

Sermon – Team Leadership
Sunday June 12, 2022

Now that it's getting warmer, how many of you are enjoying being outside?

One thing I love doing outside with my girls is playing catch. I've been doing that with my older daughter for a few years now. But this year, I taught my younger daughter how to throw and catch with a glove. And man, does she have a great arm!

Both my girls love sports. They both love to run, swim and ride their bikes. One loves volleyball and ultimate frisbee. The other loves badminton and basketball.

There are so many different sports. But all sports fall into two categories - individual or team.

Both promote athletic development and sportsmanship.

- But individual sports emphasize mental toughness and personal discipline. That's because you need them when you're competing on your own.
- Team sports emphasize cooperation and teamwork. Because no matter how talented you are, you need to work as a team if you want to win.

Let's play a game now, shall we? I'll name a sport and you'll say if it's an Individual Sport or a Team Sport. Just yell out your response. (If you're online you can type Individual or Team into the chat.)

Are you ready?

Basketball, running, volleyball, swimming, baseball, golf, martial arts.

Last Sunday, Pastor Steve preached about leadership development.

He reminded us that leadership development is vital because the church needs more leaders not only as it grows but also to enable it to keep growing.

He also gave this definition of leadership:

Partnering with God and serving others towards the fulfillment of a shared mission.

Question for you: Based on this definition, do you think leadership is an individual sport or a team sport?

In our Western culture, many see leadership as an individual sport. We think of a leader as someone who:

- Has a great idea.
- Uses their personality to attract followers.
- Makes tough decisions.
- Relies on their abilities to make things happen.

These leaders are effective at getting things done. They make decisions faster, push their agenda quickly and attract large followings with their charisma.

There's a place for this type of leadership in many organizations. But how about in the church?

Because the church isn't like any other organization is it? So what is the church?

The church is the people of God who advance God's mission and demonstrate the character of God through their lives and service.

That's our mission. That's why the way we do leadership is extremely important. Why? Because it makes a profound statement about who we are.

At Cornerstone, we believe the leadership that best reflects our calling is Team Leadership.

Today we're concluding our series called *Distinct*. We've been looking at seven distinctives that make up our unique character and culture as a local church.

Today, we're going to talk about the final distinctive Team Leadership. What I want to do today is talk about:

- 1) Why we do Team Leadership.
- 2) What the benefits of team leadership are.
- 3) What team leadership means for you and me.

First, **Why do we do Team Leadership?**

In some churches, a single leader oversees the entire church. They might be called Lead Pastor or Executive Pastor. But whatever the title, they function like a CEO – the highest ranking leader who represents the church and makes all the major decisions.

At Cornerstone, instead of a single CEO, we have an Executive Team made up of three people.

As a team, they develop the strategic plans, set ministry objectives and work with our other leadership teams like our Ministry Staff Team and our Executive Church Board.

But why do we do team leadership instead of having one executive leader?

Let's go back to our leadership definition. We said that leadership is **Partnering with God and serving others towards the fulfillment of a shared mission.**

The last part of this definition points to team leadership because leadership is about fulfilling a shared mission. In other words, Biblical leadership isn't a solo enterprise. It's rooted in God calling us to work together to advance his mission. And this includes the way we lead.

The Bible gives many reasons for this. I'd like to share three biblical reasons for team leadership.

First, **The New Testament always presents church leadership as a team effort.**

Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. (Acts 13:1-3)

What's going on here? Do we have an executive making all the decisions by themselves? No. We have a team discerning God's will together.

And the church of Antioch isn't the exception, it's the norm. Team leadership is the pattern throughout the entire New Testament.

In fact, whenever Paul establishes a church, what does he do?

He chooses the most spiritual and gifted leader to be the CEO right? Wrong. In every situation, he chooses a team of gifted leaders to oversee the church.

Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord... (Acts 14:23)

The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. (Titus 1:5)

One Bible scholar says, **"Without exception, every time the New Testament mentions the government of a particular church, the leadership structure is a plurality of elders."** (Gregg Allison)

The second reason for team leadership is that **Individual leaders are inadequate to lead God's people on their own.**

The Bible is brutally honest about our fallen nature. That's because on our own, we are too weak and sinful to do God's will in our own lives, let alone lead other people.

In the early church, no Christian would have even dared to consider being a CEO of their church. Why? Because they knew their own inadequacies and they believed that Jesus is the ultimate Leader of his church.

In the book of 1 Peter, Peter urges the leaders, Be shepherds of God's flock. In other words, lead God's people well. But in his next breath, he reminds them that Jesus, not any individual leader is the Chief Shepherd of his flock (1 Peter 5:7). Because:

- Only Jesus can defeat evil.
- Only Jesus can provide for our needs.
- Only Jesus can say, I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail!

Pastor Andrew can't do that. Pastor Steve can't do that.

The early church leaders didn't want even the appearance of making that claim. They didn't want to diminish the presence and sufficiency of Jesus. They wanted to be a Christ-centred, Christ-dependent church – just as we want to be. And team leadership reminds us that we're the under-shepherds of his church but Jesus is the Chief Shepherd.

The third reason for team leadership is that **Team leadership best reflects God's nature.**

Question: Does God exist as an individual self-sufficient person?

No. According to the Bible, God exists in community – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Each member of the Trinity coexists as individual persons each with distinct roles but part of a unified whole.

We see this in creation.

- God the Father is involved in creation. Genesis 1:1 says, *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*
- But the Spirit is also involved. Genesis 1:2 says *The Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.*
- And the Son is involved as well. John 1:3 says, *Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made...*

Now I know this is confusing. We don't fully understand it. But here's what we know. God exists as a community of three persons. And as a team of three leaders if you will – he works together in his work of creation and salvation.

But why is this significant? It's significant because we are made in God's image. We're made to reflect God's character. And to the extent that we do this, we're living the way things were designed. This means working in community to accomplish God's purposes.

We believe that team leadership is most consistent with the New Testament pattern and best reflects God's nature and how we're called to lead.

That's why we do team leadership.

And there are many benefits to doing leadership this way. What are some of these benefits?

First, as a team, **We're stronger together.**

The truth is, no individual has all the gifts needed to build God's church. God does provide us with all the gifts we need, but he doesn't give them all to one person. He distributes them among his people.

Paul puts it like this:

...the body is not made up of one part but of many... God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!"... But God has put the body together... so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. (1 Cor 12:14, 18, 19, 21, 24-25)

I love our Ministry Staff Team! Everyone is so gifted and such a strong leader. But we express our gifts and leadership differently.

- One person leads us by reminding us that God's mission drives everything we do.
- Another person leads us by their creativity and their big, fun "outside the box" thinking.
- One person leads us by pointing out risks we might have overlooked.
- Another person leads us by their calming presence and insightful perspectives.
- One person leads us by reminding us of the people in the community we're called to serve.
- Another person leads us by pointing us back to Jesus in prayer and reminding us to walk closely with Jesus.

If any one of these leaders had to be the CEO of Cornerstone – they would certainly bring tremendous strengths. But every one of us also has significant blind spots and deficiencies – at least I know I do.

Here's the thing. *Individually*, we have many strengths, but we also have many weaknesses. But *as a team*, we can cover up our weaknesses and enhance our strengths.

One person who worked with Billy Graham described his leadership style like this.

"I learned from Graham to build your ministry on a team. He knew this and he built a core team that was with him fifty years. Everybody on the team brought strengths to the table. When you build an effective team, you hire people who compensate for your weaknesses and who mobilize or reinforce your strengths, because nobody can be good at everything."

But as a team, we're stronger together.

As a team, **We're wiser together.**

Have you ever noticed that the solutions to most leadership challenges aren't explicitly laid out in the Bible? That's because leadership challenges always involve nuance and complexity. That's why we need the collective wisdom of a team.

Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed. (Proverbs 15:22)

A single leader is limited to their own wisdom.

- But a team has more combined experience giving them more insights and perspective.
- A team can test, challenge and refine ideas to make them better.
- A team has more wisdom and can make better decisions.

Many years ago before Cornerstone Centre was built, the church board met to discuss what the next era of ministry would look like.

Would we continue meeting in rented spaces? Would we build a traditional church building? Would we become a house church?

Each option had its pros and cons. There was potentially millions of dollars at stake.

So how did we discern our direction?

The church board together took a season to research, learn, pray, listen and discuss God's plan and direction for the church. What came out of that time, was a clear sense that God was leading us to do something we had never imagined doing; something that had never been done in Canada.

And that is - building a community centre facility out of which we would operate as a church and also give as a gift to our community.

That vision was to build a space:

- Where people from the community would engage in fun and wholesome activities.
- Where we would rub shoulders with our neighbours and develop relationships with them.
- Where people would experience God's love and take next steps in their spiritual journey.

This God-sized vision never could have become reality had it not been for the collective wisdom and corporate discernment of our team.

Because as a team, we're wiser together.

Finally, as a team, **We keep each other accountable.**

How many of you have heard this saying? Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

This is a quote from the English historian Lord Acton. It means that the more power you have, the more you'll be tempted to think of your own interests and use your power to help yourself.

Sadly, we've seen this throughout history. And Christians more than anyone else, should know how true this is.

The Apostle Paul says, **There is no one righteous, not even one... (Romans 3:10)**

In other words, we're all selfish, self-centred and self-serving.

The prophet Jeremiah says, **The heart is deceptive above all things... (Jeremiah 17:9)**

In other words, not only are we selfish, self-centred and self-serving – but we also don't even know it! We're blind to our flaws, pride and extreme views.

This should be a stark warning to churches. Every Christian leader, no matter how gifted, charismatic and even godly, if given too much power and left unchecked, has the potential to destroy their ministry.

Don't believe me? In the past few year years, there have been too many accounts of this happening with pastors and Christian leaders. One popular podcast even investigated a certain gifted and charismatic megachurch pastor who sought to gain more power in his church. He created a culture of public shaming and abuse which eventually led to the church's implosion. Thousands of people are still reeling from this.

Team leadership provides a restraint.

Although there's no perfect system, leaders working in teams provide a safeguard against any single person being tempted to abuse their authority, even if they have the best of intentions.

Because there's no individual at the top of a pyramid, only leaders who work in teams. So there's a system of checks and balances: Team members keep each other accountable, provide care and support to each other and speak the truth in love.

Just think: Peter needed Paul to confront his racism and hypocrisy. King David needed Nathan to confront his adultery and his lies. How much more do we need accountability for our own flaws and weaknesses?

As Pastor Andrew always reminds us, Cornerstone isn't about any one individual. It's about the mission of the church. Team leadership keeps us accountable and focused on this mission and not on ourselves.

When we lead in teams, we're stronger together, we're wiser together and we keep each other accountable. This doesn't mean team leadership is perfect.

Because compared to a CEO model, team leadership can feel slow and inefficient. There's also more potential for tension and misunderstanding.

So what does this mean for us?

It means that God doesn't require the church to be fast and efficient. He requires us to be humble.

Paul says to the Philippians.

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus... (Philippians 2:3-5)

I'd like to suggest two ways you can apply this on your own and with those you lead or serve with.

First, **Practice Humility.**

How do you do that?

- **Recognize that everyone is important but no one is more important than the mission.**
- **Place the needs of others above your own.**
- **Know that you're not here to be served but to serve.**
- **Celebrate the accomplishments of others.**
- **Assume the good intention of others and give people the benefit of the doubt.**
- **Refuse to gossip about leaders and team members or criticize them behind their back.**
- **Own up to your own mistakes and take responsibility for your actions.**
- **Deal with conflict in healthy and biblical ways.**
- **Acknowledge that ministry is complex and you don't have the full picture.**

Which one of these do you need to work on?

This July, we have a great opportunity to help you grow in this. We're running an Emotionally Healthy Relationships Course. If you're interested, you can sign-up by checking out our webpage or scanning the QR code. <https://cornerstonechurch.ca/relationships/>

How many of you know that God's purpose isn't to restore the world? It's to create a people shaped by the love of Jesus through whom he will restore the world.

Teams aren't just how God wants us to do leadership. Teams are how he wants to grow us in our love and humility.

Practicing humility grows your leadership, strengthens your team and forms you more in the love of Jesus.

The second application is to: **Pray for church unity.**

Author Pete Scazzero says, "The overall health of any church or ministry depends primarily on the emotional and spiritual health of its leadership."

As go the leaders, so goes the church.

By God's grace, Cornerstone has always enjoyed a high degree of unity throughout its history. We're thankful for this and we don't take it for granted.

Even during this pandemic, Cornerstone has been growing in its numbers and its impact.

- But we also know that there's a lot of anxiety, division and anger in our world.
- We know there's a lot of uncertainty right now and it's never been harder to lead.
- We know that so many people including our leaders are tired and worn out.

Can you think of anyone who'd want to take advantage of this? Can you think of anyone who might attack us by sowing seeds of division and distrust?

The church needs your prayers in this spiritual battle. We want to be a healthy church that continues to reach more people for Jesus so we ask that you would cover us in prayer and that you would be praying for the unity of this church. Are there some people who'd be willing to do that?

As the worship team comes back, let's do that now and close our time in prayer.

Lord Jesus,

You promised that you would build your church and the gates of hell would not prevail!

We thank you for the work you're doing in and through this church and its ministries.

We thank you for all our leaders in the past. For their faithfulness service in leading us to where we are now.

We pray for our leaders in the future. Would you raise up a new generation of young people who love you and want to be part of seeing your gospel transform families, communities and the world.

We pray for our leaders now who are leading in such difficult times. We pray for rest, encouragement, wisdom and a deep sense of your abiding love and your all-sufficient grace.

We pray for the unity of your church. We thank you for the unity we've enjoyed and ask that you would continue to preserve it. Where there may be tensions, we pray for humility. We pray for open hearts, clear communication, a humble desire to listen and understand and even for forgiveness and reconciliation where needed.

We join Jesus in his prayer for the church that we may be one, just as you and the Father are one so that the world may believe that you sent us.

In Jesus name,

Amen