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# Healthy Teams

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Signs of Health and Unhealth in Teams</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>	The Seven C's of Healthy Teaming	11
<b>A Theology of Teaming</b>	<b>4</b>	1. Connect: Deepening Relationships	11
In the Image of a Triune God	4	2. Communicate: Building Bridges through Dialogue	11
Principles from Romans 12	5	3. Clarify: Setting Clear Expectations	12
Offer Your Life as a Sacrifice	5	4. Collaborate: Harnessing Collective Strength	12
Do Not Conform	5	5. Consensus: Seeking Unified Decisions	12
Embrace Humility and Diversity	5	6. Cultivate: Nurturing a Healthy Culture	13
Recognize and Utilize Diverse Gifts	6	7. Celebrate: Embracing Joy and Gratitude	13
Serve According to Your Gifts	6	Six D's of Unhealthy or Unhelpful Teaming	14
Love Genuinely and Honor One Another	6	1. Direction Creep: Maintaining Focus	14
Serve the Lord with Zeal	6	2. Drive: Pacing for Longevity	14
Be Hopeful, Patient, and Prayerful	6	3. Dominance: Cultivating Collaborative Leadership	14
<b>Plurality and Point Leadership</b>	<b>7</b>	4. Division: Fostering Unity	15
Servant Leadership	7	5. Dilution: Keeping Purpose and Productivity Sharp	15
The Balance of Voices	7	6. Delay: Knowing When to Call for Backup	15
Conflict and Resolution	7	<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>16</b>
The Fruits of Collaboration	7	<b>Appendix</b>	<b>17</b>
The Weight of Leadership	8	Additional Resources for Eldership Teams	17
How to do this well:	8		
Mutual Servitude	8		
Relational Investment	8		
Amplifying Strengths	8		
Clarifying Influence	8		
Artful Deference	8		
Swift Reconciliation	9		
Genuine Teamwork	9		
Leadership Development	9		
Diverse Gifting	9		
Consistent Encouragement	9		
Seasonal Sensitivity	9		
<b>Cohesive Alignment</b>	<b>10</b>		
Purpose and Vision	10		
Values and Experience	10		
Structure and Roles	10		
Strategy and Adaptability	10		



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper aims to communicate the collective wisdom from our journey as the Advance Movement and, drawing on scripture and some amazing experts in these areas, to equip Advance partner churches with practical guidance for fostering gospel-centred, healthy eldership teams.

The essence of effective teaming lies in understanding the profound unity displayed within the Trinity as a paradigm for effective and healthy church leadership. Rooted in the scriptural wisdom of John 17:22-23 and echoing an African proverb about the value of community over solitude, this document emphasizes the vitality of collaborative leadership within the church. It discusses the significance of eldership teams in protecting the church's mission and the spiritual welfare of its flock, with an unhealthy team leading invariably to an unhealthy church.

**The paper provides a comprehensive overview of the biblical perspective on teamwork, underlining that teaming is not merely a strategy for church governance but a divine calling that mirrors God's very nature.**

Using scriptures and biblical examples, it offers a blueprint for servant leadership, which encompasses humility, mutual respect, and the need for balancing the voices within eldership teams to foster growth and unity in accordance with Ephesians 4:15-16.

Furthermore, the document provides practical insights into creating a healthy team culture, underpinned by the Seven C's—connect, communicate, clarify, collaborate, consensus, cultivate, and celebrate. It contrasts these with the Six D's that signify unhealthy team dynamics, including direction creep, drive, dominance, division, dilution, and delay, which can disrupt team unity and effectiveness.

The paper reiterates the importance of eldership teams reflecting the unity and love of the triune God, urging continuous reflection, celebration of strengths, and a gracious approach towards addressing weaknesses. The paper calls for a commitment to healthy, gospel-centred, and unified leadership to reflect the love of Christ to the world and to advance God's kingdom. It aspires to serve as a living resource that evolves with ongoing development and provides practical tools to implement these principles effectively within the global church network.

# INTRODUCTION

**The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. (John 17:22-23)**

There is an African Proverb that is simple and profound:

***If you want to go fast, go alone.  
If you want to go far, go together.***

In the heart of a world marred by moral failings in leadership, the role of godly, healthy eldership teams is as important as ever. Healthy eldership teams protect the call to plurality and community, it protects the individuals in the team, the mission of the church, and the people being shepherded. Unhealthy eldership teams will inevitably lead to unhealthy churches.

Recognising the pivotal role these teams play, it is essential to foster an environment where healthy, gospel-centred leadership can flourish. This document seeks to serve Advance partner churches worldwide, offering insights and principles to nurture and strengthen eldership teams in their divine calling.

Every church, regardless of its size, history, or location, operates within a unique set of circumstances and challenges. The seasons through which a church navigates are as diverse as the body of Christ itself. It is with this understanding that we approach the topic of healthy eldership teams—not with a one-size-fits-all solution, but with a spirit of humility, ready to learn from the breadth of God’s wisdom and the experiences of those who have walked this path before us.

The principles outlined in this document are timeless, drawn from the deep well of Scripture and the lived experiences of church leaders across the globe. They are designed to be adaptable, capable of being moulded to fit the specific needs and context of your church. Whether your team is large or small, newly formed or steeped in history, serving within the church walls or extending God’s love in the marketplace, the insights shared here aim to encourage, challenge, and equip you for the work of ministry.

As we delve into the biblical foundations of teamwork, the virtues of effective communication, and the importance of cultivating a culture of mutual support and respect, our prayer is that your eldership team will be inspired to new heights of service and leadership. Together, let us embark on this journey toward healthier, more effective teaming, grounded in the gospel and propelled by a shared vision of advancing God’s kingdom on earth.



# A THEOLOGY OF TEAMING

**The concept of teamwork is woven into the fabric of creation, running through the narrative of Scripture, illustrating God’s intention for collaborative and communal engagement. This theology of teaming is not merely a practical strategy for effective ministry, but a reflection of the very nature of God; the ultimate model for how we are called to live and work together.**

## IN THE IMAGE OF A TRIUNE GOD

At the outset of creation, we observe the Trinity—God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—working in perfect unity and harmony to bring creation into existence. This divine teamwork underscores the importance of collaboration, mutual respect, and shared purpose. The triune nature of God exemplifies the ideal of teaming: distinct persons with unique roles, yet fully one in essence and mission.

*Genesis 2:18: “It is not good that the man should be alone.”*

From the very beginning, God declares the need for companionship and teamwork, and he designed us with this in mind. He also commanded us and taught us to be so. This principle extends beyond personal relationships to encompass the way we are designed to work and serve within the body of Christ.

Like the triune God and the body of Christ, eldership teams should celebrate diversity in gifts and perspectives while maintaining unity in purpose and doctrine.

*Exodus 18: Moses heeds the advice of Jethro, implementing a system of shared leadership among the Israelites.*

This account illustrates the wisdom of delegation and the necessity of relying on others to carry out God’s work effectively. We see a leader listening and relying on the counsel of others for the flourishing of himself as a leader and for the benefit of the people he was leading.

Recognizing that “it is not good to be alone” in ministry, team members should lean on each other’s strengths and support one another in weaknesses.

Following the example of Moses and Jethro, effective leadership involves seeking wise counsel, delegation, trust, and empowerment of others.

2 Samuel 23 and 1 Kings 2:1-9: The stories of David and his mighty men, and David’s counsel to Solomon, showcase the strength that comes from loyalty, mutual support, and collective effort.

Through the four Gospels we see Jesus selecting twelve disciples, sending them out in pairs and establishing a model of ministry that values partnership, accountability, and shared experience.



Paul's letters to the new church are filled with references to his co-labourers in the gospel, highlighting the importance of partnership and mutual encouragement in spreading the message of Christ (e.g. Romans 16 and Philippians 1:5). Emulating Paul and his companions, eldership teams are called to a partnership that is deeply rooted in prayer, mutual edification, and a shared commitment to the gospel.

Paul's letter to the Romans provides a profound blueprint for Christian living and leadership, especially within the context of eldership teams. By delving into these verses, we uncover timeless principles that can guide us towards healthy, gospel-centred teamwork. The next section explores these principles as they relate to the dynamics of an eldership team.

## PRINCIPLES FROM ROMANS 12

### Offer Your Life as a Sacrifice

*"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." (Romans 12:1)*

Leadership in the church is more than a role; it's a living act of worship. Elders are called to lead by example, offering their lives in service to God and His people. This sacrifice speaks of commitment, humility, and a willingness to put God and others before oneself.

### Do Not Conform

*"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." (Romans 12:2)*

In a world that often promotes individualism and competition, eldership teams are called to embrace a different standard and model a counter-cultural, godly approach to life. The transformation of our minds through the Holy Spirit enables us to discern and follow God's will, fostering a culture of unity and cooperation rather than conformity to worldly patterns.

### Embrace Humility and Diversity

*"For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned." (Romans 12:3)*

Recognizing and valuing the diversity within an eldership team is crucial. Every member brings unique gifts and perspectives, and humility allows us to appreciate this diversity. Thinking of ourselves with "sober judgment" encourages a culture where every gift is acknowledged and nurtured.



## Recognize and Utilize Diverse Gifts

*“For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.” (Romans 12:4-5)*

Just as the human body functions through the contribution of various parts, an effective eldership team relies on the diverse gifts of its members. Understanding that we are “members one of another” underscores the importance of collaboration and mutual support.

## Serve According to Your Gifts

*“Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching;” (Romans 12:6-7)*

Each elder is entrusted with specific gifts, meant to be used for the edification of the church. Identifying and deploying these gifts in service to one another and the congregation leads to a vibrant, effective ministry.

## Love Genuinely and Honor One Another

*“Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honour.” (Romans 12:9-10)*

Genuine love and mutual respect are the hallmarks of a healthy eldership team. This involves a sincere commitment to each other’s well-being, a readiness to honor and uplift one another, and a collective dedication to pursuing what is good and righteous.

## Serve the Lord with Zeal

*“Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.” (Romans 12:11)*

Elders are called to lead with enthusiasm and dedication, serving the Lord with a fervent spirit. This zeal is not just for the tasks at hand but for nurturing a dynamic, spiritually alive community.

## Be Hopeful, Patient, and Prayerful

*“Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.” (Romans 12:12)*

Leadership, especially in challenging times, requires hope, patience, and an unwavering commitment to prayer. These virtues sustain the team and the church, fostering resilience and faithfulness. We believe that God calls the church to be a beacon of hope to a hurting world. One that brings healing and wellness to those who come to find safe harbor that Jesus offers. Only an eldership team that finds the same can offer this to others.

In embracing these principles from scripture and modelled by the very nature of God, eldership teams reflect the character of God and fulfil his design for communal work and ministry. The theology of teaming, grounded in Scripture, provides both the rationale and the blueprint for building healthy, effective, and spiritually vibrant leadership teams within the church.



# PLURALITY AND POINT LEADERSHIP

## Embracing the best of both worlds.

The dynamic equilibrium between plurality and point leadership in eldership teams is similar to a symphony where each instrument contributes to the harmony, yet the conductor's role is pivotal in guiding the collective performance.

We believe the Scripture speaks to this balance, urging leaders to heed the wisdom of the many while maintaining the clarity and conviction of godly leadership.

### Servant Leadership

The point leader must embody servant leadership, as Jesus exemplified in John 13:14-15: *"If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do just as I have done to you."* This servant posture means investing in relationships, both one-on-one and as a team, and striving to cultivate the best in each member.

### The Balance of Voices

The challenge lies in allowing the leader's voice to resonate while ensuring the chorus of the team is harmonious and strong. This requires a delicate interplay, like the relationship described in Ephesians 4:15-16: *"Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love."*

### Conflict and Resolution

When conflicts arise, particularly when the team's perspective diverges from the leader's, the approach must be rooted in mutual respect and love, as advised in Philippians 2:3-4: *"Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others."* This ethos ensures that the leader is honoured even in disagreement, and the team's engagement and ownership are fostered.

### The Fruits of Collaboration

By striving for the "best of both" reality, the team can expect to reap abundant fruit:

- ▶ The team feels valued, their skills and insights fully engaged, as in Romans 12:4-5: *"For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another."*
- ▶ The leader benefits from the strength and counsel of the plurality, embodying Proverbs 11:14: *"Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counsellors there is safety."*
- ▶ The burden is shared, echoing Galatians 6:2: *"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."*
- ▶ Wisdom is broadened, reflecting the collective insight encouraged in Proverbs 15:22: *"Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed."*
- ▶ Ownership and responsibility are distributed, creating a sense of collective investment in the church's direction.



- ▶ The journey is marked by joy and fellowship, mirroring Acts 2:46-47: *“And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all the people.”*
- ▶ Team members find support in times of need, as in Ecclesiastes 4:9-10: *“Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow.”*
- ▶ Mistakes are less likely as multiple perspectives illuminate potential pitfalls, in line with Proverbs 19:20: *“Listen to advice and accept instruction, that you may gain wisdom in the future.”*
- ▶ Leaders enjoy greater well-being, and the church experiences a safer, more accountable leadership.

### The Weight of Leadership

Clear communication about the leader’s influence on various matters (lightbulb moments, heartfelt convictions, or decisive actions) is crucial. As in 1 Peter 5:2-3: *“Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.”*

**Keeping short accounts, valuing the team, and closing any leadership gaps are essential to embodying the biblical model of leadership.**

By embracing this balanced approach, eldership teams can reflect the diversity and unity of the body of Christ, leading the church with wisdom, love, and a shared vision for God’s kingdom.

### HOW TO DO THIS WELL:

When both point leadership and plurality play their parts, every member’s contribution is vital for maintaining the rhythm and grace of collective governance. Here’s how each one can help to enhance this delicate balance:

#### Mutual Servitude

Every member should embody servanthood towards the team, echoing Philippians 2:7 where Christ *“emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.”*

#### Relational Investment

All should commit to deepening relationships, both one-to-one and within group settings, reflecting the New Testament model where believers *“devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship”* (Acts 2:42).

#### Amplifying Strengths

The point leader should focus on identifying and nurturing the strengths within each team member, as Paul encouraged in 1 Thessalonians 5:11: *“Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.”*

#### Clarifying Influence

The point leader needs to clearly communicate the degree of influence they will exert on various matters, recognising that not all decisions require the same level of assertiveness, as modelled by Paul’s varied approaches in his epistles.

#### Artful Deference

All should learn the art of deferring gracefully, knowing when to support the group’s consensus or to voice dissent constructively, as instructed in Romans 14:19: *“So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.”*



### **Swift Reconciliation**

Members should commit to resolving conflicts quickly, keeping short accounts, in the spirit of Ephesians 4:26: *“Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger.”*

### **Genuine Teamwork**

The point leader must genuinely rely on the team, not merely having a team in name but needing and valuing them, reflecting the interdependence seen in 1 Corinthians 12:21: *“The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you.’”*

### **Leadership Development**

The point leader should aim to minimise the distance between their leadership capacity and that of the team, constantly empowering and raising others up, according to the principle of Ephesians 4:12, to *“equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.”*

### **Diverse Gifting**

Every member should operate in their unique gifts, entrusting others to do the same, as Peter exhorts in 1 Peter 4:10: *“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace.”*

### **Consistent Encouragement**

All should strive to be a source of encouragement, reinforcing the positive, in line with Hebrews 3:13: *“But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today,’ that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”*

### **Seasonal Sensitivity**

Everyone must read and respond to the season’s needs, adjusting the balance between team input and point leadership as necessary, wisely discerning the times, as the sons of Issachar did in 1 Chronicles 12:32.

By adopting these principles, eldership teams can create a culture where point leadership and plurality are not in tension, but in harmony, each enhancing the other, for the flourishing of the church and the glory of Christ.



# COHESIVE ALIGNMENT

**Cohesive alignment within a team is a crucial aspect of ensuring that the collective efforts are moving in the same direction, toward the same goals. Healthy teams are marked by their ability to articulate and share a common understanding in response to pivotal questions that define their existence and operations.**

All healthy teams should be able to clearly articulate and communicate a common understanding of the answer to four key questions.

- ▶ What do we exist to do? (purpose and vision)
- ▶ What kind of team do we want to be? (values and experience)
- ▶ How are we going to best arrange ourselves? (structure and roles)
- ▶ What kind of season are we uniquely in and what does that require of us as a team? (Strategy)

## Purpose and Vision

The first cornerstone of cohesive alignment is clarity about the team's *raison d'être*—what do we exist to do? Understanding the purpose and vision provides a guiding star for the team's activities and decisions. It's this shared objective that gives every task, no matter how small, a sense of significance. When each team member recognises how their work contributes to this overarching goal, it fosters motivation and a sense of belonging.

## Values and Experience

The second question delves into the team's identity and ethics—what kind of team do we want to be? This is about defining the values that underpin the team's interactions, decisions, and methods of working. These values shape the team's culture and the experience of being a part of it. A commitment to these values ensures that not only are goals achieved, but they are achieved in a way that aligns with the team's core principles.

## Structure and Roles

The third question addresses logistics and practicality—how are we going to best arrange ourselves? The structure of the team and the clarity of roles within it are vital to its function. A well-organised team, where everyone knows their responsibilities and how they fit into the larger team, operates with greater efficiency and effectiveness. The clear demarcation of roles prevents overlap and ensures that resources are utilised optimally.

## Strategy and Adaptability

Finally, the fourth question asks the team to be introspective and adaptive—what kind of season are we uniquely in and what does that require of us as a team? This is about strategy and understanding that churches go through different phases. Each phase—whether it's a period of growth, consolidation, or transformation—requires a different approach. A team that recognises its current season and adapts its strategy accordingly is better positioned to thrive.

Cohesive alignment is not a static state, but a dynamic process of continually ensuring that every team member understands the purpose, lives by the values, knows their role, and is prepared to adapt their strategy to meet the demands of the present. This alignment is what enables teams not just to function, but to excel.



# SIGNS OF HEALTH AND UNHEALTH IN TEAMS

In the pursuit of cultivating a flourishing eldership team, it is crucial to discern the markers of health and vitality. Much like a gardener who tends a garden with care, we must know what we are aiming for – the lush foliage of effective collaboration, the deep roots of shared vision, and the fruit of spiritual growth. However, with equal vigilance, we must also be adept at spotting the creeping weeds of dysfunction that threaten to choke our unity and hinder our mission if left unchecked.

These signs of unhealth, if left unchecked, can stealthily grow beneath the surface, disrupting the culture of our team and community. This section looks at some of the wisdom of what healthy teams look like and some signs to watch out for.

## THE SEVEN C'S OF HEALTHY TEAMING

### 1. Connect: Deepening Relationships

*“Be constant in prayer” (Rom 12:12)*

The lifeblood of any eldership team is its ability to foster strong connections. This involves nurturing a **vertical connection** with God through collective prayer, worship, and seeking his will for the direction of the church.

*“Let love be genuine.... love one another with brotherly affection” (Romans 12:9-10)*

Also vitally important is the **horizontal connection** between team members, built on trust, mutual support, and a shared sense of purpose. Investing time in meals together, retreats, prayer meetings, and informal gatherings can strengthen these bonds, creating a foundation of unity and fellowship essential for effective ministry.

### 2. Communicate: Building Bridges through Dialogue

*“Outdo one another in showing honor.” (Rom 12: 10)*

The way we communicate is one of the key ways we have of “showing honor” – whether to your wife, to your team members, to your staff! Almost all of these other C’s are either greatly helped or hindered by good or bad communication!

Always over-communicate, rather than under-communicate. Don’t assume or expect people to know what you are thinking. Move towards things quickly – often a short conversation can help to clear the air and create clarity. If you’re a team leader, initiate with your team – actively open the channels of communication as others might feel unsure or find it hard to initiate. This could simply be creating a space to ask: Is anything unclear? Is there anything you would like to ask? Is there anything you don’t understand?

Extra communication is needed especially in seasons of change or transition or uncertainty. Even if you don’t have all the answers share what you DO know. Creating space for people to ask questions and feel heard is often what is needed in these moments.



### 3. Clarify: Setting Clear Expectations

*“For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you...” (Rom 12:3)*

Here Paul is referring to the “grace given” to him which is his apostleship. He is telling them, because I have been given this grace gift, I am going to use it to bring “clarity” to you. Here is what I want to clarify, make clear, iron out, etc.

All team members want **clarity** (*What is my responsibility?*) and **mandate** (*What are the riverbanks? What decisions can I make?*) and **feedback** (*How am I doing?*). Take time to discuss these things and create the needed clarity for team members. This clarity creates ownership in all team members, of the whole and of their parts.

Another area to create clarity is around what season our church or team is in. This impacts so much and can really serve people when it is clearly named and explained. People understand better what is expected, where to direct their energy and time and ensures there is unity in purpose and direction.

Other things to clarify are the more subtle things around culture (how we do things around here) – e.g. How do we give and receive feedback? How do we raise sensitive issues? How do we have crucial conversations? What do we expect of team members at various moments? Again, always over-communicate, rather than under-communicate. Don’t assume or expect people to know what you are thinking.

### 4. Collaborate: Harnessing Collective Strength

*For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. (Rom 12: 4 – 5)*

Collaboration is about leveraging the diverse gifts within the team to achieve collective outcomes that reflect the multifaceted nature of God’s kingdom. It is slower to collaborate, but it is better. Team will always outperform the individual in the long term. Encouraging each member to contribute according to their spiritual gifts fosters a sense of ownership and camaraderie. It’s about working together, not just alongside each other, to craft strategies, solve problems, and implement initiatives that advance the church’s mission.

### 5. Consensus: Seeking Unified Decisions

*“I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment... so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.”(Rom 12:3&5)*

Consensus in decision-making doesn’t mean uniformity of thought, but rather a collective agreement that emerges from a place of spiritual discernment and mutual respect. It’s about coming together to prayerfully consider each decision, valuing each member’s input, and seeking a course of action that everyone can support. This approach strengthens team unity and ensures that decisions are not just practical but also spiritually grounded.

We aim to bring character and maturity to these matters. We aim to be Christ-like, mutually submissive, practicing James 1 as those who are quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, and we approach matters prayerfully, to ask for the wisdom we need from God himself.



## 6. Cultivate: Nurturing a Healthy Culture

*“Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them... Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.” (Rom 12: 6, 9 - 11)*

A team’s culture reflects its values, beliefs, and practices. Intentionally cultivating a healthy team culture involves regular reflection on how these elements are expressed in the daily life of the team. It includes fostering an environment where grace is abundant, where there is a commitment to growth and learning, and where the fruits of the Spirit permeate all interactions and decisions.

There is a call here to put our gifts to work! But there is also a “manner” of working together that we are called to. And we have to work at that! Don’t think you are NOT cultivating – it’s either by *design* or *default* – but something is being cultivated!

Some good questions to ask: *How are you intentionally growing/ investing in/ creating healthy teaming? What is working against healthy teaming in your context?*

## 7. Celebrate: Embracing Joy and Gratitude

Celebration is a vital component of team life. It’s about taking time to recognize and affirm the achievements and milestones of the team and its individual members, as well as the things God is doing in the wider church.

Celebrating the victories, both big and small, encourages the heart, builds morale, and gives glory to God for his work in and through the team and church. It reminds everyone involved of the joyful journey they are on together in service to the Lord and His people.

Affirm, encourage and praise often! (Research shows there’s a golden ratio for high-performing teams. According to research, the ideal praise-to-criticism ratio is 5:1.) *“Outdo one another in showing honor” (Rom12: 10)*

**Remember; “You get what you tolerate, and you get what you celebrate” so look for those moments and opportunities to celebrate together!**



## SIX D'S OF UNHEALTHY OR UNHELPFUL TEAMING

### 1. Direction Creep: Maintaining Focus

There can be two directions that a team can pull in – strategy vs spiritual. The strategy/ human/organizational focus (often with marketplace influence where we see the church as an organisation) vs the household concept/ family of God/ more spiritual focus where we are waiting on God, are Spirit-dependent and prayerful, taking it back to the head of the church. These are often the pulls we can feel. The direction you choose sets the tone for so much – and determines how and what we do.

While there can sometimes be a blend, as a church, we do want one to more clearly lead us. We need to watch for the direction creep. We can also often default to our strategy side when we feel tired or stretched, daunted or overwhelmed.

One way to help with this is to set some helpful indicators that will help you “assess” which direction you are moving in. Things like:

- ▶ Do we have space for prayer/ spaciousness/ silence? How much of this do we create space for when we meet?
- ▶ Do we only take minutes or do we also record prophetic senses?
- ▶ Do we actively seek God's heart before/ during our times together?
- ▶ How much time do we spend on a whiteboard vs how much time we spend in the Bible?
- ▶ What books are we reading?

### 2. Drive: Pacing for Longevity

So often the rush/hurry/momentum factor can hurt a team. Speed can often complicate. Urgency adds unhelpful pressure. This can be seen in the way we have conversations, the way we make decisions, (e.g. rushing to a vote rather than leaving space to reach consensus), the hiring processes (where there is a lack of chemistry flag but we rush to hire out of urgency).

Remember the African Proverb: “If you want to go **fast**, go alone, but if you want to go **far**, go together.” Sometimes you have to slow things down, so you can get everyone on board and turn the corner together. Slower is better!

### 3. Dominance: Cultivating Collaborative Leadership

One of the most unhealthy or unhelpful barriers to creating healthy team culture is when there is a dominating/ over-bearing/ over-functioning/over-leading/over-controlling team leader. Sometimes it is obvious; sometimes the controlling can be more subtle. We need to watch out for an overdeveloped lead-elder theology.

This can be displayed in a leader who “has a team but doesn't need a team.” (*Some reflection questions here: Do you just have a team, or do you really need your team? Do they know you need them? Do they really team with you? Do you really team with them?*)

This can also be displayed in a leader or team member who is more concerned about monopolising rather than multiplying/releasing/empowering others. (Liz Wisemans book, *Multipliers*, is an excellent resource on this topic of multipliers and diminishers). This can also be seen when everything is held at the centre – with one person having



all the control or decision-making power. Rather we should aim for a more sustainable and reproducible model.

What helps with this? Humility! Create feedback processes which enable these kinds of things to be addressed. Ask for feedback regularly. Rigby Wallace suggests a great question to ask regularly: *What is it like to be on the other side of me right now?* Actively create opportunities for truth-telling, feedback, confession, repentance, saying sorry and forgiveness.

#### 4. Division: Fostering Unity

A divided team is a weak team! This can take many different formats. There can be an A TEAM: B TEAM dynamic - where some members of the team feel excluded or less than, or not part of the "inner-circle" (This could be for a number of reasons - those who are employed by the church or not, those who preach vs those who don't, those who are in a season with more capacity vs those who aren't). Then a second, sometimes more subtle example, is when a leader "plays favourites" (where there are a few that get all their attention, or those to whom they clearly listen more).

What helps with this? Keep a read on this! E.g. is the leader creating opportunities to invest in, spend time with some, or all? (You may need to "favour" the marketplace team members who naturally have less time available). Who are the verbal ones in your team? Have you checked in with those who process differently? How can you accommodate all styles (e.g. allow your internal processors time and space and then ask for their feedback specifically). Who has a "weighted" opinion which seems to count a lot? How can you hear all opinions and perspectives?

Romans 12 calls us to listen, pray with and for, honour, love, be united, be kind - that creates a unified team.

#### 5. Dilution: Keeping Purpose and Productivity Sharp

Many dysfunctions show up in a team's overall effectiveness, purpose and productivity being diluted! This can especially show in time and energy management!

One prime example is in meetings; where there is meeting confusion or chaos (Each meeting need to be clear on: What is the purpose of this meeting? What kind of discussion are we having? Whose meeting is it? Who is driving this meeting?). Other frustrations can include not having the right people in the room, not being well-prepared, not using the right format, or when it feels like the real meeting happens after the meeting.

This dilution can often be addressed with clarity and communication.

#### 6. Delay: Knowing When to Call for Backup

One of the key things a team needs to know is when to call for help. Think of the marriage counselling analogy - the best time to ask for help is not when it has all fallen apart and the couple are ready to give up; but along-the-way coaching to help address issues as they emerge and establish new healthier responses, communication and patterns of relating.

Having said that, it is good to call for help in the following circumstances:

- ▶ False teaming - surface level unity, unresolved conflict, pretending everything is okay
- ▶ Overbearing leadership
- ▶ Lack of consensus
- ▶ Fundamental shifts to teaming or style or structure where a trusted person's perspective would be helpful.



# CONCLUSION

**This paper has laid a landscape of healthy eldership teams, exploring the rich theological foundations and practical wisdom for nurturing such teams within the church.**

We are reminded of the profound truth from John 17:22-23, that unity in our teams reflects the unity of the Father and the Son, and by extension, the very nature of God. The African proverb, “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together,” resonates deeply with our Christian calling to community and shared leadership and is a core phrase quoted within our equipping times together.

By embracing the principles laid out in Romans 12, eldership teams can aspire to reflect Christ’s body, operating with a diversity of gifts but a single, united purpose. As we heed these scriptural truths, we can build teams that are robust in character, rich in love, and resolute in their mission. Let us commit to being teams that not only look inward, fostering health and vitality among ourselves, but also look outward, demonstrating the love and unity of Christ to a world in need.

As we go forward, let each eldership team take time to reflect on the health of their own community. Where there is strength, let it be celebrated and built upon; where there is weakness, let there be a gracious and committed approach to restoration and growth. May we all seek to go far together, as we journey towards the vision of a church that truly reflects the unity and love of our triune God.

May the Lord bless our efforts to create eldership teams that are as resilient as they are humble, as visionary as they are grounded, and as diverse as they are unified, to the glory of God and the advancement of His kingdom on earth.



# APPENDIX

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR ELDERSHIP TEAMS

Eldership is Team - Part 1 (Ryan Termorshuizen)

<https://vimeo.com/913202257>

Eldership is Team - Part 1 (Ryan Termorshuizen)

<https://vimeo.com/913212801>

Andrew Wilson - <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/courageous-pastors/>

Overbearing Leaders	Courageous Pastors
Are difficult to question or challenge	Invite feedback and correction
Are defensive in response to criticism	Are quick to weigh criticism and apologize
Cause apprehension or fear in the team/church	Cause security and stability in the team/church
Are quick to play the "loyalty card"	Are committed to earning and re-earning trust
Take disagreements personally	Distinguish disagreements from attack
Are threatened by gifted individuals	Are secure alongside gifted individuals
Have a sense of entitlement with respect to pay, title, honour, etc.	Seek the honour, pay, or recognition of others
Are insecure and prickly	Don't take themselves too seriously
Require quick assent from the team	Give the team space to process and develop
Are above the rules, processes, and procedures	Establish and submit to good processes
Lack self-awareness about weaknesses	Are self-aware and emotionally intelligent
Have a visible "outside" is bigger than their "inside"	Have an invisible "inside" that is bigger than their "outside"
Hold on to power and influence	Delegate, empower, and release
Avoid peer-to-peer accountability	Prize and pursue peer-to-peer accountability
See submission as a one-way street	Practice mutual submission
Promote a culture of conformity	Promote a culture of diversity
Don't mix with ordinary church members	Are hospitable and approachable
Frequently use "God told me to . . ."	Are consultative
Are emotionally volatile	Are emotionally self-controlled
Are proud	Are humble

The Emotionally Healthy Church by Peter Scazzero:

This book offers a blueprint for church leaders to integrate emotional health with spiritual maturity

## TEMPLATES AND TOOLS

The Table Group - Teamwork resources:

<https://www.tablegroup.com/topics-and-resources/teamwork-5-dysfunctions/>

