

*Introduction***A Dynamic Team**

“A person is the single most limitless entity in creation. If anything more, it’s two or more people together.” That’s a favorite quote of mine because I think it really captures the feeling associated with being part of a team that’s really on. You know what I mean, that unrestrained limitless feeling when you’re sitting together and sharing insights and ideas as a group, and you’re sharing things you didn’t even know you knew and beginning to create things you didn’t even know you could. That’s an exciting place to be! And in Philippians 2:2 Paul speaks of it as well when he talks about the complete joy associated with being of the same mind, united in spirit, and intent on one purpose.

Now that’s the foundation of a really dynamic team: to be of the same mind, united in spirit, and intent on one purpose. That’s what propels you into this territory of unrestrained and limitless. I believe this because I’ve been tuned into teams since I can remember. Ever since my early leadership experience both in school and in church, I’ve had a real fascination with understanding why some teams that have such a difference in preferences and personality styles and even past experiences seem to do so well, seem to just relate well together, work well together, think well together. They’re dynamic. And then, on the other hand, you have the similar circumstances, different personalities, different preferences, some different experiences involved, and yet that team is barely scratching the surface of their potential. Maybe they are even dismantling, with everyone disappointed that they’ve spent so much in terms of resources, with time and money involved, in something that didn’t ultimately produce anything worthwhile. So I bet whatever team you’re thinking of right now—whether it is a committee or a company, whether it’s a ministry group, a small group at a retreat, whether it’s a Bible study, whatever it is, it could even be your family—you’ve been part of teams, I’m sure, that have been limited and limitless and probably everything in between.

Through my field of study and also in consulting with teams and executives that lead teams for the past decade, there’s something that I believe to be true and that is that a team can work much, much

smarter than its individual members' strengths and skills might suggest. It's greater than the sum of its parts. Now there's another truth and that is that a team can work much, much dumber, if you will, than the strengths and the skills of the individual members might suggest; and the difference in the teams that work smart and those that don't work so smart really have to do with the leadership and the foundation that leadership sets. The leader of the team sets the tone; and the team is either moved forward and advanced in what they do together, or the team is bogged down and held back because of the leadership role. Now growing up with a behind-the-scenes understanding of how a church works because I'm a preacher's kid, I believe what is true in the marketplace is definitely true in ministry as it pertains to teams. See, it doesn't really matter what your skill level is, what your experience level is, what your education is. None of those things really make a difference in the team's vitality until the team feels connected. Now those individual characteristics and skills and gifts, those are really important, and those individuals can make contributions in and of themselves, but if they're looking to work together and to form this kind of team that brings you beyond anything you could do on your own, well you simply have to feel connected first. The team leader—and I presume that's you because you've chosen to take this course—is the one responsible for helping their team make the connection.

## **Making the Connection within a Small Group**

We could look at a number of different areas associated with teams and different things that we could focus on with teams, but today we're going to talk about making the connection within a small group. So we'll look at a team in a group and those words will be used simultaneously in a small-group setting for the purpose of ministry. Now that may be a Sunday school group, it could be a small-group Bible study, it could be a youth group, it could be an offsite breakout group at a retreat, maybe it's a table group that is put together to discuss things after a speaker has led their part. These are groups that are put together for the purpose of discussion, sharing insights, sharing ideas, sharing experiences—so for the focus of discussion not for decision-making and other things that groups might do. However the skills and techniques that we're going to talk about are certainly not limited to a group setting. You'll find that the things we'll talk about will help you in your personal life and in your professional life as well.

Here's the secret. There is a secret. To make the connection, we have got to stop doing what comes naturally. It's hard. Stop doing what comes naturally, and start doing what really works. Small groups are the heartbeat of any ministry. That's where the personal touch happens. That's where hearts are opened and needs are met and, ultimately, lives are changed. We were created for relationships. Genesis 2:18 tells us that, and connecting in a small group that allows for that connection in relationship with one another—even if sometimes in our self-sufficiency we don't really believe that exists. It isn't the size of the ministry that dictates its impact. Your role is so important as a small group leader and facilitator.

Think of it like a cruise ship. Now a cruise ship is not moved in the sea by the large rudder. What happens is that a tiny rudder is moved into the force of the sea and in turn that moves the giant rudder and ultimately turns the ship. Well, just like a cruise ship, the small rudder—a small group that's connected and doing what it needs to do—can make an enormous impact in the world around it, the church around it, the community around it, the group around it, the ministry around it, whatever it is.

Without feeling connected, people may attend our small groups, but will they really be changed? Hearing something doesn't change anyone. What transforms people is when they do something differently because of what they hear. Now the importance of making the connection is that making the connection with the people in your group then allows for a second connection—a very important connection—and that is that they begin to connect the message with their personal lives. They take what is being talked about and they internalize and transfer that and interpret it in a way that makes the way that they live their life different; and that's where the change occurs.

## **What Causes Disconnect within Small Groups?**

Experiencing a connection in our small group, you would think that would come pretty easily, but actually disconnection is what comes easily. Think of it: when people join your group, they're coming into the group with a series of questions in their minds. What is this group about? Why did I get placed in this group? Do I belong? What's it going to take for me to feel like I fit in? Do I want to fit in? These are the questions that are in their minds; and as they begin to answer these questions week after week, it's

going to affect the level of their involvement in your group. They'll either feel connected and you'll see it in their participation in the discussion, you'll see it in their attendance, you'll see it in their involvement; or they might feel disconnected and not as if they belong and you'll see that as well. Either that's going to result in a lack of attendance, or they'll begin to taper off. They might just kind of sit in on the discussion, sort of comply with it and not really contribute.

Well, you add to that our unique sensibilities and experiences and temperament and all that makes us unique in the way that God wired us particularly, and those are natural ingredients for disconnect. Just think of it. Think right now of one of the small groups that you're a part of. You've got all the personalities there. You've got people who ramble and go on and on and can't seem to get to the point. You've got those who interrupt people easily and just seem very impatient with the process. There are those who just thrive on disagreement and having some sort of large theological discussion related to anything that gets said; those who get distracted easily and take the meeting or discussion off course. You've got those who merely check out, and they just really aren't part of the group. You can see it in their body language as well as in the lack of participation.

## **Your Role as a Leader**

If you're leading small groups, and if you've done so for a while, I am sure that you'll agree with me when I say that the most challenging thing of leading a small group is managing the small-group dynamics. In French, the word *facilitate* translated means "to make easy," and that is your role as a small-group leader. Your role is to be concerned with the context of the group discussion. What can you do to move it along, to get it unstuck when it needs to be unstuck, to redirect it to make sure everyone is participating and no one is dominating? That's your role as a group leader. Now the role of the group is the content. They're the ones who are responsible for the discussion, for making sure that what they have in their hearts and minds and what's being inspired in their souls is said, and you'll want to establish that upfront as a facilitator. Facilitating a strong connection, remember, means to stop doing what comes naturally to you and start doing what works, and we're going to talk about 10 ways to help you do that.