

For Example: Team Player | Rebeca Monzo

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In Ephesians chapter 4 the apostle Paul is speaking to a group of believers made up of Jews and Gentiles who had made a decision to follow Jesus. Having made that decision they had now come together, forming God's new family in Christ. They were now a part of the same team and as members of that team they were to live in a manner worthy of their calling, that is to say, they were to live in light of the salvation gift they had received from God. The foundation is unity and they were to make every effort to keep it...Unity was to be prioritized and the daily practice of every believer. Paul calls the believers to be team players - with unity as the priority he urges them to live in their new identity in Christ and we are to do the same. On any team we find ourselves on, we are called to be like Jesus.

With Ephesians 4:1-3 as our guide, the question we are going to explore today is: As a team player how do we follow Christ's example?

*As a team player we follow Christ's example by **being completely humble**.*

- Humility wasn't considered a virtue in Paul's day. In fact the word humility was associated with failure and shame. The only acceptable place to show humility was before one's superiors like emperors and gods - and that was because there was a hierarchy one had to respect...well, that and, they could kill you. To show humility before equals or those of lesser status was considered suspicious because, in this society, one's own honour and reputation were everything.
- Sadly, not much has changed. While today the word humility can be found on many if not all lists of virtues, the practice of of humility cannot be as easily found. Like the apostle Paul, we live in a society that rewards materialism, achievement and importance. It's not enough to be on equal footing with others, we need to be above them. We are conditioned to look after, "Number 1" and to think of ourselves as better than the rest. The problem is, it's mighty hard to be a team player with this attitude.
- Paul calls the members of this new team (and us, by extension) to resist these social norms and be completely humble in their attitude toward one another. In his letter for the church in Philippi, Paul expands on this virtue of humility. He writes, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interest of others." He then points to Jesus as a prime example of this. Though he was fully God, Jesus chose to limit his divine privileges and enter into humanity and all that entails, including death on a cross. He did this so that we could be reconciled to God. Jesus was thinking of us when he left the comfort of heaven; he was looking out for our interests and, in response to what Jesus did for us, we must do the same for each other.
- The thing about valuing others above ourselves is that it's designed to be reciprocal. In a healthy church; on healthy teams, when we look to the interest of others above our own, they, in turn, should be looking out for ours. We should not go wanting. Now, I understand that sometimes we do go wanting. Sometimes, we have to work with selfish people who only care about themselves. In those times, we are still called to care for others. Paul never said that being completely humble was easy.

- To be clear, being humble does not mean that we withhold our ideas or talents – that we don't put our best foot forward; it doesn't mean that we think less of ourselves or that we can't put ourselves first every once in a while and it doesn't mean we can't be confident in ourselves. What it means is that, as a team player, every morning we wake up, we make the choice to live with a posture of humility.

*As a team player, we follow Christ's example **being completely gentle**.*

- The Greek word for "gentle" is hard to translate in the English language, but it carries the sense of self-control and kindness. I've heard it described as "strength under control" – with the imagery of a wild stallion being gentled so that a child could get on its back and ride it. It's a fruit of the Spirit, that is to say that it's evidence of the Spirit's work in our lives.
- Gentleness is used to describe Jesus by both the apostle Paul and by Jesus himself. In the gospel of Matthew 11:29, Jesus says, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."
- You'll notice, here, that Jesus couples the word gentle with humble. In Ephesians Paul does the same. That's because they go hand in hand. We can't be gentle without being humble.
- Gentleness is what we need when dealing with difficult people. Aristotle positions it somewhere between excessive anger and lack of anger.
- Gentleness is choosing to respond rather than to react. What's the difference? According to google, responding is considerate and deliberate, whereas reacting, which literally means to meet on action with another, is immediate and rash. One helps, the other hurts.
- Some people see gentleness as a weakness but it actually takes great strength to exercise. In an article I read recently on gentleness, it described it in this way: "Being gentle doesn't mean that you are weak. It means that your strength is completely in control and that a form of love and compassion are guiding your actions. A gentle person still speaks the entire truth, event truth that can be hard to hear, but they do so in a way that is absolutely loving. Gentleness is meekness. It is possessing strength but choosing to be tender-hearted."

As a team player, we follow Christ's example by being patient, bearing with one another in love.

- If you heard my Father's Day sermon back in June, you might remember there term erek apayim. It means, "long nosed" or "long of nostrils" and it's the idea of closing your mouth, pursing your lips, and breathing in through your nose. The Greek word Paul uses here means essentially the same thing. It carries the sense of being calm under fire and can be described as having a long fuse.
- You might also remember me talking, back in June, about the idea many people have about God – that He's a little like Donald Duck, only a lot more powerful. A lot of people see God as this short-tempered, easily angered, explosive character; a God who is chomping at the bit to put us in our place. But this Donald Duck idea of God couldn't be farther from the truth. All throughout scripture we see a God who continuously withholds punishment for the sake of repentance. 2 Peter 3:9 says, "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead, he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." God's nostrils are long; very, very, long because He's more concerned with our repentance than our punishment.
- That isn't to say that God does not get angry or that he never disciplines us, he does because he loves us and hates evil. But it is to say that His love for us is greater than His anger; that His desire to see us turn to Him is greater than His desire to make us pay for what we've done. Out of God's great love for us, He is willing to take a really long breath, giving us the time and space to turn back to Him.

- While God is not like Donald Duck, sometimes we can be. Sometimes we can fly off the handle with each other. Someone does something or says something that really gets under our skin and we just let 'em have it. With God as our example, we need to have long nostrils for each other. We need to take that deep breath in.
- And we need to bear with one another in love. The word "bear" in the Greek mean to "endure something unpleasant or difficult." It implies a willingness to come alongside others to bear with them despite differences and frustrations.
- I've heard it said that, "difficult people are often hurting people." Sometimes we forget that. There are hurting people in our church; there are hurting people on our teams and unfortunately, "hurt people, hurt people". The most loving thing we can do as a team player is take that long, deep breath in and bear with them.

The goal of this is to make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

- In John chapter 17 Jesus, before he is arrested, prays for his followers. He prays that "all of them may be one" and "that they may be brought into complete unity" Why? So that the world may believe that the Father sent the Son. The believers unity was rooted in Christ's own unity with the Father. Unity is both the product of the gospel and the proof of it. Unity testifies to the reconciling work of Jesus Christ.
- To be clear, unity is not uniformity where everyone agrees on everything or whereby everyone is alike. The church, as one writer put it, "is made up of a diversity of people, who are gifted to each other for the sake of unified maturity in the faith". There is room for differences in unity - there is room for different gifts, personalities and perspectives.
- When we are team players who follow Christ's example, we show those around us who Jesus is. We become a powerful witness to the gospel welcoming the Kingdom of God in, even if we're doing it alone. Working on any team can be hard and sometimes it's just easier to give into the emotions - to meet one action with another, but as team players in Christ, we are called to a higher standard because Jesus says, "we are the light of the world" - when we decide to act as the world does rather than as Jesus does, that light dims.
- I love what Kevin said when he talked about the role faith plays in being a team player and having to deal with difficult people - he said that he chooses to see each person as someone made in the image of God. Because that's who they are! They are made in the image of God and they are loved by him (even if in the moment we don't like them much).
- Unity is fleeting in the world but with the help of the Holy Spirit; as the Spirit helps us to be completely humble, completely gentle and patient, bearing with one another in love and we can do it - we can keep the unity and show those around us...Jesus.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How would you define, "Team Player"?
- What Christ-like characteristic from Ephesians 4:1-3, is the most difficult to exercise? Why?
- How big of a role does your faith play in being a team player? In what ways does your faith affect how you deal with difficult people on team?
- How do you, personally maintain unity on the teams you are on?