

## GO FOR THE GOLD: TEAMWORK

Sermon written by Martha-Jean Fitch

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**TEXT:** I Corinthians 12:4-7, Hebrews 10:24-25

Haven't the commercials for the Olympics this year been great? I love this one from Oreos that shows so many different teams that have to work together to win: rowing, soccer, playing basketball – and the amazing, synchronized swimming. And there is a song that is a familiar children's song that really fits the commercial. See if you remember it:

*The more we get together ~ together, together  
The more we get together ~ The happier we'll be.  
'Cause your friends are my friends ~ And my friends are your friends  
The more we get together ~ The happier we'll be.*

Truly that is the emphasis for the Olympics is the “team”, is it not? And even when you see just *individuals* competing – say in weightlifting or gymnastics, there still is a team involved. Heerden Hermann, an Olympic swimmer, describes it this way: *I had a coach and an assistant coach, but that's not all. I also worked with two sports doctors, a physiotherapist, a masseuse, a nutritionist, a sport psychologist and two sport scientists. All of these individuals formed part of my “team”, along with my close family and friends and training partners. Upon arriving at the Olympic Games, the circle expands even further. Now it includes all your sponsors, your national federation, and ultimately even the public. All of this means that at the moment you mount your block to start your race, the weight of expectation on you can be so big, it is almost unbearable. It is most certainly not just the hero-individual, competing for glory. He/she carries with him the hopes, dreams, and sacrifices of an extremely large group of people.*<sup>2</sup>

Wow! That's a lot of people – all working together for the same goal of helping an athlete succeed...each contributing their own level of expertise and knowledge. So, when you think that 613 athletes came from the United States to Tokyo – just imagine how many people are really on the Team USA --- a very large group of people all working together so the whole team can win!

Everybody needs a team – and every team, needs everybody! Good teams are united in thought and goals – and everyone (whether out in front or working behind the scenes) everyone is needed!

In the New Testament – and today – our team is called the church! Jesus never meant for the individual believer to “go it alone” – like a Lone Ranger. No, to be a Christian is to be connected with others – in a team of believers called the body of Christ, the church. And it takes everyone – being united in thought and goals – all working together, as members of God's team – to accomplish His will and grow the Kingdom.

And on God's team – everyone is needed! It's not a part-time, spectator team where you sit on the sidelines and watch. That is not the kind of “teamwork” that will accomplish what

God intended for His team – His church.

Think about the winning teams we know about in the Olympics, for example. They practice and train with great determination and they have a great passion about playing the game *together*. These folks know that: *“there is no ‘I’ in team”* and that *“Together everyone achieves more”*.

So, just as John Ed Mathison has said, *“If we, as members of God’s team, are going to be successful in bringing other people to know God and in accomplishing His works here on earth, we need to pick up a few habits from winning sports teams – and learn how to give our all for the common good – to serve others and God – enthusiastically!”*<sup>3</sup>

So – let’s look at some habits that we need to have to be good team as a church – using the letters: T – E – A – M.

First – the letter “T” – I am calling “Testimony”. Let’s think about those Olympic teams. All those athletes from 206 countries have a team uniform they wear, all in the appropriate colors seen in their nation’s flag. And when they put those uniforms on – they proudly give testimony or evidence of the country they are representing. And when they win a medal – what do those athletes all want to do? They get a flag of their country and take a victory lap, if you will, displaying or giving testimony, to their country of which they are so proud.

We as Christians don’t have a literal team uniform that we wear – but when we become disciples of Christ, we are called to “put on Christ”! Galatians 3:27 tells us that we who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes! And in Romans 13, Paul says we are to remove our old ways and dark deeds like dirty clothes, and put on the shining armor of right living. We are called to live decent lives for all to see, *“clothing ourselves with the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ.”* Our lives should be a living testimony of the work of Jesus in us. In fact, our hope and prayer is that we will be so filled with His grace and love – that when people look at us they see Him and not us!

To be a winning team as a church – we need to put on Jesus and let our love for God and neighbor give evidence and testimony that point others to Jesus.

T is for Testimony and E is for Encouragement. One thing that is so wonderful to see with our Olympic athletes is the way they encourage and support each other. You see it when they are cheering each other on during their events – and when they give a hug or a fist bump to each other after the event. One handball athlete from Norway put it this way: *“We are dependent on each other – and can learn from each other. There can be no finger-pointing on a high-functioning team; instead, each person must take personal responsibility for improving their own skills, giving their maximum effort each day and fulfilling their role on the team. We also have a responsibility to bring out the best in those around us. That’s what winning teams do.”*<sup>4</sup>

And that is what we as a church need to be doing as well. Each of us – of course - are working to grow in our own faith journey and walk closer to the Lord in our discipleship. But



we also have a part to play on our team in the church. We are called to regularly attend and give our best efforts at fulfilling our role in the church. And that means getting involved and finding ways you can help on the team. Sitting on the sidelines or letting someone else do the work is not being encouraging or supportive of the team. Instead, we are called to be a positive and encouraging church member, bringing out the best in others.

Hebrews 10:24-25 says: *“Let us think of ways to motivate one another to outbursts of love and good deeds. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage each other; especially now that the day of His coming back again is drawing near.”*

Olympic athletes do not neglect being together. I learned that the synchronized swimmers spend 8 hours a day, 6 days a week, working together on their sport! They know each other well and can work together as a united group and encourage each other to do amazing things.

When we neglect to be together as a church team – we don’t know each other as well and we are not growing in our faith journey with each other. And then our church is not as strong and healthy as it can be. God is calling us to come together regularly to share our faith and thus to strengthen one another in the Lord. And the more we know each other, the more we can share each with one another our troubles and problems and get help and support and encouragement. We can lift each other up and bear one another’s burdens – and then challenge each other to good deeds. That’s what it means to be part of God’s team – the church.

T is for Testimony; E is for encouragement and then there is A for Abilities. With the Olympic teams, it is obvious how they have many gifts and talents – and they have worked hard to develop them and use them in their sport. They use their gifts and abilities in powerful ways --- and do so with great passion and commitment.

We in the church are blessed with many gifts and abilities as well. In our passage today from I Corinthians 12 we read: *“<sup>4</sup>There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit is the source of them all.<sup>5</sup>There are different kinds of service, but we serve the same Lord.<sup>6</sup>God works in different ways, but it is the same God who does the work in all of us. <sup>7</sup>A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other.*

God has called us into His family, and God has given us a calling—a place and opportunity to use our specific gifts and talents. Every one of us has talents and abilities. Each one of us has been called to use those talents and abilities – and not just for our own enjoyment but to help each other. I believe that it is safe to say, if you are not involved, if you haven’t volunteered to use your gifts and talents, you have ignored God’s call, and are missing out on a vital part of living as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

John Ed Mathison says, *“The church is full of different niches and holes, and (God has) created somebody specific to fill each and every one of them. In other words, there’s a hole that God has for you to fill. God has a place for every person. And when He gets them there, He empowers them to do what He needs done.”*

There are literally hundreds of opportunities use our gifts and talents to serve.

- Teach our children or mentor our youth. We are in great need to having caring adults who are willing to help with our Wednesday night programs which will begin in September, along with a great need to teach our children in Sunday School.
- Visit someone who is sick, write a note to someone you have missed, or make that phone call that you've felt you should make for the last couple of days
- Help a neighbor in need or participate in giving to those in our community through the Blessing Box.

T is for Testimony, E for enthusiasm, A for activities and gifts – and finally M is for Mission. The Olympic athletes have made a common goal and commitment to their mission to win. They try to be the best they can be – setting the standard high. And they depend on the others in the team to help them reach their goal.

We as the church have been given the Great Commission to share the good news of Jesus Christ – to make disciples and to do all to the glory of God. We have a mission to serve others and to follow the example Jesus set for us, loving others and serving our neighbors. The task of trying to reach out to our neighbors and share the gospel can seem overwhelming – but God calls us to work together – much as the disciples worked together as a team – to reach out and change our communities – and yes, even our world! Together we can make a difference for Christ!

In 1976, at the Seattle Special Olympics, 9 contestants, all physically or mentally challenged, assembled at the starting line for the 100 yard dash. At the gun the contestants all started out, not exactly in a dash, but with a relish to run the race to finish and win.

All, that is, except on boy who stumbled on the track, tripped, rolled over a couple times and began to cry. The others, who were running ahead of the boy, heard him crying, so they slowed down and look back at him. Then two of them turned around and went back. One girl with Down's syndrome bent down and kissed him and said, "This will make it better". Then all 3 linked arms and walked together to the finish line. Everyone in the stadium stood and cheered for over 10 minutes.

People who were there still talk about what happened. Why? Because deep down we know this one thing: What matters in this life is more than winning for ourselves. What truly matters is helping others with that true fellowship.

## **INVITATION**

We have a Savior who will come and run alongside us in this race of life – Jesus Christ

our Lord. He wants you to become involved in the life of the church and receive that kind of community of love and support. Won't you come today and make your decision for Christ? Won't you come and make First Christian Church your church home? Today is the day to make that decision! Come forward right now and we will rejoice with you in your decision for the Lord.

## RESOURCES

<sup>1</sup>Raffi, "The More We Get Together".

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8-8aN6b1qjg>

<sup>2</sup>Heerden Herman, "*The unseen Olympics: teamwork, trust, and distributed leadership*". June 15, 2016.

<https://oxfordcharacter.org/blog/the-unseen-olympics-teamwork-trust-and-distributed-leadership>

<sup>3</sup>John Ed Mathison, *Treasures of the Transformed Life*, Abingdon Press, 2006. Page 24.

<sup>4</sup> Team Performance, "An Olympians View on Team Work"

<https://www.corestrengths.com/an-olympians-view-on-teamwork>