

HEALTHY LEADERSHIP TEAMS

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1. The Principle of Diversification
2. The Principle of Mobilization
3. The Principle of Spiritual Discernment

1. The Principle of Diversification

Symptom: a church has plateaued between 100 and 150 in attendance.

Likely cause: a pastor who holds the reigns too tightly.

Remedy: build a healthy team of spiritual leaders and let go of the reigns.

Growth brings increasing complexity which produces conflict. Conflict causes some pastors to pull in the reigns to regain control. When the reigns are pulled in, horses stop. So do churches.

Consider the case study found in Acts Chapter 6. The church was growing: *“In those days when the number of disciples was increasing...”* This led to complexity: *“Grecian Jews”* and *“Hebraic Jews.”* The result was conflict: *“The Grecian Jews complained because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.”*

The conflict was distracting the Apostles. They faced a choice:

- They could take over the distribution of food so it was done right. But that would leave less time for prayer and the ministry of the Word.
Result: conflict stops, growth stops.
- They could build a diversified team for an increasingly complex ministry.
Result: conflict stops, growth continues.

The Apostles chose wisely. *“Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.”* Result: *“The word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.”*

The church surged ahead because of the PRINCIPLE OF DIVERSIFICATION: *Growing complex systems require diversified team leadership.*

In Acts 6 we find **diversification of leaders and leadership gifts**. The most likely reason Grecian widows were neglected was not racial prejudice but poor administration and supervision. The social ministry of the church needed better management – better than the Apostles could do.

The Holy Spirit had not gifted the Apostles for management, but for proclaiming the Word. If they tried to administer the church they would do it poorly and begrudgingly while their preaching went downhill because they had no time to prayerfully prepare. That's a double loss for the church.

I know many frustrated pastors who are trying to fill leadership roles for which they are ungifted and neglecting those for which they are gifted! Sometimes this is the pastor's own doing. Some pastors refuse to accept the fact that there are people in the church who are more suited for certain areas of ministry than the pastor. In other instances, congregations expect the pastor to lead every ministry, while everyone else consumes what the pastor produces. In either case, lay persons never experience the purpose for which God has wired and gifted them. I learned in my early years as a pastor that this loss of fulfillment is a common cause for depression among Christians. They sense that purpose is missing in their lives, but do not understand why.

Notice also that there is **diversification in the process** by which leaders are chosen. The Apostles did not select those they believed were most suited to distribute food. They **asked the congregation** to recognize those who were gifted for this ministry: *"Choose seven men from among you who are known [the word means, to whom you can bear witness] to be full of the Spirit and wisdom."* Even in this young church the Apostles were confident that the congregation was capable of this level of spiritual discernment.

Members of a church, with which I was consulting, identified an important area of weakness in the pastor's administrative skills, I asked them to write down the name of someone in the congregation who they knew to be gifted in that critical area. They all wrote down the same two names! When I shared the names with the pastor, he doubted that these two members could accomplish what he was failing to do. My gut told me that the congregation's perception was better than the pastor's.

Some pastors insist, "The congregation doesn't have the maturity to recognize spiritual leaders among them." My response is, "If that is true, whose fault is it? Isn't it the pastor's job to *prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up...and become mature?*"¹

We need to rediscover the diversity of ministries for which God equips a diversity of people with a diversity of gifts. Discipling and building leaders into a united, competent and diversified team capable of expansive and complex ministry is among the top priorities of pastoral ministry. The church in Acts 6 effectively implemented the Principle of Diversification, which Paul would articulate many years later, a principle we must implement if we are to change our worlds for Christ:

*It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up... From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*²

All Scripture quotations are from the New International Version.

¹ Ephesians 4:12-13 ² Ephesians 4:11-16

Think about it...

- 1) Has your church plateaued in size for the past decade or more? Why?
- 2) Is your pastor trying to do tasks for which he or she is not gifted? Who in your congregation might be better suited for those tasks?
- 3) If the Principle of Diversification were fully implemented in your congregation, in what ways would your church be changing its world for Christ?

2. The Principle of Mobilization

Symptom: a church in hibernation, not just for a winter—for a decade.

Likely Cause: the focus is on coming to church, not being the church.

Remedy: learn how to listen to God, see what God is doing, and join Him!

Most people associate hibernation with bears sleeping through the winter in caves. Actually, bears are not considered true hibernators because the temperature of their bodies does not lower significantly and they are easily awakened. A true hibernator spends most of the winter in a state close to death. The animal looks dead. Its body temperature is close to 32 degrees, it breathes only a few times per minute, and its heartbeat is barely perceptible. Bats, hedgehogs and ground squirrels are true hibernators.

A church in hibernation looks dead to anyone outside the congregation. No one outside the church remembers the church doing anything that made a difference to the world in years. The breath of God's Spirit is barely stirring in its lungs. Not only do outsiders not perceive a heartbeat, they wonder if the church has a heart at all! The church has been securely curled up in its cave for years. If it died there, no one outside the church would miss it!

Why would a church go into hibernation? The answer is simple: If the only purpose of salvation is to get to heaven, why not hibernate until God calls us there?

Jesus' sounded the alarm to a hibernating church: "You have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake Up!"¹

A healthy church is not merely awake; it is mobilized. Mobilization is the opposite of hibernation. Mobilization is movement. It accelerates the cardiovascular system and raises body temperature to the point where sweat is required to avoid overheating.

The story of the church of Antioch provides a case study in church mobilization.² The Principle of Mobilization states: *The purpose of a leadership team is to get the entire church mobilized for maximum Kingdom impact.* The leadership team does not do the entire ministry for the church. Neither does it settle for getting the people to come to church to watch the leadership team play the game. Discipleship is not coming to church. Discipleship is *being the church*.

¹ Revelation 3:1-2

² Acts 11:19-30; 13:1-3; 14:26-28

“Leadership,” in the words of Eddie Gibbs, “is about connecting, not controlling.”³ Healthy leadership teams see it as their mission to mobilize the entire church by:

- Seeing what God is doing – When Barnabas arrived in Antioch, “he saw evidence of the grace of God,”⁴ and undoubtedly told the church what he saw.
- Challenging people to deep discipleship – Knowing that following Christ is costly and requires commitment, Barnabas “encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all of their hearts.”⁵
- Building an inclusive and diversified team – Barnabas brought Saul to Antioch and developed a leadership team including “prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch) and Saul,”⁶ This was not a closed team, a clique, but one that incorporated diversely gifted persons from varied cultural backgrounds. Because the team represented all sectors of the church it could mobilize all of the church.
- Listening as a group to God’s Spirit, and taking action – Learning that believers in Judea were suffering from a famine, the team led the entire church to help.⁷
- Discerning, communicating, and implementing God’s vision – “Worshipping and fasting”⁸ indicates that the leadership team was seeking God’s guidance. As soon as they discerned God’s direction, they took action, commissioning the new missionaries to their work.
- Holding people accountable for mission effectiveness – When Paul and Barnabas returned from their mission, they reported “all that God had done through them.”⁹ Clearly, they knew such a report was expected.

Henry Blackaby defines spiritual leadership as “moving people from where they are to where God wants them to be.”¹⁰ *Moving people from where they are to where God wants them to be* is too big a job for one person. It takes team to mobilize a church. Led by a team modeling God’s values, the church so passionately engages in God’s mission that it never again considers, even for a moment, crawling back into its cave!

Think about it. . .

1. Which word better describes your church: hibernation or mobilization?
2. If Jesus were writing to your church about your state of mobilization, what would he say?
3. In order to *get the entire church mobilized for maximum Kingdom impact*, how would your leadership team need to change its methods?

³ *Leadership Next* (Intervarsity Press, 2005), p. 106.

⁴ Acts 11:23

⁵ Acts 11:23

⁶ Acts 11:25; 13:1

⁷ “Disciples” in Acts 11:29 refers to the entire church. See 11:26.

⁸ Acts 13:2-3

⁹ Acts 14:27

¹⁰ *Spiritual Leadership*, (Broadman & Holman, 2001), p. 20.

3. The Principle of Spiritual Discernment

Symptom: a church stalemated by different groups pulling in opposite directions.

Likely Cause: people are listening to the voice of reason instead of the Voice of God's Spirit.

Remedy: develop spiritual leaders who model and lead others in spiritual discernment.

The Lord was blessing the ministry of my first church after seminary. Worship attendance had almost doubled. Sunday School was growing. Giving was up. We had a thriving youth ministry. People of all ages were accepting Christ and following Him in baptism.

Then Monday morning happened. A member came into my office and informed me I was stifling the Holy Spirit. "When people start testifying or praying, you should give them as long as it takes. The Holy Spirit is just starting to do something, and you cut Him off!!"

As this member left, another entered, "Why are you letting *those people* take over *our church*?! We used to have a reverent worship service. Now people are singing praise choruses, raising their hands, and talking out of turn just to show off how spiritual they are!!"

As he left, a third entered, and said, "I've prayed about how to say this to you. I hope you'll hear me in the right spirit. You need to learn to follow the Spirit during our worship services. You're too tied to the program in the bulletin. And... you're stiff. You don't clap or move around or look excited at all!!"

Over lunch, Elaine innocently asked, "How was your morning?"

I replied, "People on both sides of the worship skirmish are mad at me. I guess that means I'm doing the right thing!"

In reality, the church was stalemated by people listening to the voice of reason—their own reason—defending their personal taste or culturally shaped preferences.

The Principle of Spiritual Discernment states, *Leaders help people discern the will of God, not tell people what the will of God is.*

The New Testament Church experienced a major tug of war.

Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them.¹¹

People were pulling in opposite directions:

- Some Jews who accepted Jesus as Messiah, like the Apostle Paul, taught that salvation came through faith in Jesus, and that God did not require Gentiles to observe Jewish law.
- Other believing Jews, who loved Jewish law and culture,¹² said that God required all nations to obey all the laws He gave Israel in order to be saved.

¹¹ Acts 15:1-2

Paul became so agitated about this dispute, he wrote:

*Even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!*¹³

Wisely, leaders in the Church of Antioch understood that the Spirit of God does not produce dissension among God's people. Believers on both sides of the issue came together in Jerusalem to talk, pray and seek to resolve the issue. The account of their meeting provides an example of the Principle of Spiritual Discernment in action. Note the following dynamics:

1. A spirit of expectancy was in the air. The Church in Jerusalem did not meet Paul, Barnabas, and the other leaders from Antioch with gritted teeth and clenched fists.
*They were welcomed by the church and the apostles.*¹⁴
People on both sides of the issue saw this meeting not as a problem, but an opportunity to discern what God was doing.
2. Persons on both sides of the issue shared what God was doing among them and their convictions regarding the issue, listening carefully to the views of others.
*They reported everything God had done through them. Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses."*¹⁵
A genuine discernment process includes frank discussion of contrasting viewpoints, confident that God will reveal His will. Nothing is swept under the carpet.
3. They took the time together that deep discussion requires.
*The apostles and elders met together to consider the question. After much discussion. . .*¹⁶
Knowing that in a multitude of counselors there is wisdom, they did not rely on their individual reason or trust their first impressions.
4. They were open and vulnerable with each other as they shared what God had been teaching them.
Peter stood up and addressed them. . .
What Peter shared was the result of a personal struggle in which the Spirit of God had corrected him.¹⁷ Even after this correction, Peter had lapsed from the truth he had learned, and had to be corrected by Paul.¹⁸ Peter's humble summary of the lessons he had learned so painfully set the stage for what followed.
5. They recognized the moment when they landed on the heart of the issue.
*The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles...*¹⁹

¹² Acts 21:20

¹³ Galatians 1:8

¹⁴ Acts 15:4

¹⁵ Acts 15:4-5

¹⁶ Acts 15:7

¹⁷ Acts 10:1-47.

¹⁸ Galatians 2:11-16.

¹⁹ Acts 15:12

Many people had spoken by then, debating point by point. But suddenly, the sparring of many voices was replaced by a silence that could be felt.

6. The Spirit of God spoke through the Word of God.

*The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written. . .*²⁰

What God is saying in the present will not contradict what He has said in His Word. James demonstrated that the Scriptures taught that Gentiles would be included in the household of faith.²¹

7. The result of genuine spiritual discernment is unity, peace, joy, and restored momentum for the Church.

It seemed Good to the Holy Spirit and to us. . .

The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message.

*The Churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.*²²

Healthy leadership teams are willing to discuss deeply their experience, convictions, and understanding of the Word of God regarding issues related to the church. They share in vulnerability because they understand that we are all still learning God's ways. As they listen, study, and pray they expect the Spirit of God to break through.

Think about it. . .

1. Is there a tug of war going on in your church?
2. In what ways has your leadership team practiced the principles of Acts, Chapter 15?
3. What changes would need to be made to your team's discernment process to become more like the Council of Jerusalem?

²⁰ Acts 15:15.

²¹ See Amos 9:11-12.

²² Acts 15:28, 31; 16:5.