

" What Position Do You Play? "

6 February 2005

Bible passage: **Luke 6:12-16** (*The Message*)

"At about that same time he climbed a mountain to pray. He was there all night in prayer before God. The next day he summoned his disciples; from them he selected twelve he designated as apostles: Simon whom he named Peter, Andrew his brother, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon called the Zealot, Judas son of James, Judas Iscariot."

Several years ago now, I clipped out an article from the paper about Microsoft and Bill Gates. The interviewer asked Gates if Microsoft would be successful without him, and I was really taken with Gates' response. First, he commented on how the public image of a company becomes associated with the co-founder and leader. He referred to a sentence in a magazine that said that Bill Gates had introduced a new version of Excel. Then Gates said, "Well, I was in a few meetings, but hey, I didn't write any lines of code. I didn't come up with these good ideas. Those were the great people that we've hired. If I'd never gone to those meetings, they would have done that new version of Excel just fine."

I think the reason I was so taken with his comments was that he was epitomizing what it's like to be a part of a team. He was not trying to hog the spotlight; he was not trying to show everyone how important, wise, creative and talented he was. No, instead, he gave the credit where the credit was due—to those who used their particular gifts and talents to help create a strong company. "Those were the great people that we've hired," he said. Note that he didn't say that "I've hired." It was those we've hired. That's the mark of a team player.

I am firmly committed to power of teamwork. No one has yet convinced me that any individual, working alone, no matter how smart or talented he or she is, can create something better than a team can. I've always believed that with a team, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. We can be more together than anyone of us can be alone.

It seems to me that there's good Biblical precedence for teamwork—Jesus and his buddies. Jesus didn't try to go it alone; he gathered others around him. That's what our Bible passage is all about. It tells us that, after spending time in prayer, Jesus selected a core of folks to be with him in his work. He was a teacher and mentor to them; he was committed to helping them grow; he encouraged them to work together and help one another. In other words, he was the quintessential team leader. I think Jesus had a great idea, and I wish that more of us could be like him, and have the joy of being part of a team.

I know that many of us struggle with this whole team concept. After all, most of us like to see our names in the headlines, and we like to receive recognition for the good work we do. Sometimes we're pretty reluctant to share the limelight, but frankly, as hard as it is to work as a team, for me,

it's the only way.

Frequently, you hear us talk about one team or another here at The Garden, and let me pause here to say to you that all our teams welcome new folks to them. If you feel that your interests and talents lie in writing or hospitality or outreach or technology or coming up with Sunday theme ideas or caring for people, or any other of the team areas that are part of The Garden, please let any one of us know. We can help you get connected today!

One of the teams that I mention often is the Worship Team. Let me tell you about that team, and how this all comes together each week. The Worship Team consists of 10-14 people on any given night, and we meet every Tuesday evening for a couple of hours. The people on this team are very different from one another, and each has interests and abilities that are far different from those of the person sitting in the next seat. I suspect it would be eye-opening for us to do some personality profiles on each of us in that group! It would be crazy, I'm sure.

But our process seems to work—most of the time. Let me be quick to say that it is by no means perfect—far from it, and we're forever changing it and trying to tweak the way we work together. We get put out with one another on occasion, but we also have a good time together, and usually there's a lot of laughter as well as some tension.

At any rate, here's how it works. Each week we begin with prayer, and then we begin work on the next four Sundays. For those Sundays farthest away, this is brainstorming time for that theme. Ideas for the message, music, videos and other possibilities are shared by team members. Then we talk about anything special we could do—a handout that supports the theme, an original video that we could do, a skit, and so on. You get the picture.

My messages are usually done for the next three Sundays, and those messages have been emailed to everyone on the team for their study and planning. We try to look at the video clips that are suggested, and try to narrow down the field for both movies and songs. When we get to the Sunday that's about ten days out, we actually put the service together. We determine what the various elements of the service are exactly—which songs, which movie clips—and then we try to decide how they all fit together to create the best possible service for us all. Then we write down what we call the "flow," that is what comes first, second, next, and on until we've done the service from the beginning to the end.

The last thing we do is review the work we did the prior week putting together the upcoming Sunday. Plans are made for who's going to pray, or host. Who are our Tech Team members this week? What of this affects Hospitality Team? What are the needs for the slide preparation? What does everyone who is part of the service on Sunday need to know before they arrive? This is not a well-oiled machine, by any means, but it is the process we're using currently to work out the Sunday services.

Let me be clear on one thing. Teamwork is not the easiest way to work. The easiest way would be for each of us to do our own thing, and whatever happens just happens on Sundays. We wouldn't have to make an attempt to work with everyone's idiosyncrasies to make this work; we could operate in our own little world, and if things fit together on Sunday—great! If not, too bad. But that isn't the commitment we all have.

We want things to tie together, and we want to share the message through every single part of the service. Each person has an overriding interest and talent that brings them to the team. Some have seen every movie and TV show that was ever made! Others have the creative eye and can put together original videos that speak to all of us. Some can suggest just the right music with the right "feel" to make the point we want to make. Some have the talent of being able to envision and help create the best flow of things for a particular day. Some are people who are offering the prayer, and they're playing their part in tying together parts of the service and helping us connect with God through prayer. Some do the slides; some run the cameras. Each person is important

and brings a special gift to the process. In the words of today's theme and of Super Bowl Sunday, each person has a position to play.

The hours of effort are immense, but let me tell you—if it weren't for all these people, this wouldn't happen each week! There's no way I could do this on my own. There are so many things I like about working as a team. We share the burden, for one thing. Sometimes the load is far too heavy to try to carry alone, and it is wonderful to have all these folks around the table working together, wanting the best thing. It really does lighten the load.

However, teamwork, as I've said, is not easy work. Putting any group of folks in matching jerseys, or on the same staff does not automatically make it a team. Teamwork takes time, energy and effort. It takes a great deal of trust, and you and I know that trust is often a hard thing to come by. To me, that's one of the most important ingredients of working as a team—trusting one another totally. It means we trust the other persons to do what their particular positions and talents have equipped them for. We count on people to be who they say they are, and to do what they promise to do. Trust is essential, and when broken, is hard to rebuild. Lack of trust can destroy a team.

Being part of a team means we often have to set our egos aside, and let others step to the front. Take, for instance, Edgerrin James in the Colts final regular season game with Denver. James would have probably won the rushing record had he played that game, but because it was best for the team, he sat out. Teamwork is not about competing for the honors, or doing anything for the win. It's about cooperating and collaborating together to make it all work. Unfortunately, not all personalities and egos can adjust to teamwork, but those who can tend to thrive.

Most of all, teamwork means that we care for one another. In his book, Lee Iacocca talked about the legendary football coach Vince Lombardi. Someone had once asked Lombardi what it takes to make a good team. Lombardi talked about clubs that have good basic fundamentals and good discipline that aren't very effective. Then he offered the most important ingredient. He said, "If you're going to play together as a team, you've got to care for one another." If one player doesn't block for another, someone will get hurt. Lombardi said, "I have to do my job well in order that he can do his."

One of the best examples of teamwork is in the geese formation when they fly above us trying to move from their summer homes to the winter homes and back again the following spring. Many have studied their in-flight patterns and have determined that they work together quite effectively as a team.

Those in front rotate their leadership. When the lead goose gets tired, it changes places with one of the geese in the wing formation, and another goose takes over the lead. They help one another by creating a draft of air current that helps the next bird fly more effortlessly. In fact, one expert said that by flying in this V-formation, the whole flock gets 71% greater flying range than if each goose flew on its own.

When one goose gets sick or wounded, two fall out of formation with it and follow it down to the ground to help and protect it. They stay with the hurt bird until it's able to fly again. The geese naturally care for one another.

One thing I didn't know was that the geese in the back of the formation are the ones who do all the honking. No one knows for sure why. Maybe it's because they want the lead goose to know they're there and that all is well. Perhaps it's to encourage those up front to hang in there and keep at it.

With geese, one thing stands out above all others—it seems to be a natural instinct for geese to work together—to work as a team. Whether the goose's position is rotating into leadership, flapping as a part of the V-formation, helping the wounded, or honking, the whole flock is in it

together.

I believe the same thing is true of you and me. We're made to work with one another, and we gain so much when we can go that. Everyone feels a part of something; each knows that they've done their part; we learn to trust and we begin to see ourselves as trustworthy; we can experience the profound joy of coming together and sharing who we are, our interests, talents, skills with one another to create something so much better, so much stronger, so much more fulfilling than any one of us could ever do on our own. Teamwork works, and I thank Jesus for his good idea.

Closing:

As we leave here this morning, I hope and pray that we will see the positions that each of us plays at home, at work, at school, at play, as vital to the team. Let's pull together.

Have a good Sunday, and go in peace. Amen.