

Sermon: "The Teamwork of Disciple-making"  
Text: I Thessalonians 2:1-16.  
Sermon Outline.

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Introduction ~ **What's the best team you've ever been on?** What makes a team *a team*, and not just a collection of individuals?

**Take any of the Steelers Super Bowl teams, or the Green Bay Packers of the 1960's. They define what "being a team" really means.** Vince Lombardi said, "If you're going to play together as a team, you've got to care for one another. You've got to love each other."

**What a contrast between two of the most gifted athletes in pro sports – I'm talking about Hines Ward and Terrell Owens of the Dallas Cowboys!**

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**Hines Ward** recently had some observations about the New England Patriots cheating before and during NFL football games. No Steelers fan can ever forget the block Hines Ward threw down field to spring a running back for a touchdown in a key game in our most recent Super Bowl season. Hines Ward is a team player. Nobody is a better team player. Period.



**Terrell Owens?** Owens has incredible gifts as wide receiver. But Owens has disrupted every team he's ever played for. Recently, his behavior persuaded Bill Parcells to retire as the coach of the Dallas Cowboys.

**Are you a team player?** A recent national survey (2003) revealed that most Americans think that being a team player is the most important factor in getting ahead in the workplace. This was ranked higher than several other factors, including "merit and performance," "leadership skills," "intelligence," "making money for the organization," and putting in "long hours."

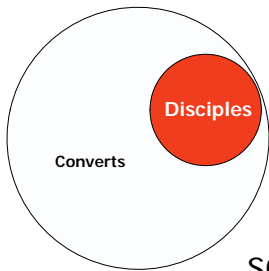
**Along with the Book of Acts, our text tells us all something remarkable: the course of human history was changed forever by a team of only three people, – three Jewish guys plus God.** When Paul, Silas and Timothy brought

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the Good News of Jesus Christ to Macedonia, the end result was that the Christian faith spread throughout Europe. You can check it out in Acts, Chapters 16 and 17.

**Last Sunday, we discovered that this unique team had a specific objective or goal they pursued together. Here it is: *In each locality, to plant a disciple-making church that can sustain itself and make disciples.*** And we also



encountered the fact that Paul and his team went, – not for converts, – but for disciples. You remember that diagram we had up on the screen, a circle within a circle: the larger circle representing “converts” and the smaller, red circle representing “disciples.”

**A disciple-making church is a group of believers in Jesus who together live out the Three Priorities of a Disciple of Jesus Christ as a team.** The priorities are simply:

- 1. A growing commitment to (a deepening personal relationship with) Jesus Christ;**
- 2. A growing commitment to the Body of Christ, your face-to-face group of believers (loving each other);**
- 3. And a growing commitment to the work of Christ in your world (personal witness about Jesus).**

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**Simple as these Three Priorities appear, they lead you unfailingly into a discipleship that is deep; and it lasts a lifetime.** Yes, these Three Priorities will look different in each individual life. **When you live out all Three Priorities at the same time, the result is a life-transformation that Jesus always intended for each person who believes in Him.**

**In this chapter, Paul, Silas and Timothy describe what they do together as the model the Thessalonian believers are to follow as a life worthy of the Gospel of God. This chapter advances our understanding of what, exactly, a disciple-making church really is.**

**A disciple-making church happens by teamwork. So, here's a team of three Jewish guys.**

**Clearly, Paul is the team leader** – an apostle of the risen Jesus; by God's Spirit, able to perform those miracles that authenticate an apostle of the risen Jesus; powerful in the Scriptures; enabled and empowered with numerous spiritual gifts. Paul is so committed to Jesus that he already bears on his body the marks of the price he's already paid to follow Jesus.

**Silas – also known as Silvanus, is a product of Greek-speaking wing of the Jerusalem Church.** He was well-respected by all the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem... even the

ones who disliked and distrusted Paul. Silas took the place of Barnabas on Paul's Second Missionary Journey. We don't know if Silas, too, saw Jesus alive from the dead; but Silas, too, can proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ for what it is: the Word of God. We also know Silas was equally at home working with Peter. Writing from Rome, Peter mentions him in I Peter 5:12. Silas is a valued "team player" all across the first-century cause of Christ.

**Then there is Timothy.** He had a Jewish mother and a Gentile father. He grew up hearing and reading God's Word in his synagogue. To simplify things on mission trips, Paul had him circumcised according to Jewish custom, making him Jewish according to ritual custom. We know that Timothy probably had the spiritual gift of prophecy. Timothy, too, is a proven team player... *but he's from the generation following Paul and Silas. Timothy is generation next.* **Together as a dynamic team, they changed their world permanently for the cause of Christ.**

**Each guy had a unique role on the team – you wouldn't put Alan Faneca at Wide Receiver or Hines Ward at Left Guard, would you? Would you let a neurosurgeon to repair your knee? Would you put Peyton Manning at Outside Linebacker?**

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**Our text indicates something intriguing. There is a specific kind of teamwork that makes a disciple-making church happen.**

**Doing church can be done without teamwork.** You've seen that. It happens all the time. One committee of the church does not know what another group wants to do. There's a world of difference between being just a group of individuals and *being a team*. Sometimes groups or individuals compete with each other. Church without teamwork is not pretty. **The disciple-making church is a team effort.**

**A disciple-making church not only takes teamwork; it takes a specific kind of teamwork.**

? **In fact, special teamwork is the key to becoming a disciple-making church. Becoming a disciple-making church takes special teamwork.**

? **In our text, we discover three specifics in the teamwork that creates a disciple-making church.**

**I. The first specific in that unique teamwork is teamwork in modeling the Three Priorities in real life.**

**A. Now, remember, the goal is to move people out of being mere converts into being disciples who are world-**

**beaters. For people to move, they have to see what it all looks like first. That's where modeling comes in.**

**1. That first priority** – a growing relationship with Jesus Christ. Paul, Silas and Timothy together experience a dynamic personal intimacy with God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The new believers in Thessalonika can look at each man and recognize each is still growing and deepening in their experience of Jesus.

**In other words, each man models what a growing relationship with Jesus looks like. This is foundational. New adult believers can look at these three guys and see what a growing relationship with Jesus looks like.**

**2. Or take that Second Priority – loving those other believers in your face-to-face group.** Paul, Silas and Timothy not only love each other; they like each other! Paul and Silas can sing together in a Philippian jail.

**Becoming a disciple-making church takes special teamwork.** It only begins with modeling what a growing relationship with Jesus looks like... It only begins with modeling what it means to love one another in a group of disciples...

**II. There is a second specific in the unique teamwork that creates a disciple making**

**church: it's the teamwork of a clean agenda and pure motives.**

**A. You noticed in our text that Paul and his team point out something unmistakable to the Thessalonians: Paul and His team are not at all like the wandering Cynic philosophers and teachers, who taught one way of life, but lived another way entirely.** They point out what anyone watching those teachers can spot: error, impure motives and trickery, telling people what they want to hear, the flattery, the greed, a selfish angle, a self-promoting agenda.

Paul, Silas and Timothy point out their own consistent example to underscore their message: 'Live out faith in Christ like we do, and don't live like those guys, who are out only for money or for personal advantage.' "...live lives worthy of God, who calls you into His kingdom and glory." (Vs. 12)

**B. The Three Priorities Paul, Silas and Timothy are building into the lives of these believers really represent the total agenda of what they are trying to accomplish.**

Their agenda is dirt simple... and it is profound.

1. These Three Priorities keep the team focused entirely on God's agenda. If something comes up, they ask, "How will this help us or distract us from building the disciple-making church

God wants us to plant here?" It is the filter, the matrix, by which they evaluate everything that goes on.

- These Three Priorities keep the team focused. They allow no cabooses or side-cars to side-track that basic agenda. "Will this suggestion distract or derail any of us from experiencing growing relationship with Jesus?"
- "Will what is proposed enable us as a group to love each other more deeply in the Body of Christ?"
- "Will what I am about to say or do enable and encourage this other disciple to share their faith in Jesus with their neighbor or co-worker?"

2. Look again at those diagnostic questions. They each reflect one of the Three Priorities. They enable you to think through what you're doing... because the toughest thing you'll ever do is to stay focused on what you're supposed to be doing...

If anything doesn't come up on the radar screen of the Three Priorities, they leave it alone... **You see, any effort spent on anything other than God's agenda distracts and takes away from Mission #1.**

**Becoming a disciple-making church takes special teamwork: staying focused on a clean agenda and living with pure motives.** If you wanted to, you could even define

"pure motives" as anything that advances the Three Priorities in somebody else's life.

**III. There is a third specific in the unique teamwork that creates a disciple making church: it's the shared passion to share the message about the risen Jesus... no matter what.**

A. A shared vision gives team members direction and confidence. Great vision always precedes great achievement. Good teams have a vision; but **great teams go beyond vision, they have passion.**

**Paul, Silas and Timothy have a shared passion.** That shared passion so dominates their lives that they willingly suffer and put up with outrage and humiliation. Because of their shared passion, they are willing to pay any price to plant a disciple-making church throughout their world.

**What is their shared passion? Their specific passion is to bring about a deep response to the Good News of Jesus Christ in somebody else's life. That is what drives and animates them.**

**Without that shared passion, it's not really possible to create a disciple-making church. But wherever disciples**

**share that passion to share the message and the love of Christ, wherever that passion is at the heart of any group of believers, God will show up with His Spirit, His gifts, His miracles, His amazing grace and love. And the result is that mere converts are transformed and changed into disciples of Jesus who are world-beaters.**

Conclusion ~ **Tom White** (in VOM Magazine) **re-tells this story of an Algerian woman, a Muslim who became a believer in Jesus Christ. Here's her story:**

"When I was 15 years old, I was looking for God. I tried to ask everyone. I even went to a sheikh. I told him, 'I love God. I am looking for Him.' He told me, 'You are blasphemous. You only need to obey your parents and say the five [Muslim] prayers.'

"I was not convinced. Every night before I went to sleep, I said, 'God, I know you are there. If You are there, why don't You talk to me?'

**"One night I was crying on my bed and I saw heaven open and rays of light writing the words, 'I am the way, the truth and the life.' I knew this was not a dream.** I ran outside on the patio and looked up at the sky. I was sure God had talked to me.

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"Later, a woman gave me a New Testament. When I found Jesus' words, 'way, truth, life,' I said, 'That is what You told me. You are God.' I gave my life to Jesus.

"When I married, I told my husband that I was a Christian. My family reported me to the police. The police in Algiers filed a court case against me for despising Islam – blasphemy." [There is a law in Algeria against conversion and against "shaking the faith of a Muslim."]

**"One morning they took me to court.** The judge was sitting at his desk between two advisers. He leaned over and asked me, 'Are you a Christian?' I said, 'Yes.' He asked what did you find in Islam that you didn't like?' I replied, 'I was looking for God in Islam and I didn't find Him.' Then I told him about my night vision and the words I found in the New Testament. I don't know if he was curious or wanted to trap me, but the judge asked, 'How do Christians pray? What do they say?'

"I tried to explain to him what we say. He still didn't understand how we talk to God. He asked, 'Where do you pray? What do you pray?' I replied, 'We can pray anytime, anywhere.'  
**He leaned forward and asked, 'Can you pray now? Here?' I said, 'Yes.' He sat back and said, 'Okay. Pray.'**

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**"I stood before him and raised my hands and started to pray. I knew that in my prayer this would be an opportunity to give a message of salvation.** I began, 'Thank You, Jesus, because we are sinners and You died for us...' It took ten minutes to finish this prayer. I prayed for the president of Algeria that God would bless him. I prayed for those in this court to see the salvation of Christ.

**"When I said, 'Amen,' the officials in the court turned to look at each other. The room was quiet. They were speechless. The judge said to me, 'This case is dismissed. Go home.'**

"I turned to walk down the long aisle to the door. I heard someone running behind me. I turned and saw the judge. **He caught up with me and said, 'Woman, when you pray to Jesus, please pray for me.'**

"Although it is against the law for Muslims like me to convert, I continue to have Christian meetings in my house. We close the shades."

**Friend, a passion for the risen Jesus is irresistible. You need that passion in your life as a disciple of Jesus Christ.**