

THE PLURALITY PRINCIPLE

Study

Guide

DAVE HARVEY

The Plurality Principle

Study Guide

Dave Harvey

 CROSSWAY®
WHEATON, ILLINOIS

Copyright © 2021 by Crossway
ISBN 978-1-4335-8057-4

Contents

Introduction 3

PART 1 BUILDING A PLURALITY

- 1 A Plurality Primer 5
- 2 A Case for a “First among Equals” 8
- 3 Dressing for Leadership Storms: Five Hats Senior Pastors Wear 11
 - Senior/Lead Pastor’s Hats Evaluation Tool 14
- 4 Counterfeit Pluralities 20

PART 2 THRIVING AS A PLURALITY

- 5 Building a Culture of Care and Accountability 23
- 6 Acknowledging and Sharing Power 25
- 7 The Plurality Tune-Up 28
 - Plurality Tune-Up Evaluation Tool 31
- 8 The Joy-Boosting Delight of Shared Ministry 38

Introduction

My first pastorate lasted twenty-seven years in the same church. For most of that time, I was the senior pastor, and we continually tuned and retuned our understanding of team leadership—what I’ve called *the plurality principle*—until it served the church well. We made plenty of mistakes, and it was painstakingly hard work. It meant having men get to know each other down to the level of their dreams, desires, giftings, and temptations. But I treasure those memories and the fruit that plurality bore in my life and contributed to our church.

Since then, I’ve served on various teams in different roles. Sometimes we’ve applied the principle of plurality well; sometimes we’ve made some big mistakes. But through it all, I’ve become only more convinced of this key truth: *the quality of your elder plurality determines the health of your church.*

As you read *The Plurality Principle*, I’ll share with you (and the elder or leadership team with which you serve) what I’ve learned about how to define, experience, and assess a healthy plurality of elders. We’ll look at what makes pluralities durable and what makes them so unpredictably delicate. We’ll talk specifically about why and how a healthy plurality contributes to a healthy church.

This study guide is designed not only to aid your personal reading but also to stoke healthy discussion, provoke evaluation, and suggest practical next steps for your elder team as a whole. So be sure to grab a journal and pen, but also put some meetings on the calendar. My prayer is that as you learn together, the Lord will help you to build and maintain a healthy leadership team.

PART 1

BUILDING A PLURALITY

A Plurality Primer

Summary

The theme of leading together flows across Scripture and informs our practice of church leadership. Leaders are called to community, connection, and collaboration. Leaders are called to plurality. By that I mean that *shared local church leadership is the consistent pattern we see in the New Testament*. The strength, unity, and integrity of the shared leadership model infuse the church with durability for its mission and care. Plurality is God's means of leading the church to fulfill its purpose, and it's also God's extraordinary means of grace for growing its leaders.

READ

Look up and read the following references to shared local church leadership: Acts 14:23; 15:6; 20:28; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 4:14; 5:17; Titus 1:5; and 1 Peter 5:1–2, 5.

PERSONAL REFLECTION AS YOU READ

1. After you read the passages listed above, do you agree with the chapter's premise that plural leadership of the local church is the consistent pattern we see in the New Testament? Why or why not?
 2. Read the six ways plurality serves the church on pages 32–33. Which of these stand out as most significant to you? Why?

GROUP DISCUSSION WITH THE ELDER TEAM

1. What was your experience of local church leadership before your current church? What other leadership structures have you experienced? How do your past experiences shape the expectations you bring into your current context?
 2. How is your local church leadership team organized? How can a church's leadership ensure that the most important leadership decisions are made as a team?
 3. How might you make your congregation more aware of the Bible's case for team leadership and the beauty of it? How are new members made aware of these convictions?
 4. How do the character qualities described in the 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9 passages contribute to team unity? How does a lack of these qualities affect team unity?
 5. Are you aware of ways that a prideful self-assessment has blocked you from supporting, working with, or having unity with others in your church's leadership team?

PRAY

Lord Jesus, you call teams of men to be pastors and elders in your church. We count it a privilege and honor to be joined to others for such a noble purpose. Give us clarity to see the model of shared pastoral leadership you have given us in the Scriptures, courage to apply it as a team, and wisdom to teach it to the people under our shepherding care. May our team of pastors/elders reflect the coequality, unity, and community that you share as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

A Case for a “First among Equals”

Summary

Throughout the Bible, when God chose to execute his will upon the earth, he began with a leader. So, while the authority for church leadership inheres in the entire elder team, a wise eldership will look for one among them with humble character, leadership gifts, and public ministry skills to fulfill the role of lead or senior pastor. This individual becomes a *primus inter pares*, or “first among equals.” When this man is wise, he inhabits the subtle space between *primus* and *pares*. He leads within the tension implied in “among.” On the one hand, he advocates for the opinions and involvement of the team as a whole. On the other, he actually uses his gifts to lead, delicately dialing his leadership, when necessary, in the direction of *first*, then *equals*, then back again.

READ

Look up and read Luke 6:12–16 and Matthew 16:18.

PERSONAL REFLECTION AS YOU READ

1. When you read the biblical examples of God using *one* to influence *many* on page 40, what images come to mind and what emotions do you experience? Why is having a first among coequals in a local church’s leadership team so necessary?

2. Most church polity is formed in reaction to past mistakes, experiences, and abuses. Take some time to reflect upon some of the failures you’ve seen and perhaps encountered in leaders. How might these negative experiences from your past influence your current approach to leadership? Are these influences for the good or for ill?

GROUP DISCUSSION WITH THE ELDER TEAM

1. Why are dependence, service, and humility essential for a senior leader? What happens when these character qualities are not present? How might a leadership culture change when these qualities are present in increasing measure?
 2. Into which of the two errors described in the chapter is your local church more likely to fall? Does your organization emphasize *first*, centering its work around the senior leader's opinions, preferences, and needs? Or does it accent *equals*, giving into an idealism of interdependence where particular leadership giftings go unrecognized? Why does your team have this tendency?
 3. What safeguards can a local church put in place to avoid incubating celebrity pastors or cultivating a leadership culture that is power-based and hardwired for command and control?
 4. What practices might your team put in place that will help your senior leader live in the tension of "among"? How can you help him advocate for and involve the team as a whole while also employing his gifts as the leader?
 5. How might you make your congregation more aware of your team's convictions about the lead or senior pastor's role? How might you make the people aware of the balance required for a team that is led by a "first among equals"? How can you invite them to pray for your senior leader and team as you live and serve together in this tension?

PRAY

Father, grant us deep friendship and trust in one another as an elder team. Help us to put aside jealousy and competition. Make us adaptable and congenial, and help us to know our limits. Help our senior leader to listen well and to advocate for the opinions and involvement of the other elders. And help us as a team, in a humble response to your gospel grace, to give him support and space to use his gifts as our leader. Amen.

Dressing for Leadership Storms

Five Hats Senior Pastors Wear

Summary

Leadership is not a consequence of the fall but rather a part of God's good design for human flourishing in a well-ordered world. In chapter 2, we explored a case for designating one member of a local church leadership team as a "first among equals." This chapter explores five hats that a senior leader must wear if he is to flourish in that role and be prepared for leadership storms. As the *custodian of the plurality*, the senior leader consistently gives himself to the health of the team. As the *catalyst of progress*, he is responsible for both personal and organizational growth. As the *curator of culture*, he's entrusted with ensuring that each part of the church reflects the DNA of the whole. As the *captain of communication*, the senior leader is the primary public voice of the leadership. And as the *liaison for partnerships*, he is the primary point of contact between the leadership team and the church's primary outside partners.

READ

Look up and read the following passages that describe leadership storms in the early church: Acts 15:1–35 and 20:1–5.

PERSONAL REFLECTION AS YOU READ

1. Elders' diverse gifts suit them for unique roles. For what roles are you uniquely suited? Do you have a strong mission impulse, strong financial skills, or strong skills for shepherding and counseling? How do your unique gifts complement the team members with whom you serve?

2. Have there been times when you lacked the clarity or humility to recognize that other team members have more knowledge, a greater body of experience, or better gifts for moving the church forward in a particular area? Have you become aware of sin that you need to confess? How might you show greater deference for others' gifts in the future?

GROUP DISCUSSION WITH THE ELDER TEAM

1. Leadership storms have pounded pastoral teams and local churches since the beginning. What particular leadership trials did you see described in Acts 15:1–35 and 20:1–5? How are the storms your church is facing today similar? How are your present trials different?
2. In the face of such storms, we need leadership. How might you make your church leadership team and congregation more aware of the five hats the senior leader must wear? How could an elder team hold the senior leader accountable in these areas? What other leaders are in place around the senior leader to help him carry these responsibilities?
3. Leadership flourishes with particularity, that is, when responsibilities reside and inhere in specific individuals. How has your leadership team done with clarifying responsibilities? Are roles and job descriptions in place that clarify responsibilities for each member of the team? If not, what particular roles or responsibilities need greater clarity?
4. Use the “Senior/Lead Pastor’s Hats Evaluation Tool” found on the following pages as a way of evaluating and serving your senior leader.

PRAY

Father, we confess that we often give in to autonomy, independence, and cynicism. We confess the particular ways we've been skeptical about leadership. Help us to cling to Christ as our Savior and senior pastor of the universal church. He is our bridegroom and head. He is the chief shepherd. He is your chief communicator, the Word. He is the catalyst of our growth. He is our rock in the storms of leadership. God, fill our team with the Spirit of Christ. Help us to behold his glory and become like him in the way we lead. Amen.

Senior/Lead Pastor's Hats Evaluation Tool

This tool uses the five hats explored in chapter 3 of *The Plurality Principle* as a way of examining and evaluating the way a senior or lead pastor is currently functioning within the elder team. Giving and receiving feedback is an important skill for a leadership team. Senior leaders should humbly examine their hearts as they receive this feedback, and the members of the plurality should be gracious and constructive, seeing this tool as a way of serving their senior/lead pastor.

Directions: The elders should work through each section and score the lead pastor with each indicator. Then, total the scores for each category and use the key at the end as a way of determining next steps. The senior/lead pastor should also rate himself to compare his rating with the aggregate score of his elder team.

Note: If you are an elder who is currently experiencing unresolved frustration with your lead pastor, do not engage in this exercise at this time. This isn't a tool to gather ammunition, execute an agenda, or satisfy an offense against your lead pastor. Rather, it's a way to humbly and sincerely strive for corporate health by serving a fellow leader. If unresolved offenses or issues are present, take the biblical steps toward reconciliation first (Matt. 7:1–5; 18:15–17). Only then would it be appropriate to return to this tool as a way of moving forward together.

HAT 1: THE CUSTODIAN OF THE PLURALITY

As the *custodian of the plurality*, the senior leader consistently gives himself to the health of the team. The overarching role of the lead pastor among the elders is to steward the group into a culture of care, trust, affection, mutual submission, and honest burden sharing. This hat focuses on this coaching responsibility, which ensures the unity and effectiveness of the elders as a team.

Rate your senior pastor on each of the following areas related to being the custodian of the plurality. The rating scale moves from 1–5 (1 = low, 5 = high). Add notes in the provided section when additional reflection, explanation, or comments would be helpful.

- Makes much of Christ and the stories of God's work in the church rather than promoting his gifts or building his personal platform.
- Is experienced in actively serving, loving, and shaping the team.
- Encourages, celebrates, and stirs up the team toward mutual service (as opposed to cultivating a culture of selfish complaining).
- Expresses humility in leadership by listening well to feedback, graciously addressing others' hurts, readily confessing sin, and admitting when he's wrong.
- Invests in the team, showing love and care as a regular and ongoing practice (as opposed to merely showing infrequent and random demonstrations of concern).

Notes for Hat 1: The Custodian of the Plurality:

HAT 2: THE CATALYST OF PROGRESS

As the *catalyst of progress*, the senior leader is responsible for both personal and organizational development. He must fuel and facilitate a culture of growth among the elders.

Rate your senior pastor on each of the following areas related to being the catalyst of progress. The rating scale moves from 1–5 (1 = low, 5 = high). Add notes in the provided section when additional reflection, explanation, or comments would be helpful.

- Sets a clear (but not flaunted or self-congratulating) example of ongoing personal growth in his devotional life, sabbath keeping, marriage, and parenting.
- Provides intentional opportunities for the team to grow together through conferences, books, and working through essential or controversial topics/issues.
- Provides (or coordinates others to provide) opportunities to grow relationships and mutual enjoyment through meals and other enjoyable activities.
- Utilizes regular, strategic evaluation to grow the team in a culture of humility that values feedback and addresses known issues.
- Leads the team to take decisive action. Discerns and makes courageous decisions regarding the church's direction.

Notes for Hat 2: The Catalyst of Progress:

HAT 3: THE CURATOR OF CULTURE

As the *curator of culture*, the senior leader is entrusted with ensuring that each part of the church reflects the DNA of the whole. He guards the organization's mission, vision/direction, and ministry values, and he ensures they are reflected across the scope of the whole church, from the elder team to the congregation. While everyone participates in the curation of a culture, the lead pastor owns the ultimate responsibility for this role.

Rate your senior pastor on each of the following areas related to being the curator of culture. The rating scale moves from 1–5 (1 = low, 5 = high). Add notes in the provided section when additional reflection, explanation, or comments would be helpful.

- Leads necessary conversations with the elder team to define and clarify the church's essential DNA (its mission, vision/direction, and ministry values).
- Consistently refreshes the elders regarding this essential DNA, and equips and inspires them to be cocurators of this culture in the church.
- Fosters clarity on essential church DNA among key ministry leaders.
- Consistently communicates church and ministry DNA to the entire congregation.
- Works with the leadership team to monitor how clearly and consistently the church's essential DNA is displayed across all ministries.

Notes for Hat 3: The Curator of Culture:

HAT 4: THE CAPTAIN OF COMMUNICATION

When it comes to biblical exposition and voicing the culture—the vision, direction, and decisions from the leaders—the lead pastor must be the chief spokesman. He is the *captain of communication*, the primary public voice of the leadership.

Rate your senior pastor on each of the following areas related to being the captain of communication. The rating scale moves from 1–5 (1 = low, 5 = high). Add notes in the provided section when additional reflection, explanation, or comments would be helpful.

- Faithfully exposit the Word of God and keeps the Bible central in pulpit communication as well as in the church's other communication avenues.
- Is confident in his authorization as the primary voice of the eldership. Regularly champions directional decisions made by the elders and other leadership matters to the church with clarity and consistency.
- Is not afraid to call the congregation to faith to give of their time, talents, and finances to support the church's mission.
- Eagerly communicates about God's work in the church to the congregation by sharing testimonies and other stories of ministry wins.
- Stewards the sharing of the pulpit and other means of communication with other leaders who are trusted to communicate on behalf of the elders.

Notes for Hat 4: The Captain of Communication:

HAT 5: THE LIAISON FOR PARTNERSHIPS

Finally, as the *liaison for partnerships*, the senior leader is the primary point of contact within the leadership team and is the church's primary (but not sole) contact point for its parachurch and interchurch (network/denominational) partners. This includes acting as the church's authorized influencer/agent to the external partners and as the ambassador for these partnerships to the church.

Rate your senior pastor on each of the following areas related to being the liaison for partnerships. The rating scale moves from 1–5 (1 = low, 5 = high). Add notes in the provided section when additional reflection, explanation, or comments would be helpful.

- Leads the elder team in establishing and maintaining relationships with all external parachurch and interchurch (network/denominational) partners.
- Ensures that the commitments between the church and the external partners are maintained.
- Actively represents the church's interests/needs to the external partners and communicates about the partnerships to the elder team.
- Communicates and effectively portrays the ministry of external partners to the congregation as a whole.
- Leads the elders in ongoing evaluation of the fruitfulness of external partnerships.

Notes for Hat 5: The Liaison for Partnerships:

SCORING

Record the score you've given to your senior leader for each of the five hats. There are 25 possible points for each category. A score of 20–25 = *a strength*; 17–19 = *developing*; 14–16 = *underdeveloped*; 10–13 = *needs attention*; and under 10 = *area of concern*.

- The Custodian of the Plurality
- The Catalyst of Progress
- The Curator of Culture

The Captain of Communication

The Liaison for Partnerships

Total Score (125 points possible)

NEXT STEPS

Senior/lead pastors should look at the scores they've received across all five areas and ask two key questions:

- Are there areas where there is a great disparity between your self-evaluation and the elder team's evaluation?
- Where were your lowest scores?

After answering these two questions, identify the most critical areas for discussion and development. Once you have identified these priority areas, find the sections below that correspond to these areas and answer the related questions.

The Custodian of the Plurality

- What areas of distraction, limitation, or selfishness might be diverting your focus from leading and loving the elders? In what two ways could you work to improve your care and concern over the next month?
- What are the primary challenges facing your elders right now (individually and as a team)? How can you coordinate with others to meet those needs?
- What are two to three practices/rhythms that you could implement to start meeting more needs across the team? (Aim for consistent wins and health over time.)
- How might you apply the gospel more directly and consistently to your relationships and team dynamic?

The Catalyst of Progress

- What area of personal growth (devotional life, sabbath keeping, marriage, or parenting) should you focus on to grow as a better model for your team?
- What method of team study or development (conference, book, or study topic) could you recommend for the team to do together? What are two specific areas of growth you could prioritize as a team over the next six months?
- List some specific ways to celebrate your team members. What can you do together over the next six months to cultivate deeper relationships?
- Are there any critical church decisions currently stalled that need to be moved forward with courageous leadership? If so, what needs to happen to wisely move these decisions forward?

The Curator of Culture

- Review your mission, ministry values, vision, and seasonal directives/emphasis points. How can you give greater clarity to this essential DNA? What needs the most attention right now?
- Where can you be more effective at being an ambassador for your church culture to the elders? How about to the congregation as a whole?
- What conversations or discussions with elders, ministry leaders, or members are necessary for you to enhance your mission effectiveness?

- What are the specific ways your church currently assesses DNA alignment across its ministries? What tool or regular maintenance practice is needed to ensure a consistent culture across the church?

The Captain of Communication

- What are the specific ways you can seek evaluation from the elders on the effectiveness of your preaching and public communication?
- What prevents you from feeling fully authorized by the team as the primary voice of the eldership? What prevents you from calling the congregation to the faith of giving?
- Are there competing channels of communication in your church—anyone or anything with a distracting voice or differing mission, vision, and culture? If so, what needs to be done to address the discontinuity?
- How should the other communicators who share the pulpit be determined? By what metrics will they be evaluated?
- What prevents you from wisely sharing the pulpit of the church with other trusted leaders?

The Liaison for Partnerships

- List your current large-scale partnerships and then consider whether each is essential, fruitful, distracting, or lacking. If distracting or lacking, consider what steps might be taken to improve the quality of the partnership.
- How would your elders rate you at connecting the church to the partnerships and the partnerships to the church?
- Are there ways that external partnerships are overutilized in your church? How about underutilized?
- In what ways could you wisely elevate the visibility and value of your outside partners?
- Are there upcoming opportunities for partnership that you should be certain to engage (conferences, training, missional opportunities)?

Counterfeit Pluralities

Summary

Teams can use the vocabulary of plurality but not really understand the meaning of the word. Their lack of clarity can forge imitations—dangerous leadership cultures that praise the principle of plurality but misapply the practice. *Expert-dependent pluralities* allow the expertise of outside advisors to displace the wisdom, prayer, and deliberation of God’s appointed shepherds. *Reluctant pluralities* fail to understand their authority and responsibilities. As a result, they are slow to speak up, and when they do, their words are so qualified or mitigated that constructive criticism often gets lost. When a high-capacity leader begins to believe that he already has the best answers, he sees the team as a mere obstacle; this can result in an *invisible plurality*. We should accept none of these substitutes, but rather make the investment to build a healthy plurality.

READ

Look up and read the following passages about lust for control, self-worship, and arrogance: Proverbs 16:8; 27:2; 29:1; Luke 18:9–14; Romans 12:3; and James 1:19; 4:6.

PERSONAL REFLECTION AS YOU READ

1. Think about a time when an individual on your leadership team spoke up or provided counsel and accountability that guarded you from lust for control, self-worship, or arrogance. Give thanks to God for that individual’s role in your life, then take a few minutes to write a note of thanks. Be sure to give that person permission to speak up again in the future.

2. Do you experience fears or feelings of shame that make it tempting to outsource all of your personal care and leave fellow pastors at arm’s length? Why is this the case? Consider sharing these feelings with a fellow elder.

GROUP DISCUSSION WITH THE ELDER TEAM

1. What principles might a church leadership team adopt to govern how they relate to outside experts such as lawyers, counselors, consultants, seminary professors, or leadership and ministry coaches? What safeguards could you put in place so that you benefit from a multitude of counselors without becoming expert dependent?
 2. Are the members of your leadership team encouraged to exercise the equal share of God-given authority that each elder possesses to shepherd, guide, and protect the church? If not, how might you encourage them in this reality?
 3. Is your congregation as a whole aware of the biblical authority that inheres in all of the elders? If not, how might you make the church aware of this reality?
 4. In what ways is your team tempted to value speed, efficiency, or even ministry size over faithfulness? What makes the temptation so strong? How have these temptations kept you from collaborating together well?

PRAY

Father, help us to be an authentic plurality, a powerful tool in your hand for gospel growth and church multiplication. Strengthen us with humility, help us to trust one another, and help us be intentional and courageous in the way we speak to one another. As we depend upon your grace, help us to put in the work that's required to become a strong team. Amen.

PART 2

THRIVING AS A PLURALITY

Building a Culture of Care and Accountability

Summary

Leaders need gifted people around them—a team that demonstrates God’s love through care, collaboration, and the scalpel of mutual accountability. There are four essentials for maintaining that kind of healthy team culture. First, we must *provide care for and also receive care from one another*. Second, we must *have clearly defined accountability*; every pastor needs other men in his life who know him, encourage him, pray for him, and understand his patterns of temptation. Third, if an elder team is going to care well for one another, they must *meet together regularly*; regularly scheduled, agenda-guided, time-respected, attendance-required meetings are part of what it takes to lead a cohesive and effective team. Finally, for a plurality to have a culture of care, we must *do everything with humility*.

READ

Look up and read the following passages about humility: 2 Chronicles 34:27; Proverbs 11:2; 22:4; 29:23; Micah 6:8; Matt. 18:1–4; 23:10–12; Ephesians 4:1–3; James 4:6, 10; and 1 Peter 5:5–6.

PERSONAL REFLECTION AS YOU READ

1. Do you typically think of yourself as well cared for or as starving for care? Why is this the case? If you are starving for care, how can you make more intentional efforts to give care to others?

2. Who is holding you accountable? Do you have other men in your life who know you, encourage you, pray for you, and understand your patterns of temptation?

GROUP DISCUSSION WITH THE ELDER TEAM

1. How might you make your congregation more aware of your desire for the church to be a place of soul care? How can soul care be better illustrated in sermons or prioritized in the pulpit? How can it be better included in meeting agendas and the church calendar?
 2. Review Chart 5.1 on page 91 of the book. Which of the three questions—*Can I trust you? Do you really care about me? Can you actually help me?*—exposes your biggest barrier to approachability? What steps can you take to cultivate a relational passport into the lives of the other members of your leadership team?
 3. What could your leadership team do to make its process of appeal more formal and defined so that you are prepared for times of crisis and conflict? What denominational group, network, or parachurch ministry might you identify as the best help in such times?
 4. Spend some time reflecting together on the beauty of humbly caring for one another. Why are messy relationships for care ultimately better than efficiency and ease? Why is this beautiful way so difficult and easily spurned?

PRAY

Father, teach us to care well for one another. Give us courage for self-disclosure and accountability. Work in us grace and humility so that we will give one another relational passports into our lives. Help us to put aside selfish ambition and vain conceit, and to value one another as more important than ourselves. Grant us the beauty of unity and caring friendship in Christ. Amen.

Acknowledging and Sharing Power

Summary

Wise leaders acknowledge their power, knowing that it can corrupt with lightning speed when we're willfully blind to its presence. Wise pluralities have *power dynamics* as a functional category for how their leadership affects the church. They are deliberate and transparent about how power is exercised within their governance. Wise teams also seek to push out power. Rather than centralizing their authority or sharing it only with those who immediately benefit from their ministry, they spread power around through empowering new elders and lay leaders and starting new churches or ministries. Wise ministries are marked by divestment, by self-forgetfulness. Wise leaders give power away with confidence that when power is shared, it's not lost; it's multiplied.

READ

Look up and read Philippians 2:5–11.

PERSONAL REFLECTION AS YOU READ

1. Review Chart 6.1 on pages 108–9 and do an inventory of your power. Reflect on each of the sources of power and the level of influence that each gives you.

2. In what ways has your personal leadership been marked by divestment, by giving power away? In what ways have you hoarded power?

GROUP DISCUSSION WITH THE ELDER TEAM

1. In his book *Playing God: Redeeming the Gift of Power* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), Andy Crouch defines power as “our ability to make something of the world” (p. 17). What images and emotions does this definition bring to your mind and heart?
2. How comfortable is your team with talking about *power dynamics*? Do you have a tendency to overspiritualize the fallen realities of leadership, or are you very comfortable talking about power differentials?
3. What steps might your leadership team take to be more deliberate and transparent about how power is exercised within its governance and accountability structures? How might you grow in awareness of power differentials—between superiors and direct reports, for example—and how they should influence policies and procedures, how you relate to the opposite sex, or how you set salaries?
4. How do lay elders serve in your current leadership structure? What more might you do to empower lay leadership in your accountability structures?
5. How can you move the needle in your organization toward giving power away? How might your church be marked in a greater way by divestment and self-forgetfulness? In what specific ways is God calling your team to give away resources, influence, talents, and authority to others?

6. How might you make the members of your congregation more aware of your theology and philosophy of power and how it should be exercised within your church? How can you better demonstrate your desire to give power away? How can they be involved in your efforts to push power out?

PRAY

Jesus, you emptied yourself of power and are now exalted. So, make the fears we have about giving away power—*we'll be forgotten; we'll be taken advantage of; we'll become useless*—wither like weeds under the heat of your gospel truth. Amen.

The Plurality Tune-Up

Summary

Elder pluralities are both durable and delicate. On the one hand, an elder team provides the local church with strength, bearing the weight of leading the church forward against all odds. At the same time, it must be said that it's easy for a plurality to fall apart. A plurality doesn't run on a set-it-and-forget-it recipe. An elder team is like delicate, powerful machinery that needs regular inspection and maintenance in order to remain healthy. And as the elders go, so goes the church. There are four factors—we'll call them *plurality cylinders*—that power the engines of your teams: (1) *the agreement cylinder*: are you on the same page? (2) *the trust cylinder*: are you honest and humble with one another? (3) *the care cylinder*: do you encourage and nurture one another? and (4) *the fit cylinder*: do you enjoy being with each other and know your places on the team? When all these cylinders are firing, the team will accelerate the church forward on mission.

READ

Look up and read Psalm 133 and Ephesians 4:1–5.

PERSONAL REFLECTION AS YOU READ

1. It's been said that you can only *expect* what you *inspect*. Would you consider yourself to be slow or quick at evaluating yourself, your team, or the church/ministry that you lead? What has led to your taking this approach?

2. How do you handle disagreement or dissent? Does pride lead you toward being more quarrelsome, or does a desire to please people lead you to a place of hyperdefensiveness? Where do you fall on the spectrum between these extremes? What do you think leads you to take this posture? What practices might help you debate in a way that upholds the law of love? Confess your struggles to the Lord and ask for his help to speak with grace and truth.

GROUP DISCUSSION WITH THE ELDER TEAM

1. Work through the “Plurality Tune-Up Evaluation Tool” on the following pages and then discuss the following questions together.
 2. In which of the four areas did you see the most green indicators? What leadership efforts, structures, or cultural realities affected this score? Could these sorts of efforts and structures be replicated for the other areas?
 3. In which of the four areas did you see the most yellow or red indicators? What leadership oversight, lack of structure, or cultural realities affected this score? Look at the recommended maintenance suggested by the evaluation tool. Which of the recommendations, if adopted, do you believe would be the most fruitful for your team? How might you share these plans with your congregation and ask for their help to grow in this way?
 4. Discipline and adaptation are important for any healthy team. If you are an older pastor, reflect on times in your ministry when you’ve had to adapt to changing circumstances or adjust expectations. Give thanks for how God grew you through those changes, even if they were difficult at the time.
 5. If you are a younger pastor, find an older pastor who would be willing to share stories about times he has had to adapt and change. What godly character should you emulate? What missteps should you avoid?

PRAY

Father, thank you for making us a part of this team. Grant us joy in our gospel partnership together and give us confidence that he who began a good work in us will be faithful to bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Plurality Tune-Up Evaluation Tool

A plurality doesn't run on a set-it-and-forget-it recipe. An elder team is more like delicate, powerful machinery that needs regular inspection and maintenance in order to remain healthy. The plurality engine runs on four connected cylinders: *agreement, trust, care, and fit*. When each of these cylinders is in good shape, the leadership engine does its job for the church. But when one or more cylinders is corroded or misfiring, the team doesn't work together as well or, worse, leadership breaks down altogether.

This tool will help you to examine each plurality cylinder and consider a few warning lights that might appear on your dashboard. Consider this a multipoint inspection that will help your elder team run smoothly and efficiently. Work through each of the sections, and then consider the maintenance recommendations that correspond with your score.

THE AGREEMENT CYLINDER: ARE WE ON THE SAME PAGE?

When an elder team isn't clear about the basis of their unity (in the gospel and essential doctrines), they'll find the agreement cylinder—and, as a result, the forward movement of the team—seizing up and breaking down in the face of major decisions. There doesn't need to be agreement on every issue, but it's important to identify and agree on essential issues and have a shared understanding of how agreement is addressed within the team.

Below is a ten-point inspection of the *agreement cylinder*. Mark each item as *green* (running smoothly), *yellow* (some maintenance needed), or *red* (urgent maintenance required).

Inspecting the scope of your theological unity:

- Do you agree on what is meant by the word *gospel* (1 Cor. 2:2–5; 15:1–8; Gal. 1:6–12)?
- Is the doctrinal basis of your unity as a team well defined?
- Do you have a statement of faith, and, if so, do you all affirm your statement of faith (Eph. 4:1–16)?
- Do you agree on the meaning of its terms (2 Tim. 2:14)?

Inspecting how well you work together as you talk through what you believe:

- Does your elder team engage in timely, consistent, respectful, and vigorous theological discussion?
- Do you employ care and wisdom when you discuss, debate, and differ on beliefs?
- Are you able to have doctrinal discussions and disagreements without dividing relationships?

Inspecting the quality of your theological conversations:

- Are you growing together theologically through study and discussion (2 Tim. 2:15)?
- When you disagree on less important doctrines or methodologies, do you do it wisely and with love (Eph. 4:1–3)?
- Is it clear to everyone that the elder team works hard to understand one another's positions and can represent them without exaggeration or misrepresentation (James 1:19)?

Recommended Maintenance for the Agreement Cylinder:

If all checks are *green*, keep engaging in godly theological discussions and growing together! Revisit this tune-up tool in six to twelve months.

The following bullets are recommended for ongoing maintenance for *yellow* items. They should be addressed soon:

- Revisit your statement of faith on a regular basis, rejoicing together over the truth, pressing into issues of clarification, and renewing alignment together around central issues. Make sure no one knowingly or unintentionally begins to drift.
- Regularly introduce new or developing issues of theological discussion. Determine a list of issues to address together, and also determine the frequency with which you'll engage in these discussions.
- Revisit or establish your guidelines for having these conversations together: How will you treat one another through these discussions and after? How will you handle disagreement? What is the hoped-for outcome of these discussions?

The following bullets are recommended for urgent maintenance for any *red* items. Address these right away before getting much farther down the road:

- Clarify the core set of doctrines that must be aligned at the team level—the statement of faith, creeds, and/or confessions that all elders must affirm.
- Establish and agree on a set of terms for engaging in these kinds of discussions together. Prioritize love, growth, patience, wisdom, and listening to and understanding one another.
- Determine how you, as a team, will embrace, accommodate, or confront dissent. Recognize that neither hyperdeference nor mindless uniformity serves the church. This is a process of growth together. If there is a particularly loud, domineering voice commanding conformity, this needs to be urgently addressed.
- Define the most urgent theological issues to address and resolve as a team.

THE TRUST CYLINDER: ARE WE HONEST AND HUMBLE WITH ONE ANOTHER?

Trust lies at the heart of a healthy team. Each man in the plurality must be convinced of the sincerity and integrity of the others. If doubt is allowed to build up, this cylinder breaks down. However, when elders can speak honestly to the church, to one another, and to the lead pastor, a culture of honesty is fostered throughout the whole congregation. Then, every member feels free to voice concerns and be vulnerable

about their weaknesses or temptations. When this kind of security is a common experience for members of a congregation, the church will operate smoothly and go miles together.

Below is an eight-point inspection of the *trust cylinder*. Mark each item as *green* (running smoothly), *yellow* (some maintenance needed), or *red* (urgent maintenance required).

Inspecting your integrity, honesty, and security:

- Are you loyal to God's word by being completely honest with one another (Col. 1:28–29)?
- Can you trust one another enough to show weakness without fear of being judged or exploited (Luke 6:37)?
- Are the elders patient with one another with respect to areas where there is a need for growth (1 Thess. 5:14)?
- Are the elders discreet when temptations are shared (Prov. 3:21)? Are they confident that no one on the team will share what is confided to them with others who should not know?
- Do the elders have one another's backs, but never for sin (Prov. 16:28)?

Inspecting the presence of humility on your team:

- Are you quick to listen and slow to speak (James 1:19)?
- Will the elders resist the temptation to withdraw when there is misunderstanding (Matt. 5:23–24)?
- Will each team member be humble if another man risks correcting him or shares an observed weakness (Prov. 9:8)?

Recommended Maintenance for the Trust Cylinder:

If all checks are *green*, keep on cultivating integrity, honesty, loyalty, security, and humility! Revisit this tune-up tool in six to twelve months.

The following bullets are recommended for ongoing maintenance for *yellow* items. They should be addressed soon:

- Make certain that you are praying together, working together, thinking together, counseling together, rejoicing together, assessing together, and confessing sins to one another regularly.
- Ask someone else on the team to examine your humility and give you honest feedback on how it's affecting the team's level of trust. Are you helping to build trust or corroding trust?
- Cultivate the humble posture of suspecting yourself first rather than others, as well as serving others first rather than yourself.

Urgent maintenance is necessary for any *red* items. A breakdown in the core trust component of security can be caused by one of several factors:

- A lack of *integrity* on the team: Is each man godly and faithful? Will he handle information shared with discretion and keep confidences?
- A lack of *humility* on the team: Is each man able to press into discussion without putting himself at the center?
- A lack of *loyalty* within the team, that is, a lack of confidence in how a man will be treated when he is vulnerable or reveals sin.

Address any of these issues right away before getting much farther down the road.

THE CARE CYLINDER: DO WE ENCOURAGE AND NURTURE ONE ANOTHER?

Jesus says that it's our love for one another, not our productivity and performance, that marks our discipleship (John 13:34–35). When a team experiences the joy and delight of receiving their primary care from within the team, a team identity begins to form. And when the team identity forms, the nurture and care of each member becomes even more important. This culture builds as each elder commits himself to providing care and concern for the others. It breaks down when care is lacking or when elders resort to seeking their primary care outside the team.

Below is a seven-point inspection of the *care cylinder*. Mark each item as *green* (running smoothly), *yellow* (some maintenance needed), or *red* (urgent maintenance required).

Inspecting how well you care for one another:

- Is it clear to each of you that the state of your souls matters to the other elders as much as (or more than) your performance (John 13:34–35)?
- Are your conversations more likely to be filled with encouragement than critique (Eph. 4:29)?
- Can you point to specific times—not merely once—when you talked together about your lives, families, struggles, and temptations; that is, when you talked about something apart from ministry (James 5:16)?
- Does your feedback on one another's performance include encouragement (1 Thess. 5:11)?
- Does someone on the team know the temptations to which each man is vulnerable (Gal. 6:2)?
- Would each wife feel free to call one of the other men if her husband was tanking? (Why or why not?)
- Is each elder receiving his primary care from within the elder team?

Recommended Maintenance for the Care Cylinder:

If all checks are *green*, keep loving each other well and committing yourselves to providing care for one another! Revisit this tune-up tool in six to twelve months.

The following bullets are recommended for ongoing maintenance for *yellow* items. They should be addressed soon:

- Revisit the trust cylinder to ensure issues of trust aren't interfering with the vulnerability that is necessary to seek care from one another.
- Estimate how much time or energy has been given to caring for one another in the past three months, both in structured elder times and in less structured personal time. Do these amounts of time reflect a commitment to care? Can more structured time be devoted to this? What other rhythms could be established to track and meet care needs on the team?
- Spend time as a team reflecting on what care needs have gone unmet in the past. What safeguards and commitments can be made and upheld to prevent lapses in care on the team?

The following bullets are recommended for urgent maintenance for any *red* items. Address these right away before getting much farther down the road:

- One of the five hats of the senior/lead pastor discussed in chapter 3 was *the custodian of the plurality*. Is the lead pastor taking responsibility to coordinate the care of the team? Is he receiving the support and participation of the entire team?
- When there is a red indicator, critical trust issues may be present within the team. These are likely unvoiced and potentially devastating to both the elder team and one or more of its members.

Review the *trust cylinder* right away. It is likely necessary to set time aside to regroup as elders, share hurts and unmet needs as they've been experienced, confess and seek forgiveness where care has been overlooked, and make commitments to work together to grow in this area.

THE FIT CYLINDER: DO WE ENJOY BEING WITH EACH OTHER AND KNOW OUR PLACES ON THE TEAM?

Elders need to know that they fit. This doesn't just mean fitting in, but knowing in their hearts and minds that they are called and gifted for the roles in which they are serving on the team. This final cylinder, when overlooked, has the potential to shut down the other three. Tensions arise when a man desires a role for which he's not suited or in which he is not affirmed. Frustrations arise when a man desires a role that isn't available. The truth is that a pastor may be a good fit on one team but not on another. A pastoral candidate whose personality or gifting does not mesh well with the team can dramatically shift the culture of the plurality and, indirectly, the entire church.

Fit is perhaps the most complicated cylinder to assess, so below is a twelve-point inspection of the *fit cylinder* to help your team maximize this critical piece of the engine. Mark each item as *green* (running smoothly), *yellow* (some maintenance needed), or *red* (urgent maintenance required).

Inspecting your endowment—your particular gifting and roles on the team:

- ____ How well do you understand the gifts God has given to each one of you, and how well is each individual's responsibilities aligned with those gifts (Rom. 12:6)?
- ____ Though each elder is distinct, does each elder's personality mesh well with the plurality?

- Are you able to work together in ways that deepen your relationships rather than strain them?
- Does your time together (or with a potential elder) incite greater joy and creativity in your roles rather than frustration and discouragement?

Inspecting your expectations:

- Does each elder know his role and what is expected of him (Acts 6:1–7)?
- Does each elder and staff member have a written job description?
- Does each elder know to whom he reports?
- Are the expectations for how to communicate to collaborators and the elder in charge of each area clear?
- Is each elder's commitment to serve the church thorough enough to support a change of roles (Mark 10:45)?

Inspecting your evaluation—your culture of ministry assessment:

- Have you clearly defined how you will evaluate one another and what determines success?
- Is each elder aware of the specific contexts where you will regularly evaluate your fruitfulness as a team?
- Have you clarified the process by which each elder can share concerns about how he is being handled or assessed (Titus 1:6–9)?

Recommended Maintenance for the Fit Cylinder:

If all checks are *green*, keep on graciously cultivating your individual callings and fit as a team! Revisit this tune-up tool in six to twelve months.

The following bullets are recommended for ongoing maintenance for *yellow* items. They should be addressed soon:

- Have an intentional and honest conversation about how each team member is experiencing his role as an elder. Utilize these conversations periodically to identify points of tension in unmet expectations or frustration with particular roles.
- Schedule a time to identify the practical roles each elder is filling, and whether his gifts are particularly suited to that role. Consider adjustments to roles as needed.
- Define the job descriptions of the elder team generally and for specific roles. Establish and periodically review clear, bold expectations for these roles. Utilize job descriptions as a means of ongoing evaluation of fit and function as a team.

The following bullets are recommended for urgent maintenance for any *red* items. If something is critically wrong in the fit cylinder, make an immediate assessment of the root issue. Consider these three problem areas:

- *Elders lack clarity on their job descriptions.* Take immediate action to define what is expected of staff or lay elders. Make this a point of strategic discussion for the elders, and work to be clear about what is required of each team member.
- *One or more team members do not fit the needs or function of the team.* Perhaps the individual's gifting does not match the developing needs of the role, or an elder came onto the board through a process that didn't evaluate gifting and fit up front, or a set of circumstances or a particular season of life has affected the elder's ability to function well on the team. If the needs of the church have changed over time, redefine the expectations for this elder. If an elder demonstrates a lack of fit, reexamine his qualification, evidence of gifting, ability to fulfill the role, or unique contribution to the team. Consider what adjustments in role or expectations may be necessary.
- *Ministry evaluation has discouraged or alienated team members.* Acknowledge any broken culture of elder expectations up front. Revisit the trust cylinder together and spend some urgent, intentional time regrouping in relationships and reestablishing the priority of love for one another over performance. Once this foundation is repaired, reconsider together how to humbly establish an evaluation process that seeks to serve both the church and the members of the team in accordance with the trust cylinder's principles.

The Joy-Boosting Delight of Shared Ministry

Summary

Having a plurality of elders is not synonymous with enjoying a united leadership team. Surprisingly, shared values, mutual respect, relational history, denominational affiliation, and constitutional responsibility do not automatically conjure up the kind of culture where doing ministry together is joyful. In fact, church cultures are sometimes marked by rivalry, self-protection, and competing agendas. But there are two clear marks of joyful partnership. The first is *surrender*—giving up claims of significance and counting one another better than ourselves. The second is *commitment*—durable partnership born out of love’s promises. These twin marks bear fruit in a strong partnership. And when a plurality’s partnership is strong, joy in ministry runs deep.

READ

Look up and read Philippians 2:1–4.

PERSONAL REFLECTION AS YOU READ

1. What rights, self-exalting dreams, or claims of significance have you been holding onto? What would it look like to surrender them?

2. The term *fellowship* or *partnership* implies an intentional commitment. Who are your strongest *fellows* or *partners* in ministry? Give God thanks for them right now.

GROUP DISCUSSION WITH THE ELDER TEAM

1. Our common commitments bring us joy. What are the common commitments—vision, values, and specific mission—that bind your team of elders together?
 2. How might you make your church more aware of your common commitments? How might you celebrate your shared vision, values, and mission publicly with the entire church?
 3. No polity, no matter how biblical, can withstand a lack of trust. And trust can't be manufactured by talking through the answer to a discussion question; it must be earned. What are the kinds of practices and behaviors that earn the trust of fellow leaders?

PRAY

Father, allow our plurality to see the beauty of a committed and humble unity and then make the sacrifices necessary to embody it. Help us to cultivate the courage to love boldly, suffer graciously, build with longevity, and trust God unshakably. Allow us to experience the unexpected joy of serving the Savior who died for us that we might lead like him. Amen.