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Speaker: Pastor Mark Hanke  
Bible passage or verse: Ecclesiastes 4:9-12  
Title of sermon: **Regiment - Play on a Good Team**  
Series: Set Your Course - #3

**Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 NIV:**

<sup>9</sup>Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor:

<sup>10</sup>If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up.

<sup>11</sup>Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone?

<sup>12</sup>Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

Well, good evening. It's good to see you all tonight. And good to see you around the world as you join with us.

We're finishing up this series. It's a short one -- we have two short ones to start the year, and this one finishes tonight. So, I want to invite you, if you would, to turn in your Bibles to the Book of Ecclesiastes, a very famous kind of very familiar passage, and we want to mine it, just again, a little bit, just to ask the question -- what does it look like to set a course? We've talked about the focus in terms of our loving and eternal God that gives us a living and transformational hope. We've talked about this setting of our focus in terms of the work that it does in us, the renewal, the hope. Tonight, what we want to talk about is the team that gets us there. Because the reality is, God never intended you to do this thing called "life" alone. He just didn't. It's impossible. And so, we want to dig into the Word of God about that. I want to introduce you to a gentleman by the name of Chris Leitch. He's a career expert. What does he deal with? Teams, businesses, and he helps them excel. He wrote an article -- he specializes in kind of what we would call "productive work environments," and that is, getting people to be high-octane performers, if you will. Don't read into that too much. Chris just tries to create an environment where wherever you're working you succeed. And in an article that he wrote, called "10 Powerful Benefits of Teamwork in the Workplace," he identifies ten things. I want to go through them very, very quickly, because they help kind of set the stage for this text.

He says, number one, a great team boosts productivity. Well, who wouldn't want that? When you have a team, you produce more. The Scripture talks about that. It provides a support network. One of the things I'm actually concerned about in this isolation of the virtual world is, it's really tough to feel like a team with a person on the screen. It is. And I think the future is going to maybe alter us a little bit, because we may discover that we're not quite as productive as once in a day when we gathered around people and they encouraged us, and they created a support network. It encourages team innovation. Why? Because, with a lot of trust and with a lot of support, you are willing to take greater risks. So it does, it stirs innovation.

A great team improves morale. When one is down, another can lift you up. I don't know about you, but every day I go to work, I'm not on the top of my game. Every day when I go to work, I'm not all, it's like, "Man, now let's take the world for Christ! It's an awesome day!" I try to be up -- in fact, I'm normally up, pretty -- especially in the morning -- I'm pretty excited about the day. But not every day. And sometimes you have a team member that just happens to be on that day when you're a little discouraged a person who improves and raises your morale. This is a great one -- it attracts talent. It does. You've seen it in the NBA. You've seen it, you know, they get one guy, and five wanna play for the team! Why? Because when you're a great team, people want to join that. People want to be a part of something that wins. People want to be a part of something that produces.

He goes on to say -- number six -- it establishes strong relationships, a team that protects each other, that releases each other's strengths. It does all those things. It establishes a strong relationship. It

improves customer service. Why? I don't know what it is. I don't know what Les Schwab does, but they have a magic formula. They have happy people who work there. And have you ever seen the folks at Les Schwab? They never walk where they're going -- they almost kind of, like, half-hustle? They do! I was at another business the other day, and this guy was walking like they paid him a buck and a half an hour. And I was sitting there watching this guy work, and I thought in my mind, "You need a week at Les Schwab! You do! It would change your life!" I don't know what they feed those boys over there, or gals, I mean -- they're just amazing! And I think, to be honest with you, there's a culture that gets set there -- it improves customer service. Why? Because they actually kind of act like they love you. Of course, when I went in there and bought my wife's tires for a thousand bucks, no wonder why they wanted me there.

It allows flexibility. A great team does. Why? Because you can move the players around. It teaches conflict resolution skills. A team -- a great team is not without conflict. One of my favorite books by Patrick Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, he says, "One of the great things" -- and I think it's really true of the Christian circles, the Christian life -- "is that one of the things that really hinders a team is the inability to have healthy conflict." The kind of conflict that stirs you to growth. The kind of conflict that challenges you to take the next step. Finally, he says, it advances your career. It's true.

Well -- where was he getting all of that from? Simple little text. Turn in your Bibles to the Book of Ecclesiastes. The guy makes millions of dollars stealing the Bible. Ha! It's all right. He's not the first one. He's not! Because he happens to be a wise person to go to the wisest person in the world. Who's the wisest person in the world? Well, the Scripture says that it was Solomon. Solomon was the wisest individual in the world, and so, it makes sense that Mr. Leitch decides, "I want to look at what kind of team I can build out of the Scriptures." And so, in this text is where a lot of this article came from.

Ecclesiastes chapter four, it starts in verse nine, and he says, "Two are better than one...." I have felt that every time I've eaten a Dorito. "... because they have a good return for their work. If one falls down, his friend can help him up. Pity the poor man -- woman -- who falls and there's no one to help them up." Don't chide them -- pity them! That's a horrible place to be. I know you may have chosen that place -- but it's a bad place to be. Pity that person. "Also, if two lie down together, they're gonna keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands woven together -- it's almost impossible to take them out."

The Scripture talks about not the church here. Let's be honest, let's be clear -- this is not the church. The church is not envisioned here in Ecclesiastes. He's talking about two people, and he's talking about three people, but I don't think it's a stretch at all to look at what God designed in the church when He said, "The many are one." The many that Christ fills are one. And so, when we look at this text, we want to move it into our culture, into our world, both relationally and corporately in the sense that we are stronger together. We are. But there's a place that every one of us has to begin, and that is, we have to admit the need for a great team. Now, you might think that that's obvious, but it's not true. There are a lot of people who are married who are not in a great team. There are a lot of marriages that aren't a great team. What do I mean by that? They are not honest with each other, they are not transparent, they're not interdependent, they don't release each other's strengths and protect each other's weaknesses. They cohabit -- they might even share the same budget, but they're not a team. They live just as if they were roommates. They don't share things, they don't grow, they don't challenge each other, they don't act as a team. And so, they are literally two people sharing the same address, but those two, if you will, don't have a greater return. In fact, if they separated, they probably in many ways wouldn't notice any difference. No -- it's a big first step, and you have to take it. To admit that I need a team is to simply say, "I am not self-sufficient." God is. He's the only one. The rest of us are all dependent individuals.

Two are better than one. That's an admission. Not everyone believes that. Not everyone believes that if I partner up with somebody else, we'll go farther than if each of us ran by ourselves. Not everyone believes that, you know, a lot of people believe that, you know what? "I don't have the time to teach this, or I don't have the time to share this with somebody else -- I'll just do it myself!" That's an individual that doesn't believe this text. They don't believe in the team -- they believe in themselves. And it's not that they don't produce a lot by themselves. But they don't understand the benefit of a team. They don't understand the glory of the triune God who is the best team in the world -- still is -- that produced something that -- by themselves, God the Father didn't save us. It wasn't God the Holy Spirit by Himself that saved us. It was God the Father who sent the Son, it was God the Holy Spirit who ratified and fulfilled and sealed with the blood of Christ our salvation. You see, the greatest team that exists today demonstrates to us. We're not sufficient in and of ourselves. To admit that I need a team is to say God has created me to love and to be loved. It's a choice you have to make if you want to be on a great team. You have to let people love you. And if you have a frozen heart or a protected heart, a wounded heart that you won't let people in, you won't be on a team. Oh, you might live with that person, you might go to church with that individual, but you won't be a team. Because you have to let somebody love you to be on their team. To admit that I want to be on a team, I must be willing to trust.

Maybe one of the best teams that I love looking at in the Old Testament is David and his good friend Jonathan. It was David and Jonathan who made the statement -- Jonathan made David swear again by his love for him, and he said, "For he loved him as he loved his own soul." What a statement. "He loved him as he loved his own soul." And because of that, they were an unbelievable team. Jonathan encouraged David at times when David wanted to quit. Some -- they'd rather do it themselves, and they will never know the power of a team. Number one, you have to admit that you need a great team. Number two, you have to make the decision from this text to walk with people who will ultimately make your life better. You have to make that choice, and it's a choice you make every day. It's a choice to get around people who will motivate you to develop a deeper and a better character. I've said it before -- my mom was right when I was a kid, "Birds of a feather flock together, and a bad apple can ruin the whole batch." Yeah. You have to choose carefully who you hang around. That's why the selection of person that you're gonna marry -- whoo! You cannot give that enough attention. Because you're gonna saddle yourself up to that person, and if that person drags your character down and that person doesn't build yourself up, you've got 50 years of decline. Or -- you have 50 years of a trajectory going somewhere that you're going to love and enjoy. Yeah. People who motivate you to develop a deeper and a bigger character. The Scripture says that in Proverbs 27:17, "As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens another friend." It's a person who's going to challenge you. It's a person who's not gonna let you get away with being lazy. It's a person who's not gonna allow you to kind of coast. It's a person who's gonna come to you when you're 50 and challenge you to have the best 10 years of your life. It's the person who's gonna come to you at 80 and is gonna tell you -- "You're quitting? You still have work to do." It's the person who won't let you settle. It's the person who encourages you. They have a good return. "If one falls down, his friend can help him up." We all fall. We all have those days where we stumble, and it's the person who cheers you on, it's the person who says, "You can do it!" It's the person who says, "I see the power in you. Don't give up." A friend who's always willing to open the door.

I have a friend. He's remarkable. He really is. One of his greatest passions is to help people behind him. And he's so good at it. I will dare say, he's opened the door for more people to succeed, to take advancement in their life, to achieve something that they would have never achieved on their own. One day I asked him, "Where did this come from?" And he reflected back on the days when he was younger. He said, "Because all my life there were people that helped me. They gave me opportunities that I would have never gotten on my own." And there was a day in his life where he said, "That's the way I'm gonna live."

I had another friend. He was a risk-taker. Not for himself -- he risked on other people. He risked on people in the ministry that had made mistakes. That's risky stuff. Most wouldn't do that. This guy had a reputation that was stellar. He had a lot to lose. And when he took a risk on certain individuals that I know well, I mean, he was putting his entire name and reputation on the line for them. Seldom do you ever see anyone do that. He would let them ride on his coattails. He would open doors for them. People who motivate you to develop a better character are the kind of people that you want to be around. Why? Because when you stumble, they'll pick you up. When you have a bad day, they will be there to cheer you on. People who know the value of your soul. That is so critical. Matthew 7:6 says, "Don't throw pearls to swine." Why? Because, if you've ever been around pigs, they don't know the difference between a rock and a diamond. You could put both of them in front of them and what do they do? Snort and look for the lettuce! They don't have a clue! And there are people who don't know the value of your soul. They don't. They don't see you as a person to protect and to cherish and to love. You're a commodity to be used, you're a person that can advance them, you're an individual that can provide a service, but you're not a person whose soul they value.

Ah, years ago Kerri and I were watching, and -- this was before the great fall of Tiger Woods. And I was with Kerri, and I just remember saying, "I'd hate to be him." I really would. Not that I wouldn't want his golf game. You know, prayer does have its limits. No -- I'd hate to be an individual who questioned every person's motive around you. And you wondered, is there anyone here for me? But you want to find out who a good friend is? Mess up. Really good. Tiger did. Everybody ran from him. It was the most common thing to do to hate Tiger, and I heard it even around our church. "Tiger Woods is such a slimebag." Yah. About like you. You know what I was really interested in? Who golfed with him after he fell. Why? I don't know. Because I actually pitied him. I pitied him, because I sensed that he was alone. I sense -- I don't know him, I've never met the guy. Never had a conversation. I just realized that when you're at that kind of level, there's very few people who care about your soul. They want to ride your coattails to millions of dollars, but you want to find out who your friends are? Mess up. And he did.

There were two individuals -- when he golfed, they requested in practice rounds to golf with him. When he needed a place to stay, he stayed at their house. Two of the most unlikely individuals in the world -- bald-headed Mark O'Meara and comeback player of the year twice. That means you have to be pretty good and then fall apart. And he won it twice! Steve Stricker. I mean, two guys look like -- you know, one guy looks like he runs the Cub Scouts, and the other guy looks like he's a member of them. I'm not here to defend Tiger. I'm here to look at two individuals and say, "That's what you're looking for." And by the way, that's what you wanna be. When your friend messes up and everyone runs away, will you be the person who cares for their soul? Will you be the person who values that individual? If they no longer are a ticket to your advancement, do you stay with them? Walk with people who will make your life better. People who know the value of your soul. People who do not run away from you when you make a mistake. You're gonna make one. Sometimes you make a lot of 'em. And you're either gonna hide the rest of your life or you're gonna be willing to tell one person, and they're gonna be the kind of person that is filled with such grace that they don't laugh at you, mock you, or act as if -- "Oh my gracious, you really are a sinner!" They know you are.

Friends can give you an emotional buffer from life. Friends who can see a short-sighted decision that you're about to make and don't say, "I told you so." They're just there when you need to pick up the pieces of your bad decision. They're not individuals who are silent when you're being stupid. They're just present when you were stupid. They're there. People who do not run away from you when you make a mistake. People who will not leave you when life gets rough. If one falls down, friend can help him. If he's attacked, they'll defend him. If he's cold, they'll see to it that he gets warm. Walk with people like that. Why? Because there's gonna be those days that you lose a job. There's gonna be days that you're a victim of crime. There's gonna be days where somebody sues you. And you're gonna need somebody who believes in you, who knows your heart and has made a commitment, no matter if the entire world runs away from you. Mark O'Meara -- probably, what?

Those of you who know him, I don't know, 10, 15 years older than Tiger. You wondered, what was the connection? Almost like a father-son. But he risked his entire relationship and stuck with him, and when he showed up for a practice round, you could always see either Stricker or O'Meara with the guy that everyone hated. Again, I'm not trying to defend Tiger. I just want us to be people like Mark O'Meara. Because they're people who will make your life better.

"Dear friends," the Scripture says, "since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other." If God was willing to sacrifice His life -- and by the way, identify with the likes of me -- surely, I ought to love others. "Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God." And his point is this -- John is saying, when life gets hard, don't run away. Why? Because we're better together. We simply weren't meant to live in this life alone. Life was never meant to be done alone. Why? Because great teams release your strengths. Great teams protect your weaknesses. Great teams encourage you when you stumble. Great teams challenge you when you want to quit. Great teams are there to advise you when you're making a bad decision, but they're also there to encourage you when you're reaping the consequences of yesterday's ill-advised move. You need 'em. Two are better than one. Three? Can't hardly -- you can't defeat them. Imagine a church that everyone in the church makes the decision -- "You know, to the best of my ability, God, I'm gonna be a teammate with this church. To the best of my ability, when they're behind my back, or I'm behind their back, they're gonna be safe with me. I am here to help any and every one takes the next step, find encouragement, excel, and if and when they make a mistake, I won't run. Why? Because I value their soul."

Back in 1961 there was a movie that came out. It was a book, actually. It's been made into a movie twice. It's called *The Incredible Journey*. Remember it? It's old. It's rated G-squared. It's so good you can watch it with anyone. Two dogs and a cat. The other mates are, you know, some kind of animals. In the original, they were in Canada and they had a 300-mile journey to get back to the people that loved them. And oh, man -- in the movie and in the book, they faced trials and rivers and the threat of being eaten alive. Each of them had a peculiar gift that the others drew strength from. It's a beautiful story, because it's the story of your life. God gifted you uniquely. But He never gifted you to run alone. You have a journey to run. But if you do it with people, you will be their strength. You will be a benefit to them and they to you.

Another, more modern story -- there were four hobbits, an elf, a dwarf, a human, and a wizard, who were partners with Frodo. What was their journey about? A ring. What was their destination? A mountain. They faced evil, they faced people who wanted the power of the ring, who hungered more for their own personal advancement than what was good for the world. Tolkien understood as a believer, simply -- life simply cannot be done alone. He understood the power of fellowship, and he'd experienced the deep and abiding friendship of those that he would meet with weekly that spurred him on. You see, I'm pretty convinced that the Lord of the Rings is really Tolkien's life. I have a task that God has given me. It's bigger than me. There's evil powers that want to destroy me. And I will only make it if I run with friends.

My prayer for you is that you believe the same. Life simply cannot be done alone. It can't. It can feel exhilarating sometimes. It can be an adventure out there by yourself. But the tragedy is, you will fall and there will be no one there to pick you up. How much better -- how much better is that you have somebody who will fight for you and say, "When the entire world has run away from you, I want to golf with you."

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