

The Game Plan

Teamwork

Week 2

by Mandy Barkhaus

We're in our second week of this new sermon series about the big win, and it's sports-themed. So, thinking about some sports movies, sports movies are the best at displaying the power of teamwork. There are Remember the Titans, Major League, and Bad News Bears. I'm not a sports movie person, so I had to ask my husband, Tom, what? Sports movies. But there is one that I did see, and one of my favorite movies is The Longest Yard, which was originally released in 1974. I didn't see that one, but then they remade it with star Adam Sandler, and I saw that one, and it was good.

Adam Sandler's character name is Paul Crewe, and he is a former professional football player. He gets in trouble and ends up in prison because the warden wants to form a football team.

They send him to a Texas prison, and he doesn't want to do this, but he ends up forming a football team of inmates. And because the guards have this big guard versus guard game coming up, and they're going to practice with this team of inmates. Now, teamwork is a big part of the movie, and it's something that we can all relate to because it's not just in sports but also in life.

We do teamwork in all areas of our lives at school and work, at home, and at church. Now, in the movie, there is this diverse group of characters, and their lives are all filled with unique perspectives. They each possess different strengths and weaknesses and backgrounds and perspectives. And so the inmates faced some really big challenges both on the field and off of the field.

And it kind of mirrors the challenges that we face in life, in our daily lives. Sometimes. Sometimes, there's just simply a communication breakdown, and that makes it a struggle for a team to work. Sometimes, there are conflicting personalities, and other times, the journey toward this common goal. This common objective is not always a smooth one. Sometimes, the end goal.

We don't even agree on what the end goal should be, right? That's a problem. Sometimes, we don't agree on how fast we should get there or what routes to take. But even in the

movie, it shows that despite all of these challenges and difficulties, working head-on to face these things is when the team finds success.

Now, this movie reminds us that every individual plays a crucial role, and it's when we come together and use our unique strengths and support one another we can overcome any difficulty like we can overcome any adversity when we play as a team. Well, the Apostle Paul, when he wrote his letters to the Corinthians, knew that they needed a little pep talk when it came to teamwork.

And so he wrote these letters, and he started reminding them that they are unique, yet he called them to be unified. So we're going to be in First Corinthians chapter 12, and starting at verse 12, Christ is just like the human body. A body is a unit and has many parts, and all the parts of the body are one body; even though there are many, we are all baptized by one Spirit into one body, whether Jew or Greek or slave or free.

And we were all given one Spirit to drink. Certainly, the body isn't one but many parts. If the foot says, Well, I'm not part of the body because I'm not a hand, does that mean it's not part of the body? If the ear says, Well, I'm not part of the body because I'm not an eye, does that mean it's not part of the body?

If the whole body were an eye, what would happen to the hearing? And if the whole body were an ear, what would happen to the sense of smell? But as it is, God has placed each one of the parts in the body just like he wanted. Now, here in this section of Scripture, Paul, the Apostle Paul is talking about spiritual gifts.

Everyone has this unique gift given by God. And we're all different, yet all made in the image of God for a beautiful purpose. And he's also making a distinction not just with spiritual gifts. Yes, he's saying we all have different spiritual gifts, but he also says some of us are slaves, some of us are free, some of us are Jews, and some of us are Gentiles.

Now think about this because, for a really long time, the Jews tried to remain kind of separate from the rest of the world. They were they were focusing on God. They had certain rituals and things that they did. So, for many of the Jews, inviting these Gentiles into the community was probably quite a bit challenging thing to do.

But Paul says like, Hey, we're all baptized by the same Spirit. And so we are one, we are one body, we are one team. Now, in the movie *The Longest Yard*, Paul Crewe brings together what seems to be kind of a questionable selection of inmates, but yet he forms this cohesive football team, and it shows the power of collaboration.

It's a testament to the idea that despite our differences, we can do remarkable things when we are unified by a common goal. The goal of the church is to follow Jesus and to share the

good news of Jesus with others, reflecting Jesus in the world. Now, I love seeing this come to life in the church and the steering team, which is the team that is elected leaders, that kind of steer horizons in what direction?

They came up with a goal for us, and one of the goals for us in 2024 is to set our vision and strategies. We began this work this week. On Tuesday, we had our staff, and we had our elected leaders, and our newly formed vision team all gathered together. In this meeting, people's gifts and talents were exposed, and it was a beautiful thing.

I think it's important to note, too, that maybe you just come on Sunday mornings, and you get to see the amazing staff and volunteers here on stage on Sunday morning. But I want to let you know that we have amazing leaders all over this church, not just on Sunday morning but beyond worship, leaders that make this church what it is.

So, back to Paul. Paul continues to explain about this team, this body, and some guidelines on how this body should work. So starting again at verse 20, but as it is, there are many parts but one body. So then I can't say to the hand I don't need you, or in turn the head can't say to the feet, I don't need you.

Instead, the parts of the body that people think are the weakest are the most necessary. The parts of the body that we think are less honorable are the ones we honor the most. The private parts of our body that aren't presentable are the ones that are given the most dignity. The parts of our body that are presentable don't need this, but God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the part with less honor so that there won't be any division in the body.

And so the parts might have mutual concern for each other. Now, it's pretty likely that you've heard this passage before or the many other passages in the body that refer to the church, the many passages in the Bible that refer to the church as the body. We say that often, this is the body of Christ. I use that a lot in my sermons. When I am speaking, I think it's really important because it's easy to understand. We all have bodies, and we can understand that each part of our body has a different function that helps it all work together. Now, Paul uses the image of the body, I think, for two reasons. Number one, because again, everybody can understand the image of the body, but there's also something else happening in society at the time.

There's this current idea in the society that they would have related to now New Testament scholar N.T. Wright. He puts it this way. He says there are some really famous examples where Roman speakers declared that the whole society was like a human body. And then he goes on to explain. He says the point that they were making was that the different jobs involved a difference in status.

He says some were more important than others, more high profile, more honorable, more caring, more dignity, and more valuable to the common good. And then he explains that also, in contrast, there were other roles in the society that were dishonorable and fit for people of the lower sort, more dispensable. So here is what they've been listening to. And then Paul comes in with this letter, and he's like, Hey, I know what you're hearing in society, but here's how the church is going to model.

Here's what the church is going to do to model for the world. He says We are going to live in such a way to show that every single member of the body is just as indispensable as any other. It's pretty amazing to think about Paul's words reflecting the opposite of what was happening in society. Now, this way of classifying people is not just confined to the church in Corinth, which was clearly a problem.

It was not just confined to the past Roman world, but this is something our church needs to hear today: There is no more hierarchy. We're going to challenge the class system in our world. That's what Paul is doing. That's what Paul is saying. That's what Paul says the church ought to do. And he's reminding the church that no one is more important than anyone else in the eyes of God.

And because we are all equal and because we are all one team, if one person loses the game, we all lose the game. So this is verses 26 and 27. If one part suffers, all parts suffer with it. If one part gets the glory, all the parts celebrate with it. You are the body of Christ and parts of each other.

It's incredible. Some of the discoveries that we have made in recent years in science continue to discover all sorts of ways that our bodies, like our physical bodies, are connected with each other, with the other parts of our body. Our bodies are really all about teamwork. There is a new study showing how our gut health is linked to our brain health.

They're discovering what that means for ending things like Alzheimer's, which I know many of us care deeply about. There are so many of these other discoveries that science is discovering. And it's really incredible. Then, when we move from talking about our physical bodies to talking about the church body, here's something really cool that's happened.

We have a baptism later today. We had a couple of them in the past several weeks. We actually have a few more scheduled for the coming weeks. In these baptisms, we agree to welcome these people into the team and support them on their journey. And then I know that parents do this right when we baptize an infant.

I know what parents are doing. But isn't it fun for us to think about what gifts these little ones will bring to the team? We are stronger because they are part of our team now. A good

team shares both in the suffering and in the rejoicing. And this idea also departs from the Greek and Roman world. The HarperCollins Study Bible calls it this dispassionate self-sufficiency. We're not going to do that anymore. Paul is saying we are going to care about one another. Then, when we build relationships with our team, we strengthen our team, and we can work and accomplish more when our team is stronger there. I found out this week that there are 196 churches in Lincoln.

There are a lot of churches in Lincoln, and there are some really good things about that. That means people have access to a church fairly close to them wherever they live in the city. But there are also some bad things that I think about this as well. There are some out of those 196 churches. There are some tiny churches.

And I am not saying that tiny churches can't do big things, but I am saying, and I do think that if we were collected, we worked together more, we could probably do greater things for Jesus. Now, this is one of the reasons why I love that we are part of Justice in Action.

Justice in Action is a group of 21 faith communities within Lancaster County. What we do as part of Justice in Action is listen to the community and find out why people are struggling in our community. We've narrowed it down to three things that we are focusing on right now. We are focusing on creating a mental health navigation system in Lancaster County. If you are suffering from a mental illness, you would have one number to call that would know and be able to point you in the direction that would best help you.

And the second thing that we're working on is affordable housing. This is a very new initiative for us. We're in the very early stages of researching what's currently available in Lincoln and what the solutions might be. And the third initiative that we're working on is adult pretrial diversion, which looks at why the prisons and the jails are overcrowded.

And while remaining public safety at the forefront. So we're working on these things through Justice in Action, we were we voted on, the things that people are suffering with. We are struggling with people who are struggling now. Maybe you don't have any direct connection to any one of these three things that we're working on.

But isn't that exactly what Paul is telling us to do, that we are supposed to suffer with others, and by doing this teamwork together with these other churches, we may help some of those people who are suffering begin to heal? And there are many different ways that you can be a part of Justice in Action. A lot of you are a part of this in various ways.

Some of you are deeply involved with our research teams, which is amazing. So thank you for that. I read this article in the New York Times just a couple of weeks ago titled Train

Yourself to Always Show Up. And the article was about a practice that's found in the mission.

The Mishnah is a Jewish text from around the third century, and it describes a ritual where several times a year, thousands of people would travel to Jerusalem, and when they got there, they would climb the steps up to the temple and they would climb the steps, and they would go right. They would enter the massive plaza and start circling.

Right. They would keep circling. Right. And then, if you were mourning, or you were brokenhearted, or you were sick, or you were lonely, you would do the same thing. You would travel to Jerusalem. You would climb up those steps to the temple. But instead of turning right, if you were lonely or sick or hurting, you would go against the current and you would turn left.

And then every person who encountered somebody in pain, right? If you're going right and you encounter somebody coming left, you would look that person in the eye, and you would say, What happened to you? Why does your heart ache? And then, the person will respond. Maybe they would say, Well, my father died, and I didn't get to say the things I wanted to say to him, or my partner left, and I just don't know what to do, or my child is sick, and I don't know what's going to happen.

And then those who are walking, right, they would then offer a blessing to that person. They would say to them, May the Holy One comfort you. You are not alone. Then, they would continue walking until the next person approached. So, the article ends with these words. It said, Imagine a society in which we learn to see one another in our pain, to ask one another, What happened to you?

Imagine that we hear one another's stories, say amen to one another's pain, and even pray to one another for one another's healing. I call this the amen effect. Sincere or tender encounters that help us forge new spiritual and neural pathways by reminding us that our lives and our destinies are intertwined. Ultimately, it is only by finding our way to one another that we will begin to heal.

To truly experience all that God has for us. We need to be a team. We are better when we are together. We win in life. We win as the church when we do the work as a team. I am. I have been the lead pastor here for a year and a half. I am continually amazed at the team that you guys are, and I thank you for being a part of the team if you are not quite yet part of the team, but you want to be if you want to find your place or your purpose, I'll invite you to go to Horizons Dot Church slash serve.

There, you will find two different links. You will find the link to our next growth track class, and you will also find a link that simply says something like, I want to find a place to serve because everyone has something to offer the team. We started a weekly staff devotional, and so I ordered these books called 52 Devotions for Church Leaders for all the staff.

Week one was about the calling we all have as followers of Christ. There were two things that stood out to me in this devotion. This devotion is talking about Abraham's calling. Then, our calling. The first thing that stood out was that God also has called you personally in several ways. And then, at the end of the devotion, it said this: It's crucial to understand that you have to decide every facet of your call.

Of course, others can help, encourage, and support you along the way. But our calls are personal between God and us. And the great part of this is it's never too late to find your gift or rediscover a new gift. But you and God get to decide part of our value statement that is out on the walls. Underneath one of the statements, it says that we connect as a multigenerational community through all phases of life.

It kind of sounds like a good team. And then it says, we support each other in our faith with love and truth. It sounds like a good team. It says We don't have life all figured out. We learn from each other, and that's why we are better together. Would you pray with me? Gracious Almighty Father, God, thank you for bringing us here today as the body of Christ gathered in worship. We gather together in person and with those who are worshipping online because we are all one body. We ask that you help us recognize our gift and our purpose on the team and allow us to give honor and glory to you. In all that we do, all that we say, in all that we are, and we say all of this in Jesus' name, Amen.