



# Who's at the Helm?

Ecclesiological Position for Male Biblical Eldership at Legacy Church

## Summary Statement

We have resolved to lead those partnered with us in community from the Biblical position of male eldership in plurality. In plainer language, that simply means we see the Bible describing and prescribing a model for us to lead the church, and we see it to be by a collective group of qualified men. We will unpack this summary statement and why we enforce it locally by discussing:

**Male Leadership:** Why do we believe God has called men to lead his church? What can women do then? Is God a sexist? Is this just a cultural nuance no longer important?

**Qualified Leadership:** What qualifies a man to be an elder? What's his family have to do with it? What about preaching?

**Plural Leadership:** What format should this leadership take? Can this happen efficiently? Who's "really" in charge? How is this different than a business?

## Introductory Remarks

We understand that there are hundreds of different ideas on how churches should be led swirling about the church landscape today. The more time advances, the more complex and varied these ideas get. We feel this positional paper could help you understand which model of leadership we as a church have devoted ourselves to. We do believe that the structure of leadership does inform how the rest of the church will *believe* and *behave*. Alexander Strauch refers to this in saying,

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*"Ultimately, structure determines how things are done in the local church. I find it ironic that some evangelical leaders in America are more concerned about the structure of the United States government than the structure of the local church. I doubt that many evangelical leaders would say, "It doesn't matter how the U.S. government is structured as long as there is some form of leadership." Yet, that is precisely what I have heard some evangelical leaders say about the local church."<sup>1</sup>*

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We agree with Strauch, which is why we wish to make our ideas plain before you to understand and decide your partnership with us and/or to bring the Word to bear upon our actions as church leadership by way of reminder. Most of the people we run into that have left another church upon disagreement have formed a disagreement with the leadership or its structure. It's seldom that a family cuts loose from a church due to a collision with another family not in leadership. Because of this, the "what/when/how/why" of our leadership becomes very important.

We as elders have spent a truck-load of time discussing and researching all of this and are putting our lives together in real and vulnerable humility to model it before you. The model we choose isn't cutting edge or elegantly

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call To Restore Biblical Church Leadership*, page 102

emergent but it has endured since creation and is prescribed by our King. We believe the Bible has called us to collect a group of qualified, called, and desirous men to lead Jesus' precious church.

A single note regarding this positional paper is our interchangeability of the words *pastor*, *elder*, *overseer*, and *shepherd*. The exegetical reasoning for this exceeds the design of this paper, and we wanted to keep this short so we'll leave it at that.

## Male Leadership

*...likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, <sup>10</sup> but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works. <sup>11</sup> Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. <sup>12</sup> I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. 1 Tim 2:9-12 (ESV)*

*But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God. <sup>4</sup> Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, <sup>5</sup> but every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, since it is the same as if her head were shaven. <sup>6</sup> For if a wife will not cover her head, then she should cut her hair short. But since it is disgraceful for a wife to cut off her hair or shave her head, let her cover her head. <sup>7</sup> For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. <sup>8</sup> For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. <sup>9</sup> Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. <sup>10</sup> That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. <sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; <sup>12</sup> for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God. <sup>13</sup> Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a wife to pray to God with her head uncovered? <sup>14</sup> Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him, <sup>15</sup> but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering. 1 Cor 11:3-16 (ESV)*

*<sup>33</sup> For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints, <sup>34</sup> the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. <sup>35</sup> If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. <sup>36</sup> Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached? <sup>37</sup> If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. <sup>38</sup> If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized. 1 Cor 14:33-38 (ESV)*

God is not a sexist and the church is not a "boy's club". I know this has been purported through the ages and our description of leadership as being "male" may reinforce that for some people. God doesn't hate women or even see them as "second class citizens". He has made *both* man and woman in his image. Men leading women is not oppressive regardless of what the culture thinks and we as a church will follow the Biblical direction given. This is what we call the *complementarian* position, which is a long word to simply describe men and women complementing each other through the roles they play in God's created order.

Our Creator joyfully fashioned woman in his image the very same way he did man. Man and woman both carry the same dignity and value in creation, yet they differ in role. We'll actually see "role deference" a little later again in our discussion of elder plurality. Broadly, we have a beautiful image of role deference in the Trinity where

Jesus is God, (John 1) and he is following God as his head. (John 5:19, 30) This is part of God's mystery. Also, later in the Gospel when Jesus is coming out of his baptism, he follows the Holy Spirit into the wilderness (Mark 4:1) only to send the Holy Spirit to his followers later in the Gospel. Here we clearly see a beautiful portrait of equality in dignity, glory, and stature – yet deference in role. Christ is no less God by following his Father in heaven. The Holy Spirit is not “above” Jesus in rank as He leads Jesus into the wilderness. We have to trash the cultural nuance that God is the boss, Jesus is his first employee, and the Holy Spirit is the stepchild we don't know much about. This “first, second, third” idea of the Trinity is incorrect and can even hurt how we see women or elders in leadership. The Trinity is a beautiful snapshot of marriage and community for us today.

Today, by defining roles for women, many have come under fire for defining value, stature, or honor. They are not the same. When God directs the young church (and therefore us) through Paul, He attributes variance of role without variance of stature, significance, or value. We'll look at a few texts many use, or abuse, in defining women in leadership.

When Paul addresses his young disciple Timothy regarding women's posture, demeanor, and role in the church he basically comments that women are to appear in modesty and with a spirit of quietude, or humility (1 Timothy 2:9-15). Paul was saying that the “appearance” and action of the Christian woman was to fit the claim that Christ has won her over and that she understands authority, headship, and covering. Her attire wasn't to smell of rebellion, and either was her demeanor because she had been freed from rebellion. Her leadership in the young church community was also to fall under authority, again in stark opposition with the old order of rebellion. This had been a problem Timothy needed guidance on so Paul said very plainly, “I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.” (1 Timothy 2:12) Commentator Thomas Constable notes on this verse,

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*“(exercise authority) means to act on one's own authority or to act in an autocratic manner. To exercise authority in this way would be to submit to no higher authority in the church. If a woman exercised some authority in the church (e.g., as the leader of a ministry) and she did it in submission to the male leadership, she would not be sinning. It is taking inappropriate authority on herself that Paul prohibited. A woman can have authority over others in the church provided she is under the authority of the male leadership of the church.”<sup>2</sup>*

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Like this passage in mood and directive is Paul's word to the church at Corinth. In 1 Corinthians 14:34 Paul says to the church, “As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. <sup>35</sup> If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.” Wow, that seems harsh at first glance using words like “shameful”, “permitted”, and “submission”. The truth is that context holds weight here. It exceeds the boundaries of this brief treatment to speak on context, but why Paul wrote something matters as much as what he wrote. Thomas Constable remarks,

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*“It is improper for a woman to speak in church meetings in the situation Paul addressed in the context. That situation is the questioning and perhaps challenging of what a prophet said who was sharing something he or she believed God had given him or her to pass on to the church”<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas Constable, Notes on 1 Timothy, 2010 Edition, page 28

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Constable, Notes on 1 Corinthians, 2010 Edition, page 161

Remember that we're looking at a church gone wild. One issue was women struggling with their role in community with the gathering in particular. Ancient Jewish tradition was very limiting regarding women's role in learning or teaching law and now Jewish Christians grappled with their new life in Christ and what that meant. Add to this a Gentile league of women who were familiar to women teaching publically some of the various philosophies of the day. The resulting young church was filled with women who struggled with headship, covering, submissive spirits, and modesty. Paul is not saying that women aren't to open their mouths in the service ever because that would disagree with other passages he has written. He is saying that publically— women don't take the lead.

Legacy Church does believe in women leading, but we keep it within the same boundaries Paul prescribes to Timothy and Corinth. We do not see a cultural shelf life on these passages of scripture that renders them null and void for today. There is just as much sin and rebellion today as there was when the letter was written. Christ is still just as much the head of the church, and husbands are still just as much the heads of their households. The Bible is still true for us today and where it is clear, we see it as binding on us.

So what do we allow women to do then? We allow women to lead women, children, speak to the church, pray before the church, read scripture before the church, apply the Gospel to others in church community, and even exercise service to the church to a deacon's degree of service. We have wide parameters for women to lead, just not at an elder's level. Eldership we reserve for qualified men. Not only do we allow women to exercise proper leadership within community, we desire and need it to an increasing degree. We would love to have a long "deaconess" list as we grow.

1 Corinthians 11:2-16 also lays out the model and progression of headship and authority. Paul speaks to a church that didn't really do church very well. They struggled in many areas and women exercising leadership over men in the gatherings was just one of the potholes they kept hitting. He said in verse 3, *But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.* Here we have the key to *how* we can be equal and submissive at the same time – Jesus and his posture before God. Alexander Strauch comments on this principle within this passage,

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*"By stating that "God is the head of Christ," Paul emphasizes the hierarchal relationship that exists in the Godhead. Although equal in substance, Christ obeys and submits Himself to the Father within the relationship of the persons of the Godhead (1 Corinthians 15:28). This submission certainly doesn't imply inferiority on the part of the Lord Jesus Christ... The woman is in no way inferior to the man because she subordinates herself to him than Christ is inferior to God the Father because he subordinates himself to the Father."*<sup>4</sup>

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This understanding is key to honoring women as fully as God intends and honoring male leadership as fully as God intends at the same time. Glance at any Forbes list of amazing leaders and it will be littered with strong and capable women. Women can lead – this is a fact. Our complementarian view here isn't blind or ignorant to that fact but we believe we honor God better by not just putting the most gifted individual up front at the helm, but by imaging the created order and Jesus' submissive but equal relationship to God his Father.

## Qualified Leadership

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<sup>4</sup> Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call To Restore Biblical Church Leadership*, page 61-62

I'm pretty picky about who's leading my wife. It's because I'm protective of her. If I just let anyone lead her around, I'd be a pretty cruddy husband. Jesus is like this with the church. Jesus is passionate about his bride, the church. His passion shouldn't be lost on us as we witness it's splendor on display in the Gospel to us. He loves his bride, died for his bride, and yearns to collect his church to him in the end of all ends. With such a high value on his bride and adopted family, not just any leadership will do. Not even leadership the culture calls "good and qualified" will do. Only a leadership qualified according to the standards laid before us so clearly in the Bible will do for his church. He too is picky on who is at the helm.

*The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. <sup>2</sup> Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, <sup>3</sup> not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. <sup>4</sup> He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, <sup>5</sup> for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? <sup>6</sup> He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. <sup>7</sup> Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil. 1 Timothy 3:1–7 (ESV)*

*This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you— <sup>6</sup> if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. <sup>7</sup> For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, <sup>8</sup> but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. <sup>9</sup> He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it. Titus 1:5–9 (ESV)*

*So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: <sup>2</sup> 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; <sup>3</sup> not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. 1 Peter 5:1–3 (ESV)*

These passages encapsulate most of where we see the qualifications for church eldership. I'm sure you can already see that there's some overlapping of qualities so I'm going to condense them into a few dominant categories. I have borrowed and altered this simplification from Alexander Strauch's work *Biblical Eldership*.

(1.) Moral and Spiritual Character

(2.) Skills and Abilities

(3.) Motivations

### Moral & Spiritual Character

...above reproach...

We see clearly Paul's admonition for us to have men who are above reproach or "well thought of by outsiders", which means being free from any offensive or disgraceful blight of character or conduct. This would simply mean living above the fray regarding sexual immorality, rash judgment, drunkenness, anger, greed etc... If a man

can live in such a way that the world cannot bring a case against him and the ripples of his life show to the verity of his character, he would be above reproach. A good example of this would be Job in the Old Testament. Not even Satan himself could bring a valid accusation against him. His life was above the fray. (Job 1:1, 8)

#### ...husband of one wife...

One of the areas important to Paul and us regarding this moral and spiritual character being above reproach is in the area of marital and sexual purity. The enemy has always used this avenue to destroy families and nations and is still doing it in churches today. (Numbers 25:1-5, 1 Kings 11:1-13, Ezra 9:1-2) The quickest way to spread an acceptance for sexual impurity in a church body is through acceptance in its leaders. This is why it is important for elders to live beyond chronic and unadulterated sexual sin.

As a side note, we believe that a man divorced and re-married can still be a "husband of one wife", and therefore an elder candidate if he meets all other qualifications, is called, and aspires to the office. Being a husband of one wife simply means to be devoted to one woman inside of a monogamous marriage in all fidelity. We, therefore, do not believe the Bible teaches that a man with a divorce in his past necessarily excludes him from consideration any more than a man with no children does (who is not able to keep his kids submissive and under control). We would take such situations case by case.

#### ...self-controlled...

Here we see that in order to be qualified for elder leadership, one must be disciplined and controlled regarding money, alcohol, emotions, and exercise of authority. We do exercise freedom in what we eat and drink, (which means, yes we drink beer) but being drunk and under the control of any substance is strictly spoken to in the Bible. (1 Corinthians 5:11, 6:9-10, Galatians 5:21, Ephesians 5:18, 1 Peter 4:3) With the issues abusing alcohol causes and mankind's attempt to make drunkenness a remedy for the effects of sin in our lives, elders called to lead cannot be given to the same addiction.

Just as we can be gluttons with drink, we can be gluttons with food and money. These we don't like to talk about very much, but the simple truth is that a man cannot be above reproach in being self-controlled when their money is not under the control of God. This is not an indictment on wealthy people, it is an admonition to be under the stewardship of all that God brings, which means seeing provision as God's ownership and man's management. God has made some men wealthy, and that isn't a sin. It is a sin however when anyone, wealthy or not, treats their provision as theirs to do with whatever they want with no accountability or reflection on the owner. Under this view, even poor people can be gluttons of money and uncontrolled in their posture to wealth. Some accrue great wealth and do it with no self-control, and some hold on to their wealth with no self-control.

As a side note here, we as a church will not even consider a man for eldership who has not exemplified a track record of good biblical understanding of financial giving. A man who gives to the church and Kingdom sacrificially, joyfully, and consistently paints a picture of a man who is under control in his money and not given to either gluttony or hoarding of God's resources. There is more to discuss here than this paper wishes to cover, but it should be clear here that we see being self-controlled in money as being demonstrated through a Biblical exercise of giving.

Finally, how someone handles their emotions and authority also disclose their level of self-control and are indicative of a man's qualification for eldership. We see Paul using phrases like "sober minded", "not violent but gentle", and "not quarrelsome" in the pivotal passages above. These all need very little discussion as they speak to

our handling of emotions as they pertain to others and leadership. Someone who cannot make decisions, speak, or lead due to being swept up in anger for example is not qualified for leadership.

## Skills & Abilities

### ...manage his own household well...

How a man handles his home is a forecast to how he will handle the church. This is Paul's summation of the father/husband. This is typically overlooked in many churches where the leadership endorses a great business leader or a man with stature in the community, yet whose family is starving for love and time and the children are unruly or given to very wild living. Such a man, Paul says, is unsuitable for eldership. In Titus 1:6 Paul says the children shouldn't be "*open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination*" and he tells Timothy that they should be "*submissive*." We understand that all kids have seasons where they explore rebellion deeper than others and every individual is ultimately responsible for their own transgressions, yet a family environment where such life is patterned and obvious shows the father's inability to bring the Gospel to address the disobedience and pastor it correctly.

Another side note regards Paul's statement to Titus that the "*children are believers*" (Titus 1:6) This is actually much better rendered "having faithful children" rather than having Christian children. The word we render "believe" from also means faithful, dutiful, or trustworthy. Salvation is a spiritual act from God and even the best of Christian fathers cannot ensure that their own children will be regenerate. The contrast is not between saved and unsaved children, it is between respectful and lawless children, which further agrees with Paul's word to Timothy.

### ...able to teach...

Paul speaks to Titus and Timothy both also about the elder's ability to handle God's word to us. In Titus 1:9 he says, "*He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.*" Remember, heresy was rampant when Paul wrote this and he only considered men qualified and called who knew their Bible well enough to spot a fake. Heresy is still rampant. The church needs shepherds who can keep it safe from wolves who sound good with their heresy and smooth teachings. A man who cannot do this is not fit to lead. This does not mean however that an elder must be a great preacher of the word. There will be some elders gifted to lead from a pulpit and communicate well, but all elders need to have an ability to communicate truth over a lie. This is why it is important for there to be a very close agreement between elders as to what fits into the "open hand" of belief and the "closed hand" of belief (discussed in the partnership covenant material).

## Motivations

### ...aspires...

We glean much from Peter's word to the church 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;<sup>3</sup> not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.*" When one desires the noble task of leading as an elder and aspires to such an office, the church community feels the love a shepherd is charged to exercise. If a church endorses an elder who is qualified and called to lead, but has no desire or aspirations to lead – it will be a miserable failure and the people won't be cared for properly. You can always tell when someone doesn't want to be around you or have anything to do with your life. This is not what Christ had in mind when he prescribed the leadership of his bride.

## Plural Leadership

Legacy Church, from day one, has been committed to a model of leadership in which the elders lead as a committee of equal men in humility as seen in the Bible.

Plural eldership might be the most neglected and misunderstood forms of leadership in the church today and stands in stark contrast to what many more recent church models have defaulted to. This default model is largely exercised in the business world as the seemingly logical structure. The western church, particularly in America, has borrowed largely from the world's business structure to lead God's people to the point where many of us don't even question it. "If it works for Google or Starbucks, it must work for us too."

Many adopt a style of leadership that vaults a singular man to the top of a pyramidal structure. It is the singular man atop the others that makes the decisions and plots the course. In this model, senior pastors may even have the ability to remain at the helm upon disqualifying matters. The lower level pastors in such a structure have authority, but only a fraction as much and not to the degree where the senior pastor has to answer or be accountable to the other pastors. In many of these churches, the church is not bigger than the singular man. In fact, upon his absence, the church struggles to stay alive. Robert Greenleaf posits,

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*"To be a lone chief atop a pyramid is abnormal and corrupting. None of us are perfect by ourselves, and all of us need the help and correcting influence of close colleagues. When someone is moved atop a pyramid, that person no longer has colleagues, only subordinates."*<sup>5</sup>

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This is very unstable for the church and we see a different style painted for us in the Bible. Examples of plurality in the Bible are:

- Jesus entrusted the church with plural leadership in the original twelve disciples.
- Seven men were set apart for service to the early church with no chief designated. (Acts 6:3-6)
- James told those who were sick to "call for the elders of the church". (James 5:14)
- Paul appointed a team of elders in his new church plants. (Acts 14:23)
- Paul said his farewell to the "elders" of the church of Ephesus, not the pastor. (Acts 20:17,28)
- In Paul's greeting to the church of Philippi, he greeted a plurality of pastors and deacons. (Phi. 1:1)
- Paul charged Titus to labor in setting in a plurality of pastors in Crete. (Titus 1:5)
- Peter as well speaks to elders in plural form. (1 Peter 5:1)

It might be noted by some that these passages are mainly descriptive and not prescriptive and therefore not necessarily a model for us today. Some might even consider a nuance of plurality or symposium in leadership a cultural item and not binding on us today or look to the obscurity of particular passages regarding leadership mode. Author Bruce Stabbert comments on how we read the Bible in order to render plurality in the pastorate,

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*"This is a case where the clear passages must be permitted to set the interpretation for the obscure. Thus, of the eighteen passages which speak of church leadership, fifteen of them are plural. Of these fifteen, seven of them most definitely speak of a single congregation."*<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Robert Greenleaf, Servant Leadership, Page 63

We believe at Legacy that the Bible describes a symposium of qualified men leading God's family together while clothed in humility and deference. This greatly images God in the Trinity (discussed below) and places a higher premium on health for the body and care through accountability. This of course isn't the fastest way to make decisions and "get things done" and can even feel cumbersome in moments, but in the long haul, is the healthiest form of leadership we feel convicted to follow. Mark Dever, pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church says the following regarding plural pastoral leadership,

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*"This (plurality of elder) is sometimes cumbersome, but it has immense benefits. It rounds out the pastor's gifts, making up for some of his defects and supplementing his judgment. It creates support in the congregation for decisions, helping unity and leaving leaders less exposed to unjust criticism. It makes leadership more rooted and permanent and allows for more mature continuity. It encourages the church to take more responsibility for its spirituality and helps make the church less dependent on its employees."*<sup>7</sup>

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As Dever explains in the first quote above, the list of benefits is long. It takes an elder's weaknesses and allows them to be buttressed by his fellow pastor colleagues. Otherwise, the church suffers where a single elder is weak. In other words, a church's leadership would only be as strong as the single strongest elder is at that moment. In our case at Legacy, I am not necessarily gifted in counseling people who suffer in chronic depression or those who feel overly victimized. I can go a couple rounds, but after that I seem to run out of steam when those hurting need more care. We have elders who find themselves more apt to long suffering care in such instances. Because of this, the church will not suffer in this mode of love. Also, I am currently more called in communicating by preaching, teaching, and laying out the church's vision than the other elders and because of that, they feel comfortable that I round out their weaknesses they strive to grow in. As man and wife complement each other, so we as a symposium of called men complement each other.

In addition to the enhancing of the church's leadership by plural harmony in the elders, the church is more stable and mature when the preaching/ruling elder is unavailable, sick, absent, or disciplined in some way. If the head is removed, the body doesn't die. In college football, many programs rise and fall depending on the head coach alone. The church leading without plurality faces the same rocky coastline. Many churches would almost consider shutting the doors and finding another home if the lead pastor had to leave for some reason. This is not healthy for the church, nor is it a Biblical model. The Legacy community can rest assured that if one of our elders had to recuse himself or vanished for any reason; the other elders can continue to lead the church. This resilience in leadership is safer and allows us to look long-term, even beyond the lifespan of a single gifted man.

Plurality also provides a guard for elders in times of accusation or aggressive conflict with members of the church. As pastors in Legacy Church, we have already gone through such times and I am sure more are to come. For example, due to our honoring this church model of leadership, it isn't upon my shoulders to officiate my own hearing or defend myself against cutting accusation. A collective of elders can protect each other in wrong accusation. It can also be a refuge for the body in times of *just* accusation. In this scenario, the body can access any elder, even the lead pastor in times of concern. This protects a church from cronyism and assures the body of its safety. We are accountable to each other because we are equal to each other and humble before each other. This is healthier for our own lives and builds an approachable leadership.

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<sup>6</sup> Bruce Stabbert, *The Team Concept: Paul's Church Leadership Patterns our Ours?*, pages 25-26

<sup>7</sup> Mark Dever, *What is a Healthy Church*, page 117

Probably our favorite benefit in plural leadership is the picture of community it plays out before the church. We show a picture of community when we lead each other, submit to each other, serve each other, challenge each other, apply the Gospel to each other, sacrifice for each other, and reconcile with each other. The alternative is a senior pastor cloistered off in a tower unaccountable before all preaching a Gospel with their mouth they cannot display with their lives. We choose a slower, grittier, more vulnerable mode of relating to each other. This way, when we preach on community, reconciliation, sacrifice, humility, and the Gospel, we aren't hypocrites. We want to not only preach community, we want to display it clothed with submission, humility, deference, and leadership.

### Primus Inter Pares: First Among Equals

*Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. " 1 Tim 5:18 (ESV)*

To add to the surgical care a group of equal qualified men provide the church, one elder will most typically carry a role seen by many to be a "lead" role. As a more prominent voice that holds the bulk of the preaching load and communicates the bulk of the vision for the church, both the elders and the church body typically see this more prominent elder as a sort of "first among equals." Although they share the same level of dignity, authority, responsibility, calling, and so forth, there is once again deference in role. Mark Dever continues, "*Still, the preacher or pastor is, fundamentally, just one more elder, formally equal with every other man called by the congregation to act in this capacity.*"<sup>8</sup> Alexander Strauch also notes,

*"Although elders act jointly as a council and share equal authority and responsibility for the leadership of the church, all are not equal in their giftedness, biblical knowledge, leadership ability, experience, or dedication. Therefore, those among the elders who are particularly gifted leaders and/or teachers will naturally stand out among the other elders as leaders and teachers within the leadership body."*<sup>9</sup>

We see this concept most clearly in Paul's words to Timothy stating that ruling elders are "worthy of double honor." (1 Timothy 5:17) Also, we have valid Biblical examples in a lead elder being first among equals, yet being equal simultaneously with the rest of the elders. One interesting example shows us subtly and simply by the order of names, which is Biblically significant. To be named first in a list of names nuanced the leadership or "lead" of that individual. In Acts 13: 1-3 we have a semi-unknown Saul being sent out with other men to be on God's mission. Notice that Saul's name falls last and Barnabas' comes first, denoting his leadership.

*<sup>1</sup> Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. <sup>2</sup> While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." <sup>3</sup> Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. Acts 13:1-3 (ESV)*

After their first stop at Cyprus, God manifested his power magnificently through Saul who is also known as Paul. God dealt with a wicked magician through Paul's word by deeming him blind for others to witness and believe in God's power. From that point on, Paul's name was always first in the lists, not to denote that he was the boss, but to denote that he was now the first among equals. *Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos... (Acts*

<sup>8</sup> Mark Dever, What is a Healthy Church, page 117

<sup>9</sup> Alexander Strauch, Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call To Restore Biblical Church Leadership, page 45

13:13a) Paul was still equal to Barnabas in calling and duty, yet was also the megaphone God used to establish his young church.

Also, briefly consider How Jesus called twelve men to himself from all the followers and disciples hearing and believing his teachings. From those twelve, Jesus further singled out three in Peter James and John. And even among those three, Peter stood out as the “first among equals”. This is another beautiful way of showing us this unique form of leadership. Peter was not everyone’s boss but was equal to Thomas, James, Paul, and Barnabas in stature and duty even though their giftedness and mark to lead were different.

The Legacy elders have determined to function in this fashion. We understand that a call to lead as elders is something we all share, but there is role variety among us. We complement each other and protect each other; not giving in to the temptation to covet another’s calling and compete for a pulpit. This will be slower and more difficult for us as leaders, but it images God and community. Because the Gospel, the community it forms, and the mission it joins us to informs everything we do – we have determined to lead by a plurality in which a “first among equals” exists in humility.