

Teamwork

by Dick Gruber

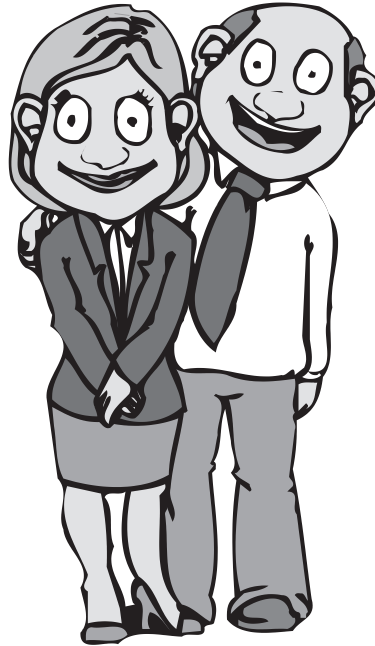
For 25 years, Darlene and I have served as a team both in marriage and in ministry. The writer of Ecclesiastes writes, "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken" (Ecclesiastes 4:9–12).

Two are better than one. When two people join together to accomplish God's work, great things can happen. In the early days of our ministry, Darlene and I often collided rather than cooperated. Sad to say, this was mostly my fault. Every team must have a leader, and I was slow in discovering the dynamics of leadership.

It took time to understand each other's skills, approach, and expectations. As the lead member of the team, I eventually learned to soften authority with compassion, to administrate rather than agitate, and to listen rather than lecture. Basically, I learned to *serve* my teammate.

Give and Give

The world teaches that successful teamwork requires *give* and *take*. I believe that God's plan for a successful team requires *give* and *give*. The first and most important directive for the ministry team is to "serve one another in love." So many difficulties in Sunday School and



children's church teams would be vanquished if the members would choose to serve.

Over the years I have experienced and observed what I call *teamwork deficiencies*. When a team is in conflict, I can usually trace the problem back to one or

more team members becoming upset because his or her "rights" were violated. This deficiency causes the team member to enter the *take* mode and trouble begins. The rights of individuals are to be placed on the table in favor of the benefits cooperation breeds.

Communication is vitally important in team teaching or preaching. Team members must discuss, record, and restate expectations. If an objective or responsibility is not clearly defined, misunderstanding can occur. When misunderstanding is allowed to go unresolved, major conflict results. Major conflict destroys team effectiveness.

We once preached a boys and girls camp out east. Camp seemed to be running well, but the spiritual results I expected were nonexistent. Three days into the camp, I discovered there was a deficiency in the counseling staff. Sides had been chosen and lines drawn. These good Christian people were angry at each other.

I opened the service that evening by dismissing all adults. I encouraged them to leave the room so that I could have church with the children. They were not to come back until they had settled their differences.

We had a wonderful service that night. Almost 40 minutes into our worship time, the adults came back in groups of two and three. All had been crying. God brought His healing to camp and attitudes changed from that moment on.

Work It Out

If you are in the midst of difficulties with a team member, sit down with him or her and talk it out. Take it to the Lord in prayer. Do not allow yourself the luxury of telling others in the church about your problem. If a brother is overtaken with a fault, you who are spiritual go to him and assist him in the healing process. Give up your right to hang on to bitterness and apologize.

Teams need a unified purpose. Sit down with your team and decide why it is that you all are serving in this area of ministry. Be challenged by God with new goals for your class or church group every year, quarter, month, and week. God wants to grow the children and those who work with them. A well-defined purpose will spread through all aspects of your teaching.

In the day and age of our ministries, team teaching is a necessity. It is no longer considered safe for the child and teacher to be one-on-one in a closed environment. Churches around our nation are implementing the three-person rule. The three-person rule states that no child will be ministered to in

a one-on-one setting. There will always be three or more people in the classroom or children's church. With this in place, the church cannot be found negligent in protecting the child from a leader or teacher with impure motives. By the same token, a teacher cannot be accused wrongly if there are others in the room.

Team teaching is an opportunity to serve side by side with another believer. Working together for the gospel has been a joy for Darlene and me over the past years. One teaches while the other prays. One handles discipline while the other continues to teach. One assists the special needs individual while the other concentrates on the entire group.

Questions for Further Study—

1. In what ways can you *serve* your teammate?

2. How can you improve communication among your team workers?