

# 30

## Healthy Missional Church Leadership Teams

Ed Boschman

*“I will put together my Church, a church so expansive with energy that not even the gates of hell will be able to keep it out.” Matthew 16:16 (The Message)*

About 100 years ago, a London newspaper asked its readers to respond to the question, “What is wrong with the world?” The brilliant theologian G.K. Chesterton wrote back to the editor: “Dear Sirs, I am. Sincerely yours, G.K. Chesterton.”<sup>1</sup>

Because the church is led by people who are “imperfect,” it is good to begin by admitting that reality. Equally important is the declaration that Jesus himself is the Chief Shepherd and guarantor of the church. Still, Scripture makes it clear that God’s plan includes the leadership service of appropriately gifted and called believers. As Sanders clarified, the fact that “the Son of God became the servant of God to do the mission of God,”<sup>2</sup> provides the leadership model for the church.

In brief, the mission of the church is to bring glory to God by delighting in him and making disciples. The chosen apostles discovered early in the life of the church that they would need to build and equip teams of leaders with various service mandates to ensure effectiveness and efficiency in their mission.



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Paul commends those who aspire to leadership (1 Tim. 3:1). Biblical history bears out that both good and bad leadership have inherent consequences, and that lack of leadership is not helpful. The biblical teaching also assumes plurality of leadership. Because there is only one Lord of the church, under-shepherds are intended to serve in teams.

The spiritual energy which has the power to accomplish the mission of the church has its source in none other than the Inaugurator of the church. The coordination of the multiple expressions of that spiritual dynamic has been assigned to leaders. The context for those servant roles has varied through the centuries. As leaders have made themselves available to the indwelling Spirit's power, their influence has facilitated God's mission within and through the church. However, as Sanders laments, "Real leaders are in short supply."<sup>3</sup> How then do we develop healthy missional leaders? And how will we build effective leadership teams for our churches?

## Followers of Jesus

*"Come follow me...." - Jesus*

*"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." - Jesus*

It was not complicated at first, but it was costly. Jesus' simple call to his early disciples was to follow him...to reprioritize their lives by putting him first. As that followership was increasingly understood, it was coupled with a high order of committed love and obedience.

Christian leaders are followers of Jesus first and foremost. In biblical terms that means denial of self, and cross-bearing. It means that Jesus has full authority over the follower. Jesus' Kingdom way of doing things is radically different from alternate possible plans. Greatness is pursued through service (Matt. 20:25-28). Effective partnership is achieved through kindness, compassion, forbearance and submission (Eph. 4:31-32; 5:21). Relationships are preserved through speaking truth in love and generous forgiveness and the carrying of one another's burdens (Eph. 4:15, 4:32; Gal. 6:1-2). Additionally, the costs of leadership, such as criticism, wounds, failures and persecution are to be considered part of the calling (1 Pet. 2:19-23).

Following Jesus has the predictable outcome of becoming more and more like him. When the followers of Jesus were first called the equivalent of "little Christs" in Antioch, they were getting followership right—not perfectly, but right nonetheless. So it is possible for 20<sup>th</sup> century leaders as well.

**Healthy missional church leadership teams are together committed to a radical and daily faith-follow relationship with Jesus.**

## Guided by the Bible

*“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.” – Jesus*

*“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” - Paul*

The Bible clarifies some ways in which the quality of a disciple's followership may be measured. The gospels clarify three clear core value commitments of Jesus: 1) that he loved and obeyed the Father, 2) that he loved and sought to save the lost, and 3) that he loved and cared for the found. In each case, the love he demonstrated was without consideration of cost. All Jesus' followers then, and especially those who lead under his authority, should be known for those same values.

Scripture is the message of God's salvation story. The Bible's Holy Spirit inspired and therefore completely trustworthy message becomes the principal text by which church leaders are schooled, and that by the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

That same Spirit is the one who guides leaders into all truth and into communion with God through Bible reading, meditation and both speaking and listening prayer.

Wisdom is a central pursuit of leaders. It's striking that Scripture makes clear that wisdom resides in God, and that he is generously inclined to share it with his followers—if and when they ask for it. Andy Stanley's book, *The Best Question Ever*, makes much of the importance of a good connection between leadership and wisdom. He suggests, in fact, that the best question ever is: “What is the wise thing for me to do?”<sup>4</sup>

More specifically, Scripture identifies a series of qualifications applicable to those who serve as church leaders. In the face of that, it is startling to observe how often churches put into positions of leadership individuals who are clearly not qualified by biblical standards.

Though not specifically identified as a church elder qualification, it is self-evident that leaders are in attitude and action loving God with heart, soul, strength and mind, and neighbor as self. If that isn't obvious, discernment need go no further.

The specific listings of qualifiers are found in 1 Tim. 3:1-7 and Titus 1:7-9. What is particularly noteworthy in these texts is that most of the checkpoints are relatively easy to make determinations about. God has not made it extraordinarily difficult for the church to determine whether a potential leader is qualified.

**Healthy missional church leadership teams are together committed to seeking insight, wisdom and direction from the Bible.**

## Committed to the Same Mission

*“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.” – Jesus*

*“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.” – Paul*

At one point in his teaching ministry Jesus clarifies that he is looking for those disciples who are willing to take up their own crosses and follow him. “Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.” (Matt. 16:25).

And as we know from reading more of the story, the cost of discipleship is significant, and only those willing to pay that price are worthy.

So it is in the church age as well. Those who are satisfied with playing church or playing at church will not be able to endure for the Kingdom cause. There have been many would-be followers in today’s churches who have counted the stewardship costs too great. They have left the Kingdom mission because they have loved the world and its pleasures more than the treasures of heaven’s Kingdom. Clarity about the Mission, and commitment to it, are critical in the ministry of reconciliation entrusted to the church.

The mission of an organization is often described as “the reason it exists.” When an institution has an identifiable inaugurator, it is imperative to learn from that initiator what the reason for starting that organization was. As noted earlier, Jesus clearly indicated that the “ecclesia” was called to be on a mission which even the gates of hell could not stop. Broader readings of the gospels, and the New Testament round out the reasons for the existence of the church—more correctly described as an organism than an organization.

Jesus institutes the church to bring glory to God. How is that accomplished? God is glorified when those who believe in Him worship and take delight in Him, both individually and in covenant community. It is in the context of the latter that the baptism, teaching and equipping of disciples take place. And while there may be occasions where people come to faith in Jesus in the context of the gathered church, it is more often true that the witness of the scattered believers results in people who are seeking peace with God, respond to the invitation to place their trust in Jesus, to repent of their sin, and to commit to a life of joyful, loving obedience to the Lord.

So it’s clear enough that the mission of the church is to be making disciples. Faithful obedience to that commission brings glory to God. The last things that Jesus said to his disciples before his ascension make that unmistakably clear. In

Matthew 28 a literal and contextualized translation of verses 19 and 20 would be “going, disciple the people groups, baptizing and teaching...” The only imperative in that text is the word “disciple.”

Additionally in the moments before Jesus is “taken up” he declares that the Holy Spirit would come upon the disciples. The results of that anointing were evidenced in their witnessing about Jesus, starting in Jerusalem, and carrying on into Judea and Samaria, and, to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

The reason the church is on the earth is to partner with God in his mission to be reconciled with mankind, yes, and even with his created world itself (2 Cor. 5:11-20; Rom. 8:18-22; Rev. 21:1).

It is noteworthy that this described mission is not unlike what Jesus clarified as the greatest and second greatest commandments before the church was born. Loving God with heart, soul, strength and mind, and loving neighbor as self is really an old way of saying glorify God by making disciples. When Jesus called the twelve, he told them that he would turn them into “fishers of men.” It is entirely appropriate to assume that he intends that same agenda for us.

**Healthy missional church leadership teams are together committed to the inherent missional cause for the existence of the church.**

### **Living Integrous Exemplary Lives**

*“If you love me you will obey what I command.” - Jesus*

*“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.” - James*

In Harper Lee’s classic book, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, young Scout is driven to defend accusations that her father is a closet racist. The line she chooses is that “he is the same at home as he is in the public streets.”

Because duplicity appears so effective on the surface, hypocrisy finds its way into our lives with insidious ease. When Jesus was on this earth, he was patient and gracious with human strugglers, except hypocrites. Hypocrisy is the result of knowing better but living wrongly. It is pretense: the display of piety without purity of heart.

This is the challenge that Hybels addresses in his book, *Who You Are When No One’s Looking*. He correctly points out that “It takes a great deal of old-fashioned courage to be a Christian.”<sup>5</sup>

Additionally, because doubters and skeptics, and more generally, the unbelieving crowd often uses the line, “The church is full of hypocrites” as cause for their resistance to God and their unbelief, it is imperative to be alert to its temptation.

While it is impossible for leaders to be perfect, it is our proper response to grace to strive towards that goal. It is equally important that we are appropriately transparent about our sins and failures, and confess them in order to keep short accounts and whole relationships.

Small accountability groups where confidential transparent authenticity is practiced are highly valuable. One-on-one coaching, mentoring, and discipling are also effective in the pursuit of integrity.

Because leaders are expected to “embody” the mission of the church, the lifestyle and behaviors of leaders are “on display.” The Apostle Paul was brave enough to say, “Imitate me,” while he did add, “as I imitate Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1). The focus in this arena of concern is often on being sure that leaders do not set bad or inappropriate examples. That is a valid matter, and biblical criteria need to be applied. The caution is to be sure that the Bible gets to define sin and draw the boundaries. That is not the privilege of other groups or individuals.

The other side of the coin is that the power of leadership is well invested as it models God and neighbor loving missional behavior. It is very unlikely that a church family will live with a missional outreach focus if the leaders are not modeling evangelistic living. Church families become like their leaders. If church leaders are discipling, training, equipping and deploying the saints, it is reasonable to expect that Kingdom mission results will occur. When leaders practice hospitality, it is likely to catch on. When leaders love their neighbors to faith and welcome and assimilate them into the church community, people will learn that living on mission is not out of reach for them. When leaders intentionally invest in healthy marriages and family life, the examples they set have the power to become the impetus for multiplication of those commitments.

The spiritual health that is the result of closely following Jesus needs to be matched by emotional health. Peter Scazzero effectively points out that growing up emotionally is not a default reality. It requires focus, decision and discipline. This process involves understanding that it is important to grow through emotional infancy, childhood, and adolescence into emotional adulthood. One of the key indicators of emotional maturity is having “the capacity to resolve conflicts maturely and negotiate solutions that consider the perspective of others.”<sup>6</sup>

**Healthy missional church leadership teams are together committed to living appropriately transparent authentic lives as models for those they serve as leaders.**

## Committed to Team-Play Partnerships

*“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” - Jesus*

*“Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply from the heart.” - Peter*

Sports teams are the obvious illustration. Assigning a stocky defenseman into a goal-scoring position is never wise. Asking that same defenseman to be the goalkeeper is not any wiser. Team players are gifted for and further trained for specific roles on the team, and the collective impact is best when each is in their proper position.

So it is with leaders in the church. The most effective leadership network is one in which the individuals are partnered with others to build a complementary grouping of abilities and gifts. The lead team in the early church was soon a partnership of those who were assigned to roles including apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers (Eph. 4:11). Some were assigned to prayer and teaching of the Word, and others to meeting tangible needs (Acts 6:4)

This kind of team play is also applicable in the larger church. In his book, *Winning on Purpose*, John Kaiser suggests that accountable leadership partners correctly when “the role of the board is to govern, the role of the pastor is to lead, the role of the staff is to manage, and the role of the congregation is to minister.”<sup>7</sup> While it’s true that the lead under-shepherd has a unique role as leader among leaders, the missional impact of the church will depend on each member of each team, and each team, leading in harmony.

In order for this to occur, there are some basic biblical guidelines that need to be followed. These God-given imperatives are in place to guard against sinful human inclinations to which all leaders are susceptible. Pride is to be averted by not thinking more highly of oneself than one ought (Rom. 12:3). Ego is to be kept in check through pursuing humility by “submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Eph. 5:21). Our immature aggressive inclinations are to be replaced by “speaking the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15). Our unforgiveness and grudge-bearing are to be rejected by choosing instead to make peace with other members of the team (Matt 5:23-24; 18:15, 17). Even something as subtle as impatience is to be conquered by “bearing with one another” (Col. 3:12-14).

When this kind of Godly partnership is defined, committed to, and pursued, effective partnership results. At the foundation of a maximized team is mutual trust, which both believes in and frees each contributor. Patrick Lencioni suggests

that healthy and effective teams will need to experience the following in sequence: vulnerability-based trust, productive ideological conflict, authentic agreement, peer-to-peer accountability, and attention to results.<sup>8</sup>

**Healthy missional leadership teams are together because they need one another to maximize their individual and collective impact.**

### **Affirm and Pursue Common Vision**

*“I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.” – Jesus*

*“No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the Kingdom of God.” – Jesus*

A vision is a picture through the lens of faith of a preferred future in a particular place. It takes into account yourself, your ministry, your environment, and your God.

Scripture clarifies that lack of vision among people results in that people perishing (Prov. 29:18). Alternate translations indicate the meaning of “perish” is lack of restraint or focus and therefore inability to develop cohesion and effective togetherness.

We have clarified that the vision of Jesus for his church is success in the Kingdom mission he has assigned. That success however can be defined in multiple ways. It cannot be assumed that all those who share in the service of leadership in a local church are committed to the same picture of a preferred future condition. Some may be dreaming of a local body that multiplies itself by birthing daughter churches; others may be envisioning growing to mega-church size. Some may be committed to being the number one Bible teaching church in the area, and others may prefer being the most effective evangelistic church in the region. Some may dream of making inroads into the upscale professional community, and others of focusing on ministry to the disadvantaged and underprivileged.

It can be particularly frustrating and difficult when key leaders differ in their priority vision for the church. Collaborative processing in the direction of common vision is imperative for the maximization of impact.

**Healthy missional leadership teams are unswervingly banded together in pursuit of increasing glory for God through the genuine expansion of his church.**

### **Committed to Effective Meetings**

*“It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us...” - Luke*

The game is not played in the huddle. But the huddle is ultimately important. Players who choose to skip the huddle will not be able to do their best on the team.



Patrick Lencioni warns of “death by meeting,” and though some leaders are energized by meetings, many more are not. The effective practice of teams has often resulted in efficient plans that can allay the burden of leadership and significantly moderate fatigue factors.

Developmental meetings of 1-2 days’ duration should be scheduled three or four times per year. Strategy meetings are best when they are topically focused and should be limited to 2-4 hours in length. This kind of meeting may best be held monthly. Additionally, weekly staff meetings of approximately one hour in duration are best utilized for tactical planning and team member coordination. Finally, daily or as needed administration check-ins should be limited to 5-10 minutes as needed.<sup>9</sup>

**Healthy missional leadership teams enthusiastically invest time and energy in the various kinds of meetings needed to maximize individual and collective ministry impact and results.**

### **Bound Together by Covenants**

*“If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God.” -Paul*

Clarity of partnership expectations and personal roles is essential for cohesion and strong collective impact. Macchia suggests that it may be helpful to put in writing a team member commitment document.<sup>10</sup> Healthy missional leadership teams are willing to agree to partnerships which includes accountability.

We must be careful not to lose our souls in the service of leadership. It is of absolute importance that leaders, both individually and together, choose to enter “into encounters with God in the places where you need it most in the context of your leadership.”<sup>11</sup>

Finally, leaders must always serve with a full alertness to the reality that getting things done, even great and noble things, and yes, even Kingdom things, will be worthless, except they are sourced in love.

One of the most effective covenant promises that team members can make to one another is to speak the truth in love as they work together. In my own experiences of leadership team-building it has been my practice to let each partner know that I would never talk about them in an unhealthy way behind their back, and that it would be my commitment to absolutely avoid getting hooked into a critical triangle conversation in their absence. Nor would I ever withhold from them a grievance or hurt that I was experiencing in my relationship with them. The net result of that

promise was that they could always assume that my partnership with them was fully up to date and spiritually and emotionally healthy.

Upon clarifying that, it was my privilege to ask them for the same commitment in return. That kind of covenantal loyalty binds teams together in loving relational partnerships and returns big dividends in Kingdom impact.

**Healthy missional leadership teams are willing to strengthen clarity, cohesion and impact by documenting and signing on to their commitments to one another and their ministry.**

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Mel Lawrence, *Spiritual Influence* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 99.

<sup>2</sup> J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 125.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 77.

<sup>4</sup> Andy Stanley, *The Best Question Ever* (Sisters: Multnomah Publishers, 2004), 160.

<sup>5</sup> Bill Hybels, *Who You Are When No One's Looking* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1987), 15.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Scazzero, *Emotional Healthy Spirituality* (Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 179.

<sup>7</sup> John Kaiser, *Winning On Purpose* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 170.

<sup>8</sup> Patrick Lencioni, *The Advantage* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 19-71.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 175.

<sup>10</sup> Stephen Macchia, *Becoming A Healthy Team* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 165.

<sup>11</sup> Ruth Haley Barton, *Strengthening The Soul of Your Leadership* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2008), 17.

## Study Questions

1. “God has not made it extraordinarily difficult for the church to determine whether a potential leader is qualified.” Discuss how difficult this might actually be when choosers come from a different culture than the chosen leaders.
2. Have you seen problems like the author indicates in the following statement? “It can be particularly frustrating and difficult when key leaders differ in their priority vision for the church.” Discuss how you would respond if you were: a) one of the leaders, b) a missionary counselor, or c) a concerned member.