

The Core Elements of the Healthy Church Model

The Healthy Church Model gives us a simple but robust foundation for building a healthy and unified church. These are the core elements of the model:

BUILDING HIS CHURCH IS THE CENTRAL THING GOD IS DOING ON THE EARTH.

Jesus said, “On this rock, I will build My Church.” (Matt. 16:13-19) The revelation of the Person and purpose of Jesus Christ is the Foundation on which Jesus will build His Church. This shows us the centrality of the Church in the purpose of God. It’s not that God has many purposes, and this is merely one of them. This is the core purpose of God, and the purpose for which Jesus came. There are many good things we could do, but God has called us to the highest: the building of His Temple, the preparation of His Bride, the equipping and maturing of His Body. Our goal is the building of His Church.

A HEALTHY CHURCH IS ONE IN WHICH EVERY MEMBER IS FUNCTIONING PROPERLY.

In the New Testament, the Church is compared to the human body (1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4). When a part of someone’s body is not functioning properly, that person is, by definition, “sick” or “unhealthy.” Thus, a simple definition of a “healthy” human body is one in which every member is functioning properly. It is the same with a healthy church. Paul says, “From Him [Christ] the whole Body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” (Eph. 4:16) If every member functions properly then the local church will be healthy and fulfill God’s purposes.

WHEN THE PEOPLE DO THE MINISTRY WORK THE CHURCH IS BUILT UP.

It is vital that we understand Paul’s words in Ephesians 4:11-12: “And He gave the [leaders] to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the Body of Christ ...” This is sometimes (incorrectly) understood as: the leaders equip the people, the leaders do the work of the ministry, and the leaders build up the Body of Christ. And the rest of the people in the church are seen as needy objects of the leaders’ ministries.

In reality, Paul said: the leaders equip the people. Then the people do the work of the ministry which, in turn, is what builds up the Body of Christ. It is not the leaders who build up the Body of Christ; it is the people! The Church will *only* be built and come to maturity when the people function properly – when the people act.

THE ROLE OF THE LEADERS IS TO EQUIP THE PEOPLE, BUILD LEADERS, SHAPE CULTURE, AND CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT FOR THE PEOPLE TO DO THE WORK OF THE MINISTRY.

A leader’s primary attention must not be on personally doing the ministry work, but on building the people to do the ministry work. This is not to suggest that church leaders should never do any direct ministry work themselves. Jesus did ministry work, but, most importantly, He equipped His disciples and they acted and proceeded to build the Church all over the world.

Jesus integrated the two – ministry work and equipping. Every time Jesus did ministry work, He equipped His disciples through it. His focus was building people and the ministry work provided the rich context and diverse opportunities to do so. There is no better way to equip people than in the midst of the ministry work.

TO “EQUIP” THE PEOPLE MEANS TO DO WHATEVER IS NECESSARY TO NURTURE A DAILY LIFE AND CULTURE IN WHICH EVERY MEMBER FUNCTIONS PROPERLY.

Paul uses the word “equip” in Ephesians 4:12 to express that the church leaders are to *do whatever is necessary to nurture a daily life and culture in which every member functions properly*. This includes practical teaching, but it’s much bigger than that. “Equip” includes:

- Creating a culture in which every member functions. “Culture” means shared beliefs, values, attitudes, actions, language.
- Personally building and empowering leaders who will nurture this culture across the life of the church.
- Envisioning and providing opportunities for people to function.
- Designing and implementing the necessary “spiritual infrastructure” (organization, administration, systems, resources, learning, evaluation, prayer, etc.) to support the people as they act and to ensure that all the various facets of church life work well together.

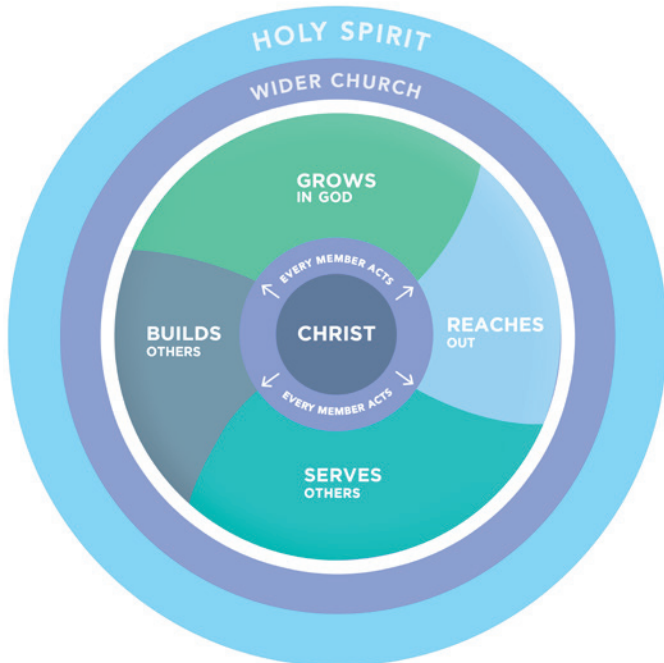
In summary, it’s the people who do the work of the ministry and build up the Body of Christ, and the role of the leaders is to equip the people to do that – basically to do everything necessary to make that happen. That is what the leaders must do. Their primary attention must not be on personally doing the ministry work, but on building the people to do the ministry work.

Thus, the leaders are not called merely to *run programs* but to *build people*. This is a profound paradigm shift for many believers and churches. It is a shift away from a *program* mentality to a *people* mentality. It is a shift from *logistics* to *life*.

Here is how to evaluate your own personal focus as a leader. Ask the question: Over the last month how much time did I spend running programs (administration, logistics, etc.) and how much time did I personally spend investing in people's lives? In the Great Commission, Jesus did not say, "Go and start programs." His commandment was, "Go and make disciples" – build people's lives!

A HEALTHY CHURCH IS ONE IN WHICH EVERY MEMBER GROWS IN GOD, SERVES OTHERS, BUILDS OTHERS AND REACHES OUT.

For a church to be healthy it must have all four facets (Eph. 4:15). Of course, churches will have seasons of special emphasis on one or another of these. However, over time, all four must be strongly built. And all four must come from life – the indwelling life of Christ in each believer's life (John 15:4-5). Our union with Christ is expressed in these four practical ways. Through these, every member and every church will fulfill both the two Great Commandments (Matt. 22:37-40, Grows in God and Serves Others) and the twofold Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20, Builds Others and Reaches Out).



A HEALTHY CHURCH WILL HAVE A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER CHURCHES AND WITH THE BROADER BODY OF CHRIST.

Like the various members of a healthy human body (1 Cor. 12), the early churches were individually strong but they were not isolated or independent. Neither were they dependent on one another; instead there was a healthy interdependence.

FUNDAMENTALLY, THE OVERARCHING VISION OF EVERY LOCAL CHURCH SHOULD BE ESSENTIALLY THE SAME.

All churches are called to the same broad vision that God gives us in Ephesians 4:11-16. It is true that some churches will have a particular capacity in a certain focused area (e.g., teaching or evangelism). But often that will revolve around the focus and special abilities of a certain highly gifted leader. Moreover, churches with a big emphasis on one or a few things are sometimes out of balance and the rest of the church's life is neglected.

Generally speaking, each local church should not try to be a special church with a unique calling. That idea came from the corporate world, in which one company tries to have a unique vision and market in order to gain a competitive advantage over other companies – this is certainly appropriate in the business world. However, there simply is no biblical support for such an idea for local churches.

THE SINGLE STRATEGY TO BUILD HEALTHY CHURCHES IS TO BUILD PEOPLE'S LIVES – TO BUILD LEADERS AND TO BUILD EVERYONE ACROSS THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH.

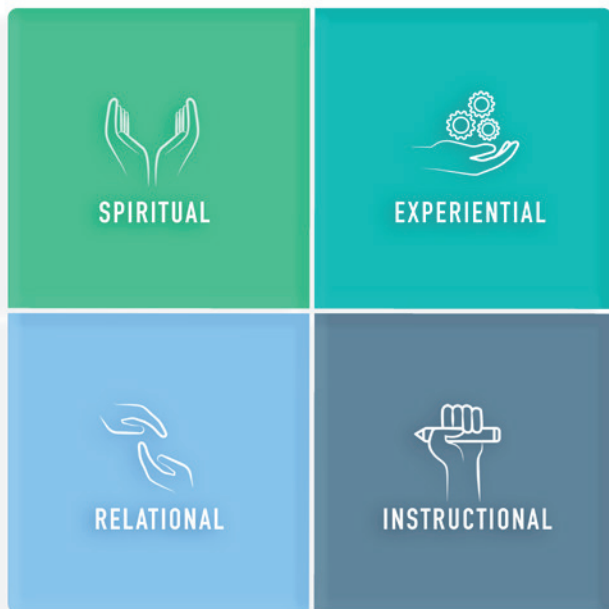
To use Jesus' words: "Make disciples." To use Paul's words: "Equip God's people." The core strategy of every local church must be to build leaders and to build everyone.



IT IS THROUGH THE FOUR DYNAMICS OF TRANSFORMATION THAT THE LEADERS NURTURE THE LIFE OF EVERY MEMBER FUNCTIONING. "EQUIP" MEANS THE FOUR DYNAMICS.

The Four Dynamics of Transformation (4Ds) give us a very clear and practical description of exactly how this equipping occurs! It is through the four dynamics that a healthy church is built.

- **Spiritual Dynamics** - The Transforming Power of the Holy Spirit
- **Relational Dynamics** - The Transforming Power of Relationships
- **Experiential Dynamics** - The Transforming Power of Doing
- **Instructional Dynamics** - The Transforming Power of the Word of God



EVERY CHURCH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT WAS PLANTED AND NURTURED USING ALL FOUR DYNAMICS.

The apostles created a very rich environment to nurture life and to build the church – in every church in the New Testament. It was a culture of connecting with God in prayer, praise and worship, serving one another, giving, reaching out to the lost, time in the Word, fellowship with one another, and spiritual exercises (Acts 2:42-47).

The example of the Thessalonian church is dramatic. Paul spent only a short time there establishing the church (Acts 17:2) before he was sent away in the midst of fierce persecution. Yet, not long after, he writes that they're doing so well that they have become "a model to all the believers

in Macedonia and Achaia" and that their "faith in God has become known everywhere" (1 Thess. 1:8)!

What did Paul do in that short time to establish such profound and enduring life? He used the four dynamics (1 Thess. 1:5-8)!

THE ROLE OF THE FIVEFOLD MINISTRIES (EPH. 4:11-12) IS NOT JUST TO DO THE MINISTRY WORK THEMSELVES, BUT THEIR PRIMARY ROLE IS TO BUILD PEOPLE AND NURTURE CULTURE.

- **Apostle** – gives overall leadership to the church. The apostle is the general contractor ("wise master builder" – 1 Cor. 3:10) who sees how all the parts go together in a unified, productive way, and gives broad vision for change and for health. He is responsible for the total work, and gives overall direction, leadership, design and strategy.
- **Prophet** – connects people with God so that we love God, worship God, serve God, know God, depend on God, put God first. "Grows in God."
- **Pastor/Shepherd** – connects people with others in the church so that we love and serve one another. "Serves others."
- **Teacher** – connects people with truth so that we all learn and grow. "Builds others."
- **Evangelist** – connects people with passion for the lost so that we reach out. "Reaches out."

WE SHOULD THINK OF THE FIVEFOLD MINISTRIES NOT ONLY AS FORMAL MINISTRY "OFFICES" BUT ALSO AS ROLES IN THE LIFE OF EVERY LOCAL CHURCH.

In the New Testament there are men and women who functioned in each of these offices (Peter was an apostle, Philip an evangelist, etc.) Moreover, there are certainly men and women today who function in each of these offices. Yet there are also many men and women who perform these *kinds* of roles in the normal daily life of a church without having the specific office.

For example, while there are some "Evangelists" in the church today, there are far more people who are "evangelistic" in their giftings and callings. If we think this way, then the door is open for almost every local church to have all five of these kinds of ministry at work.

THERE ARE POTENTIALLY MANY LEGITIMATE FORMS OF LOCAL CHURCH GOVERNMENT. MOREOVER, WHAT'S APPROPRIATE IN A CERTAIN CONTEXT CAN CHANGE OVER TIME.

The New Testament writers had plenty of opportunity to lay out a detailed, systematic plan for church government. However, they carefully avoided doing this. In the entire book of Acts, for example, Luke never once gives specific

details regarding the government of the churches at Jerusalem or Antioch. In his broad address to church leaders in 1 Peter 5:1-4, Peter (like other New Testament writers) does not promote or even define one particular and precisely detailed system of church government.

The exact form of government may vary from place to place and from time to time according to many factors, like size, culture, age, stability and maturity. The design of the actual form of church government in each case in the New Testament was the responsibility of wise church planters and leaders under the direction of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:10).

STRUCTURE MUST ALWAYS COME FROM LIFE AND MUST ALWAYS SERVE TO SUPPORT LIFE.

In church life, as the church grows and matures, the visionary leadership and new directions will create the need for particular governing and administrative structures. Structure comes from life.

These structures, in turn, are essential to protect and facilitate the life and work of the church and enable the church to continue to grow in both size and maturity. Structure serves life.

Here are some key observations regarding structure:

- The particular structure that is needed changes as the church grows and matures.
- You should have no more structure than what the life actually requires.
- At the point that your structure gets in the way of life it must be changed or eliminated, or else you will end up with the life of the church serving the structure!
- Focus on life, not structure! Let the structure come naturally. In reality, life comes first – always!

OUR GOAL IS A “HEALTHY CHURCH” AND NOT A “PERFECT CHURCH”!

Perfection is a hard task master. It is unachievable and if you pursue it, you will drive yourself and others. Your church will never be perfect, but it can be healthy!

THE HEALTHY CHURCH MODEL PRESENTS FIVE MAJOR PARADIGM SHIFTS.

These five paradigm shifts are:

Traditional Paradigm	New Testament Paradigm
<i>1. Who builds the church?</i>	
The leaders do the ministry work and the church is built up.	The people do the ministry work and the church is built up.
The leaders build the church.	The people build the church.
<i>2. What is the role of the people of God?</i>	
The people are needy objects and passive recipients of the leader’s ministry.	The people actively function in the work of the ministry.
<i>3. What is the role of the leader?</i>	
The role of the leader is to do all the work of the ministry.	The role of the leader is to equip the people, build leaders, shape culture, and create an environment for the people to do the work of the ministry.
<i>4. Where and when does “church” occur?</i>	
“Church” occurs in a building on Sunday morning.	“Church” occurs in the homes, workplaces and lives of God’s people, all week long (Acts 2:42-47).
<i>5. How is a healthy church built?</i>	
Run effective ministry programs.	Build people.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information, please see: *Building Healthy Churches* by Malcolm Webber.



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