

Firm Foundations (Teamwork - Chapter 12)

n/a

Ready:

"How good and pleasant it is when brothers can live together! It is like fine oil on the head, running down on the beard, running down Aaron's beard, on his robes. It is like the dew of Hermon falling on the mountains of Zion. For there the LORD has appointed the blessing—life forevermore." -Psalm 133:1-3

"Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success." - Henry Ford

Set

If you hear someone extolling the virtues of teamwork, it's usually within the context of a group of people pressing toward a common goal or successful result. That's certainly something you would expect to hear from legendary UCLA head coach John Wooden, who led the Bruins to an unprecedented 10 NCAA men's basketball championships between 1963 and 1975. But in an age when players and coaches are primarily judged by wins and losses or by individual performance, too often the journey from point A to point B is overlooked, even though there can be significant contentment found in the process alone.

Wooden, who has never been as concerned with winning as most would assume, is reminded of a time when he was working with his book publisher on some marketing items. Two representatives from the company, Amber Ong and Steve Lawson, had brought him 30 basketballs to sign. Ong would hand him a basketball, and Lawson would read the name of the person to whom each autographed item would be sent.

At one point during the assembly line, Wooden paused for a moment and said to Lawson, "This is teamwork." It was an authentic reflection of the true joy that working together with others has always fostered.

"Sometimes we fail to realize how important others are to us," Wooden says. "I think that teamwork really starts out in the home. Children have to help in various ways, and that must be taught when they're young. I think parenting is the most important profession in the world. If children are taught to be considerate of others and think of others and help others in every way they can, they're going to have a much better life, and they're going to be content with themselves."

Wooden's sentiment is eloquently portrayed by David in Psalm 133. Verse 1 says, *"How good and pleasant it is when brothers can live together!"* This psalm, which can be extrapolated to the teamwork model, ends in verse 3 with the promise that within this model of harmony *"the LORD has appointed the blessing—life forevermore."*

Contentment is one of the underpublicized benefits of teamwork. But just like anything of value, a solid foundation must first be laid. For Wooden, there are a handful of principles that absolutely must come into play for effective teamwork to be achieved. First on the list is friendship, which sadly is not as prominent within the college and, especially, professional ranks these days. Yet according to Wooden, the best teams have this foundation at their core.

"Friendship is doing for others while they are doing for you," he says. "It's called ministry when all of the doing goes in one direction. Friendship goes both ways. Friendship is like a good marriage—it's based on mutual concern. Friends help each other; they don't use each other. If we are going to successfully work with others, it is vital to know the role of friendship. Friendship comes from mutual esteem and devotion."

Friendship breeds the next key element of teamwork—loyalty. Wooden describes loyalty as a "foundational quality that gets us through hard times." It speaks to our integrity and must be in place for any team to succeed. "In basketball, we want to know if we can count on our teammates," Wooden says. "When we know that they will be there to support us in tight spots, we are more likely to go the extra mile when they too need help. That combination makes each of us better. Loyalty is the force that forges individuals into a team. It's the component that moves teams toward great achievements. That's why, as a coach, I always stressed it."

While loyalty is an emotional characteristic of teamwork, reliability puts that dependable attitude into action. It's more than just a promise to stick by someone's side. It's the proving ground by which others know they can depend on us.

"They know that we will make the effort to do our best, whatever the situation might be," Wooden explains. "They know we won't run, cower or become paralyzed by fear. They have learned to count on our consistency and trustworthiness. We'll still be there making the effort to do our best long after the weaker ones have faded. People can bet the farm on us and still be able to sleep at night. Reliability earns the respect of those around us."

But while many might stop there, Wooden digs even deeper and peels back another layer to reveal the important component identified as "consideration." The Early Church—as portrayed in the book of Acts—grew considerably thanks to this dying principle.

For instance, in Romans 12:10, we are told to *"show family affection to one another with brotherly love. Outdo one another in showing honor."* This concept is further promoted in Hebrews 10:24, a passage that reminds us to *"be concerned about one another in order to promote love and good works."*

"In a way, I think that plain courtesy is teamwork to me," Wooden says. "When our team went on trips, I was insistent with my players that they treat waiters, hostesses and janitors just as if they were the presidents of a university. I think consideration for others can make someone a better team player, and I think it makes them better at everything."

When all of these foundational elements conjoin, a strong bond is formed, and an irrepressible team spirit is forged. Wooden refers to this as "the ultimate expression of interdependence." It

also embodies the kind of unity described in 1 Corinthians 12:26: *“So if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.”*

“Just as team spirit embraces an element of enthusiasm, it also houses a component of cooperation,” he says. “But where cooperation makes others better, team spirit makes the group better. Team spirit is consideration, respect and dignity for others. I believe that if heads of state throughout this troubled world of ours truly had more consideration for others, our problems would not be as severe. I’m not saying we wouldn’t be without problems. Trouble will always exist. But if we display true consideration for others, most of our problems will be manageable.”

When teaching these principles, Wooden often relied on the time-honored coaching tradition of correction—even if it meant keeping a star player out of the game. He strongly believed—and still believes—in the wisdom found in Proverbs 3:11-12: *“Do not despise the LORD’s instruction, my son, and do not loathe His discipline; for the LORD disciplines the one He loves, just as a father, the son he delights in.”*

“I found the bench to be the greatest ally I had to make individuals comply with what was best for the team,” Wooden says. “As a result, we lost a few games but developed character in the lives of many young men. We won more championships than any other team ever has, but more important, we developed champions on and off the court.”

And that brings us back to contentment, that oft-forgotten benefit of teamwork. While so many people struggle to find meaning in worldly measures of success, Wooden knows how a godly view can last a lifetime and then some.

“I don’t believe there’s any greater joy than finding out that something you have said or done has been meaningful to another, particularly when it was done without any thought of something in return,” Wooden says. “If I’m remembered as someone who was considerate of all others, that would make me very happy.”

Go

1. What are some seemingly nondescript ways that teamwork has found its way into your life? How did working with others on simple tasks make you feel after the fact?
2. Coach Wooden says that we sometimes “fail to realize how important others are to us.” Who are some important people in your life who you sometimes take for granted? What are some ways that you can show appreciation for them?
3. What is your definition of loyalty? Why do you think loyalty is so important to teamwork? What are some examples of loyalty that you have experienced? What about disloyalty? What differing effects did those two actions have on the team dynamic?
4. Read Romans 12:10. How do you think consideration can improve a team’s chemistry? In what ways would a lack of consideration do harm to a team’s chemistry? What are some ways that you show consideration to others on your team or in your group?
5. Read 1 Corinthians 12:26. What are some ways you can celebrate the success of a teammate or friend? What are some ways that you can comfort them in times of sorrow and grief?

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Bible Reference:

Hebrews 10



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