

**“There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”**

As a pastor, I can experience some pretty interesting meet and greets. So much so that I have been tempted at a party, cookout, ball game, or concert, to mix it up a little bit. Almost all first time meet and greets include the question “What is it that you do for a living?” “I am a pastor” is the most straightforward answer but sometimes I think it would be fun to say, “I am in sales” or “I help fix roller coaster rides” or “I am a coach.” Technically I wouldn’t be lying about any of them as each have their place in the life and ministry of a pastor. I can only imagine the different stories that could come from those answers. Nevertheless, I usually just say, “I am a pastor.” The next question is usually, “Oh yeah, where?” My reply is “First Presbyterian Church”, and do you know what almost always follows? “That is great, I am Methodist, Baptist, Episcopalian, Lutheran, Catholic, etc.” and sometimes it includes a direct connection with a particular church. I will admit that it is great to hear how many people I meet for the first time and learn of their association with the church. Even so, I have developed a coined phrase I like to offer after they claim their allegiance to a denomination. That phrase is, “That is awesome, I am so grateful to be on the same team with you.”

That is right! In Christ, we are all on the same team. And because we are all on the same team, that being Team Christ, we have all been given the opportunity and privilege and responsibility to wear our team’s uniform (Colossians 3:12-17), participate and get in the action (Matthew 28:18-20), cheer on one another (1 Thessalonians 5), and provide backing and support as boosters (1 Peter 4).

But wait, how do we all end up on the same team? Through baptism, we are all grafted by God and sealed by the Holy Spirit. And what does this team look like exactly? Using the word “TEAM” as an acronym can help us break it down.

“T” is for together/ unity. Warren Wiersbe writes that our togetherness and unity is “not an organizational unity or a denominational unity but a spiritual unity based on faith in Christ and the glory of God within. Harmony within Christ’s church is not based on the externals of the flesh but the internals and eternal of the Spirit in the inner person. We must look beyond the elements of our first birth—race, color, abilities, etc.—and build our fellowship on the essentials of our new birth” (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Transformed*, Victor Books, 1989, p. 80).

Our spiritual connection unites us into one faith and one family: “For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, in all, and living through all” (Ephesians 4:4-6).

The faith that we are all one in Christ has wide-ranging implications. First, it calls for unity and harmony among brothers and sisters in the body of Christ. We are to walk in a manner worthy of our calling, like Jesus, showing humility, gentleness, patience, “bearing with one another in love,” and making “every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:1–3). We can embrace our differences, even celebrate them, as long as “above all” we clothe ourselves “with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony” (Colossians 3:14).

Relational unity in the church is the best witness to the reality of Jesus Christ and God to the world.

“In union there is strength.” Aesop

“Sticks in a bundle are unbreakable.” Kenyan Proverb

“E” is for everyone. Humanly speaking, those who believe and follow Christ are a diverse lot. We come from every nation, tribe, and people group (Revelation 7:9). We speak different languages and reflect unique cultures and social classes. But for all who are members of Christ’s family, race, rank, and gender lose their significance.

In faith, we believe every person comes to Jesus Christ the same way—by grace through faith. “Jew nor Greek” speaks of race, nationality, and ethnicity. “Slave nor free” refers to our rank, social class, or profession. And “male and female” indicates our gender. These distinctions lose their importance in God’s eyes. We are all one in Christ, God’s Son.

“The strength of the team is each individual member. The strength of each member is the team.” Phil Jackson

“A” is for accountability. We may not always like it, but without it, the team falls apart. Paul said, “In this new life, it doesn’t matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized, slave, or free. Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us” (Colossians 3:11). Therefore, how can we hate or discriminate against someone if Christ our Savior lives in them? Every form of condescension, partiality, and intolerance based on race, rank, and gender must be repented of and nailed to the cross because we are all one in Jesus Christ. If someone we know and love isn’t doing their part for Christ’s church, we have a responsibility to hold them accountability, lovingly.

“In teamwork, silence isn’t golden, it’s deadly.” Mark Sanborn... entrepreneur

“Trust is knowing that when a team member does push you, they’re doing it because they care about the team.” Patrick Lencioni

Steve Jobs was once quoted: “My model for business is The Beatles. They were four guys who kept each other’s kind of negative tendencies in check. They balanced each other and the total was greater than the sum of its parts.”

“M” is for mission driven. Christ followers are called to be united in passion, plan, and purpose, just as the Father and Son are united in the same. All of us are all treasure-bearing earthen vessels (2 Corinthians 4:7). All of us are redeemed by the same blood; we are all going to the same heaven; we have a shared aspiration, a shared enemy, and a shared hope and joy.

Marvel’s The Avengers, featuring Iron Man, Captain America, the Hulk, and Thor is not just inspiring for comics fans. There’s a huge lesson about teamwork you might not have paid attention to. The Avengers’ lesson is that ONE is better than one, meaning that one team is better than one person. It is universally different from five people verses one person. A group of five can probably accomplish more than one person alone, but it’s when those five people work together as a team when the magic happens. The hard part is making those five individuals put their egos aside, trust each other, and act as a team. Captain America and Iron Man have a pretty different view of the world, and compromise doesn’t come easy. But they respect and trust one another despite their disagreements, and they can see the value the other brings. The abandonment of ego is what allows you to become part of a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. When you are part of a team, a truly cohesive unit that functions with a single purpose, you can accomplish wonders.

Being one in Christ, together, united, each and every one of us, accountable, and mission driven, can also be seen in the story of Charles Plumb, a US jet fighter pilot in Vietnam. Plumb had completed 75 combat missions when he was shot down. Plumb was ejected and parachuted into enemy hands, where he spent six years in a Vietnamese prison. One day, a man came up to him and said, “You’re Plumb! You flew jet fighters in Vietnam from the aircraft carrier Kitty Hawk. You were shot down!” Plumb was confused and asked how the man knew about that. “I packed your parachute,” the man replied. The man then shook Plumb’s hand and said, “I guess it worked!” Plumb assured him it had and said, “If your chute hadn’t worked, I wouldn’t be here today.” Plumb thought a lot about that man who held the fate of someone he did not even know, in his hands. He kept pondering how many times he might have seen the guy, and not even said anything because he was a fighter pilot, and the stranger was just a sailor.”

“Who’s packing your parachute?” In our life, be it spiritual, personal, or work related, many people have a hand in our parachutes. Being one in Christ, we never know who God may be working through next to fulfill God’s purpose for us all.