

August 2011

Dear Brethren:

Very warm greetings from all of us here in Mindanao, Philippines, who are privileged to be called during this time.

The Bible clearly warns that as we approach the end of this age people will be lovers of *themselves*: "... blasphemers, disobedient to parents . . . unloving, unforgiving, slanderers . . . traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" (2 Timothy 3:1–4, *New King James Version*). These distractive attitudes, and the results they will bring, are the very reason why God is going to send Jesus Christ to intervene in the affairs of mankind. God is going to save us from destroying ourselves. Most of us find it very normal to focus on ourselves, or our three closest friends: me, myself and I.

One of the greatest challenges we face in this life is learning to work together with other people. This is especially difficult today because we are continually bombarded by messages that urge us to do just the opposite. Be your own person! Do your own thing! Look out for number one! Get yours while the getting is good! Nice people finish last!

These ideas are so prevalent, and heard so often, that it is easy to accept this kind of thinking as normal and right. Yet these self-oriented attitudes are tearing away at the very fabric of our society. The building blocks of civilization—marriage, family, churches and communities—are crumbling as everyone pulls in different directions instead of working as a team. To function as team members, we have to learn to think bigger about how to relate to others, work with others and avoid offending others. Teamwork cannot be learned while alone in a corner. Teamwork requires functioning together with others under a variety of conditions. Learning to operate as a team is an essential part of our calling as Christians. But just what is a team? Why do teams exist? What qualities enable us to become effective team members? And why is this subject so important?

Dictionaries define a team as two or more animals working together to pull a load. A team is also defined as a group of individuals working together to achieve a goal. Another definition refers to a team as a group of people cooperating together to accomplish a mission that is unattainable by one person alone. Teams exist for a purpose. Marriages, families, businesses, athletic organizations and even church congregations (in the true biblical sense), exist to achieve goals—not just to function as friendly social clubs. A group of people socializing together is a party, not a team! In order for these social units to function smoothly, each member must learn and practice teamwork skills. Teamwork involves joint action and coordinated effort by every member of the team. Each person must be willing to subordinate individual interests and desires for the unity, efficiency and effectiveness of the group in order

to achieve the desired team goal! Each person must learn to appreciate, love, forgive and be patient with other members of the team. These are not easy things to do, but they can be learned! This requires knowledge and practice. It also involves understanding and developing the qualities that make team members really effective.

The first requirement of a successful team is that each member must share the same sense of mission; each must focus on the same goal. Every member of an athletic team must want to win. If several key members do not care, they will sabotage the efforts of other team members. Husbands and wives must share a commitment to making a marriage work, and develop the skills to make it succeed. Members of a family—father, mother, children, grandparents and other relatives—must develop a commitment to the family to enable it to thrive. Members of a business must focus their efforts to make it profitable. Inefficient efforts made in different directions will lead to failure.

The Apostle Paul understood this principle when he admonished the Corinthian church to be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment (1 Corinthians 1:10). He heard that the church was fragmenting as people chose to follow different teachers. Each was doing what he or she individually thought to be right, but this was destroying the church. They were not working together as a team. Paul was well aware of the scriptural admonitions that two cannot walk together unless they are agreed (Amos 3:3), and every city or house divided against itself will not stand (Matthew 12:25), which the Corinthians had apparently forgotten.

God Sets a Goal for Us

Our goal as Christians is to develop the mind of Jesus Christ (Philippians 2:5). Jesus said: "I and My father are one" (John 10:30). Jesus and His Father are focused on the same goal—the salvation of mankind. They are working together to achieve that goal. As Christians, we must develop the same focus, the same perspective and the same goals as Jesus Christ and God the Father (John 17:11). That perspective is found in the Word of God. As we study, meditate upon and strive to live by every word of God, we will develop the same perspective (become at one) with God and Jesus Christ—we will join the team (Hebrews 2:10–11).

The second requirement of a successful team is that all members must work together to achieve the same goal. In the book of Acts we read that members of the early church "sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need" (Acts 2:45). This was a temporary situation that accompanied the momentous events that occurred on Pentecost when the New Testament church began. Thousands were being called, and the brethren pulled together in this exciting work. Acts 4:29–31 records dramatic results when the church prayed together about the same goal. However, we also read that Paul and Barnabas, although focused on the same goal, had difficulty working together because they could not agree on methods (Acts 15:36–40). To work smoothly together as a team, we must learn to be patient, understanding, forgiving and pleasant with others. These are the attributes of real Christians (Galatians 5:22–23).

A third requirement is that each team member must be willing to subordinate personal opinions and agendas for the good of the team. This prevents conflicts and divisions that hinder a team from achieving its goal. Paul told the Corinthians that promoting different opinions and agendas is divisive and disruptive, which is contrary to God's desire (1 Corinthians 1:11–13). Paul further explained that there always will be divisive individuals who do not see the big picture and do not understand what teamwork is all about (1 Corinthians 11:18–19). The Bible reveals that contentions and arguments are the result of pride (Proverbs 13:10). This is why we need to ask ourselves—wife, mother, child or church member—are we really thinking of the team when we promote our own opinions and agendas, or are we simply motivated by pride? Jesus put the goal of the team first when He said to His Father, "Not as I will, but as You will" (Matthew 26:39).

A fourth requirement for an effective team is that all members need to see and understand the importance of their individual roles to the overall mission. When we each see how our own efforts contribute to the overall goal, we are inclined to work for the success of the team. Paul draws a parallel between the members of a church and the parts of the human body (1 Corinthians 12). He explains that when each part makes its own unique and essential contribution, the body thrives. When we neglect or reject the role we have been given—wishing to have a different role—we hurt the team.

The Bible outlines God-given roles for members of marriages, families, churches and other social units. Husbands are to love and provide for their wives, and wives are to love and submit to their husbands (Ephesians 5:22–23). Children are to honor their parents, and parents are not to provoke their children (Ephesians 6:1–4). Employees are to work hard and be respectful of employers, and employers are to be considerate of employees. Church members are to respect their leaders, while leaders must be respectable and show loving concern for their flock (1 Thessalonians 5:12–13; Philippians 2:19–22). We get into trouble—as many do today—when we begin to alter and reject these fundamental roles. The basic building block of society works best when all members understand the importance of their unique roles and strive to fulfill them.

The fifth requirement is that each team member must strive to do the best job possible! The Bible principle is: "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might" (Ecclesiastes 9:10). We are all admonished in Scripture to "be wise as serpents" (Matthew 10:16). This means working smarter, not just harder. We must seek wise counsel—but not just from those who happen to agree with us (Proverbs 11:14). Teams succeed when everyone goes above and beyond—when all members strive to function together at an optimal level!

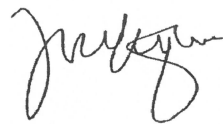
The sixth requirement for teamwork is motivation! One of the sharpest rebukes in Scripture is leveled at the Laodicean church. Its members are rejected by God Himself because they become "lukewarm" in their efforts to do the work of God. Compare Revelation 3:7–10 to Revelation 3:16.

Jesus motivated His disciples by outlining clearly what the future held for them if they developed as mature Christians (Matthew 19:28). Because they caught the vision (Acts 1:8), their motivation was contagious and the church grew (Acts 2:47). Jesus warned that we must be careful not to let "the cares of this world" sidetrack and dampen our motivation for living God's way (Matthew 13:18–23). God's people together—as families and members of the church—are to be inspiring, motivated lights to the world.

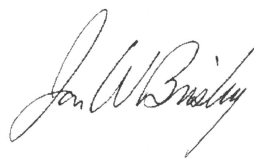
The seventh and final requirement for a successful team is that individual members cannot give up when the going gets rough; they must continue to play hard until the game is over. They must be determined and persistent in their pursuit of the team goal. Jesus told His disciples, "He who endures to the end shall be saved" (Matthew 24:13). Again, He said: "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62). Rewards do not go to those who give up and quit, but to those who finish the race (1 Corinthians 9:24–27). We must develop discipline and determination to hang on through difficult times. In all aspects of life—marriage, child-rearing, finding employment, and even in religious belief—we cannot afford to give up in the face of trials. We must persevere and endure in our effort to work through problems as we look to God to show us the way (1 Corinthians 10:13). But it is not just for us alone. As Christians and potential members of God's family, we must also learn to be encouraging and supportive to other members of the team (Romans 12:10–13). We do this by praying for, calling, writing to, and expressing concern for others. This is how God's family is to operate.

One of the biggest challenges we face in life is learning to work with other people. To work smoothly with others as a team, we must develop the appropriate skills. This will come with knowledge, with practice and with the help of God's Spirit. Learning to function as a team—in marriage, family or church congregation—is an essential aspect of our calling as Christians. Why not set a goal of becoming a better team player? Examine yourself and determine on what qualities you need to work. You will be developing the very skills that Jesus Christ will require of those who reign with Him when He sets up the Government of God on this earth. God wants each of us to be on His team! This is why learning to function as part of a team is so important.

Your brother in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Mario Roque".

Mario Roque

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Jon W. Brisby".

Jon W. Brisby