. And Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, *It is* not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace."

² Genesis 50:20-21 "But as for you, ye thought evil against me; *but* God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as *it is* this day, to save much people alive. Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them."

Focusing on similarities is unwise. Each of us have some spiritual gifts and are missing some spiritual gifts. Some are leaders and others are followers; some are listeners and others are doers; some are helpers and others are creators. There are janitors, accountants, engineers, salespeople, technicians, installers, welders, and marketers—none of these are the same at all, and neither were they meant to be! Our strengths are meant to complement the weaknesses of others.

First Corinthians 12:17 says, "If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?" We need all the gifts in the body, not just one or two. Sometimes people have character issues that need to be changed, but we should never try to change someone's talents. We need each person's talents and strengths.

"But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him" (v. 18). He made each of us perfect the way we were designed to be. He approved it, and we are to appreciate that design, too, and to appreciate the differences among us. Our differences please God.

Rating people is unwise. If the speaker of an event wouldn't show up, it would affect the meeting. But if an attendee wouldn't show up, it might go unnoticed.

Unfortunately, the speakers or more visible parts tend to get more glory. But every person deserves honor, including those who come to listen with a desire to learn and grow.

Verse 23 says that "those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness." Paul is saying

the feeble and unpopular members of the body should get even more honor than the ones that naturally get it. That's a Biblical rule. Shift your admiration and find opportunities to praise the less visible members.

In my mingling with Anabaptist businesses and people, I believe there is a segment of respect and honor towards others that's missing. We've been taught in school and church that we don't lie, steal, or cheat; however, we've missed teaching honor and respect. Give honor especially to those that we may say are less honorable, such as the



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person cleaning the floor. They are important; what would the floor be like if they weren't cleaning it?

"For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked" (v. 24). Gifts that get more attention and focus aren't the only ones that should get the praise and honor. Recognition should go to people who seldom get it. What about the guys who are out in the shop under welders' helmets getting smoke in their eyes when it's 95 degrees, sticky, and hot? Who gets the praise? The guys in the sales department. What about the guys in the shop that are doing the dirty work? They are the ones who need the recognition and praise. Start giving them that and you're going to quickly get a team moving in one direction. Give praise often.

Team building

Value everyone. I once interviewed a potential employee and asked, "What skills and strengths do you think you can bring to our company?"

This person, who had some handicaps, replied, "I don't have any."

This person was recommended to us and when I talked to him on the phone, his communication skills were clear. He spoke like he was educated, not careless with his words. So, I said, "Really? That's interesting because I would see you as a good communicator."

You should have seen his eyes! No one had ever told him that. All his life he had been talked down to, discouraged, and torn apart. He was convinced he didn't have anything to offer.

I had to focus on what he could become, not what he was at the time. If you can master this, it is a gift you can give somebody you are working beside. They may have their issues, but there may be a reason they have their issues. Maybe you're the one who can make the difference in the life of that person by showing them what they could be.

A college professor told his students that one of the questions on the exam would be: "What's the name of the cleaning lady who cleans the school?"

One of the students asked, "Is this important? Is this really going to be part of the test? Will it make a difference?"

He said, "Absolutely. If you don't learn to know and value everybody as important, you've missed a very important part of life."

Compliment often. Complimenting and encouraging don't come easily or naturally for everyone. For myself, I didn't grow in this area until I was told numerous times that I was an encouragement to other people. Then I

took an aptitude test and at the top was encourager. And then it hit me: maybe that's what I'm supposed to be, an encourager. Regardless of whether it comes naturally for you, practice complimenting and compliment often. Find opportunities to praise. Master that! Go home and practice on your spouse and children.

The culture in corporate America is often terrible; people claw and scratch just to get to the next rung on the ladder. They don't understand the

concept of giving appreciation and respect to those lower than them. They think it's all about status and position. We need to give credit to everyone in our companies and not run over other people to grow in the company. In fact, the Bible says that those who are servants and humble themselves will be exalted, but those who exalt themselves will be humbled.¹ That doesn't make any sense to the world, but that's what God's Word says. How easy it is for you to praise or rejoice with someone who got the credit for something, perhaps even something you actually did? Compliment often. Give sincere praise. Seek to give of yourself to build up and encourage other members of the team around you, with Jesus as your example.²

Care for others. Whether in the workplace or in our churches, we should be alert for those who are suffering and have empathy for them. Care doesn't play favorites. We should be shepherds; shepherds seek out and show care to



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¹ Matthew 23:12 and Luke 14:11

² Philippians 2:5, 7 "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" Who "made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men."

those who may be neglected and hurting.¹ “And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it” (v. 26). When we discover someone of the team is hurting, we should sincerely express care and ask how they are doing. And we should listen—and really listen. Sometimes what somebody is saying isn’t what they mean; often there’s a meaning behind their words that they yearn to have understood and ministered to.

Know your role. Everyone on a team should understand and know how the other works. Do you know what your role is? One person may be an encourager, one a doer, one a listener, and still another a visionary. Make sure you know what you’re good at. There may be a reason why someone else—not you—is the boss, business owner, or the one who writes your paycheck. There are a lot of things I can’t do that you can. I was not meant to do those things, and you’re not meant to do what I do. It’s not so important what your role is as that you are doing your absolute best. As Christians, there’s no room for mediocrity.

The cost of division

Division breaks momentum. Teams lose when they are divided. In corporate America, labor unions and management often work against each other. The employees demand a raise and threaten to strike if they don’t get it. Management says they can’t afford to give a raise because competition overseas is putting them out of business. People are often working against each other and acting like they are competitors or enemies rather than a team.

“That there should be no schism in the body” (v. 25). Division tears apart. Does that mean we can’t think differently? No. The principle here is to agree to disagree peacefully. It’s an art that can be mastered, but remember, your company should be moving in the same direction.

As Christians we all need to be going the same way with the focus pointed to Christ. If we are working against each other, Christ won’t get the glory. Why are you digging your heels in when someone thinks lunch should be at 11:30 and you think it should be at 12:30? Is there a principle here that honors the Lord, or is it just because you don’t

want to change?

Nobody likes to change but sometimes we have to. Sales departments and service departments don’t have a good reputation of working well together. The guys out in the shop sometimes think, “Those sales guys—all they do is sit around and drink coffee. They expect the impossible.” And sometimes the sales department guys are thinking, “Those guys out in the shop, they don’t follow instructions; they’re not on time.”

If you’re having that problem with your company, go back and talk to the boss and say, “Let’s bring them together; let’s sit around the table and talk. How can I help make your job easier? How can you make my job easier?” Discuss it. Your problem isn’t going to go away; you can’t sweep it under the carpet.

An autoimmune disease is when the body works against itself. It actually fights against itself. That’s a good way to die. And in businesses, sometimes there’s an employee or two who are working against each other. That’s not teamwork. That’s not progress. We need to be working together whether we agree or not.

If you’re expecting the fingers and the thumb to be the same, it’s not going to work. Their functions are different—in fact it is in God’s very design that they oppose each other!

Gossip destroys trust. Does your company have a no-gossip policy? Dave Ramsey defines gossip as “discussing anything negative with someone who can’t help solve the problem.”² That includes your Sunday afternoon discussions under the oak tree as well as your Monday morning breaks around the coffee pot. May it never be said of us that we gossip about anyone, and perhaps especially about those called to places of responsibility over us, including leadership in the church and in business. In the same article, “Gossip is Poison to Your Team,” Ramsey says, “Gossip is unfair to everyone involved.” Whether true or not—and gossip often has some elements of both—it is unkind and unloving to gossip, and further, it undermines the trust and function of a good team. We manifest our care for one another when we intentionally avoid the poison of gossip: “but that the members should have the same care one for another” (1 Corinthians 12:25).

¹ Matthew 18:12-13 “How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray.”

² “Gossip is Poison to Your Team,” <https://www.daveramsey.com/blog/gossip-is-poison-to-your-team> (accessed on June 30, 2018).

Conclusion: What is Teamwork?

Teamwork is:

- sounding *differently*, but harmonizing
- thinking *differently*, but understanding
- working *differently*, but pulling together
- performing *differently*, but complimenting
- being *different*, but cooperating
- appearing *different*, but blending

Is teamwork everyone being the same? No, but it's everyone going the same direction together. It's complementing each other, just like two opposite poles of a magnet pulling together. In four-part harmony, each of the notes are different. They're not meant to be the same, but when blended together, they are beautiful. That's teamwork—being different but blending together beautifully.

I was at a job fair when an older gentleman walked up and said, "We've been dealing with you for thirty-five years." He lived in Lebanon County but had been driving to New

Jersey for work for thirty years. He continued, "Over there in New Jersey they can't get good appliance service. We like you guys. We need one of these companies over in New Jersey!" Referring to our company, he said, "They care more about what *He* thinks," pointing upward, "than what's in their wallet."

What your business does affects other businesses in the Anabaptist community. We are connected as a team—our reputation for Christ is linked to each other. If I stumble and fall, it affects how the broader Christian community is viewed. So what is people's impression of your business and how you deal with them? Are they saying that you "care more about what *He* thinks than what's in your wallets"?

If you think of the human body and how it functions, it moves, it flows and works together. It doesn't work against its members. How well the teams in our homes, churches, or businesses function is a sign of how well we are pulling together and fleshing out teamwork as Christ would like it to be. The better we get along, the more we embody the body of Christ!



Stewardship
Resources

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