

Common Enemies (Teamwork - Chapter 1)

n/a

Ready:

"We must pursue what promotes peace and what builds up one another." -Romans 14:19

"Gettin' good players is easy. Gettin' 'em to play together is the hard part." -Casey Stengel

Set

When a lanky quarterback turned defensive back from the University of Minnesota named Tony Dungy arrived in Pittsburgh for the Steelers training camp, no one would have blamed him for being a little overwhelmed. After all, that team featured 10 future Pro Football Hall of Fame inductees: Terry Bradshaw, Franco Harris, Lynn Swann, John Stallworth, Mike Webster, "Mean" Joe Greene, Jack Lambert, Jack Ham, Mel Blount and Head Coach Chuck Noll provided the nucleus of a team that would claim four Super Bowl titles.

Dungy was a part of the 1978 team that defeated the Dallas Cowboys in Super Bowl XIII. He led the team in interceptions that season and a year earlier became the only player in NFL history (since the AFL-NFL merger) to throw an interception (while filling in for injured quarterbacks Terry Bradshaw and Mike Kruczek) and intercept a pass in the same game.

While most would assume it was the star power that turned the Steelers organization into a dynasty, Dungy says it was the attitude of selfless cooperation that made the team virtually unbeatable. He knew that to be true because he already understood—from previous experience—what true teamwork looked like.

"I was fortunate," Dungy says. "I played a lot of team sports when I was young. I think sports do teach you that. The coaches that I had early on really did stress winning. They stressed skill development and those types of things, but they always taught that you win together. That's one of the great things about Fellowship of Christian Athletes and about athletics, especially the team sports. Everyone working together is imperative if you're going to have a good team."

While many people tend to state the obvious when it comes to teamwork—first emphasizing working together toward a common goal—Dungy believes the true essence of the word must emerge from each team member's intentional acts of selflessness.

"Teamwork doesn't mean you don't have individual goals," he clarifies. "It means you're willing to put your individual goals behind the goals of the team. If you can do that, you'll be a great teammate, and you'll have great teamwork. That's what we're always looking for on our football team—people who can put their individual goals and hopes behind those of the team,

which are winning and being the best team that we can be.”

As the head coach of the Indianapolis Colts, Dungy used those biblically inspired concepts to help his team claim the Super Bowl XLI trophy. He readily cites 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, where the apostle Paul—in an effort to diffuse dissension among the Early Church in Corinth—reminds the members that “there are different gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different ministries, but the same Lord. And there are different activities, but the same God is active in everyone and everything.”

“It’s really all over the Bible,” Dungy says. “Not everyone’s going to have the same gifts or abilities. Paul talks about what it would be like if we were all the same thing. Everything is needed. All parts of the body are needed for the body to function well. Christ talked a lot to His disciples about not wanting the preeminent position but being willing to serve. It’s all for God’s glory, and we’re all working together. There seems to be a constant emphasis on how everyone has a part.”

Dungy’s philosophy is also driven by biblical principles presented in such key Scriptures as Romans 2:11, which tells us that “*there is no favoritism with God.*” Everyone has great value in God’s eyes and has been called to be a part of His kingdom.

“The big thing that I see when I read the Bible is that Jesus always pointed out that everybody was important,” Dungy says. “And that’s what you are trying to sell to your team—that everybody has a role. No matter how small you think it is, even if you’re not necessarily the star, you are important ... And that’s what good teams have. It’s not a matter of having the most talented guys but of having the most cohesion, the most ability to work together.”

But in order to work together, the team must first have a coherent understanding of the overall vision. The question, *What are we playing for?* must be answered; and the subsequent answer must be accepted and wholeheartedly embraced by every single individual.

“If we have a common goal—just like Christ and His team had the common goal of spreading the gospel—and if we work together, we can do great things, and no one can stop us,” Dungy says. “But if we are fragmented and we’ve got different agendas and ideas and we’re not working together, no matter how much talent we have, we are not going to be successful.”

Dungy says there are many issues that have the potential to divide a team, “especially in professional sports.”

“Number one is the paycheck,” he says. “If the football team is your source of income, then you’re going to want to do everything to maximize that. A lot of times that goes back to individual goals—publicity, desiring to be in that star position, ego, pride. A lot of what we associate with worldly ideas really gets in the way of teamwork.

“Another enemy of teamwork is individualism. As a team, the whole has to be greater than the sum of every individual part. The only way to do that is to work together, and by working together you can get more done, and you have fewer distractions and less negatives. It’s the same way whether it’s a church body, a family body or anything that you’re trying to get done. You can go a lot farther pulling together than you can with individual people pulling separately.”

These things collectively chip away at team unity until the proverbial cracks in the armor begin to show. Sometimes the chipping is subtle and is disguised as legitimate individual concerns.

In more than 30 years of experience within the NFL, Dungy can attest to the increasing difficulty of keeping teams together and, more importantly, keeping teams unified over a long period of time.

“We all want to do well,” Dungy says. “We all want to provide for our families; and players often feel that ‘the better I do, the better I can provide for my family.’ That’s true, and you don’t want to take that part away; but you don’t want to look at that so much that we lose the team concept. And you’ve got other things like the media and outside forces that tell players they should be playing more, they should be getting the ball more or ‘You could be helping your team if they used you more.’ We have to worry about that to a great extent.

“We also have agents now that say the same thing,” adds Dungy. “They want what’s best for their client, and that’s their job. But their job isn’t to see the team win; it’s to see their client do well. So we’ve got to embrace that and still focus everybody in the right direction. Those are big challenges. It’s not easy getting everybody on the same page, working together, but the teams that do it successfully are the teams that win.”

Every attack on team unity can inevitably be traced back to the basic element of pride. One of the *American Heritage Dictionary’s* definitions of pride is “arrogant or disdainful conduct or treatment.” Other definitions are “an excessively high opinion of oneself” and “conceit.”

Dungy says that pride rears its ugly head in two specific ways. The first is when teammates fall prey to the lie that their job isn’t as important as the job belonging to the so-called stars on the team. “Sometimes you get a situation in which some players say, ‘Well, I’m not a starter or I’m not a key component, so maybe my job is not important,’” Dungy explains. “You have to make them feel that it really is. You really do need them. Even if their job is small, the player needs to do it exceptionally well in order for the team to be successful.”

But 2 Corinthians 10:12 warns us not to “*classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. But in measuring themselves by themselves and comparing themselves to themselves, they lack understanding.*” This line of thinking keeps many people from reaching their fullest potential. It also leads to mediocrity, which can result in feelings of insecurity and even depression.

The opposite is true for those who fall under the more traditional definition of pride—those who are bent toward arrogant and conceited mindsets. Habakkuk 2:4, however, tells us that one whose “*ego is inflated . . . is without integrity.*”

“Some athletes always feel that everything depends on them, because they are in that star position,” Dungy says. “You need to let them know there’s not as much pressure as they might feel. It’s telling them, ‘You’ve just got to do your job. Yes, it’s a big job, but we have other guys who also have to contribute. You aren’t the only one out there.’”

Sometimes pride can be easily detected, but many times it remains hidden within the heart. Because of that fact, Dungy believes that there is an element of spiritual warfare that takes place as it relates to teamwork.

“Satan can use things that are good, like ‘I want to do my job well,’” he says. “But if I take that to extremes, that can get in the way. There are all kinds of things that can be good in and of themselves, but Satan can direct that away from the team’s goals. That’s what you’re always on the lookout for, those subtle little things that can get in the way of team unity.”

All of these factors also come into play when teamwork is transposed to a much greater level of significance—that is, within the larger Body of Christ. In the same way that teams fail to reach their goals due to distractions brought on by pride and individualism, so too is the Church often diverted from its goal of reaching the world with the gospel message of hope and salvation through a relationship with Jesus.

That’s why it’s so important to live by Romans 14:19, a passage in which the apostle Paul instructs us to *“pursue what promotes peace and what builds up one another.”*

“Just watching children, we understand that our human nature is not bent toward teamwork,” Dungy says. “It has to be nurtured. You have to develop it. You have to constantly work on it. It takes practice. It’s the same thing in the church setting. You have to really emphasize it and be on the lookout for the little fine things between the lines that get in the way.

“It’s human nature to put yourself first,” he continues. “But Romans tells us not to think like the world thinks but to transform your thinking. That’s really what you have to constantly try to do.”

Dungy’s reference to Romans 12:2 may not always be linked to the principle of teamwork, but the truth of the passage is nonetheless an effective tool in establishing unity and warding off its common enemies such as pride, confusion and a lack of vision: *“Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.”*

In order to stay in a Christ-centered frame of mind, Dungy understands that he must maintain a constant attitude of prayer or *“pray continually,”* as we are admonished in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 (NIV).

Dungy takes his cue from Jesus’ prayer found in John 17:21-23, which provides believers a template of how to pray for unity within a team or any group of people: *“May they all be one, as You, Father, are in Me and I am in You. May they also be one in Us, so the world may believe You sent Me. I have given them the glory You have given Me. May they be one as We are one. I am in them and You are in Me. May they be made completely one, so the world may know You have sent Me and have loved them as You have loved Me.”*

“I pray a lot for our team,” Dungy says. “I pray in the evenings for direction. I pray for individual guys. I pray for that common bond and that sense of unity. I pray that we’ll bring the right guys in the mix, the guys that we need both spiritually and athletically. And I really pray a lot that we keep our focus. That’s probably the biggest thing that I pray for, because I feel like if we do that, we’re going to be successful.”

Dungy’s players have undoubtedly felt the power of his prayers. Colts’ linebacker Tyjuan Hagler is certainly no exception and says his coach’s unique leadership style fosters an atmosphere of peace and cooperation.

“I hear a lot about how other teams always argue, and there’s always a lot of stuff going on in the locker room,” Hagler says. “People are unhappy with the coaches, or they’re unhappy with

each other. But everyone on this team reacts to each other as one. Everyone sticks together no matter what the situation. If there's a problem that we need to correct, we talk about it. We don't point fingers like other teams do. We don't blame the coaches. We put it on ourselves to get better as a team."

Hagler's description makes Dungy's work sound easy, but the seasoned head coach knows all too well the difficulties that accompany the task at hand.

"It is the biggest challenge," Dungy says. "Fortunately we've had a good team here for a few years and so you're a close-knit group; and you're in the playoffs, and everybody understands how fun it is when you do win, and that snowballs. But many times, the biggest thing is getting everyone to focus on the ultimate goal of winning and not the little smaller goals that are individually oriented."

And to do that, Dungy clings to the Word of God for instruction, guidance and encouragement. One passage that sums up his belief in teamwork and how it can be achieved is found in Romans 15:5-6, which states, "*Now may the God of endurance and encouragement grant you agreement with one another, according to Christ Jesus, so that you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ with a united mind and voice.*" While winning is certainly important to Dungy, that Scripture ultimately reminds him of the true purpose behind teamwork.

"The things that I talk to my players about, the qualities we're going to need to be a good team on the football field," Dungy says, "those are the same qualities we're going to need if we're going to be an effective team for spreading the gospel."

Go

1. When Tony Dungy talks about playing for the Pittsburgh Steelers (see the "In His Own Words" section), he explains that the team's success had more to do with teamwork than talent. Can you think of some teams that had great talent but failed to succeed?
2. What are some individual goals that could hinder a team's goals? Can you describe a time when you were asked to sacrifice personal goals for the greater good of the team? How did that impact the end result?
3. Read Romans 2:11. Have you ever been on a team in which the coach had favorites? If so, how did that make you and the other players feel? How did it affect the team's ability to work together? How does Romans 2:11 cut against the grain of the world's tendency to pick favorites?
4. What are some enemies of teamwork that you have encountered? How did those negative elements affect team chemistry and the team's overall success? Read Romans 14:19. In what ways can you promote team unity and peace and build your teammates up?
5. Read Romans 15:5-6. Which of God's characteristics does the apostle Paul say can bring forth unity? What are some of God's other attributes that we depend on while striving for unity and peace?

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Bible Reference:

1 Thessalonians 5



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