

## ***“Creating Great Teams: A Threefold Cord”***

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Thank you so much for being you.

Here is a message on creating great teams,

and everything I’m about to share I learned from you and alongside you.

What a blessing you are! Listen for the Word of God from Ecclesiastes:

### **Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 (NRSV)**

<sup>9</sup> *“Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil.*

<sup>10</sup> *For if they fall, one will lift up the other;*

*but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help.*

<sup>11</sup> *Again, if two lie together, they keep warm;*

*but how can one keep warm alone?*

<sup>12</sup> *And though one might prevail against another,*

*two will withstand one. A threefold cord is not quickly broken.”*

A threefold cord is not quickly broken.

### ***A Threefold Cord***

In the Third Century BCE,

just over 200 years before Jesus was born in a manger  
because there was no room for Him in the inn,  
one or more souls set down the proverbs and sayings  
we know as Ecclesiastes.

Ecclesiastes is a blend, a collection, a hodgepodge

of prudential wisdom sayings,  
gentle cynicism, and  
traditional piety.

Ecclesiastes' author – or authors – recognized, affirmed and articulated

that we are “both secular and pious, you and I.”[1]

“Secularism and piety do battle in our century, [in times such as this,]

not so much between different men [and women],  
as within all men [and women].”

“We live in the church – we also live in the world;

we take a little from both.”

“For these reasons,

we are not far from the mind and mood of Ecclesiastes,  
one of the most secular writings in the Bible.”

Yet this blend of secular and pious writings

has much to say to contemporary Christians about creating great teams.

## ***A Threefold Cord***

This weekend audiences in Uniondale NY will witness the final performances  
of Ringling Brothers, Barnum and Bailey Circus.

Started in 1881, the three-ring circus ends its run now.

In 1883, P.T. Barnum led 21 circus elephants across the Brooklyn Bridge.

Folks were nervous about the suspension bridge, finished in 1881.

They had never seen anything like it before.

P.T. Barnum proved that if the Brooklyn Bridge was safe for 21 elephants,  
it was safe for everyone.

John Augustus Roebling was a great pioneer in the design of steel suspension  
bridges.

Born in Germany in 1806,

he studied industrial engineering in Berlin  
and at the age of 25 immigrated to western Pennsylvania,  
where he attempted, unsuccessfully, to make his living as a  
farmer.

He later moved to the state capital in Harrisburg,

where he found work as a civil engineer.

He recognized that bridges spanning wide waterways

were generally unstable and often unsafe in high winds and stormy  
weather.

Roebling is credited with a major breakthrough in suspension-bridge  
technology:

a web truss added to either side of the bridge roadway  
that greatly stabilized the structure;  
and the invention of wire cable.

Roebing figured out that if you wove three wires together

a three-fold cord is stronger than one.

Using the web truss model and the wire cables he invented and manufactured,

he designed bridges that spanned the Niagara Gorge at Niagara Falls,  
the Ohio River at Cincinnati and Louisville,

and one that linked Manhattan and Brooklyn in 1883,  
1,600 feet long from tower to tower over the East  
River,

a marvel known as the Brooklyn Bridge.

### ***A Threefold Cord***

A three-fold cord is stronger than two and definitely greater than one.

Three is not a crowd, a number to be whittled down to two or one for the sake of ego.

Three or more is a team.

Visit our congregation and you are likely to hear:

*“Many hands make for light work.”*

as well as

*“All hands on deck!”*

Binding together, bonding together, bridging together

is a good thing and a God thing.

Creating a great team requires weaving together

the gifts, skills, and resources God offers and provides.

John Augustus Roebing proved to the world the value of weaving wire.

Yet it was God who put us here on Earth together,

to till the land and practice faithful stewardship and care for each other.  
What would it take for the Church to prove to the world the value of teamwork?  
Let's show the world – starting here and now – that we are working and playing,  
serving in unity and transforming the community,  
celebrating our diversity,  
tolerating our differences,  
lifting up one another as we yoke together for common  
causes.

### ***A Threefold Cord***

Here are five elements of creating great teams in the Church of Jesus Christ.

Coincidentally, they spell **T - E - A - M - EXCLAMATION POINT**

Amazing.

The Lord does provide.

**T = The whole people of God.**

The church is not a business; our focus is people, not profits.

We are called, commissioned and compelled to be about  
creating, sustaining and empowering a Christ-centered faith  
community,  
not a corporation or social club.

So what this means is when you meet or plan or gather for teamwork, in teams,  
be patient and listen to folks' stories.

If a meeting with a 20 minute agenda takes 60 because folks are sharing  
their pain and joy, aches and questions, let it be.

Be patient and be present for one another.

Make sure all voices are heard & have a chance to share.

Insist that everyone be respected and recognized.

Is that too much to ask? What do you think?

Ensure that the loudest voice or the voice that can't stop talking

or the voice that dominates or has the deepest pockets or longest history  
does not dominate or necessarily get his or her way.

The biggest mouth – especially mine! -- isn't always right

or have the best idea or clearest vision.

Listen as well as you can and then say,

“Thank you. And who else has something to share?”  
Listen, and let the magic happen.

Another thought about the whole people of God.

Don't pine for whomever is absent from the team,

or wish for someone present to be gone.

Work with whomever God sends.

Stir what you got.

My father was a church preacher and a school teacher.

In the Teacher's Lounge a colleague would sometimes complain about her  
classroom.

*“If only little Johnny wasn't there, everything would be so much better.”*

George E. Calvert would say, *“Work with whomever God sends. Love that child  
of God. And if he wasn't there, trust me, another rascal would take his place!”*

**E = Expect to be humbled.**

You might set the agenda or think you know what is best for everyone else,

however God has a way of humbling folks, of keeping us in check.

Someone – Nancy Shealy -- suggested nine years ago

our church sell Christmas Trees and Wreathes.

As the idea caught fire I thought we were going to take a bath to the tune of \$10,000.

I ate some humble pie and asked, “What can I do to help?”

Turns out I was so wrong about my initial assessment.

Thanks to teamwork for the past 9 years each sale is bigger and better than the last.

Someone – Millie Suttles -- suggested we start a thrift store.

I wanted a day care center in the same space.

I got on board and asked, “What can I do to help?”

Today Chalice Thrift Store is almost 5 years old and has raised \$60,000 for missions.

Someone else’s idea just might be as good or even better than yours,

so put away your pride and ask, “What can I do to help?”

**A = Yes, AND rather than No Because**

One of the finest exercises our Church Board ever did was called “No Because /Yes And.”

We divided into small groups of three or four people.

The leader offered a hypothetical idea for the church,

then told us to come up with a list of why we should not do it,  
beginning each sentence with “no, because.”

He said, “Hypothetical: Our church youth group wants to go on a mission trip.  
To Haiti. Begin.”

Well, we ripped that one to shreds, and as we did so the energy in the room was gloomy.

*No, because it's not safe.*

*No, because insurance won't cover it.*

*No, because none of us speak Creole.*

Okay, said the leader, now respond to their request with “yes, and.”

The energy in the room went through the roof.

Ideas were popping; the excitement was palpable.

*Yes, and we can send our Disciples Men and Disciples Women to help.*

*Yes, and we have blanket insurance coverage for all church activities.*

*Yes, and we can lead a VBS there because we already have materials.*

*Yes, and let's order some additional resources in French and Creole.*

Great teams learn to say “Yes, and...”

then marvel as energy pops and sizzles and God is praised.

One reason we are so significant is because we're a permission giving congregation,

which starts from having a can-do attitude of “yes, and!”



**M = Ministry should be fun.**

All work and no play makes the church a very dull place, indeed.

Emma Goldman said, *“If I can't dance, I don't want to be part of your revolution.”*

Dance

Laugh

Play

Enjoy life and one another.

You catch more bees with honey than vinegar.

So be joyful!

Have fun!

**! = Cosmic Action in the Cosmos**

The work and play and community service we do as great teams is cosmic,

transformational, changing me, changing you, changing the church & the world.

In Calling and Character, William Willmon

imagines the disciples shouting as they return [to Jesus],  
*“It works! We are actually ministers!”[2]*

The disciples return with joy and a good bit of pure astonishment.

*“Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!”*

Jesus said to them,

*“I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning.”* (Luke 10: 17-18)

“In other words, this ministry is much more than helping people,  
more even than healing and preaching.”[3]

Ministry in the name of Jesus is transformational, miraculous, cosmic.

“God is taking back the whole cosmos through our work.”[4]

God is using us, calling us, empowering us to work together to ensure that

there us room in the inn for the Baby Jesus and all the children of the world.

### ***A Threefold Cord***

The love you give and share with your great teams

will open hearts and minds to the unifying power of the threefold cord.

Look, unity is assured in the end...in the beginning in Heaven.

Granted, in the end, after we die and awake in Heaven,

we will all be made whole, complete, blessed in the everlasting presence of God.

The question is:

Will we wait until we are dead to become unified in the eyes of God?

Why not start now, here,

blooming where we are planted and given to one another as blessings?

Rather than moan and weep

and say “all is broken” and “woe are we” and “alas, poor unity, we never knew ye”

why not start from a place of unity, and see where it takes us?

Martin Luther King, Jr. gave us God’s gift of a launching pad for unity in our teamwork

when he wrote from a Birmingham jail:

*“In a real sense all life is inter-related.*

*All [people] are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality,*

*tied in a single garment of destiny.*

*Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.*

*I can never be what I ought to be  
    until you are what you ought to be,  
        and you can never be what you ought to be  
            until I am what I ought to be...*

*This is the inter-related structure of reality.”[5]*

This is the power of God’s threefold cord, made manifest through our teamwork.

*All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!*

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[1] Dwight E. Stevenson, Preaching On the Books of the Old Testament, 1961, (Harper, NY) Page 111.

[2] William H. Willimon, Calling and Character: Virtues of the Ordained Life, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 138.

[3] *Ibid.*, 138.

[4] *Ibid.*, 138.

[5] Martin Luther King Jr., *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*.