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DEDICATION

To Scott Marques and Derek Landman,
the first two elders I served with.

Twenty-five years ago, we started to write this book.

OTHER BOOKS BY PJ SMYTH

Crossing the Line of Faith

A short book for churches to give to people who are considering crossing the line of faith, or who recently have.

Through the Waters of Baptism

A short book for churches to give to people who are considering getting baptized, or who recently have.

How the Gospel Moves from Friend to Friend

Suitable for individuals or small groups who want to be evangelistically effective every day.

CONTENTS

Foreword by Andrew Wilson	1
How to use this book	3
PART 1: FOUNDATIONS	5
1. Men with vision	7
2. Men with scars	19
3. Polity, plurality, and authority	29
4. Fathers and mothers	45
PART 2: RELATIONSHIPS WITH EACH OTHER	57
5. How leadership plurality feels	59
6. The five-legged table	65
7. Attitudes	71
8. Alignment	79
PART 3: RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE LEADER	93
9. The case for "first among equals"	95
10. How "first among equals" feels	101
11. Key contributions from the leader	107
12. Key contributions from the team	117
PART 4: RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE CONGREGATION	123
13. With the congregation	125
14. With deacons	137
15. With staff	145
16. With elders' wives	151
PART 5: ROLES	159
17. Shepherd	163
18. Teach	181
19. Equip	189
20. Lead	197

PART 6: CHARACTER	209
21. Leading yourself	215
22. Leading your family	225
23. Leading the church	233
PART 7: REPRODUCTION	245
24. Apprenticeship	247
25. Appointment	255
Forward!	267
Endnotes	269

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FOREWORD BY ANDREW WILSON

This is the best book on eldership I have ever read.

Books on this subject are usually written by two sorts of people. There are *thinkers*: academics and scholars who walk us through what the Bible says from a theoretical perspective (like many of my favourite writers). And there are *thinker-doers*: people who serve as part of an eldership team somewhere, and participate in the government of the church, but whose primary gift is still clearly on the intellectual and theoretical side (like me). Both types of book can be helpful, but both tend to address questions that are more conceptual than practical, and may contain plenty of insight but not much fire. (*Doers*, by and large, are so busy being elders that they don't have time to write books about it.) What we need is a book about eldership from a *doer-thinker*: someone who can challenge us biblically and provoke us intellectually, but whose gifts and contribution primarily revolve around leadership, wisdom, application and experience. We need someone who will speak to us as if we are about to enter a pasture, or even a battlefield (Acts 20:25-31), rather than a library.

This is what PJ has provided. This book does not simply answer the usual questions in a different way; it asks different questions. What does it actually mean to have a team of equals where one of them is the leader? How do fathers and mothers serve together in the church? How do you train and reproduce elders? What sorts of things stop eldership teams from functioning properly, and what can we do about them? These are the issues that we

wrestle with each week, and they are addressed here with clarity, honesty, biblical insight and passion. The result is a book that feels more like a travel guide than an atlas, which eldership teams of all shapes and sizes will benefit from working through together.

In his opening paragraph, PJ makes a striking statement: "I don't want to be a rock star, a fighter pilot or an astronaut. I want to be an elder." You can tell. The vision he casts is compelling, and you can smell its authenticity, because it is borne out of a life spent pastoring God's people in three different countries. So even when readers disagree with PJ on exactly how to answer some of the questions he raises, my guess is that few will dismiss the importance of asking them, nor the integrity, humour and robustly biblical common sense with which he responds.

Anyway: I am grateful to God, and to PJ, for this book. I trust that you will be too.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

I enjoy most aspects of leading a church, but none more than leading an eldership team and developing new elders. This book has emerged out of nearly twenty-five years of eldership experience, and is designed to help *develop* potential elders and *recalibrate* existing elders.

Each chapter concludes with a *reflection section* to help the reader engage with the material and facilitate group discussion. The questions probe the heart and help clarify ministry philosophy, and press the reader to apply what he is learning in the context of his eldership team and church.

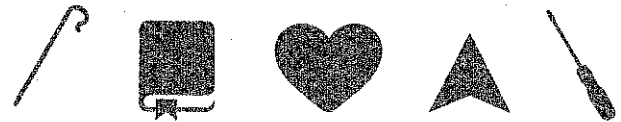
The structure of the book allows *flexibility* in how it can be used. *Potential elders* could meet with an existing elder(s) to discuss their answers to the reflection section of each chapter. *Existing elders* might work through the book together, discussing their answers in each reflection section.

The "feel" of the book is somewhere between a text book and a motivational leadership book. To keep the book to a manageable length and to keep the momentum up, I avoid unnecessary padding and have been restrained with personal anecdotes. I have bucked the modern trend of starting each chapter with an attention-grabbing story as I know most elders and potential elders are busy people, and I trust they will appreciate the no-nonsense approach.

I usually quote Scripture references within the text rather than as footnotes to assist ease of reference for those who will read this book with their Bibles open. All Scriptures are quoted in the English Standard Version unless otherwise specified, and all italics and bold in quoted verses are mine.

PART 1

FOUNDATIONS



CHAPTER 1

MEN WITH VISION

Elders are explosively dangerous men as far as the kingdom of darkness is concerned. They are warrior brothers dedicated to Jesus and his church, and champions of gospel advance in their neighborhoods and the nations.

PRIVILEGE

I enjoy good movies. I am stirred watching Maximus Meridius lead his men in a fight to the death in the Coliseum. I am roused watching Louis Zamperini inspire his fellow prisoners in the face of extraordinary cruelty. But nothing excites me more than leading our church into the purposes of God with my fellow elders. I don't want to be a rock star, a fighter pilot or an astronaut. I want to be an elder.

My journey to eldership got off to a dubious start. In 1997, aged 25, I started a church with my wife and twelve friends who were unhinged enough to give it a go. A few months in, I appointed myself and two of my best friends as elders. I just announced it. Appointing elders can be so easy when you do it wrong! About a year later, we connected with a movement of churches called Newfrontiers, who took us under their wing and coached us in all-things church, including eldership. As we learned from the Bible what elders really were, our faces became redder and redder, and the three of us decided to de-elder ourselves. We asked our friends in Newfrontiers to help our congregation find suitable men to appoint in our place, or to reappoint us if and when appropriate. We were soon reappointed, and by God's grace went on to become a healthy eldership team.

I have now been an elder for nearly twenty-five years. The first eight years (1997 to 2004) were in River of Life Church in Zimbabwe, and the next twelve (2005 to 2016) were in GodFirst Church in South Africa. My wife and I planted both of these churches, which both grew steadily and became multi-congregational churches. We gained a great deal of experience with eldership

teams because our model was to develop eldership teams for each of the congregations as they gradually matured into their own autonomous churches.

From 2017 to 2018 I did a two-year stint at Covenant Life Church in the metro area of Washington D.C. After several years of significant challenges in the church, the hope was that I would be able to help the elders swing the eldership pendulum to the "dynamic middle" where the strengths of a leader and the strengths of a team converge. The pendulum proved more resistant than we anticipated, but they were two valuable years in fine-tuning my convictions around eldership. Since 2019, I have been leading the eldership team at Monument Church (which we planted), and continuing to strengthen eldership teams around the world.

Being an elder for nearly my entire adult life has been a massive privilege. Despite challenges along the way, I wouldn't trade it for anything. Being on the frontlines of local church life and leadership with a team of brothers has been riveting and invigorating. Together, we have fasted and prayed, celebrated, mourned, confessed our faith, and sometimes confessed our sin. We have made audacious, faith-fueled decisions together. We have charged mountains together. And we have laughed and laughed together.

Several moments stand out for me, such as when Scott Marques and Derek Landman (fellow elders on my first eldership team in Zimbabwe) sat me down and asked me if I was aware how unpleasant I could sometimes be to follow! They spoke truth to me, with love, that made it easier for me to hear the hard news. They pointed out that I was sometimes more passionate about the project than the people, which could make it feel like I was using

people more than serving people. I was cut to the heart, but I felt deeply cared for by those two brothers. By God's grace, I am told I have improved in this regard since then.

Another memorable moment came when praying with Stephen Jack, Greg Tait and Sheshi Kaniki (the first group of elders at GodFirst Church in South Africa). We experienced something of an Acts 13 moment, where we clearly felt God commission Stephen and Greg to lead their own congregations, which led us into multi-site. The presence of God was tangible. It was one of the most genuinely prophetic moments I have been part of. In fact, many of my sweetest memories of eldership have been in times of prayer together.

When I was diagnosed with cancer in 2010, I had to step out of leading the church for nearly a year while I received treatment. Eldership plurality serves a local church in many ways, not least to secure her in the event of the leader being taken out. Over that year, neither the congregation that I led nor the wider multi-congregational church missed a beat because we were a church led by elders – *a team with a leader* more than *a leader with a team*. Another crisis hit me in 2017 when I was falsely accused of various things. I was privileged to have my eldership team investigate the matter, and clear me of wrong-doing. Rather than having to defend myself, it was a privilege to be accountable to a respected, duly elected body of brothers who could objectively weigh the accusation against me.

My family has also felt the privilege of eldership. Ashleigh has known a better husband because I have been an elder. Jack, Ben and Sam have known a better dad because I have been an elder. Simply, I have found eldership to be a disciple-making, man-

shaping, family-blessing privilege. I became an elder by the calling and grace of God. I remain an elder by the calling and grace of God. And, by God's grace, I pray this book will help other men discover this same calling and grace.

CRISIS AND OPPORTUNITY

As much as I long for more and more men to enjoy the personal benefits of eldership, I have a higher motivation for writing this book: the Great Commission. If we are to fulfil Christ's mandate to take the gospel to our generation, we need to plant thousands of churches across the nations of the world in the coming decades. For this to be done *well*, we need more leaders at every level of the local church. For this to be done *at all*, we need more elders. Loads. More. Elders.

The world needs more of *Jesus*, therefore it needs more *churches*, therefore it needs more *elders*. A church can operate without a building, without an office, without a cappuccino machine, without musicians, without all manner of ministries, but it cannot operate without elders, at least not for long.

I was told I would sell more books if I entitled this book *Leaders*, because apparently the leadership market is enormous, whereas the elder market is small. My point exactly. The rate of conversion from *leader* to *elder* is way too slow. We need all sorts of leaders, with all sorts of gifts, in all sorts of roles in the church, and of course not everyone is called by God to be an elder. Yet the crisis remains: we are not producing elders fast enough and well enough. We need a new generation of men to hear the call to eldership, and to humbly and courageously respond. To my mind, three

main things contribute to the scarcity of elders today: a deficit of character, a deficit of courage, and a deficit of vision.

CHARACTER

General Norman Schwarzkopf said if a man had to choose between leadership and character, he should choose the latter.¹ So too with elders. When I started out in ministry, I would say things like “character is more important than gifting” but I am not sure I really believed it. I believe it now. I believe it because over the years I have watched many elders drop out of the race. Some have re-joined, although they and their teams bear the scars. Some will never run again. The thing is, not one of them dropped out due to a deficit of gifting, courage or vision.

Brothers, each of us is just one foolish decision away from disqualification, and we make such decisions based on character not gifting. Character is so important that the flagship passages about eldership in Scripture are devoted mostly to issues of character. We devote an entire section of this book (Part 6) to a study of these passages. Three whole chapters. I am leaving it to the latter part of the book not because it is less important, but because you will feel a growing sense of its importance with each piece of the eldership calling we describe throughout the book. With that growing awareness in place, we’ll drive home the key character traits that Scripture and experience indicate must be strong in a thriving elder.

COURAGE

Eldership requires courage, yet courage is not in vogue. Edwin H. Friedman notes that modern culture, certainly in the West, is generally cynical about leadership courage:

I believe there exists throughout America today a rampant sabotaging of leaders who try to stand tall amid the raging anxiety-storms of our time ... a regressive mood that contaminates the decision-making processes of government and corporations at the highest level, and, on the local level, seeps down into the deliberations of neighborhood church, synagogue, hospital, library, and school boards.²

Ironically, America exists *because* of leadership courage. She was founded on the mettle of the explorers, fashioned by the resolve of the Founding Fathers, and forged by the valor of American soldiers on multiple battlefields. And yet, today American culture is generally risk-averse, leadership-dissenting, and adventure-shy. It is the same in Africa. In Zimbabwe, the famous reply given by anyone who is blamed for anything is, “I am not the one” – do you hear echoes of Adam in Eden? The Adamic propensity to abdicate is alive and well in our generation, making it hard for elders to lead as they should. Of course, elders should be servant-hearted and Christ-like not insensitive or dictatorial, but leading with courage is essential. Elders need to settle up front that eldership is not for the faint-hearted. James Stewart writes:

Field-Marshal Wavell has told, in his notable lectures entitled *Generals and Generalship*, the story of how

Napoleon, when an artillery officer at the siege of Toulon, built a battery in such an exposed position that he was told he would never find men to man it. But Napoleon had a sure instinct for what was required. He put up a placard – “The battery of men without fear”: and it was always manned!³

Eldership is an exposed position, and courageous men are required to man it.

VISION

Three men were laying bricks together. A passer-by asked each man what he was doing. The first said, “I am laying a brick.” The second said, “I am building a wall.” The third said, “I am building a great cathedral.” I have found that elders generally think about eldership in similar categories. Most are in the first group, some are in the second, and a minority in the third.

The first group think of eldership as “laying a brick.” They draw their job description exclusively from New Testament texts that specifically mention the characteristics and function of elders, including 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1, 1 Peter 5, and Acts 20. They rightly conclude from these texts that elders should be men of godly *character* who *shepherd* and *teach* their congregation.

The second group think of eldership as “building a wall.” They draw their job description from the same texts as the previous group, but also from what the New Testament teaches more broadly about the nature and purpose of the local church. They reason, “If elders are called to lead New Testament-style

churches, and if New Testament churches were clearly spirit-filled, prayerful, evangelistic, city-impacting communities, then it follows that elders should be spirit-filled, prayerful, evangelistic, city-impacting men.” Hence, their vision for eldership is larger and better than the first group.

The third group of elders, the “cathedral builders,” think about eldership the same way as the second group, yet their vision for eldership is grander still. They note how the entirety of Scripture presents the people of God as joining God in his mission to bring his knowledge and glory to all the nations of the earth (Gen. 12:1-3 through Rev. 7:9-12). They note how Jesus commissioned the Church to global evangelization (Matt. 28:18-20, Acts 1:8). And consequentially, they reason that elders should be men committed to this grand, global vision for their generation. Although the majority of their time and energy likely goes into mobilizing their church for *neighborhood* mission, if you cut them, these men bleed with a grand vision for gospel evangelization of the *nations*.

Certainly, elders should display the basic character and competencies laid out in the “brick” texts of the New Testament, but in terms of defining eldership, we don’t start there. That would be like an actor learning his lines and developing his character before finding out about the grand theme of the production.

Jesus leaves us in no doubt about the ultimate aim of local church life:

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. (Acts 1:8)

That is the mission of God, therefore *that* is the mission of the Church, therefore that is the mission of elders. If elders interpret their role *outside* of the Great Commission, they reduce the office of elder to something much scantier than God intended. But if elders interpret their role inside the Great Commission, the basic “bricklaying” of eldership gets infused with a “Cathedral-building” largesse and energy otherwise quite unattainable. The basics of eldership – modelling godly character, caring for people, and teaching God’s word – are now done on a trajectory of pushing back darkness in their neighborhoods and the nations. If big vision attracts big men, then “cathedral building” eldership will attract giants.

To use a maritime metaphor, if you strip the Great Commission *out of* eldership, then a local church is merely a barge tied up to a pier. It’s a nice barge with two main living areas. One is a hospital where the elders *care* for the saints, and the other is a classroom where the elders *teach* the saints. They teach the saints to keep their cabins tidy and to perform various tasks on the barge. Everyone seems well cared for and well taught, but the barge stays tied up to the pier. It never goes anywhere. It never makes any waves.

Conversely, when you inject the Great Commission *into* eldership, then a local church becomes a battleship on the high seas. It also has a hospital area below deck where injured saints are cared for, and there is also a classroom where the saints are equipped. But those in the hospitable recuperate to the background throb of the propellers driving the ship forward, and they sleep with a gun under their pillow. Those in the classroom are taught to the sound of the guns on deck blasting away at the kingdom of darkness, and when class ends they are back on deck. The context of care and

training is mission. The theatre is war. The trajectory is forward. When elders locate their calling within the Great Commission, they become explosively dangerous men as far as the kingdom of darkness is concerned – warrior brothers, dedicated to Jesus, devoted to the local church, and champions of gospel advance in the neighborhoods and nations.

REFLECTION

1. Why do you aspire to eldership?
2. What aspects of eldership most excite you and which most concern you?
3. On a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 being “high”), how would you describe your level of courage for eldership? Briefly elaborate.
4. In terms of the three bricklayers, which group do you think you are in? Briefly elaborate.
5. Is your church a barge or a battleship? Briefly elaborate.

CHAPTER 2

MEN WITH SCARS

There is no place in the ranks of elders for those who suppose they can shepherd in a way that Jesus didn't — without startling loss to earthly ambition and carnage to natural desire. A call to eldership is a call to come and die.

We are told to work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12-13). This chapter is the *fear and trembling* moment for potential elders, and a sober reminder for existing elders. I pray that God would use this chapter to drive many men away from eldership, and some toward it. As the Lord sifted Gideon's army at the spring of Harod, may he sift the readers of this book, and filter out the scar-averse. Jesus *gave himself up* for the church (Eph. 5:25), therefore, there is no place in the ranks of elders for those who suppose they can shepherd in a way that Jesus didn't – without startling loss to earthly ambition and carnage to natural desire. Eldership is the road less traveled, and potential travelers must first count the cost. Jesus said:

If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? (Lk. 14:26-27).

Elders are called to exemplify “normal” Christianity. Therefore, if every Christian should count the cost in this way, how much more should elders? Could it be that the general lack of sacrifice amongst Christians today has been propagated by a general lack of sacrifice amongst elders? Potential elders should count the cost in the following areas:

THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

If you are considering eldership, you cannot say, “Lord, I am happy to serve you, but on my terms. Let us go 50-50 on this: you get my service, but I get to choose the conditions of that service.” Did Jesus say, “If anyone would come after me, let him negotiate his terms, deny difficulty, and stand up for his rights?” Or did he say, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23)? Elders must clearly see the absurdity of trying to negotiate terms with the One who “also made the stars” (Gen. 1:16 NIV). Elders have settled, completely settled, that they cannot serve God *and* Money, or God *and* Self, or God *and* Comfort. In *The Man God Uses*, Oswald J. Smith writes:

Now let us ask ourselves some very plain questions. Does God come first in my life or does business hold the supreme place? Is it God first or pleasure? God first or money? What about my family, my loved ones? Do they come first or does God? What then, are the terms of discipleship? Let me give the answer in just two words: “GOD FIRST”. And if I could, I would put them on a banner in the sight of every congregation in the world – GOD FIRST.⁴

If you have invited Jesus into your life to improve it rather than rule it, don't become an elder. If you want him to bless your agenda rather than making his agenda your only agenda, don't become an elder. If you claim to have entered his Kingdom, but are actually hoping that he will enter yours, don't become an elder. If you call him savior but treat him like a service-provider, don't become an

elder. If your terms of discipleship are anything other than GOD FIRST, do not become an elder.

THE COST OF THE TITUS STEP

In J.R.R. Tolkien's novel, *The Hobbit*, Bilbo Baggins pleads, "I just need to sit quietly for a moment." Gandalf responds, "You've been sitting quietly for far too long!" Men in your twenties and thirties, listen to me: if you sit quietly for too long, somewhere between the age of thirty-five and forty-five you will, in a flash, go from being that "great young guy with great potential" to that "middle-aged guy who hasn't done anything." To avoid this sorry state of affairs, you need to take the step that few take. I call it the "Titus Step." Paul describes it in 2 Corinthians 8:16-17, 23:

I thank God, who put into the heart of Titus the same concern I have for you. For Titus not only welcomed our appeal, but he is coming to you with much enthusiasm and on his own initiative.... As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker among you. (NIV)

Did you spot the magic words: *His. Own. Initiative*. He received from God his *own* concern for the church. He stopped riding the coat tails of Paul's enthusiasm and initiative, and developed his *own*. That was how he transitioned from being Paul's junior to Paul's "partner and fellow worker." Don't step into eldership before you have stepped into ownership. Before ordaining you, the elders must say to themselves, "Something has happened in that man's heart. The freeloader has become a load bearer. The hired hand has become a shepherd. Now he won't run when the

wolf comes, for he owns the sheep in his heart. He is truly our partner and fellow worker" (see John 10:11-15).

THE COST OF TRUE FORTUNE

Those who lead in the Kingdom of God must be clear on what is "up" and what is "down," for things are different there from the kingdom of man. Spurgeon explains the difference:

Have you a better house than you used to have, and more money, more friends, and more of this world's good things; and do you now forget your God? Ah, then you have indeed gone down in the world.... If you had come to me and told me that you had lost everything, but that you loved Jesus better, I should have sympathized with you because of your trouble, but I should have congratulated you on your fortune. But now that you have got on so well in the world that you do not love your Lord as you once did, I can only pity you because of your dreadful poverty and mourn over the fearful loss that you have experienced.⁵

If the things you own actually own you, eldership is not for you.

THE COST OF HARDSHIPS AHEAD

The Bible mentions many wonderful things that are ours in Christ. We are created in Christ, chosen in Christ, redeemed in Christ, recipients of every spiritual blessing in Christ, and ultimately, we

shall be raised in Christ (Eph. 2:10, 1:4, 1:7, 1:3, 1 Cor. 15:22). Yet, we also share in the suffering of Christ. The apostles agree on this: John introduces himself as, “your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus” (Rev. 1:9 NIV). Paul concurred that every heir of God and co-heir with Christ will share in his suffering and his glory, and that both the sufferings and the comfort of Christ overflow into our lives (Rom. 8:17, 2 Cor. 1:5, Phil. 3:10). Peter tells us not to be surprised at hardships, and calls us to rejoice as we participate in Christ’s sufferings (1 Pet. 4:12-13). If hardship is to be anticipated by the rank and file in God’s army, then it is guaranteed for elders, for elders are called to exemplify normal Christianity. In any case, officers always draw more enemy fire than the troops. Yet this has benefits, for pastors who have suffered are better able to pastor those who suffer (2 Cor. 1:3-5). John Newton explains:

God appoints his ministers to be sorely exercised, both from without and within; that they may sympathize with their flock, and know in their own hearts the deceitfulness of sin, the infirmities of the flesh, and the way in which the Lord supports and bears all who trust in Him. The leader benefits, and everyone benefits.⁶

Brothers, God will strengthen you through every storm (Ps. 139:5-8, Isa. 50:10, Matt. 28:20, Rom. 8:38-39, Heb. 13:5), but if storms are not for you, then don’t become an elder.

THE COST OF LIFE

A fundamental role that elders play is *protector*. In the New Testament era, a shepherd (a common biblical description of elders) was a dangerous profession. As Jesus said in John 10, fighting off robbers and wolves, and being prepared to lay down their life for the flock, was a serious expectation for a shepherd. The New Testament era was one of significant persecution and suffering for the early church, similar to certain countries today. I have friends, and friends of friends, around the world today who are elders, and they are the first to be taken in for questioning, or imprisoned. Although in many parts of the world elders may not be at risk of imprisonment or death from persecution, at the time of writing the globe is gripped by the COVID-19 pandemic, and elders who care for congregants who are sick and dying will experience some risk to their health. Apart from the risks of persecution and health, elders are often the first to be targeted by social or mainstream media, and just one disgruntled congregant can cause reputational damage. Elders are protectors, and this cost should be counted.

THE COST THAT CHRIST PAID

Where might we find grace to joyfully embrace the cost of eldership? At the cross. In Acts 20:28, Paul charged the Ephesian elders “to care for the church of God” and he then added, by way of ultimate motivation, “which he obtained with his own blood.” He called on them to remember the cross of Christ, knowing that at the cross the cost of eldership becomes the *privilege* of eldership. Ann Voskamp writes:

[God] gave us Jesus. Jesus! Gave him up for us all. If we have only one memory, isn't this one enough? Why is this the memory I most often take for granted? He cut open the flesh of the God-Man and let the blood. He washed our grime with the bloody grace.... Doesn't that memory alone suffice? Need there be anything more? ... The bark on the raw wounds, the thorns pressed into the brow, your name on the cracked lips ... He has ... given us the incomprehensible.⁷

Brothers, remember the cross. Remember Christ who gave himself for the church (Eph. 5:25). Remember our Shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep (Jn. 10:11). Allow this *one great memory* to melt your heart into a Christ-like form, into a shepherd-like shape, and empower you for eldership.

Like Chuck Palahniuk, author of *Fight Club*, potential elders must be able to say, "I don't want to die without any scars." If they can't, they should not become elders. Amy Carmichael, missionary to India for fifty-five years, wrote:

*Hast thou no scar?
No hidden scar on foot, or side, or hand?
I hear thee sung as mighty in the land,
I hear them hail thy bright ascendant star:
Hast thou no scar?*

*No wound? No scar?
Yet, as the Master shall the servant be,
And piercèd are the feet that follow Me;
But thine are whole: can he have followed far
Who has no wound nor scar?*⁸

Remember him. Remember his scars. Like Thomas, place your hand in his side and your finger in his hands and feet, and say, "My Lord and my God!"

REFLECTION

This is a defining chapter of the book, and possibly a defining moment in your life. Write a short paragraph with your reflections on these things:

- The cost of discipleship
- The cost of the Titus Step
- The cost of true fortune
- The cost of hardships ahead
- The cost that Christ paid

CHAPTER 3

POLITY, PLURALITY, AND AUTHORITY

Eldership teams minimize the weaknesses and amplify the strengths of the individual members. Few burdens seem heavy when everyone lifts. Few enemies seem intimidating with brothers at your side. Few fortresses seem unassailable when you charge them together.

ORIGINS

Elders were an important part of the governmental structure in Old Testament Israel. Although they are mentioned over one hundred times in the Old Testament, we are not given details of how they governed, how they were chosen, how old they were, or what qualifications they had. There were different types of elders such as elders of Israel (Ex. 3:16), of tribes (Deut. 31:28) and of cities (Deut. 19:12). The elders worked closely with other leadership groups including officials (Deut. 31:28), judges (Deut. 21:2), heads of tribes (Deut. 5:23), family chiefs (1 Kings 8:1) and priests (1 Kings 8:3). The nation of Israel continued this kind of leadership layout into the era of Jesus and the early church, although by this time groups such as Pharisees, chief priests and teachers of the law were also in play (Matt. 15:2, 16:21, Acts 4:8).

The first time we encounter the word “elder” in the New Testament is Acts 11:30. Luke, the author of Acts, doesn’t tell us why or how the leaders of the early church came to use the term “elder,” or how the first elders in Jerusalem were appointed. We assume that from Acts 2 to Acts 11 the apostles led the Jerusalem church, and that by Acts 11, inspired by the Holy Spirit, they adopted the term “elder” from the Old Testament and Jewish culture to designate the group of men who led the local church. Maybe some (or all) of the apostles continued to serve as elders. Certainly, Peter appeared to happily own the role of elder throughout his apostolic ministry (1 Pet. 5:1), but it seems that others who were not apostles were appointed as additional elders (Acts 15:8). Whatever the process was, “We can be sure that the establishment of congregational oversight by a plurality of elders was no arbitrary decision.”⁹

From Acts 11:30 onwards, elder-led congregations were clearly the norm. In Acts 14:23, we read of Paul and Barnabas appointing elders in “every church” that they had started. In Acts 15 and 16, we read of the Jerusalem elders interacting with the apostles on a matter of doctrine. In Acts 20, Paul meets with the Ephesian elders in Miletus. And, in Acts 21:18, we hear again about the Jerusalem elders.

In the epistles, there are various references to elders. Paul’s letter to the Philippians is addressed to the elders and others (1:1). The three main lists of elders’ characteristics are found in 1 Timothy 3:1-13, Titus 1:5-9 and 1 Peter 5:1-4, and there are also significant things said about elders in Acts 20, 1 Timothy 4:14, 5:17-19, 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13, James 5:13-15, and Hebrews 13:7 and 17. (I believe these references to “leaders” in Hebrews 13 are referring to elders, or similar.¹⁰) Also, the apostle John referred to himself as “the elder” in the opening verses of 2 John and 3 John.

The last we hear of elders in the Bible concerns the twenty-four elders around the heavenly throne (Rev. 4:4). They seem to be a type of high council, either representatives of the eternal body of Christ, or angels, yet they bear the title “elder.” It is a remarkable thing that elders have their history in the Old and New Testaments, and their future in heaven where the title “elder” will live on into eternity describing the twenty-four elders around the throne.

TERMINOLOGY

The Bible uses three words interchangeably to describe the same office: *presbuteros* (which is most commonly translated “elder”), *poimen* (“pastor/shepherd”), and *episkopos* (“overseer/bishop”).

Paul uses the words “*presbuteros*” and “*episkopos*” interchangeably in Acts 20:17 and Acts 20:28, and in Titus 1:5 and Titus 1:7. Peter does likewise with all three terms in 1 Peter 5:1-2. Therefore, we may conclude that elders are pastors/shepherds, who are also overseers. Maybe part of the reason for the interchange is to capture something of their dignified *position* (elder), as well as something of their *function* (overseers, shepherds). There seems to be no biblical distinction between the role of an elder and a bishop, although some denominations use the two words to describe different offices.

So, what should we call elders? Biblically speaking, it seems we *could* call them elders, pastors, shepherds, overseers, or even bishops. I prefer the term “elders” for the following reasons:

- “Elders” is the most frequently used biblical term to describe those who lead a church.¹¹
- “Elders” better emphasizes the plurality of the office in cultures that are prone to get over-enamored with “the pastor.”
- “Elders” better accommodates the breadth of gifting that elders may have. Minimally, all elders should be pastorally gifted, but each may have different gifts besides that, sometimes pronounced gifts, and always and only referring to him as “pastor” can be somewhat limiting.
- Always calling the elders “pastors” can over-emphasize the pastoral aspect of church life to the neglect of other important aspects, such as evangelism.

- Some cults have hijacked the term “elder” and use it in unbiblical ways. It is a title we should fight for, not surrender.

Notwithstanding my personal preference for the title “elder,” the advantage of having different biblical phrases to describe the same office is that the chances are one of them will suit your context and culture. Whatever title you choose as your predominant term, I suggest you *clearly explain* what you mean by it, and then be *consistent in your usage*. For example, some churches call elders who are on the church staff “pastors,” and call elders who are not on the church staff “elders.” Assuming the two groups are actually one-and-the-same in terms of your ecclesiology and structure, then why not rather call them by the same title (noun) preceded by a simple adjective, such as “staff elders” and “non-staff elders?” Doing so helps mitigate against people thinking that elders and pastors are two different offices in the Bible, or that earning a salary from the church somehow makes an elder more of an elder, or less of an elder, than those who earn a salary from somewhere else.

POLITY

There seem to be three main forms of church government in operation today:

Episcopacy

Episcopacy means “ruled by bishops.” This is a top-down model in which a senior leader (maybe an archbishop) has authority over

the second-tier leaders (maybe bishops), who each have authority over local churches in a geographical area (maybe called a district or diocese). A priest of some sort (maybe a vicar) leads each congregation in the district. Although this model of oversight is not obvious in Scripture, the rationale is that it continues the form of church government that some believe the early church had evolved into by the time the original apostles died off. The logical progression thereafter was for successors to appoint subsequent successors.

This model is not without strengths, although it seems that rather than bishops, it should be the prerogative of *local elders* and *trusted outside ministers* to recognize and appoint local church leaders (Acts 13:1-3, Acts 14:23, 1 Tim. 4:14). Part of the reason to prefer this approach is that the term “bishop” is biblically synonymous with the term “pastor/elder/overseer.” “Bishop” does not seem to indicate a “higher order” of leader.

Presbyterianism

Presbyterianism means “ruled by *presbyters*,” which is the Greek word for “elders.” In this system of polity, local elders who are resident in that local church lead the church. However, denominational Presbyterianism places another layer (or more) of governance over the local church in the form of synods or general assemblies, which are *higher* groups of elders that preside over a group of churches.

The Acts 15 assembly of “apostles and elders” lends some credence to this kind of polity, although one should be cautious about reading too much into what was a unique situation between two

churches. The conclusions of the council do not necessarily imply that the Jerusalem elders had authority over the Antioch church, or any other church. Whilst the Jerusalem elders certainly helped shape doctrine for their church and the Antioch church, it was arguably the apostle Paul who elevated that local ruling to a wider ruling (Acts 16:4). Either way, it seems to be a stretch to say that Acts 15 is the equivalent to a modern-day synod of elders making formal decrees for all churches, especially when this model of polity is not obvious elsewhere in the New Testament.

The greatest strength of this system is its conclusion that local elders govern local churches, a conclusion this book will argue has immense biblical support. However, biblical support for regional elder boards (synods) that oversee local church congregations is harder to find. Certainly, the plurality of pluralities (the combination of local church elders and the regional synod) makes for robust accountability, although an imposed external governing body often struggles to produce genuine unity, and a multi-tiered form of government is complex in nature and tends to disempower those in the bottom tier.

Congregationalism

Congregationalism refers to local churches that are congregationally governed, usually meaning two things. First, it means that the church is *self-governed*, ultimately answerable to itself rather than an individual, synod, or denomination beyond the church. Second, it means that it is *democratically governed*, meaning that the congregation is the highest authority rather than an individual (such as a senior pastor), or a group (such as a board of elders).

Proponents of congregationalism would point out that Jesus seemed to imply this model of church government in Matthew 18 when he told us to take even the most extreme disagreements to *the church* rather than the bishop, synod, apostolic team, elders or deacons.

Conclusions

As I will argue below under the headings *Plurality* and *Authority*, I believe Scripture presents leadership *authority* in a local church lying with a *plurality* of elders *within* that congregation, rather than with the congregation or with some external entity. According to the definitions above, this would be something of a blend of Presbyterianism and Congregationalism. Although I believe the “buck stops” with the elders, I will also argue that Scripture portrays these elders as:

- A. Being receptive to the input of their *local congregation*.
- B. Being eager for meaningful input from *outside the local congregation*, such as one or two leaders/elders of other churches who are known and trusted by the local elders, maybe from within an association the church is part of.
- C. Having a clear and empowered *first-among-equals* leader, who may be called the Lead Elder or Senior Pastor, although he is quite different from the CEO-style Senior Pastor customary in many churches today, and the team quite different from the “Executive Board” style of eldership that tends to accompany the CEO model. To the contrary, all the elders – whether staff or non-staff – would be practicing

pastors in some way, and enjoy a brotherly and collaborative atmosphere on their team.

Without diminishing the weight of my convictions around these things, I appreciate that Scripture is not prescriptive on the details of how such plurality should work, and therefore some of my inferences should be held lightly, and we should be comfortable with a fairly broad range of acceptable practice.

PLURALITY

The Bible sometimes specifies and often implies that churches should be governed by a plurality of elders. For example:

- *The Jerusalem church* had a plurality of elders (Acts 11:30, 15:2). We know that this was a very large church, so we should not think that plurality of elders is only for small churches.
- In terms of the *first churches they planted*, Paul and Barnabas appointed “elders for them in every church” (Acts 14:23). The accent is on plurality, and “every” implies that this form of church government should be universal. These churches were likely small, so we should not think that plurality of elders is only for large churches.
- The *Cretan churches*, also likely small churches, had a plurality of elders (Titus 1:5). Note also how Paul instructs Titus to appoint “elders in every town,” again implying the universality of this model.

- The *Ephesian church* had a plurality of elders (Acts 20:17, 1 Tim. 4:14).
- Churches in the Roman provinces of *Asia Minor* had a plurality of elders (1 Pet. 1:1-2, 5:1-2). Also, Peter wrote this epistle as a general letter to many different churches, again implying that plurality of elders was the universal model.
- The *multiple churches that received James' letter* had a plurality of elders (Jas. 1:1, 5:14). This, too, was a general letter to many different churches, implying that plurality of elders was the universal model.
- The *church that received the letter to the Hebrews* had a plurality of leaders, likely elders (Heb. 13:17).
- In 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:7, the singular word, "elder," is used. However, both the context and the Greek word used suggest this is a representative "singular" amongst a "plural."
- We may also argue inferentially from the *nature of the church*. Congregations are multi-membered, multi-gifted, inter-dependent bodies of believers (1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4). An autocratic one-man model of leadership would be inconsistent with this, whereas a multi-membered, multi-gifted, inter-dependent body of elders is thoroughly compatible.

When John introduced himself as "the elder" (singular) in 2 John and 3 John, he was likely referring to his old age rather than implying that he was the single elder in a local church. (Paul

used the parallel Greek word in Philemon 9, when he referred to himself as an old man.)

Some point to Timothy, in Ephesus, as justification for a one-man model of leadership. However, as we have already said, both Acts 20:17 and 1 Timothy 4:14 infer a plurality of elders in Ephesus, and it is likely that Timothy was in Ephesus as a temporary apostolic delegate more than a lead elder.¹² A similar argument is sometimes presented for Epaphras, in Colossae, but this is equally tenuous. He was certainly the original evangelist or "church planter" (Col. 1:7, 4:12), but more than that we can only speculate.

We have to conclude that all New Testament churches, irrespective of size, location, ethnic make-up, or who planted them, were led by a plurality of elders. An army of respected Bible scholars concur:

- Alexander Strauch writes, "Church leadership is a team effort, not the sole responsibility of one "professional" religious leader."¹³
- Bruce Stabbert writes, "The seven clear passages which teach the existence of plural elders in single local assemblies ... should be allowed to carry hermeneutical weight over the eight other plural passages that teach neither singularity nor plurality. This is a case where the clear passages must be permitted to set the interpretation for the obscure."¹⁴
- Jeramie Rinne has a whole chapter entitled *Shepherd Together*, and speaks of church leadership as a "team sport."¹⁵ He analogizes an eldership team with a Swiss Army Pen

Knife, where each elder brings a different gift/s to the team.

Pragmatic *experience* also affirms the value of plurality. Eldership teams minimize the weaknesses and amplify the strengths of the individual members. Few burdens seem heavy when everyone lifts. Few enemies seem intimidating with brothers at your side. Few fortresses seem unassailable when you charge them together. Eldership teams have more resources, more wisdom, more energy and more fun than an individual working alone. They share the credit for victories and the blame for defeats, which fosters humility and minimizes pride among the team members. Rinne writes:

When elders are practicing a healthy plurality, it's harder for one man's views or tendencies to dominate, because the elders offset one another. The gentle elders temper the more fiery ones. The activists move the analyzers towards actually making decisions. The big-faith elders keep every decision from being one more exercise in fiscal conservatism and risk management, while the practical elders help the dreamers and visionaries not do stupid things under the pretext of 'trusting God.'¹⁶

Sometimes a church finds itself in position where it has just one elder or no elders. This might be because it is a church plant and elders have not yet emerged, or because of a crisis that has removed the existing elders. In these situations, it is usually best for someone from the outside to play a "Titus on Crete" role to help appoint new elders. This role could be played by a trusted elder or eldership team from another church, or from the group

to which the church affiliates.

AUTHORITY

Due to our human propensity to either abuse authority or rebel against it, "authority" has become a toxic word in many cultures. Yet, one cannot read Scripture without acknowledging that elders are entrusted with responsibility (which implies commensurate authority) to govern the local church in both *doctrinal* and *general* matters.

In terms of doctrinal matters, elders are called to teach the flock the word of God, give instruction in sound doctrine, and rebuke those who contradict it (1 Tim. 3:2, Titus 1:9, 1 Tim. 5:17). Paul charged Timothy (who was either an elder at Ephesus, or working as an apostolic delegate amongst the elders) to "keep a close watch on yourself and *on the teaching*" (1 Tim. 4:16). And it was "the apostles *and the elders*" who met to decide on certain doctrinal matters in Acts 15:3. Of course, this doesn't imply there should be passivity amongst the congregation in terms of doctrinal discernment. Like the Bereans, they should eagerly receive teaching from their elders as well as examine the Scriptures for themselves to see if what is being taught is correct (Acts 17:11). Neither does this imply that the congregation should be passive in terms of "teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom" (Col. 3:16). A wise eldership team will cultivate a general culture of believer-to-believer encouragement and support, as well as equipping believers to teach and counsel one another in different contexts. But overseeing all of this are the elders, ultimately entrusted with responsibility for sound doctrine in the church.

In terms of governing general matters:

- The various names for elders (pastor, shepherd, overseer) imply broad governance.
- We read in 1 Timothy 5:17, "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching." This suggests that elders also "rule" the church in matters other than doctrine (preaching and teaching).
- 1 Timothy 3:4-5 tells us that part of an elder's authentication comes from "managing" his home well, as opposed to "ruling on doctrine in his home," also implying broad governing/managing responsibility in the church.
- In 1 Peter 5:1-4, Peter's exhortation to elders supposes a broad governing role, as does Paul's exhortation to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:28.
- The warnings for elders to avoid being domineering further intimates they had broad governing powers (1 Peter 5:3).
- Assuming (as I do) that Hebrews 13:17 refers to elders, the exhortation for the congregation to submit to the elders indicates that elders govern in all matters arising within the church.

Some churches restrict the elders' influence to doctrinal and pastoral matters, and appoint another group, maybe a deacon board, to rule on general governance matters. I have the following concerns with this approach:

- As we have seen, it does not seem to be *biblical*.
- It seems *illogical* for a community of people to trust the elders with greater matters of doctrine but not lesser matters of governance. Of course, wise elders know they are not skilled in all areas, and will delegate responsibilities to suitably qualified others and be receptive to their recommendations, but the elders should retain overall governance.
- It seems "top-heavy" to have another executive team to act as a check-and-balance to a healthy team of elders that itself would include a diversity of gifting and perspective, and that is amenable to counsel from deacons and other respected members.
- Generally speaking, I have observed that churches whose elders only govern doctrinal matters tend to attract "bookish" elders who struggle to rally God's people to much more than showing up on a Sunday to listen to them teach sound doctrine. Elders should be both teachers *and* leaders, and should be authorized to lead the church in both doctrinal *and* general matters.

In all this, I am not suggesting that elders monopolize the day-to-day leadership and ministry of the church, a theme that I will return to in the next chapter.

REFLECTION

1. Elders today can trace their origins to both the Old and New Testaments, and remarkably, there will even be twenty-four elders in heaven. How does this impact the way you think about eldership?
2. What terminology does your church use for elders, and why? Do you feel your terminology both honors Scripture and serves your culture and context? Elaborate.
3. Have you had any experience with Episcopal or Presbyterian forms of polity? If so, what are your observations on their biblical viability, and their strengths and weaknesses?
4. Have you had any experience with the Congregational variations of the one-man model, the fully democratic model or the corporate model? If so, what are your observations on their biblical viability, and their strengths and weaknesses?
5. On a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 being “very”), how convinced are you of the biblical evidence for eldership plurality? Briefly elaborate.
6. On a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 being “very”), how comfortable are you with elders having authority over both doctrinal and general matters in the church? Elaborate.

CHAPTER 4 FATHERS AND MOTHERS

The Church is a family, and it will only flourish to the extent that we value, honour and esteem women and men, mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers.

— Andrew Wilson

Much has been written and said over the centuries and particularly in recent years about the roles of men and women in society, the home and the church. And there is much disagreement. Such is the importance and breadth of the topic, elders will need to do their own work and come to their own conclusions. To help them on their way, I will try to concisely express my views on the matter: in short, I do believe Scripture teaches us that, properly understood, eldership is a role that only men can fulfill.

In our cultural context, this is a tough one to swallow, but I think a lot of that comes down to our **confusion of categories**. Most significant is that in our modern, technologically shaped world, we are prone to think of people in mechanistic ways. This means that we tend to read the term ‘elder’ as meaning the same thing as ‘leader’ does in business, politics or industry. In those spheres, it makes sense for the person – irrespective of their sex – who is most competent to be given the position of CEO, president or manager. But when the Bible describes the role of elders it doesn’t really have our **corporate** contemporary leadership models in view. Rather, the picture is far more of the church as a **family**, which is overseen and protected by fathers. These fathers are expected to have certain gifts (for example, being able to teach); but their primary qualification is their godly character as fathers. This is made especially clear in Paul’s first letter to Timothy. Throughout this letter Paul relates the biological family to the family of the church, and the church family to the biological one. This is especially plain in his instruction that a man should only be recognized as an elder if he is a good father of his biological family. This is a point that cannot be emphasized enough: *elders must be fathers*. Normally that means they will have their own families. Always it must mean they are able to father the church.

All kinds of people (of both sexes) should lead in all kinds of areas of church life and ministry – but only men can be fathers. Women should not be elders because women cannot be fathers. This is not to say that a woman should not lead a business as the CEO or lead a nation as the President or Prime Minister, as those areas of life are not in the same category as a church *family*. And, as I will soon say, it does not mean that women should not hold extremely significant positions of leadership in the church.

If elders are fathers, and women cannot be fathers, then can unmarried men or married men without children be elders? I believe so. Being a spiritual father means two things: being a man and having a fatherly, spiritual demeanor. More about this in Chapter 22.

When eldership is understood in this fatherly sense, it is much easier to grasp what we mean when we talk about the *complementarity* of men and women. If there are fathers in the church then there must also be mothers, and sisters and brothers. When thinking about these things I work my way down a “funnel” of consideration, working from greater to lesser:

My first and broadest thought is the **symphony of creation**. Think of the harmonious pairings in creation: sun and moon, sea and sky, and heaven and earth. A basic building block of creation seems to be complementary pairs that are equal in worth although different in function. It is also worth noting that some societies throughout the ages have assigned sex distinctions to these aspects of creation: the sun is always masculine while the moon is feminine. The sea is ‘she’ while rocks are ‘he.’ Complementarity is woven into the very fabric of the universe.

Then my mind goes to similar **concordant pairings amongst humans**: father and mother, husband and wife, son and daughter, and brother and sister. In contrast to cultures that regard women as inferior to men, the Bible teaches that these pairs are fully equal in worth. They are equal beneficiaries of the divine image and earthly rule and equal recipients of the Holy Spirit and his gifts, and they have equal access to the blessings of salvation (Gen. 1:26-28, Acts 2:17-18, 1 Cor. 12:7, Gal. 3:28). Yet in contrast to cultures that blur, even erode distinctions between male and female, the Bible teaches that whilst equal, men and women have certain God-ordained differences in roles. For example, this syncs with our experience as a married couple: Ashleigh and I are physically and emotionally different from each other which enables us to be a harmonious and complementary pair in life. She can bear children, I cannot. She has a motherly bond with our sons that I cannot emulate. She has a perspective on life in our church that I do not. But I am better suited to bear the responsibility of protection, and I have a fatherly bond with our sons that Ashleigh cannot have, and I have a perspective on church life that Ashleigh does not. Our differences are not a source of antagonism but the foundation of our complementarity.

Progressing down the funnel, I think of **church as family**. In the Bible, the primary description of God is father (Matt. 6:9, Eph 3:14-15). Unsurprisingly, the derivative primary description of the Church is family, with family language and warm relationship part and parcel of church life (Matt. 12:49-50, 1 Cor. 4:17, 1 Tim. 5:1-2, 2 Tim. 1:2, 1 Jn. 3:14-18). This is very important. Church-as-family not only lays the axe to the root of consumer church (where people come to receive a service, and then leave), but it

brings into play the importance of the complementary pairings of fathers and mothers and brothers and sisters in church life.

Next, I think of **the importance of father-elders in the church**. If men are not playing their role in the church, churches will be like single-parent families. Many men should be able to play a fatherly role in the church, but, as I said above, elders *must* play a fatherly role. Importantly, this is fundamentally a **servant** role. As husbands and fathers lay down their lives in their homes, so elders do in the church. As I said in Chapter 2, in seasons of persecution, it is the elders who are taken in for questioning and imprisoned first. In seasons of pandemics, it is the elders who are leading in visiting the sick, and therefore putting their own health at risk. Protecting and serving is what true fathers do.

Certainly, there seems to be a consistent *pattern of fatherly leadership* in the Bible: The Levites, the twelve apostles, and the New Testament local church elders were all male. There are exceptions of a queen and a female judge (2 Kings 11:1-20, Judg. 4-5), but these were in unusual circumstances and, as such, should not be regarded as normative. It is also significant to my mind that Jesus appointed only men to be apostles. Although apostles are not the same as elders, by appointing twelve men and no women to be apostles, Jesus established a principle that not all church offices are necessarily open to women. One objection to this is that the culture of the day didn't allow Jesus to choose women for these positions, but this impugns Jesus' integrity and courage, and is inconsistent with how Jesus readily took on other cultural norms of the day, such as healing on the Sabbath, speaking with a Samaritan woman, and eating with tax collectors and sinners. I also note the pattern of male leadership throughout church

history. The consistent pattern through the centuries has been that the office of elder/pastor (or its equivalent) has been reserved for men. Although this does not demonstrate conclusively that such a position is biblically correct, it gives us reason to reflect seriously on the matter before declaring that the church has wrongly interpreted Scripture on this issue through the centuries.

And then there are the *apostle Paul's* writings about eldership. In 1 Timothy we are told an elder should be the "husband of one wife" (3:2). Some argue that this is not a definitive argument for male elders because in this era only men needed to be warned about marital unfaithfulness. However, 1 Timothy 5:9 delivers a similar sentiment about women, saying that a widow should only be enrolled if she has been "the wife of one husband." Others suggest that elders had to be male in this particular church but not in others, due to a specific problem with women heretics. However, the same requirement is found for elders on the island of Crete several hundred miles away (Titus 1:6). Paul also says that an elder should manage his own household well (1 Tim. 3:4). "Although there were some female heads of households such as Lydia (Acts 16:15), if there was a man present, it was customary for him to be head of the household. Combined with the injunction to be the husband of one wife, this is a very strong indication that Paul sees overseers as fathers."¹⁷

Next, I think about **the importance of mothers in the church**. Titus 2 gives spiritual mothers explicit marching orders, and Paul's efforts to be both fatherly and motherly towards the Thessalonians clearly point to the need for mothers in the church (1 Thess. 2:6-8, 11). If women are not decently represented in church life and leadership, the church will be like a single-parent family. However,

for a church to enjoy the influence of mothers, women do not need to be elders, so long as elders genuinely understand the need for mothers, and are proactive in releasing women into the myriad of roles and responsibilities available to them. Which brings me to my next consideration.

I think about the **importance of empowering and releasing women generally**, not only "mothers." Saying that women should not be elders is saying they should not be *fathers*, not that they should not be leaders. Many male eldership teams are close to hopeless in this regard. Some are lazy or unimaginative, and a few are plain chauvinistic. Others have got distracted as they have tried to restore a healthy model of eldership to their churches. I can think of some eldership teams who have commendably transitioned their churches away from congregational or one-man models to healthier elder-led models. However, as the pendulum swung, the executive function of elders was over-stated and the rank and file were unwittingly disempowered. In the preceding chapter I talked about the role of elders in governing both spiritual and general matters, but this should not mean that they monopolize leadership in spiritual and general ministry. I will argue in Chapter 19 that elders should equip others – not as an optional extra, but as a core responsibility.

Some elderships wisely structure the meeting rhythms of the senior leadership of the church to keep the emphasis on empowering other men and women. For example, the Eldership Team might meet once or twice a month to deal with the things that only they should deal with, whilst another team (maybe called the 'Leadership Team' or 'Elders and Deacons') consisting of suitably gifted men and women might meet more regularly to execute

the bulk of day-to-day church ministry. Such churches may have women heading up massive areas of ministry and responsibility, with loads of people (including many men) answering to them. Certainly, there are many legitimate ways for elders to meaningfully involve women in the leadership and ministry of the church and ensure a well-rounded family tone. In her book *Jesus, Justice and Gender Roles*, Kathy Keller writes:

Women are encouraged to be active, verbal participants in the life of the church – teaching, exhorting, encouraging, and contributing in every way except in the office of elder ... The verses that mandate this gender-based distinction are provided with armor against the charge that their stipulations are time- or situation-specific only ... there is something that is being commanded to the church that we must find a way to obey. Dismissing, ignoring, or throwing one's hands up in despair of finding clarity are not options.¹⁸

Kathy Keller is provocative here, calling for elders to make room for women in every area of church life except those prescribed for elders. Convictions around male eldership should catalyze not paralyze elders in making space for women to express their gifts.

Specifically, I think about the importance of **women deacons**. The topic of deacons receives fuller treatment in Chapter 14, but if (as I shall argue) women can be deacons, then having women deacons goes a long way to ensuring women are meaningfully involved in church leadership. Elders and deacons are a concordant pairing in church life, both vital to a healthy and empowered church. Deacons/deaconesses need to have character traits similar to that

of elders. They may have a defined role in leadership, or may have more of a general mandate. Either way, they are serious leaders, and publicly appointing women to be deacons is a powerful demonstration of healthy complementarity.

A particular area to consider is that of **teaching**. Paul makes it clear in Titus 2 that *women teaching women* is essential, but beyond that he seems to envisage two other categories of teaching.

The first category, and by far the weightiest, is teaching done by *qualified elders or similar* (Acts 6:4, Titus 1:9, 2:1, James 3:1, Heb. 5:12, 1 Tim. 3:2, and 4:11-16). As we shall see in Chapter 18, it is impossible to overstate the importance of this biblical charge to elders. Falling into this category is the famous 1 Timothy 2:12 where Paul says he does not permit a woman to “teach or exercise authority over a man.” It is clear that Paul has in mind some important limitations on women teaching, and by earthing his argument in creation and the Fall, we assume such limitations are for every culture and generation.

The second category is teaching that is open to *the whole church*. It is the “one another” form of teaching (Col. 3:16) that will sometimes occur in a public setting (1 Cor. 14:23-26). In contrast to the first category of teaching, it seems to be open to all believers regardless of sex or leadership status. To illustrate from 1 Corinthians 14, if women are able to bring hymns, tongues, interpretations, and prophetic contributions of various sorts in a certain setting, then to be exegetically consistent shouldn't they also be able to bring a “lesson” (ESV) or “word of instruction” (NIV) in that same setting? However, Paul doesn't elaborate on what is meant by these, and how they might differ from teaching by elders.

So then, what differentiates elder-type teaching from everyone-type teaching, and what contexts are appropriate for each? These are important questions for responsible elders who want to neither stifle the voice of women nor ignore the biblical limitation on women teaching. Eldership teams need to work out what teaching contexts they believe are reserved for elders (or men) only, and then should confidently equip and release women, and other men, to all other arenas of ministry.

I hope that women's voices have been well heard in churches I have led over the years. We have had active women's ministries where women teach women, women leading certain types of mixed-sex Small Groups, women holding varied and significant staff and lay ministry positions in which they often oversee men, and women teaching seminars and workshops. Functionally, the day to day ministry of the church has been done by a leadership team consisting of men and women. Our Sunday meetings have women involved in helping host the meetings, leading worship (and I mean actually directing the congregation in worship as opposed to merely being a lead vocalist), leading in prayer, interviewing and being interviewed, giving testimonies, and bringing significant prophetic contributions and words of encouragement.

In terms of the actual Sunday sermon, I believe that the routine, authoritative public preaching of God's Word is the role of elders. Therefore, I and the other elders (and trainee elders) do the preaching. We occasionally have a woman contributing a section on a relevant theme within the sermon. To help train preachers and hear a diversity of voices, we sometimes have other people (men and women) bring 5-10 minute "lessons" from the Bible (1 Cor. 14:26) on Sundays.

In closing, I must add that I think it is appropriate for a woman, or a team of women, to lead churches in situations or seasons where male leadership is not an option. I am thinking, for example, of situations in rural Africa where due to urbanization there are virtually no men left in certain rural villages. Women might also lead emerging churches for a season in pioneering contexts where women are the primary evangelists.

REFLECTION

1. On a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 being "very"), how convinced are you that elders should be men? Explain your position. What is your church's position on this matter?
2. Outside of eldership, do you think women are sufficiently encouraged, valued and released into ministry in your church?
3. What is your view on women teaching? In what contexts do women teach in your church, and why?

PART 2

RELATIONSHIPS WITH EACH OTHER



CHAPTER 5

HOW LEADERSHIP PLURALITY FEELS

Elders are joined by shared calling, compelling vision, similar beliefs and values, complementary gifts, and true friendship. They develop clearly defined goals for which they share ownership, and around which they hold themselves mutually accountable.

In Part 1 we made the case for a church being led by a plurality of elders. We turn now to how leadership plurality actually works, starting with how it *feels*. The scarcity of clear biblical examples and instruction about how eldership teams function leaves us with significant latitude in how eldership teams may express leadership plurality. However, we can glean something of the feel of leadership plurality from other places in the Bible where leadership plurality also appears to be in operation, such as in the Trinity, in David's army, and in the apostle Paul's "team."

THE TRINITY

The greatest example of leadership plurality is seen in the way our triune God has made himself known to us: the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three distinct persons; each person is fully God; yet there is only one God. Although they are equal in deity, we see a difference in terms of order. For example, we are told that the Father has given Jesus the name above all names (Phil. 2:9), and yet Jesus remains in clear submission to the Father (Jn. 5:19). The Holy Spirit is "sent" by both the Father and Jesus (Jn. 14:24, 15:26) and yet is himself fully God (Gen. 1:2, Jn. 3:8), and is sometimes called the Spirit of Jesus (Acts 16:7). The members of the Trinity are undivided.

Drawing application for an eldership team, although a lead elder would provide the team with over-arching leadership, another elder may have "a higher name" in a certain area of church life. An elder particularly gifted in preaching might loom larger than the lead elder in that regard, or the leader might defer to an elder particularly gifted in administration when it comes to matters

of process. However, these elders would want to express their authority in their particular areas of responsibility in a way that submits to the leader and the team. When eldership plurality is in operation, although there is no doubt who is the over-arching captain of the team, it sometimes appears that Tom is leading, sometimes that Dick is, sometimes that Harry is, and other times that they all are. Although it is something of a mind-bender, this is precisely where the power of leadership plurality lies – it dissects *hierarchy and democracy* to combine the best of *leader and team*.

DAVID'S ARMY

Another example of leadership plurality is found in 1 Chronicles 11. Similarly to the previous example, it is something of an enigma. For example, verses 24 and 25 read:

Such were the exploits of Benaiah son of Jehoiada; he too was as famous as the three mighty men. He was held in greater honor than any of the Thirty, but he was not included among the Three. And David put him in charge of his bodyguard. (NIV)

Try expressing that on an org chart! First, note how these men *complemented rather than duplicated* each other. Although Benaiah was as famous as the Three he was not included among the Three. He was equal in "worth" yet played a different role. Applying this to eldership, although certain decisions and contexts require elders to be equally engaged, elders understand that although equally called, they will express their callings differently and in ways that *complement rather than duplicate* each other. Also, note how Benaiah had a *specialist role* of chief bodyguard. Whilst all elders

will have some identical shared responsibilities, where possible it makes sense to deploy each man according to his special passions and gifts as they align with the needs of the church.

PAUL'S TEAM

Paul had a group of men who helped him serve various churches. He was clearly the leader of this "team," but similarly to the previous examples, he expressed his leadership in a way that respected the plurality of the "team" and harnessed the power of the team members. For example, when Paul asked Titus to visit the churches in Crete, we assume that Titus willingly agreed. But when Paul "strongly urged" Apollos to visit the Corinthians, Apollos refused (1 Cor. 16:12)! How would Paul, the team leader, handle this situation? Instead of pulling rank and insisting that Apollos obey, Paul respected that "it was not at all his will to come now." And, judging by Paul's comment about Apollos visiting "when he has opportunity," it appears that Apollos remained soft-hearted to Paul's leadership.

We get a further indication that Apollos was a "team man" when, on another occasion, we deduce that he checked with the brothers before embarking on a trip: When Apollos "wished to cross to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him.... When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed" (Acts 18:27). This blend of *individual initiative*, coupled with *respect for the leader and team*, is inspiring and instructive for elders. We strive to be mighty men, with mighty convictions, with egos mightily subordinated to the Lord and to one another.

REFLECTION

1. Is it clear who is the leader of your eldership team? Elaborate.
2. Is it also clear that you are leading together? Elaborate. Do different elders "take the lead" in different contexts? Do you think that is healthy?
3. Try and think of at least one unique gifting or ability each of the elders on your team has, including yourself. Take a moment to thank God for equipping your team with complimentary gifts. Any brief thoughts on how to release each member more in their complimentary giftings?
4. As per the Paul-Apollos vignette, is your leader confident enough to "strongly urge," and are the team members confident enough to sometimes decline for good reason?

CHAPTER 6

THE FIVE-LEGGED TABLE

In view of their resources in Christ, eldership teams should be able to harness the power of individuality and togetherness better than any unit on earth. This is the "secret sauce" of successful eldership teams.

The challenge for any team is how to maximize both individuality and togetherness. We see this ideal everywhere, from the motto on the back of American coinage “*E Pluribus Unum*” (Out of Many, One), to *The Jungle Book* mantra, “The strength of the wolf is the pack. The strength of the pack is the wolf.” In view of their resources in Christ (1 Pet. 1:3), eldership teams should be able to harness the power of *individuality and togetherness* better than any unit on earth. This is the “secret sauce” of successful eldership teams.

To this end, think of an eldership as a pentagonal, five-legged table, where stability and effectiveness comes from all five “legs” being upright, and being a similar length. The five legs are:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| 1. Individual | (each individual elder’s role) |
| 2. Leader | (the leader’s role) |
| 3. Team | (the team’s collective role) |
| 4. Outside counsel ¹⁹ | (the role of outside advisors) |
| 5. God’s sovereignty | (confidence that ultimately Christ is building his Church) |

To harness the power of leadership plurality, no leg should be *regularly neglected* or *regularly dominant*, however, *different legs should be deferred to* in different situations.

NO LEG SHOULD BE REGULARLY NEGLECTED

If Leg 1 was regularly neglected (i.e. if some or all elders regularly lacked confidence in their own *individual calling* and conviction),

individuals would not speak and act with conviction, and too many decisions would be abdicated to either the leader or outside counsel.

If Leg 2 was regularly neglected (i.e. if the elders regularly lacked confidence in the gifting and judgment of *the leader*), the team would get jammed up on decisions, go too slow, and lack cohesion and direction.

If Leg 3 was regularly neglected (i.e. if the elders regularly lacked confidence in the collective wisdom of *the team*), they would struggle to collaborate within the diverse perspectives on the team and make decisions that they could support in a unified way.

If Leg 4 was regularly neglected (i.e. if the elders regularly neglected *outside counsel*), at best they would limit themselves to the capacity of their team members, and at worst they would be susceptible to *group think*.²⁰ Because the nature of a blind spot is that you don’t know you have one, a wise eldership team will invite trusted outside counselors in on a regular basis whether they feel they need particular help on something or not, and give them the freedom to raise any concern or idea with them at any time.

If Leg 5 was regularly neglected (i.e. if there was insufficient acknowledgment that the *Sovereign Lord* is at work in all circumstances), team life would develop a self-reliant, pressured tone. When things went well, pride would creep in, and when things went badly, there would be recrimination and shame.

NO LEG SHOULD BE REGULARLY DOMINANT

When Leg 1 regularly dominates, an *individual(s)* moves from a healthy conviction in his own perspective to being obstinate and “quarrelsome” (1 Tim. 3:3), and often holds the team to ransom.

When Leg 2 regularly dominates, *the leader* becomes overly assertive and suppresses the contributions of the individuals, the team as a whole, and outside counsel.

When Leg 3 regularly dominates, a healthy appreciation for *collective team wisdom* mutates into an *idolatry of plurality*. This can result in overuse of one-man-one-vote to make even small to medium-sized decisions on the team. (One-man-one-vote is occasionally useful for legal decisions requiring a record of a formal vote or to resolve a stand-off around a major issue, but overuse leads to all sorts of dysfunction including “analysis paralysis,” stodgy decision-making, and “tall poppy syndrome”²¹).

When Leg 4 regularly dominates, *outside counsel* moves from the realm of invitation to imposition, intentionally or unintentionally usurping the God-given authority of the eldership team, and ending up weakening rather than strengthening the eldership team.

When Leg 5 regularly dominates, the doctrine of *God’s sovereignty* is over-applied in a way that produces passivity rather than action, and abdication rather than responsibility. At best, such a team might be docile in decision-making, and at worst they might need the same rebuke that Joshua did: “Get up! Why have you fallen on your face?” (Josh. 7:10).

HOWEVER, DIFFERENT LEGS SHOULD BE DEFERRED TO IN DIFFERENT SITUATIONS

Deferring to Leg 1: Often the team will wisely defer to an *individual elder’s conviction* on something. As a rule, in small to medium-sized decisions, deference should be given to the elder(s) carrying the particular responsibility, or with the most experience in that area, or with the highest level of faith for that particular thing.

Deferring to Leg 2: Due to his role and gifting, the *lead elder* is very often best positioned to make small to medium-sized decisions, and to be the primary architect of vision and strategy. Unless he is moving in a direction that is unbiblical, unconstitutional, or plain loopy, the team should eagerly follow his lead. A leader plays an invaluable role in helping the team avoid the “Ready, Aim, Aim,” syndrome, just as the team guards against “Ready, Fire, Aim.”

Deferring to Leg 3: For large to massive decisions, the majority opinion of the team should usually be followed. If an elder disagrees with the decision, his confidence in plurality and the *collective calling of the team* enable him to concede in good heart and back the decision of the team. Remember, unity does not equal uniformity. All are obliged to give their perspective as a decision is approached, and all are obliged to support it once made.

Deferring to Leg 4: Although the elders are the highest human authority in their local church and are therefore under no obligation to heed advice from elsewhere, they do well to be receptive to the advice of trusted outside counselors. Normally, elders would make the decision, however in crisis situations it can

be wise to have a “parachute” clause in the church’s Constitution or Bylaws giving two or three outside counselors official powers (e.g. a deciding vote) in the event of deadlock on the team over a massive or controversial issue.

Deferring to Leg 5: Sometimes the combined wisdom and action of Legs 1-4 will not be enough to resolve a problem. In such situations, the team should defer to “Leg 5” by restricting themselves to humble prayers to their sovereign Father: “We do not know what to do but our eyes are on you. Father, unless you build the house, we labor in vain. Build your church, Lord. Work this circumstance out according to the counsel of your will. Work this situation out for your glory and our good.” (2 Chr. 20:12; Ps. 127:1; Matt. 16:18; Eph. 1:11; Rom. 8:28).

REFLECTION

1. Do you agree that all five “legs” contribute to healthy eldership? If you disagree with one, make a case why. Can you think of any other “legs” that are worth mentioning?
2. Is any “leg” on your team either regularly dominant or regularly neglected? If so, propose a remedy.
3. Mention some actual instances when your team has successfully deferred to different “legs.”
4. Does your team have any official or unofficial “parachute plan” for crisis situations? If so, summarize it.

CHAPTER 7 ATTITUDES

Regulated by Jesus, elders know when to soothe and when to challenge, and when to press for progress and when to preserve the status quo.

Space does not permit me to elaborate on all the attitudes that contribute to successful plurality, but in my experience three stand out as amongst the most important: *conviction*, *brotherhood*, and *trust*.

CONVICTION

You will remember from the “five-legged table” analogy how important it is for each elder to have strong convictions about his own calling to eldership, that of his fellow elders, and that of the lead elder. Where lies the basis of such conviction, and what benefits accrue to a team with high levels of conviction in these areas?

The origin of an elder’s confidence is foremost in Christ’s headship of the church (Col. 1:18), and then in Christ’s delegated authority to elders. Make no mistake, the risen Christ himself gives leaders to the church (Eph. 4:11-16) and the Holy Spirit makes a man an elder (Acts 20:28). Assuming a reasonable process of eldership apprenticeship and appointment, each elder may be convinced that God has called him and his brothers to lead their church together, and that God will give them the grace necessary to fulfill their mandate, including the promise of God-given wisdom (Jas. 1:5). Decent levels of conviction enable elders to:

- *Maintain motivation despite the mundane* aspects of eldership. Although they sometimes have to push through stodgy agendas, they never forget they are in the business of pushing back darkness. They are men bought by Jesus, called by Jesus, and equipped by Jesus, who boldly lead God’s people into God’s purposes.

- *Maintain their poise* in the disorienting days that we live in. They allow them to sometimes compromise on practice without ever conceding on principle.
- *Maintain flexibility in how they express their eldership*. Calling seldom changes but the way we express our calling often does. The Lord calls us to eldership, but our fellow elders help us express our eldership in a way that best serves the church and the eldership team in different seasons. And seasons do change in a church, meaning that the eldership team should adjust accordingly.
- *Collaborate around major decisions whilst delegating lesser decisions* to each other. To say it the other way, it is hard to collaborate with, and delegate to, men who you don’t really think should be elders!
- *Be regulated by Jesus more than anything, or anyone, else*. Knowing Jesus has called them to eldership, their dominant thought is “what would Jesus do?” From here they find wisdom to know when to soothe and when to challenge, and when to press for progress and when to preserve the status quo. They are comfortable with adventure and uncertainty, yet sober-minded, steady, and committed for the long haul. They are both thick skinned and soft hearted, bounce back fast from disagreements, and readily overlook offenses.

BROTHERHOOD

I recently heard someone speculate that good friendships amongst elders might actually work against an effective eldership dynamic, because friendship can make it harder for elders to disagree with each other. Nonsense. Elders are mature men who know that speaking truth a loving way, in a loving environment, is God's best (Eph. 4:15), and that genuine relationship and a strong sense of brotherhood is mission-critical, not an optional extra.

The theological motivation for this is derived from who God is, and what God's church should be like. God himself is a loving, highly relational triune community (Lk. 3:22, Jn. 16:28) and the predominant description of God is "Father" (Matt. 6:9, Eph. 3:14-15). It is therefore no surprise that the New Testament church was a warm community (Acts 2:41, Eph. 3:14-15), with leaders regarding themselves as fathers (1 Cor. 4:15-16, 1 Thess. 2:6-8, 11-12), with family language and warm relationship being part and parcel of church life (Matt. 12:49-50, 1 Cor. 4:17, 1 Tim. 5:1-2, 2 Tim. 1:2, 1 Jn. 3:14-18). Therefore, elders who lead the *family* of God on behalf of their *heavenly Father* will want to truly be brothers.

There are also pragmatic reasons for brotherhood. Simply, effective and happy leadership plurality is impossible without meaningful relationship. Knowing and being known, and loving and being loved, enables high levels of trust and ownership. The better you know each other, the better you will be able to discern and promote each other's gifts. The better you will guard each other. Who would not want such a brotherhood? And, the congregation will notice your love for each other and imitate it. Eldership teams

that *feel corporate* produce churches that *feel corporate*. Eldership teams that *feel like family* produce churches that *feel like family*. Here are a few ways to enhance relationships on the team:

First, make sure everyone on the team is *theologically convinced* of the importance of brotherhood, and committed to the endeavor.

Second, grow the team at a *pace* that maintains decent relationships amongst the team. If necessary, limit (or even reduce) the size of the team to regain a healthy relational dynamic.

Third, be *vulnerable* with each other. Jeramie Rinne writes, "If you're an elder, take a risk and get real with the others. Don't be afraid to reveal your hurts and fears, struggles and sins."²² This is excellent advice, but Rinne might be too gentle. I think it is less a case of, "Go on, take a risk and be vulnerable with your fellow elders," and more a case of, "Don't even think about becoming an elder if you are not willing to remain vulnerable!" Confessing struggles and sins to each other when necessary is not an optional extra for elders (Jas. 5:16). Vulnerability is vital if we are to build the strong bond that protects our team and our flock.

Fourth, commit to developing and maintaining relationships with each other *outside of meetings*. This can be done elder-to-elder or couple-to-couple through eating together, hanging out, even going away together. The more vulnerable you can be, the deeper and faster relationship will form. Not everyone needs to be best friends, but everyone needs to feel known and loved, and needs to trust each other.

Fifth, keep *elders' meetings* as relational as possible. Cultivate an atmosphere of fun, laughter and inoffensive banter. Build in

some structured time when different elders share current highs and lows in their lives, and then pray for them. Any brother who is experiencing any sort of crisis receives unhurried attention. Remember, this kind of thing isn't a prelude to eldering, it is eldering (Acts 20:28, 1 Tim. 4:16). It is important for the lead elder to set an example of vulnerability and emotional warmth.

Sixth, *work smart and delegate well* to free up time and energy to build relationally. If the team is constantly over-worked, then brotherhood will take strain. Do not sacrifice relationship on the altar of task.

Seventh, *pray* a great deal together. Prayer is the most unifying team activity on earth.

Eighth, avoid *describing yourselves* in a way that tacitly undermines brotherhood. For example, if the concept of a "Board of Elders" conjures up non-relational corporate notions in your culture, then rather choose a more neutral description such as the "Eldership Team."

And finally, in the event of deadlock around a major issue or some significant breakdown in relationship on the team, *quickly invite in outside help*. Quickly. Not as a last resort. If you take too long you will likely incur way more relational damage on the team than if you invited someone in to help before the molehill became a mountain. Of course, the primary role of outside help is to help maximize the team's potential, not just to solve relational problems, but that is a part of it.

TRUST

Let us imagine the following "trust grid" analogous to the colors on a traffic light.²³

Red	I do not trust you. You need to work to earn my trust.
Orange	I sort of trust you, and try to give you the benefit of the doubt. Prove me right.
Green	I trust you in a robust way, and my trust will not be easily eroded.

I once knew an eldership team who had several members on it who honestly thought that a culture of suspicion, particularly of the lead elder, was healthy. They had in mind how President Lincoln deliberately recruited a cabinet that was a "team of rivals." A cabinet of rivals might help unite a nation in civil war, but it will soon divide a local church. Of course, blind trust is not what we are talking about here, but in many ways trust is the life blood of an eldership team, and it can only be given and never demanded.

Given the importance of *trustworthiness in an elder* (see the characteristics in 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1, and 1 Peter 5), and given the *importance of faith* in the kingdom of God, elder-to-elder and elder-to-leader trust should be consistently green, with maybe occasional orange for brief periods, and never red. If it slips into orange, then immediate and thorough conversations need to be had to get back into the green. If it slips into the red, then the klaxon sounds, all tools are put down, and a solution must be found in short order. If you let it ride, things will deteriorate not

improve. If a brisk return from red to green is not possible, then the only way to restore trust on the team will be by changing the team.

Trust is so important, that a church is better off with a smaller, less impressive eldership team who trust each other, than a large, impressive team who don't. Guard trust. Cultivate trust. Keep short accounts with each other. Keep no record of wrong. Ask rather than assume. Believe the best. Apologize quickly and thoroughly where you can, and stand your ground graciously where you can't. Disagree agreeably. Let no wound fester: clean it, bind it, and move forward in faith.

REFLECTION

1. On a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 being "very"), how strong is your personal conviction around your calling to eldership? What might be eroding that conviction? What might enhance that conviction?
2. On a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 being "very") how strong is the sense of brotherhood on your team? What things erode brotherhood? What things enhance it?
3. On a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 being "very"), how strong is the level of trust on your team? Elaborate. Is there any orange or red in the mix? If so, outline a plan to return to green.

CHAPTER 8 ALIGNMENT

*Do two walk together unless they have
agreed to do so? – Amos 3:3 (NIV)*

We turn now from key attitudes to key areas of alignment that enhance healthy leadership plurality. We will look at four: *agreement on key issues, size and composition of the team, effective elders' meetings, and the benefits of an annual check-in.*

AGREEMENT ON KEY ISSUES

Here are the areas I strongly urge elders to agree on before trying to journey together. It will require some hard work on the front end, but it will pay off.

Agree on the Vs

Agree on your vision. A vision statement reflects the unique sense of calling that your church has, which would no doubt be some kind of contextual re-articulation of the Great Commission. Agreement here will provide an invaluable grid to help the team know what to say “yes” and “no” to, keep the main thing the main thing, and guard against different elders’ pet issues dominating.

Agree on your vital doctrines. An eldership team should have strong agreement around *primary doctrines*, broad agreement on *secondary doctrines*, and space for respected interpretations on *peripheral doctrines*. Without clarity here, major tensions and confusion are inevitable. We should be dogmatic where the Bible is, but not where the Bible isn’t.

Agree on your values. Values speak to your philosophy of ministry, to the things you most value and most want to emphasize. There might be some overlap with “vital doctrines” but try to keep your

values action oriented. For example, your top six values might be *Gospel Centered, Mission Driven, Word Honoring, Spirit Empowered, Prayer Fueled, and Discipleship Based.* A cluster of values such as these will serve as your team’s true north.

Agree on your primary vehicles. Vehicles speak to your methodology, and the practical things that you prioritize to move the mission of your church forward. For example, your primary vehicles might minimally be *Sunday Meetings, Small Groups, and Serving Teams.*

Agree on a decision-making framework

Patient thought upfront in terms of who-does-what, who-needs-to-know-what, and who-gives-permission-for-what, will save you hours of time and stress as the size of the team grows. Think through what issues must come to *all elders*, or a *sub-group of elders*, or just the *lead elder*, or just *one elder*. Think through what things need the whole team’s *permission*, what needs their *perspective*, and what things the team merely need to be *informed* about. Broadly speaking, I suggest entrusting *smaller matters* to the elder who has particular responsibility for that area, or the lead elder, or a combination of both. On *medium-sized matters*, the minority would usually be content to move forward in honor of the judgment of the majority, especially if the lead elder was part of the majority. On *momentous matters* (such as removal of the lead elder, or some key doctrinal dispute), unanimity should be pursued, and you probably need an official voting mechanism (with the help of outside advisors) to fall back on in case you cannot make a harmonious decision.

Agree on a framework to work through inter-team grievances

I suggest a simple Matthew 18-type approach to solving elder-on-elder disputes. *Step 1:* If you have a problem with a fellow elder, you should initiate conversation with him. Do not leave it to fester; talk to him and see if you can resolve it. Similarly, if you know or suspect that an elder has a problem with you, then you should also initiate as per Matthew 5:23-24. Similarly, if you are aware of a problem between two elders, urge them to obey Matthew 18 and Matthew 5:23-24. If they don't heed you, then you need to invoke Matthew 18 with them for that! *Step 2:* If the two of you can't resolve your issue, then draw in one or two other elders to help you. *Step 3:* If the matter still can't be resolved, draw in more, or all, of the elders, maybe with some outside help.

Agree on how to handle potentially controversial situations ahead of time

Two such areas spring to mind. First, *culturally controversial issues* such as sexuality and gender. Have an agreed position on these matters before you need them, or else you could be vulnerable if church members or the media suddenly engage with you around such issues. Second, *ministries that elders' wives or family are involved in*. If poorly handled (or even well-handled!), changes in these areas can cause friction amongst the elders. Imagine some worst-case scenarios, and talk through how everyone will need to respond if those scenarios ever occur. For example, imagine an elder's wife leads worship and both she and her husband think she is doing a great job, but another elder who oversees the Worship

Department views things differently! Wise is the team that talks through these sorts of scenarios before they need to.

Agree on how staff and non-staff elders work together

Communication, capacity and *personality* should be considered. In terms of *communication*, staff elders have little trouble staying "in the know," but special effort needs to be made to keep the non-staff elders abreast of salient matters. In terms of *capacity*, non-staff elders should all do *some* hands-on shepherding to avoid them becoming detached governors, but it needs to be recognized that their general output will be less than staff elders, and likely be in more specialist areas. In terms of *personality* type, non-staff elders need to be comfortable not being looped-in on everything, and delegating meaningful decision-making and implementing authority to the staff elders. I have noticed that men with a ravenous appetite for details and an unusually high sense of responsibility do not find it easy to be non-staff elders.

We look more at staff and non-staff elders in Chapter 15, but in larger churches thought needs to be given to how staff elders report to other staff elders for their staff roles. Clear but brotherly expectations and structures go a long way to protecting relationships and maximizing potential. Simultaneously being a lead elder, a brother elder and a staff "boss" to other elders is not easy, and thought should be given to how it all works. Try to think through who reports to who, how, and how often? What is each staff elder responsible for, and how is that measured? What recourse does either party have if the "staff" relationship is taking strain?

SIZE AND COMPOSITION OF THE TEAM

Size

Biblically, we know that an eldership team should be plural, meaning there should be at least two elders. If the church is small, it is easy to imagine just two or three elders, but what when a church grows? We know there is wisdom in a multitude of counselors (Prov. 15:22), so it follows that the more elders the more wisdom. However, because eldership is about more than men pooling their wisdom on various matters, there is a point of diminishing returns. In my experience, the dynamic of a team *always* changes as it grows, so every team will eventually hit a size where the compromises are not worth the benefits. The optimal size for a team depends on several tangible and intangible factors, so all I can do is mention a few of them in the hope that each team can apply them to their own situation to help them work out their optimal size.

First, and quite obviously, is the matter of *suitability*. If you only have two men who are biblically suitable to be elders, then that is your eldership team for now, no matter how big the church is. However, you can invite others to sit in with you and assist you until you are ready to appoint more elders.

Second, the team's *ability to delegate* genuine responsibility amongst themselves, and to others, is a factor. When levels of trust and ability to delegate are high, a team can usually be larger without compromising efficiency.

Third, *philosophy of pastoral care* is a factor. If the team believes that weighty pastoral responsibility should only be provided by duly appointed elders, then the eldership team will need to keep growing in proportion to the growth of the church. Or, if the team is comfortable to equip and release lay leaders to meaningful pastoral responsibility (reporting to the elders), then the team can remain smaller without limiting church growth.

Fourth, given it is generally true that it is easier to cultivate and maintain deeper *relationships* amongst a smaller team than a larger team, then a team with a higher value on relationship might choose to limit the size of their team to safeguard their relational value, or at least to grow at a slower pace.

Fifth, the *preference of the leader* is something to consider. The leader is the primary culture-shaper on the team and is held to account more than the other elders for team health and efficiency, so he obviously needs to have a major say in both the size and composition of the team.

Composition

It is not always wise or possible to appoint every man who could be an elder. Other than their personal suitability (character and competence) and their sense of calling, I consider five *other* things before appointing an elder:

Capacity: He might have great character, high charisma, and strong competency, but if he lacks the capacity to fulfill the demands on him as an elder in your church (maybe due to the demands of his family situation, or work, or health), then I would not make him an elder.

Context: If you are trying to grow an ethnically diverse church, you might need to refrain from appointing more and more elders from the dominant culture. It might be better to have a smaller eldership team that is proportionally more diverse. Similarly, it might not be wise to appoint men in their fifties and sixties in a church that desperately needs the next generation to take more ownership, or vice versa.

Chemistry: It is not good to have a cliquey team where everyone is best friends, but it is equally unwise to think that you can build a healthy team if there are oil-and-water personalities in the mix. Building a happy and effective team with compatible personalities is hard enough!

Balance of roles: Thinking ahead to the primary roles of elders in Part 5 (shepherd, teach, equip, lead), whilst all elders should have a basic proficiency in all four areas, ideally different individuals will be particularly gifted in *different* roles, and this will produce a well-rounded yet potent team. Therefore, it might not be wise to keep appointing teacher-types to a team that is already very strong in that department but lacking in the areas of pastoral care, equipping and out-and-out leadership.

Balance of strengths: I worked with one eldership team who had a personality strengths assessment done, and it emerged that of the sum of the elders, the percentage of the “go-getter” characteristic on the team was 7%, and that the leader contributed almost all of that 7%! I pointed out that this would create an adversarial relationship between the leader and the team, as he would have few allies for his progressive brand of leadership, and that the risk-averse team would unconsciously herd together and ostracize him. I hoped I wasn’t right, but I was, and within a year the

compounding friction caused a spark, and the team went up in flames. This was an extreme scenario, but it makes the point that a healthy and happy team is not just pot-luck, and that strengths profiles are something to consider.

EFFECTIVE MEETINGS

There are so many different ways to run successful meetings. I know some teams who have hardly any agenda or structure and who seem to laugh their way through copious cappuccinos, but who somehow stay happy and productive. I know other teams whose meetings are, well, at the other end of the spectrum, and also seem to be happy and fruitful. That said, here are my suggestions:

First, meet *frequently* enough to allow the team meeting to be not only efficient, but also to be relational. If the agenda is too tightly packed you will forfeit some important (often spontaneous) “off road” moments that build relationships, whether it simply be enough time to laugh together, or time to check in with a brother who is struggling.

Second, keep the meetings to a *length* that brings the best out of the team. When meetings regularly drag on, morale and productivity will wane, and the risk of unbrotherly behavior will increase. Be concise whenever possible. Remember that a good point will sell itself.

Third, ensure quality time for *prayer* either in the meetings, or in another regular context.

Fourth, *delegate* as much brainstorming and other prep work to sub-groups to maximize the efficiency of the meetings when the team are all together.

Fifth, try and give some regular time to the various *essential aspects of eldership* (shepherd, teach, equip, lead). You might do this intuitively or you might try to plan your agendas to ensure that over a six-month period decent time is spent on all categories to help produce a biblically balanced expression of eldership in your church.

Sixth, make sure that the *real debate doesn't begin after the meeting*. This is not to say that team members shouldn't process together in appropriate ways outside of meetings, but be careful that such behavior doesn't undermine meetings and make them empty rituals.

And finally, have a *capable facilitator*. Elders' meetings are so central to team life that the lead elder will normally want to lead the meetings, but he will often need a facilitator of some sort to help him ensure that the meetings are productive and healthy. Some lead elders are superb facilitators and can comfortably lead and "chair" their own meetings, but this is rare. I personally prefer to ask another suitably gifted elder to facilitate parts of our meetings to enable me contribute to the discussion rather than just facilitate it, and to make sure we don't stall when discussing a complex issue (which I am prone to doing). I particularly like him to host sections of the meeting that deal with financial or legal issues, as that is not my strong suit. However, I do not abdicate my role as primary culture setter and team leader to a "chairman." Of course, in some contexts churches have to have a Board of

Trustees with a Chairman who may not be the lead elder, but that is different from what I am talking about here.

ANNUAL CHECK-IN

A healthy team will keep short accounts with each other and raise concerns along the way. However, many teams find it helpful to also plan a "check-in" moment once a year or so. There are many ways to do this, and with a bit of trial and error, each team will figure out a way that works for them. Some will include their wives, others not. Some will do it conversationally, others in writing. Some will develop their own questions, whilst others may want to use the following *7-C Check-In* that I find helpful. No matter how you choose to do it, I recommend that all elders participate in the check-in, both staff and non-staff elders. Staff elders might also participate in a separate staff review that focuses on their paid employment, but reviewing all elders equally bolsters a sense of brotherhood and equality on the team.

Calling

Over the last year, would you say that your sense of calling to be an elder has increased, decreased, or maintained? If it has increased or decreased, briefly explain what has contributed to that.

Character

Of the characteristics mentioned in 1 Timothy 3:2-7 and Titus 1:5-8, which three do you currently feel strongest in, and which

two do you currently feel weakest in? Who are you personally accountable to, and how does that accountability dynamic work?

Chemistry

On a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 being “very good”), how is your relational chemistry with your fellow elders? What aspects of brotherhood are you most enjoying? Are you experiencing any friction? How could your team deepen their relational chemistry?

Culture

On a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 being “very”), how comfortable are you with the culture of the eldership team and the church? Which aspects do you particularly like? Are there aspects that you are struggling with?

Competence

Although there is some overlap between the various aspects of eldering, we could say that elders *shepherd* God’s flock (1 Pet. 5:2), *teach* God’s word (Titus 1:9), *equip* God’s people (Eph. 4:11-12), *lead/govern* zealously (Rom. 12:8, 1 Tim. 5:17, Heb. 13:17), and *model Christian character and leadership* (1 Tim. 3:2-7, Titus 1:5-8, 1 Pet. 5:1-4). Which three of these five roles do you feel strongest and weakest in?

Capacity

Are you expressing eldership and ministry in a manageable and sustainable way? Do you need to shed some responsibilities? Could you take on more responsibility?

Church

Mention three areas of church that you feel are going particularly well at the moment, and two areas where you would like to see improvement. What ideas do you have to improve these areas?

REFLECTION

1. In which areas of *agreement* is your team strong, and weak? Suggest practical steps to help find agreement in the areas of disagreement.
2. What are the benefits and challenges of the current *size and composition* of your team?
3. Where is your team strong in *running effective meetings*, and where is there room to improve? Suggest some improvements.
4. Do you have any type of *annual check-in*? If so, mention its strengths and weaknesses.

PART 3

RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE LEADER



CHAPTER 9

THE CASE FOR “FIRST AMONG EQUALS”

What team would not want the stimulation and courage of a gifted leader? What leader would not want the security and wisdom of a gifted team?

In the previous chapters we looked at various attitudes and actions that “oil the wheels” of plurality. We now turn to one of the most critical success factors for healthy plurality – a “*first among equals*” team leader. The term “first among equals” or “*primus inter pares*” is sometimes used in political and religious contexts when one is trying to communicate that the leader is afforded an extra measure of respect and influence by the team, whilst simultaneously remaining equal and accountable to the team in various ways. In antiquity, the leader of the Roman Senate was referred to as “*primus inter pares*,” as was Constantine the Great. In more recent times, some political leaders have also referred to themselves in a self-deprecating way as “first among equals” as a form of respect for, and camaraderie with, their colleagues.²⁴

Although the phrase “first among equals” is not used in the Bible, it is a useful idiom to describe the type of leadership that we deduce from Scripture is appropriate to eldership teams. If an eldership team consists of a plurality of “equal” elders (which I argued for in Chapter 3), and if that team should have a leader who is “first” (which I argue for below), then should he not be a “first among equals” kind of leader?

THE BIBLICAL CASE

I believe that the *first among equals* model is the most likely to enable a safe and stimulating leadership environment for a church, and more importantly, is a biblical model. Here is why I believe that:

The biblical norm is that biblical teams have leaders. By way of illustration, the examples of leadership plurality from Chapter 5

(the Trinity, David’s army, and Paul’s team) all involve a leader of some sort. Actually, leaders more than teams stand out across both the Old and New Testaments, therefore having a lead elder who leads the eldership team would be consistent with this general biblical pattern.

“*Body theology*” calls us to honor spiritual gifts, which would include the gift of leadership (Rom. 12:8). If a multi-gifted body of elders is the appropriate unit to lead a multi-gifted local church body, then it makes sense that part of the multi-giftedness within the elders would be a team leader especially gifted with the gift of leadership. It would be strange to honor all other gifts amongst the team except that of leadership.

The apostle Peter was clearly “first among equals” of the Twelve – he is mentioned first in the various lists of the apostles in the gospels, and in Luke 22:32 Jesus said to Peter, “strengthen your brothers.” Bearing in mind the Twelve Apostles functioned for a time as the *de facto* eldership of the early church in Jerusalem church, we may assume Peter was also the leader of the Jerusalem church, an assumption amply supported by what we read in Acts 1:15, 2:14, much of Acts 3, 4, and 5, and Acts 15:7-11. Since the Jerusalem church had a leader, then we can assume other churches also should.

As the Book of Acts progresses, James seems to have seniority in the Jerusalem church. Acts 12:17 speaks of “James and . . . the brothers,” and a similar dynamic is implied in 15:13 and 21:18. Whether or not he was lead elder *per se*, it seems the elders/church at Jerusalem afforded him special influence amongst them, which is consistent with the principle of a “first among equals” leader.

The apostle Paul assumed different elders would have different roles. 1 Timothy 5:17 refers to elders who both "rule well" and "preach and teach" and who are financially rewarded for their labors. Although there is no clear evidence Paul is referring here to a lead elder as such, the point is that Paul assumed different elders would have different roles and gifts, a principle consistent with the practice of having a lead elder. Actually, most lead elders tend to fit comfortably into the specific category that Paul mentions here, being suitable for the role precisely because they are gifted to both "rule well" (lead) and "preach and teach."

HOW HURT CAN DISTORT THE "DYNAMIC MIDDLE"

First among equals requires perseverance and maturity because we tend to naturally bias to the extremes of rebellion (no leader, thank you very much) or *domination* (shut up and do what I tell you). Our "first among equals" model allows for neither, and will press an eldership team to find the *dynamic middle* where the very best of leadership and the very best of team converge. Finding this dynamic middle should be a pleasant journey of discovery, but can be particularly taxing (or even elusive) for an individual or team that has been hurt in the past by either too strong a leader or too strong a team. If that has been your misfortune, I expect you will encounter three particular challenges:

First, you will struggle to know where this dynamic middle actually is. If you have been hurt by a leader, your "middle" will be further toward the "team" end of the spectrum than is healthy. Conversely, if you have been hurt by a team, your "middle" will

be further toward the "leader" end of the spectrum than is healthy. You will need to allow others with experience to coach you on where the middle really is.

Second, you might struggle to grasp that the radical middle is a *band not an exact point*. *First among equals* is an attitude more than a system. It is kinetic not static. It has to be, because its genius is getting the best out of different individuals on the team in different contexts. Therefore, sometimes the dynamic middle will be to the left of center to defer more to the leader, and other times to the right to defer more to the team or to a particular team member. If you try and secure an immovable center point with all sorts of codifications and protocols, you will corrupt the soul of spirit-led plurality. Enjoying the full bandwidth of the dynamic middle requires trust in each other and trust in the Lord.

And third, you will likely find yourself longing for the "middle" for defensive more than offensive reasons. Your motive will be more to "keep the balance of power" rather than get the very best out of both leader and team. This is an unhealthy way of thinking, and you will likely drift towards being a policeman. Again, allow others to coach you on the great *potential* of first among equals, not just on how it protects from danger.

Understandably, it can be tricky to trust once you have been hurt, and it can be wise to take a season out of leading to give your soul a chance to recover. Remember, "hurt people tend to hurt people" so it is not wise to lead if you are still badly hurt. But don't stay out of the race long. Lean into the Lord, and into others again, and you will return stronger, humbler, wiser, and more tender than before – exactly the kind of qualities needed on "first among equals" eldership teams.

Friends, despite the challenges “first among equals” is worth it. Think of the apostle Peter: without him the team of apostles would have been weaker and more vulnerable; without them, Peter would have been weaker and more vulnerable. Without them, his impulsiveness could have been dangerous. Without him, they might have been overly cautious. But together they made a great team. Of course, over-elevating a leader leaves him vulnerable to pride and aloofness, but conversely, under-elevating him leaves the team vulnerable to mediocrity. The genius of “first among equals” is that it leverages the strengths of both team and leader. What team would not want the stimulation and courage of a gifted leader? What leader would not want the security and wisdom of a gifted team? A called and unified team of elders, led by a humble and courageous leader, mobilizing a gifted and energetic church body, is a phenomenal concoction for gospel advance.

REFLECTION

1. Do you find all five of the biblical rationales for “first among equals” compelling? If not, why not? Can you think of other biblical reasons to either support or undermine the argument?
2. In your own words describe what is meant by the “dynamic middle.” What kind of experience have you had with leadership dynamics in the past, and how do you think this might be currently helping or hindering you?

CHAPTER 10

HOW “FIRST AMONG EQUALS” FEELS

It is first among equals not first against equals. In every happy and effective eldership I know, the leader is fighting for the team's influence, and the team are fighting for the leader's influence. Each tries to “out honor” the other.

IT DOES EXACTLY WHAT IT SAYS ON THE TIN

In 1994 a wood stain manufacturer called Ronseal ran a series of advertisements claiming their product did exactly what the information on the tin (can) claimed it would do. Since then "doing what it says on the tin" has become a vernacular phrase for "by name and by nature." "First among equals" leadership should feel like it sounds. All three words are vital: *first* and *among*, and *equals*.

First: The leader will be afforded a seniority and influence greater than the other elders by virtue of his gifting and position as leader. Although other elders on the team may express meaningful leadership in different areas themselves, and although the leader is ultimately accountable to the team, *there is no doubt who is leading the team*. The team heartily empowers the leader to lead them, and celebrates his spiritual gift of leadership. In that sense he is "first."

Among: However, the leader expresses his leadership from among the team rather over the team, leading as a brother more than an executive. Although he is free to press for what he wants, like Paul with Apollos, he is respectful and big-hearted when he doesn't get his way (1 Cor. 16:12).

Equals: The elders, leader included, are equal in worth before God, in their calling as elders, and in their shared responsibility for leading the church. However, within their equality they celebrate a diversity of expression in their gifts, experience, and talents (Matt. 25:14-30), and happily play different roles according to their individual strengths. Although equal in their calling as elders, how they outwork their calling will be different.

The following table speaks to the important balance of both "first" and "equals:"

Too much "first"	Too much "equals"	"First among equals"
The team is squashed	The leader is squashed	The team and leader flourish
Elders are cheerleaders	Elders are handbrakes	Elders are supportive yet wise
Lack of decision-making process	Hyper decision-making process	Healthy decision-making process
Too big a target on the leader's back	Everyone's baby is no one's baby	Shared responsibility
Hard to correct the leader	Hard to correct the team	Both open to correction
Leader dominates and team abdicates	Team dominates and leader abdicates	Strong leader and strong team

IT FEELS LIKE "SIDE-BY-SIDE, NEARLY"

We once took our elders and their families to the circus at the end of the year to thank them for their commitment. One act involved a man standing with his two feet on different horses as they cantered around the ring side-by-side. Although it looked like the horses were exactly side-by-side, the outside horse was actually marginally ahead. The outside horse was the "lead" horse, although the lead he was giving was subtle. To the crowd's delight,

at various intervals the rider allowed each horse to surge about a yard head of the other one, making the rider do the splits. But he always brought the horses back to their default formation, side-by-side with the outside horse slightly ahead.

This is a helpful analogy for us. The default formation of the team and their leader should be generally side-by-side (equals) with the leader marginally ahead (first). However, in certain situations, one horse might pull ahead of the other. This is fine so long as the gap is not too large, and it is not for too long, and no one falls off! I can remember lots of instances and seasons where I *really* led as the leader, and seemed to have special grace from the Lord to be ahead of the team on various things. I also remember instances and seasons where different team members, or the team collectively, seemed to be ahead of me. But most of the time, it feels we are side-by-side, with me slightly ahead.

Because ultimate authority lies with the team not the leader, the team know they are within their rights to rein in the lead horse anytime. But they also know that if they do that too often, or with too much of a jolt, it will frustrate the leader and make him wonder why the team ever asked him to lead! Reciprocally, the leader knows that if he pulls too far ahead too often, it will frustrate the team and make them wonder why they ever asked him to lead! But when both parties are committed to honoring the other, “first” and “equals” harmonize beautifully.

IT FEELS LIKE “MUTUALLY DEFERENTIAL”

Sometimes I hear teams say that “the leader is the accelerator and the team is the brake.” I am not a fan of this metaphor as it

unhelpfully stereotypes the leader as the only go-getter and the other elders as risk-averse, which should not be the case. Also, it feels adversarial more than synergistic, implying that the leader and team are opposite forces playing opposite roles. Nonsense. It is first among equals not first against equals. In every happy and effective eldership team I know, the leader is fighting for the team’s influence, and the team are fighting for the leader’s influence. Each tries to “out honor” the other (Rom. 12:10).

I love hearing leaders say, “Brothers, as ready as I am to proceed on this, I am eager that we feel a collective “yes” before we move ahead. How do you feel about this idea? What am I missing?” I love hearing teams respond, “You didn’t actually need to check in with us on this, but thanks for doing so. Let’s do it!” Or, “We are grateful for your initiative and eager to move forward, but would you be open to the following caveats?” Honor produces honor. If you want your leader to acknowledge the team more, affirm him more. If you want your team to acknowledge you more as leader, acknowledge them more. Never fight for your own rights. Once both sides start doing that, so begins the death spiral. The “life spiral” happens when all players are looking upwards to Jesus, worshipping him, and trying to represent him in their relationships with each other. Happy is that band of brothers.

REFLECTION

1. Which line in the table especially caught your eye, and why? Can you think of other lines that could be added to the table?

2. Does “side-by-side, nearly” generally describe your team and your leader? Have you got any examples when either the leader or the team pulled ahead in some way? What did that look like?

3. In your own words explain what is meant by “mutually deferential.” How is your team doing in that regard?

CHAPTER 11

KEY CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THE LEADER

There are few things that frustrate elders more than a timid leader, exasperate them more than a proud leader, and bless them more than a confident yet humble leader.

Here are some key contributions that the leader can make to help produce a healthy first among equals dynamic. I will speak directly to lead elders.

LEAD YOURSELF

The most difficult member of your team to lead will be you. I recommend you work on yourself in the following areas:

Be secure and satisfied in Jesus

This comes first. Unless you are ultimately secure and satisfied in Jesus, you will look for security and satisfaction in your church and your eldership team, and there is not a whisper of a chance that they can provide that for you. It's a fool's errand, and will inevitably cause you to slip into behaviors that will test your team. Your desire for success may cause you to drive them rather than guide them. Your desire for affirmation may cause you to appease them rather than lead them. Your pursuit of achievement may entice you away from your moral and theological center to whatever doctrine or method appears to be pragmatically successful, which will exasperate and disorient your elders as you lurch from one "great idea" to the next. So, brother, as they say on airplanes, first put on your own oxygen mask before helping others with theirs. Breathe in the grace of God deeply for yourself before helping others do the same.

Resist pedestalization like the plague

The Bible is clear that leaders are a necessary gift from the Lord, and should be honored and respected. However, leaders should not be put on pedestals. Your team members should not expect from you things that should only be expected from God. That is also a fool's errand. In fact, it is idolization, and whenever something created is elevated to something ultimate, after the euphoric rush of elevation always follows an excruciating fall. If they deify you, when you eventually disappoint them, they will vilify you. Of course, you are not ultimately responsible for their attitudes, but you can do things to help them keep Jesus on the pedestal rather than you. Be humble and authentic. Share your humanity with them. Confess sin and weakness to them. Boast about how the Lord graciously uses you even when you are a knucklehead. And most importantly, teach them to be ultimately secure and satisfied in Jesus themselves, so they are not tempted to seek that in you.

Be a man of two blends: confidence and humility, and faith and vision

Lead confidently yet humbly. There are few things that frustrate elders more than a timid leader, exasperate them more than a proud leader, and bless them more than a *confident yet humble* leader. In terms of faith and vision, vision without faith is hollow and faith without vision is aimless. Be catalytic and consistent in both areas. Keep finding fresh ways to articulate "The Big Why." Help them to own the vision for themselves. When you hear them remind you that "doing so-and-so is not actually in keeping with our vision" and that "we must trust God to fulfill what we believe

he has promised to us” then you may break out the champagne – they have understood the vision and they are in faith for it!

LEAD STRONG AND LEAD TOGETHER

If you take *lead* out of *leadership* you get *er-ship*. What direction should we go in? “Er, not sure.” What should our ministry emphasis be this year? “Er, good question.” What is the Lord calling us to? “Er, don’t know. Let’s vote.” Brother, you are called to lead, really lead. But lead together. Be a man of conviction and innovation, be proactive and inspiring, but lead from *within* the team rather than *over* the team. In your heart, *need* the team rather than *tolerate* the team. Think of yourself as “leading the team that leads the church” rather than as the “leader of the church.”

When I was leading my first eldership team, I felt God speak to me when I was traveling on the London Underground. We were a young eldership team and still working at getting aligned on the important stuff, and although I didn’t realize it, I was getting sloppy at keeping us moving together at a similar pace. If you have traveled on the London Underground, you will have heard the iconic address over the PA systems whenever people get on or off a train to make sure they don’t fall between the platform and train: “Mind the gap.” I felt God say to me “mind the gap emerging between you and your team.” The gap can take different forms. It can be *relational*, *philosophical* or *doctrinal*, or to do with *gifting*, or simply about *general speed*.

The relational gap

You don’t need to be best friends with everyone on the team, but you should be relationally connected with everyone, and ideally really good friends with one or more elders. In times of relational peace, rather than neglecting relationship building, try to deposit as much relational collateral as you can which you can then draw on in times of tension. In times of tension, move *towards* each other relationally, not apart. Do not let issues fester. A warning sign that the relational gap is too large is you thinking, “Leadership is lonely. My elders don’t understand me.” They may not understand you totally, but they probably understand you sufficiently. And if they don’t, the answer is for you to help them understand you rather than withdraw from them. Don’t become aloof from the normal fellowship dynamics of the eldership team. Be amongst your team and amongst the people. If a few people abuse their proximity to you, the answer is to coach them, not to withdraw to an ivory palace.

The philosophical and doctrinal gap

Pro-actively look for ways to enhance the philosophical and doctrinal harmony of the team. Attend conferences with other elders rather than alone. Read the same books at the same time. Talk through controversial doctrines and hot button issues together.

The gifting gap

In view of your stronger gifts in some areas, it is appropriate for there to be a gifting gap between you and the team in those areas, but the gap should not be too large. Keep the gap small by helping to develop other elders in those areas. Colin Baron writes,

It is interesting to note how often Paul left a church and allowed leaders to come through, later going back to appoint elders. When you are not itinerant, you have to provide creative ways to provide space for men to emerge to stand alongside you ... other team members must be given opportunities ... to blossom in their own gifts.²⁵

For example, if you monopolize the preaching, the church can become overly dependent on your preaching gift, and it can be harder and harder for other preachers to emerge. Or, if you are the only one bringing leadership energy to elders' meetings, the leadership gap will likely widen. Use different elders to present matters compatible with their areas of passion and gifting, both to the eldership team and to the congregation.

General speed

Two African proverbs need to be held in tension. The first is, "Go fast, go alone. Go far, go together." This is an exhortation for the leader to slow down to the pace of the team. The second is, "Speed of the leader, speed of the pack." This is an exhortation to the team to speed up to the pace of the leader. Both will need to happen to "mind the gap."

LEAD TOWARDS BALANCE

Build a balanced team

We have already begun to say that eldership involves several main roles: *shepherding* God's flock (1 Pet. 5:2), *teaching* God's word (Titus 1:9), *equipping* God's people (Eph. 4:11-12), *leading/governing* zealously (Rom. 12:8, 1 Tim. 5:17, Heb. 13:17), and of course, *modeling Christian character and leadership* (1 Tim. 3:2-7, Titus 1:5-8, 1 Pet. 5:1-4). Keeping all five aspects in play is no small feat, and the leader plays a vital role in this. It may come naturally to you if you are a "jack of all trades," or be more of a challenge if you are personally strong in certain aspects and weak in others. Similarly, if your team consists of elders who are each naturally strong in the same aspect(s) of eldership, then you will feel the team vehicle always pulling to one side of the road, and you will need to keep a particularly tight grip on the wheel to ensure your team stays balanced on all aspects of eldering.

Part of building a balanced team is being a talent scout: You don't need to be *the most competent at everything*, but you need to be *competent at spotting and deploying competency* on your team (or heeding the advice of another elder who is stronger than you in that regard). Well-rounded teams consist of sharp-edged specialists, and you need to spot and sharpen those edges. One of the main reasons that teams plateau is because the members are not deployed according to their strengths. Delegating the right things to the right people enables the team to play to the level of the *most* gifted man in every area. Delegation should be clear but

not overly detailed, as this honors the creativity and gifting of the delegate. Equip, empower and promote your team members.

LTVc

There are four things which, if all in play, make for a strong and safe church: *leader*, *team*, *vision*, and *congregation*. When someone joins a church, they usually do so because they immediately find one or two of these things particularly compelling. For example, maybe they like your (the *leader's*) preaching so much that they decide to join the church. But as the months go by, they gradually get to know various members of the eldership *team*, and increasingly catch the *vision* of the church, and along the way make some excellent friendships in the *congregation*. The hope is that by the end of their first year they are feeling meaningfully connected to you (the *leader*), the *team*, the *vision*, and the *congregation*. This is a strong and safe way to build a church. Therefore, try to lead in a way that helps the people feel equally joined to all four “aspects” of church. The more magnetic you are, the harder you might need to work at ensuring people are not overly connected to you and sufficiently connected to the vision, the eldership team and the congregation.

REFLECTION

1. All elders need to have their fundamental security and satisfaction in Jesus rather than in ministry or somewhere else. Where are you, or could you be, tempted to look for ultimate security and satisfaction other than Jesus?

2. Which of the potential “gaps” are smallest (healthiest) on your team? Are there any gaps that you feel are too wide, or in danger of widening? What could be done to “mind” these gaps?

3. In terms of a balanced team, which of the five aspects of eldership is your team collectively strongest in and weakest in? Does the “vehicle” pull to a certain side of the road?

4. In terms of a balanced church, do you think people in your church are generally well-connected to the leader, the vision, the eldership team and the church community? Elaborate.

CHAPTER 12

KEY CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THE TEAM

Paul thought of himself as both a father and fellow worker to Timothy (Phil. 2:22). This is helpful language for elders. You are both following your leader and are a fellow worker alongside him.

In addition to working with the leader in the areas mentioned in the previous chapter, here are several other things for the team to be mindful of:

“FOLLOW” AND “FELLOW”

Paul thought of himself as both a father and a fellow worker to Timothy (Phil. 2:22). This is helpful language for elders. You are both *following* your leader and are a *fellow* worker alongside him. Sometimes you will need to be especially deferent to his visionary burden and whisper in his ear, “Make the call, brother, we will follow.” Other times you will need to remind him, “Brother, we are in this together as *fellow* workers. Can we discuss it some more?”

To bolster the “follow” dynamic, it is important to afford him authority commensurate with his responsibility as leader. Give him generous latitude to lead you within the bounds of Scripture and your agreed vision and values, and encourage him to confidently execute the vision, strategy, and day-to-day tactics of the church. And if he occasionally colors outside the lines, don’t come down too hard on him. Part of his (much needed) gifting is to draw very close to the lines, and sometimes shift the lines a little, so if you want a catalytic leader you need to take the rough with the smooth.

To bolster the “fellow” dynamic, reassure him that you are owning the vision with him. Speak of “our vision” not “his vision.” Don’t let him be the only catalyst or the only voice of faith. Also, if there is relational strain developing, or if you feel he is off color, take the initiative and move *towards him*. This will mean a great deal

to him and reassure him that you in it together as fellow workers. All of this will also position you well for when he needs correction.

FIGURE HIM OUT

Hebrews 13:17 speaks about the “advantage” of having cheerful leaders rather than “groaning” leaders. Tragically, the least joyful area of ministry for many church leaders is leading their eldership team. Literally, they groan more at the thought of an elders’ meeting than any other aspect of church life. This. Should. Not. Be. To help your leader serve you with joy rather than groaning, you need to figure him out. He will be trying to do the same to you and trying to adjust his style to serve the team, but it is as important for the team to joyfully accommodate his preferences and style to get the full advantage out of him. Leaders will have certain quirks that are often an integral part of their flair, and a wise team will accommodate, even appreciate them for the prize of a leader operating in his gifting.

To help figure him out, you could ask the following questions:

What elements of eldership team life are particularly important to him? How can the team ensure that those particular things are fulfilled? For example, I highly value a buoyant prayer culture on our eldership team. If our prayer time is dozy, I get twitchy. Similarly, I highly value our times together as elders and wives, as I feel our camaraderie as couples is mission critical, so I feel uneasy if couples don’t prioritize those times or don’t organize baby-sitters and so on. I also highly value a culture of encouragement, so I get bleak if we jump straight to critique before celebrating the strengths of a proposal or an event that we are reflecting on. I am

also particularly passionate about elders personally modeling our values. I whole-heartedly agree with Peter Drucker that culture eats strategy for breakfast. Therefore, I like our team to talk a great deal about culture and values, sometimes at the expense of getting through the agenda efficiently! I am grateful for a team who refrains from rolling their eyes when I get verbose about values!

How does he like to process, internally or externally? If he is an internal processor, how can you give him space without him becoming reclusive or the team feeling left out? If he is an external processor, are you prepared for him to say unfiltered things that he might not really mean, or appear to make decisions that he may need to “walk back” the next day? I am an external processor. Just yesterday an elder sent me an email asking why I had changed the plan on something we had discussed a few weeks ago. I thought we were just chatting and he thought we were forging a plan in stone!

How large is the intuitive component of his leadership? I think that a part of the spiritual gift of leadership is intuition, and that part should be respected. Think for a moment about another spiritual gift such as an evangelistic gift. Evangelists speak to unbelievers in a way that may sound rather average, and yet unbelievers respond in droves! The point is, spiritual gifts really are supernatural, and therefore it should not surprise us when someone with a leadership gift has something of a “sixth sense” for what direction to go in, especially in the absence of clear scriptural data or common sense on a particular issue. I often like to lean on empirical data and common sense, but sometimes I am unable to give coherent reasons for my thoughts on something, and resort to subjective phrases like, “I feel that ...” or “I have a hunch that ...” or “I have

faith that if we do that ...” It gets weird fast if too many decisions are based solely on intuition, but honoring intuition often leads to surprisingly positive results.

KEEP AN EYE ON THE CARICATURES

Here are few caricatures of dysfunctional eldership teams. I have intentionally hyperbolized, and I hope no team perfectly fits any one of these caricatures, but they are worth keeping an eye on to ensure you don’t drift towards any of them:

The Sycophants: We simply cannot believe how lucky we are to have the fabulous lead elder that we have. We feel our main role as elders is to encourage him, and pick up the pieces after him. If people push-back on his ideas, we warn them not to touch the Lord’s anointed. Loyally backing our leader is what eldership is all about!

The Mavericks: The more our fearless leader says “Charge,” the happier we are! We believe eldership is about recognizing, raising up and releasing people into ministry, and if we do it recklessly, so be it – at least we won’t die wondering!

The Bottle Necks: We have meetings to plan meetings, write position papers on how to write position papers, and form committees to form committees. Our leader spends so much time preparing perfectly worded proposals for us that, in the unlikely event of us approving the proposal, he lacks the energy to implement it.

The Jury: Our elders’ meetings are quite like a court room really. We keep our poker faces on during the lead elder’s presentations,

then pick away at them until all the faith has been sucked out of the room, and then we vote.

Protectors of the Realm: We have the sacred responsibility to protect our church from our lead elder. He says he finds it rather suffocating that he is the only elder being kept accountable, but we find him more docile if he is in a constant state of mild asphyxiation.

REFLECTION

1. Is your relationship with your leader more “fellow” or “follow” or a healthy blend? Elaborate.
2. Have a go at answering each of the four questions about your leader.
3. Do any of the caricatures come close to describing your team? Elaborate.

PART 4

RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE CONGREGATION



forward to what lies ahead (Phil. 3:13). We press toward the goal of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:13-14). We lay aside every weight, and we run forward in the race (Heb. 12:1). We run to win (1 Cor. 9:24). We put our hand to the plow and we do not look back (Lk. 9:62). Like the four living creatures, we go straight forward, led by the Spirit, without turning (Ez. 1:12).

Brothers, the backward gravitational tug of discouragement and fear is immense. There is a satanic tractor beam trying to keep us from gospel advance. Recognize it and resist it.

Like Moses, we call God's people forward (Ex. 14:15). We know that the Lord is with us wherever we go, therefore we call God's people forward in strength and courage (Josh. 1:9).

"Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong" (1 Cor. 16:13).

ENDNOTES

1. General Herbert Norman Schwarzkopf, Jr, quoted in James Charlton, *The Military Quotation Book* (St Martin's Press, 2002) p. 83.
2. E.H. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve* (Seabury Books, 2007) Kindle Location 115.
3. James Stewart, *Heralds of God* (Regent College, 1946) p. 26.
4. Oswald J. Smith, *The Man God Uses*, (New York: The Christian Alliance Publishing Co., 1925) Kindle Loc 740-744, Kindle Edition 2013, Formatting by George Stahnke.
5. C.H. Spurgeon, Sermon: 'An All-important Question,' October 4, 1906, *Spurgeon's Sermons*, Volume 52:1906 (No. 3008). Available at: www.ccel.org/ccel/spurgeon/sermons52.xli.html
6. R.K. Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon: The Supremacy of Christ* (Crossway Books, 1989) p. 45.
7. Ann Voskamp, *One Thousand Gifts* (Zondervan, 2010) p. 154-155.
8. Amy Carmichael, 'Hast Thou No Scar?' in Amy Carmichael, *Gold Cord: The Story of a Fellowship* (SPCK, 1952) p. 64.
9. Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership* (Lewis and Roth Publishers, 1986) p. 154.
10. "Leaders" are mentioned three times in Hebrews 13. Those mentioned in v. 7 are possibly in prison (note the reference to those in prison in v. 3), but the leaders mentioned in v. 17 and v. 24 appear to be very much in circulation. Although these leaders are not referred to as elders, "perhaps they were leaders in the wider city church ... at any rate, the leaders carried a weighty responsibility; they were accountable for the spiritual well-being of those

- placed in their care" (F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Rev. ed.) (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990) p. 385. Their ministry of the word and watching over souls certainly sounds like the work of elders. If it walks like a dog, and barks like a dog...
11. Technically, it's the word most often used to translate "*presbteros*," which is the word most often used to describe those who carry this role.
 12. Timothy played the role of apostolic delegate in other churches before arriving in Ephesus, which would be consistent with him playing that role in Ephesus. And, at the end of 2 Timothy Paul says, "come to me," implying Timothy was not based at Ephesus permanently.
 13. Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, p. 33.
 14. Bruce Stabbert, *The Team Concept* (Hegg Bros., 1982) p. 25-26, quoted in Strauch, *Biblical Eldership* p. 36.
 15. Jeramie Rinne, *Church Elders* (Crossway, 2014) p. 86-90.
 16. *Ibid.* p. 93.
 17. Andrew Wilson, 'Is Eldership Gender-Neutral?', Think Theology blog, July 27, 2018. https://thinktheology.co.uk/blog/article/is_eldership_gender_neutral_a_response_to_katia_adams
 18. Kathy Keller, *Jesus, Justice and Gender Roles* (Zondervan, 2012) Kindle Location 366.
 19. I am referring to one to three leaders/elders of other churches who are known and trusted by the elders, maybe from within the association the church is part of. There might also be some key leaders within the local congregation, maybe senior deacons, who also provide meaningful counsel to the elders.
 20. Group think is a psychological phenomenon where a group tries to reach a consensus without sufficient evaluation of alternative viewpoints, usually by isolating themselves from outside influences.

21. When the tallest "poppies" are recurrently pruned to the average opinion of the team and mediocrity becomes the new normal.
22. Rinne, *Church Elders*, p. 92.
23. Credit to Ger Jones (Vintage Church, LA) and Alan Frow (Southlands Church, CA) for this grid.
24. See Wikipedia www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Primus_inter_pares
25. Colin Baron, *Newfrontiers Magazine*, 2003.
26. Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, p. 364.
27. *Ibid*, p. 362.
28. *Ibid*, p. 355.
29. A phrase from the Church at Brook Hills, Birmingham, Alabama. www.brookhills.org
30. For example, (1) John Stott, *The message of Romans: God's good news for the world*, (InterVarsity Press, 2001) p. 393; (2) Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996) p. 914; (3) Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Inter-Varsity Press, 1988) p. 528-529.
31. For example, see (1) Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament*, (InterVarsity Press, 1993) 1 Tim. 3:11; (2) Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006) p. 265-266; (3) John Stott, *Guard the truth: the message of 1 Timothy & Titus* (InterVarsity Press, 1996) p. 101.
32. John R.W. Stott, *Guard the Truth: The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus* (InterVarsity Press, 1996) p. 101.
33. Craig Roberts, '10 Things I've Learned From Lambs', Modernfarmer.com; December 3, 2013. <https://modernfarmer.com/2013/12/10-things-learned-lambs>
34. *Ibid*.

35. For example, if a congregant thought I was heavy-handed and unapproachable, then it would be uncharitable of me to expect the person to approach me about it. Although it might be biblically accurate (Matt. 18) to insist they do, the biblical atmosphere is one where the stronger do all they can to bear with the weaker.
36. Juvenal, from his *Satires* (Satire VI, lines 347–348).
37. Andrew Murray, *Teach Me To Pray* (Bethany House, 2002) p.103.
38. See Roberts, ‘10 Things I’ve Learned From Lambs’, *op. cit.*
39. ‘Philosophy and Practice of Pastoral Ministry,’ February 2014, Covenant Life Church, Maryland, Internal Paper, by DeVries, Maresco, Rogers and Wikner.
40. Phil Newton, *Elders in Congregational Life: Rediscovering the Biblical Model for Church Leadership* (Kregal: Grand Rapids, 2005) p. 42.
41. Handley Carr Glyn Moule, *Charles Simeon* (Methuen & Co., 1892) p. 87, quoted in David R. Helm, *Expositional Preaching* (Crossway, 2014) p. 12.
42. Donald Coggan, *Stewards of Grace* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1958) p. 46.
43. Tim Keller, *Center Church* (Zondervan, 2012) p. 89.
44. The meta-narrative of the Bible is the good news (gospel) that through Christ’s life, death and resurrection, God is graciously renewing all things, starting with those who believe in Jesus Christ.
45. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, quoted by R.T. Kendall in Greg Haslam (ed.), *Preach the Word!* (Sovereign Word, 2006) p. 17.
46. Greg Haslam, in Haslam (ed.), *Preach the Word!* p. 31.
47. C.H. Spurgeon, quoted in Ray Comfort, *Spurgeon Gold* (Bridge-Logos, 2005) p. 104.

48. John Piper, Sermon: ‘Alone in a Big Church,’ September 20, 1981. Available at www.desiringgod.org/messages/alone-in-a-big-church
49. John MacArthur, Jr., Sermon: ‘Characteristics of a True Church, Part 4’, May 26, 2013. Available at www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/90-459/characteristics-of-a-true-church-part-4
50. John Calvin, *Commentaries*, Hebrews 10:24.
51. Timothy George, ‘The Priesthood of All Believers,’ First Things blog, October 31, 2016. www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2016/10/the-priesthood-of-all-believers
52. Carlyle Marney, *Priests to Each Other* (Judson Press, 1974) quoted by Timothy George in ‘The Priesthood of All Believers,’ First Things blog, October 31, 2016. www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2016/10/the-priesthood-of-all-believers
53. *Ibid.*
54. John R.W. Stott, *God’s New Society: The Message of Ephesians* (IVP, 1979) p. 165.
55. There are pros and cons to intuitive and conscious leadership styles. When it comes to decision-making, the “sixth sense” of intuitive leaders often enables them to make good decisions quicker than conscious leaders, yet they are often weaker than conscious leaders at *building sustainably* on those decisions. When it comes to *reproducing leadership*, intuitive leaders can be weaker than conscious leaders because they are harder to imitate, although they tend to *attract more high capacity followers* due to their greater flair. Following intuitive leaders can be an *exciting yet exhausting* ride, whilst following conscious leaders can sometimes not be exciting enough, but at least there’s no danger of motion sickness.
56. The word of God must remain a higher authority than leaders. If your conscience is seared by your leaders, either resolve the matter or be free to move on without fear of vilification.

57. Harry Truman, Truman University Website, Truman Quotes page. www.truman.edu/about/history/our-namesake/truman-quotes
58. Quoted in Normal Vincent Peale, *The Power of Positive Thinking* (OM Books International, 2016) p. 157.
59. Rocky Balboa, in the movie *Creed* (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Pictures, 2015).
60. C.H. Spurgeon, Sermon: 'Pride and Humility', August 17, 1856, quoted in *The Complete Works of C.H. Spurgeon*, Volume 2: Sermons 54-106, Sermon 97.
61. John R.W. Stott, *Guard the truth: the message of 1 Timothy & Titus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press) p. 96.
62. Tim Chester, 'Eating together as enacted grace #1', 6 November 2007. Available at: <https://timchester.wordpress.com/2007/11/06/eating-together-as-enacted-grace-1/>
63. John Wesley, *Journal*, June 11, 1739.
64. Alan Frow, Southlands Church internal *E+ Expectations* Document.
65. Newfrontiers Magazine, Volume 2, Issue 04, Sept-Nov 2003, p. 7.
66. Strauch, *Biblical Eldership op. cit.*, p. 324.