

# Sermon Notes: The Idol in the Pulpit

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## Key Idea

Modern church structures often elevate a single leader to a role that Scripture never assigns — risking burnout, abuse, and even a distortion of the gospel itself. The “senior pastor” model is not found in the New Testament. Instead, the church is called to be led by a plurality of elders, keeping Christ as the head, and removing all idols — even the one in the pulpit.

## Sermon Outline

### 1. Whose Church Is It?

- The church belongs to Jesus, not to any man (Matthew 16:18)
- Church planting is not entrepreneurship, it's kingdom expansion (1 Corinthians 3:5–9)
- 'This isn't my church. This certainly isn't Chris's church. It's His church.'

### 2. Moses and the Blueprint

- Moses was given exact instructions for the tabernacle (Exodus 25–31)
- 'Could you imagine if Moses was like, “So basically, you're saying just freestyle it?”'
- We are not called to freestyle the structure of the church either.

### 3. When Ego Builds the Church

- Many churches today are built around vision-casting pastors, not Christ.
- 'Instead of being built by Christ Himself as the chief cornerstone, churches are built by people creating brands.'
- 40% of pastors have considered quitting. \$50 billion is stolen annually from churches.
- 73% report emotional manipulation. 55% report abusive authority.

### 4. What the Church *\*Should\** Look Like (Acts 2:42–47)

- Teaching, Fellowship, Prayer, Breaking of Bread, Generosity, Signs and Wonders, Evangelism
- 'Everything else is window dressing. Communion frequency? Style of preaching? Open-handed. Are we worshipping Jesus and being equipped to share the gospel?'

## 5. The Role of a Pastor (Biblically Speaking)

- Responsibilities: Teach, Care, Lead, Guard Doctrine, Shepherd, Live with Integrity
- 'An elder is a pastor. A pastor is an elder. There's no senior pastor office in the New Testament.'
- Key Texts: 1 Timothy 3:1–7, Titus 1:5–9, 1 Peter 5:1–3, Acts 20:28

## 6. Greek Terms That Matter

- Presbuteros – Elder
- Episkopos – Overseer/Bishop
- Poimēn – Shepherd/Pastor
- All three appear in Acts 20:17–28 and refer to the same people.

## 7. The New Testament Pattern: Plurality of Elders

- Acts 14:23, James 5:14, Titus 1:5, 1 Timothy 5:17, Philippians 1:1
- 'The church wasn't even considered a church unless it had a plurality of elders.'
- 'There is not one passage that describes a church governed by one pastor.'

## 8. Why This Matters: The Gospel Is at Stake

- 1 Timothy 2:5 – One mediator, Christ
- 'When we rebuild the old system with nicer lighting and rebranded signage, we're not just adding structure — we're subtracting from the gospel itself.'

## 9. Conclusion: Christ at the Center

- 'This church has a head, and it is not the man with the microphone — it is Christ Himself.'
- 'A plurality of elders isn't just good governance — it's the gospel in leadership form.'
- 'We don't say "Touch not the Lord's anointed." We say the Lord has anointed all who are in Christ.'

# ! Common Objections to Plural Eldership (and Biblical Responses)

## 1. “But someone has to be in charge.”

**Objection:** Without a senior pastor, how will decisions get made? Doesn't someone need the final say?

**Response:**

- The *Head* of the church is **Christ** (Colossians 1:18), not a man.
- Scripture consistently shows **shared leadership among elders** (Acts 14:23, Titus 1:5).
- Unity and direction are sought through **prayer, fasting, and consensus**, not hierarchy (Acts 13:1–3).

*“Unity comes not through one man’s vision, but through shared submission to Christ.”*

## 2. “Plurality leads to division or indecision.”

**Objection:** Too many leaders equals conflict or gridlock. A single leader keeps things moving.

**Response:**

- Biblical plurality does not mean democracy — it means **mutual submission** under Christ.
- Healthy eldership includes **differing gifts**, which strengthens rather than weakens leadership (Romans 12:4–8).
- When the church was at a theological crossroads, the apostles and **elders together** sought God’s will (Acts 15).

*“Shared leadership isn’t slower — it’s safer.”*

## 3. “But Timothy and Titus were pastors.”

**Objection:** Doesn't Paul's instruction to Timothy and Titus prove singular pastoral leadership?

**Response:**

- They were **apostolic delegates**, not local senior pastors. Their role was to **appoint elders** (Titus 1:5).
- Nowhere does Scripture say Timothy or Titus *led* a local church alone or permanently.

*“They weren’t pastors of churches — they were planters of elders.”*

#### **4. “Senior pastor isn’t in the Bible, but it’s a helpful model.”**

**Objection:** It’s a modern innovation, but it works and God has used it.

**Response:**

- Effectiveness is not the same as **faithfulness** (1 Samuel 13:8–14).
- God may *use* anything, but that doesn’t mean we’re free to *build* however we want (1 Corinthians 3:10–15).

*“Blessing doesn’t equal blueprint.”*

#### **5. “Someone has to cast vision.”**

**Objection:** Without a senior pastor, who hears from God and casts direction for the church?

**Response:**

- Vision isn’t owned by one man. **All elders are to seek God together** (Acts 20:28).
- The early church was led by **multiple men listening to the Spirit** (Acts 13:1–3).

*“In the throne room, we cast crowns — not vision.”*

#### **6. “Isn’t plurality just shared authority?”**

**Objection:** As long as there are multiple leaders somewhere on the org chart, doesn’t that count?

**Response:**

- True biblical plurality means **shared responsibility, authority, and visibility**, not token accountability.
- Many “plurality” models still function as **one-man shows with advisors**.

*“Plurality in name but not in practice still builds a platform around a personality.”*

## **7. “Churches with senior pastors grow faster.”**

**Objection:** Mega-churches with strong leaders reach more people and are more effective.

**Response:**

- That logic mirrors **worldly success metrics**, not kingdom faithfulness.
- Jesus grew a movement by **making disciples, not building platforms**.

*“Jesus didn’t hand out microphones — He handed out towels.”*

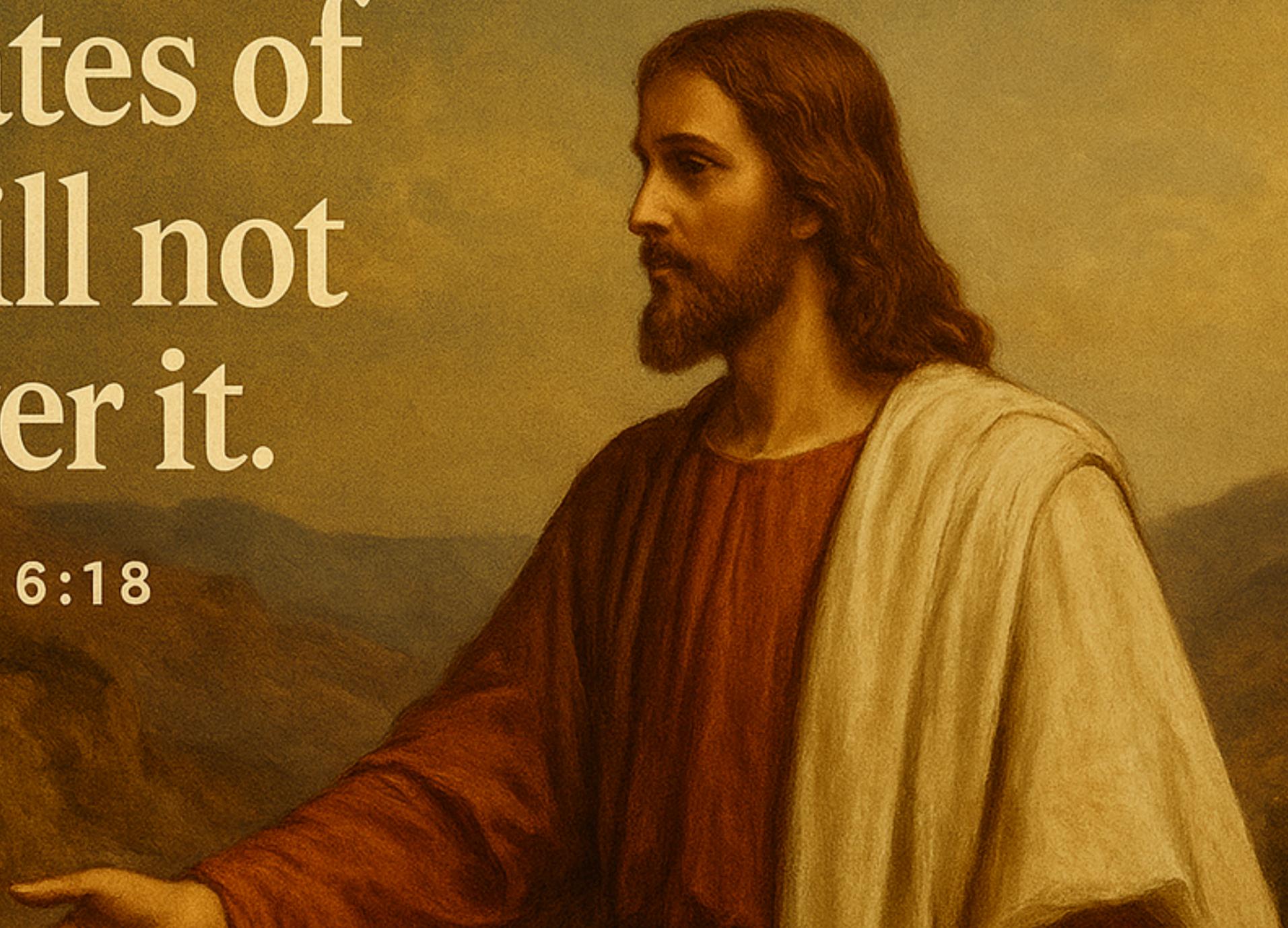
# THE IDOL IN THE PULPIT

THE SCANDAL WE SILENCE BUT  
SCRIPTURE SHOUTS ABOUT



I will build My Church,  
and the gates of  
Hades will not  
overpower it.

MATTHEW 16:18



THIS SHIFTS OUR MINDSET FROM OWNERSHIP TO STEWARDSHIP. WE'RE NOT ENTREPRENEURS LAUNCHING A BRAND, WE'RE LABORERS IN A FIELD THAT BELONGS TO THE KING. WE DON'T WANT TO MAKE A NAME, WE EXPAND BECAUSE HIS NAME IS WORTHY TO BE KNOWN.



**So just  
freestyle it?**

meter is: (8 inches)

**Measurements** (in cubits: roughly 18 inches)

**Materials** (e.g, acacia wood, gold, silver, bronze, specific yarns)

**Colors** (blue, purple, scarlet)

**Designs** (cherubim embroidered into the veil)

**Placement** (exact positioning of furniture and curtains)

**Roles** (who could do what and how)

**Clothing of priests** was also specified in detail

# BY THE BARNNA GROUP, A RESEARCH ORGANIZATION THAT MONITORS CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS TRENDS IN AMERICA.

Research shows that 40% of pastors have considered leaving the ministry in the last three months. Over 70% of pastors experience loneliness and have no close friends they trust with personal matters. 70% have a lower self-image now than when they first joined the ministry

More than 7000 churches close each year. Most pastors don't last more than 5yrs.

Eph 2:19-22

# THE CHURCH IS...

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

THIS IS THE CHURCH. DISPLAYING GOD TO THE WORLD.

1 Peter 2:9

But you (all/yall) are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

# THE CHURCH IS...

It's this body that loves each other so well that its actually a light to the world.

Incredibly focused on getting the gospel to the ends of the earth.

That is **united** in prayer, worship, communion, hearing the word of God, sharing testimony and experiencing the

SUPERNATURAL MANIFESTATION OF HOLY SPIRIT FOR

THE COMMON GOOD. With disciples discipling to do the

work of the ministry.

**THE CHURCH EXISTS TO  
WORSHIP GOD  
EQUIP THE SAINTS  
REACH THE WORLD**

**WORSHIP — EQUIP — SEND (Wes)**

Everything else? Window dressing.

Style of preaching? Open-handed

Communion frequency? Discuss

Speaking in tongues? You can you might not

42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.  
43 Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles.  
44 And all the believers were together and had all things in common;  
45 and they would sell their property and possessions and share them with all, to the extent that anyone had need.  
46 Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart,  
47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Acts 2:42–47 (NASB),

- ✓ Teaching
- ✓ Fellowship
- ✓ Worship
- ✓ Prayer
- ✓ Sharing
- ✓ Evangelism
- ✓ Unity

# WHAT IS A CULT?

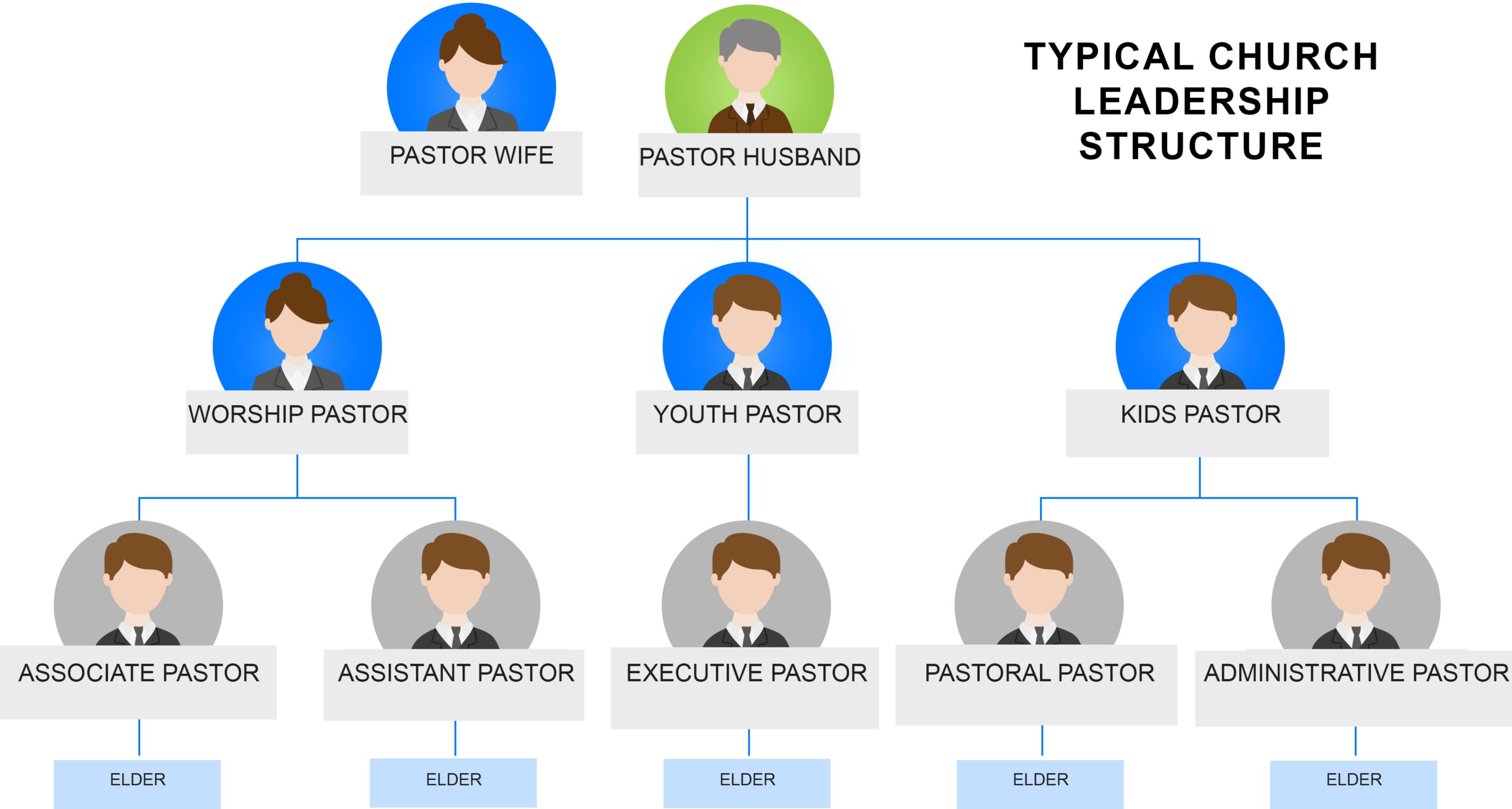
The hierarchical structure of a cult can vary depending on the specific group, but here is a general outline:

Leader: Cult Leader: The central figure who holds ultimate authority and control over the group.

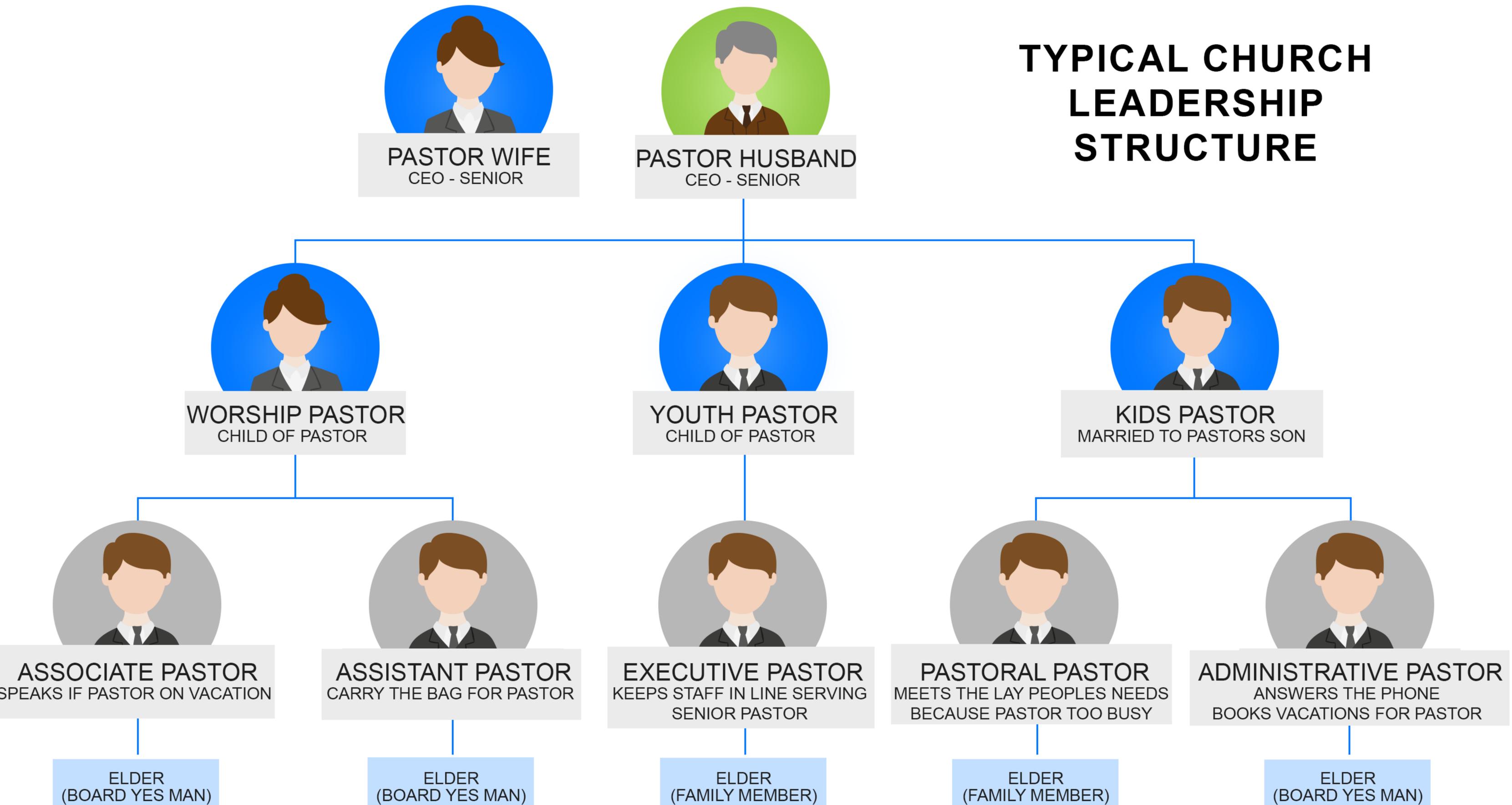
Often regarded as infallible or possessing divine qualities.

Exerts significant influence and control over the members.

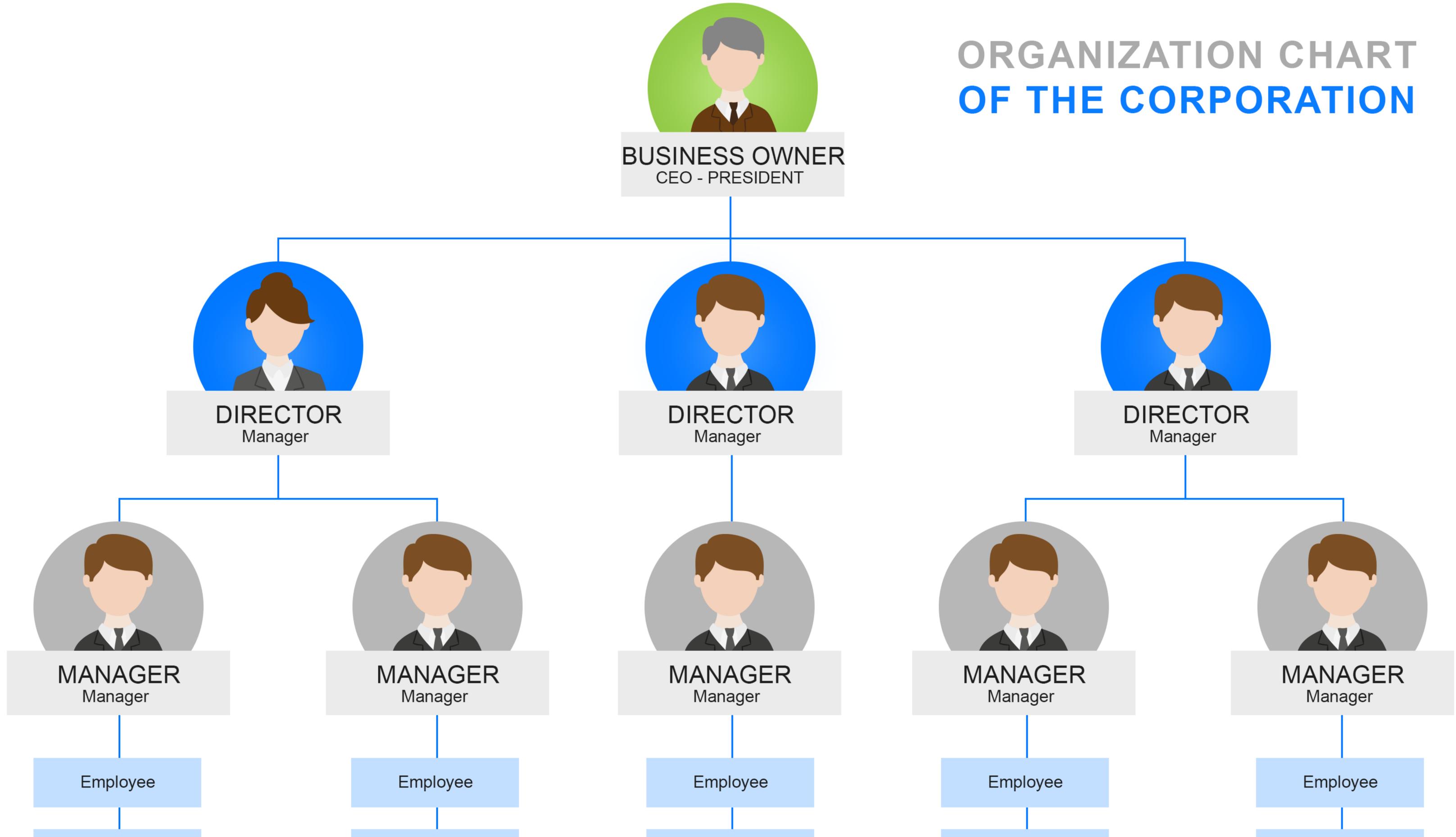
# TYPICAL CHURCH LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE



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# ORGANIZATION CHART OF THE CORPORATION



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Teaching and Doctrine: ... were required to have a solid understanding of Christian doctrine and were responsible for instructing the believers in the teachings of the faith. They were to ensure the preservation and transmission of sound doctrine within the community.

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## **Acts 20:17 ESV**

### **Paul Speaks to the Ephesian Elders**

17 Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the **elders** of the church to come to him.

..  
28

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the **Holy Spirit has made you overseers**, to care for the church of God,[a] which he obtained with his own blood

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## **1 Peter 5:1-3**

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: 2 shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight,[a] not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; [b] not for shameful gain, but eagerly; 3 not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.

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## **Acts 15:2 esv**

2 And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the **elders** about this question.

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1 Timothy 3:2 ISV (International Standard Version)

Therefore, an **elder** must be blameless, the husband of one wife, stable, sensible, respectable, hospitable to strangers, and teachable.

# PASTOR ROLE

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## **I Peter 5:1-4**

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## 1 Peter 5:1-4 NLV

5 And now, a word to you who are elders in the churches. I, too, am an elder and a witness to the sufferings of Christ. And I, too, will share in his glory when he is revealed to the whole world. As a fellow elder, I appeal to you: 2 Care for the flock that God has entrusted to you. Watch over it willingly, not grudgingly—not for what you will get out of it, but because you are eager to serve God. 3 Don't lord it over the people assigned to your care, but lead them by your own good example. 4 And when the Great Shepherd appears, you will receive a crown of never-ending glory and honor.

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## Titus 1:5-9 NLT (New Living Translation)

5 I left you on the island of Crete so you could complete our work there and appoint **elders** in each town as I instructed you. 6 An **elder** must live a blameless life. He must be faithful to his wife,[a] and his children must be believers who don't have a reputation for being wild or rebellious. 7 A church leader[b] is a manager of God's household, so he must live a blameless life. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered; he must not be a heavy drinker,[c] violent, or dishonest with money.

8 Rather, he must enjoy having guests in his home, and he must love what is good. He must live wisely and be just. He must live a devout and disciplined life. 9 He must have a strong belief in the trustworthy message he was taught; then he will be able to encourage others with wholesome teaching and show those who oppose it where they are wrong.

## I Timothy 3:1-7 NLT

1 This is a trustworthy saying: “If someone aspires to be an **elder**, he desires an honorable position.”

2 So an elder must be a man whose life is above reproach. He must be faithful to his wife. He must exercise self-control, live wisely, and have a good reputation. He must enjoy having guests in his home, and he must be able to teach.

3 He must not be a heavy drinker or be violent. He must be gentle, not quarrelsome, and not love money.

4 He must manage his own family well, having children who respect and obey him.

5 For if a man cannot manage his own household, how can he take care of God’s church?

6 An elder must not be a new believer, because he might become proud, and the devil would cause him to fall.

7 Also, people outside the church must speak well of him so that he will not be disgraced and fall into the devil’s trap.

## **PLURALITY OF ELDERS**

(plurality referring to the state of being multiple)

- Jesus personally appointed and trained twelve men. Jesus Christ gave the Church plurality of leadership.

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- The elders of the church in Jerusalem united with the twelve apostles to deliberate over doctrinal controversy (Acts 15)
- James instructed the sick believer to “call for the elders [plural] of the church [singular]” (James 5:14)
- At the end of Paul’s first missionary journey, he appointed a council of elders for each newly founded church: “And when they had appointed elders [plural] for them in every church [singular], having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed” (Acts 14:23). Note that here, as in James 5: 15, the term elder is plural and the word church is singular.

- When passing near the city of Ephesus during a hurried trip to Jerusalem, Paul summoned the “elders of the church,” not the pastor, to meet for a final farewell exhortation (Acts 20:17,28).

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- When Paul wrote to the Christians at Philippi, he greeted “the overseers [plural] and deacons” (Phil. 1:1).

- At both the beginning and end of Paul's ministry, he appointed (or instructed others to appoint) a plurality of elders to care for the churches he founded or established (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5).

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- According to the Titus 1:5 passage, Paul did not consider a church to be fully developed until it had functioning, qualified elders: "For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city as I directed you" (Titus 1:25).

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- When writing to churches scattered throughout the five Roman provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia in northwestern Asia Minor (1 Peter 1:1), Peter exhorted the elders to pastor the flock (1 Peter 5:1). This indicates that Peter knew that the elder structure of government was standard practice in these churches.

In addition to explicit statements regarding a plurality of elders, other examples of shared leadership exist throughout the New Testament (Acts 13:1; 15:35; 1 Cor. 16:15, 16; 1 Thess. 5: 12, 13; Heb. 13:7, 17, 24). On the local church level, the New Testament plainly witnesses to a consistent pattern of shared pastoral leadership.

Leadership by a plurality of elders is sound biblical practice.

“It is concluded after examining all the passages which mention local church leadership on the pastoral level, that the New Testament presents a united teaching on this subject and that it is on the side of plurality. This is based on the evidence of the seven clear passages which teach the existence of plural elders in single local assemblies. These passages should be allowed to carry hermeneutical weight over the eight other plural passages which teach neither singularity or plurality. 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. Only three passages talk about church leadership in singular terms, and in each passage the singular may be seen as fully compatible with plurality. In all these passages, there is not one passage which describes a church being governed by one pastor.”

***Bruce Stabbert, author of the book *The Team****

# TYPICAL CHURCH LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE



PASTOR WIFE  
CEO - SENIOR



PASTOR HUSBAND  
CEO - SENIOR



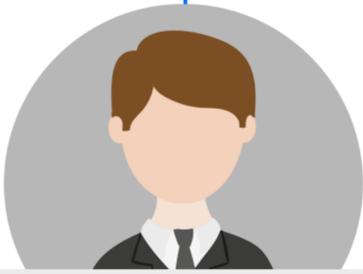
WORSHIP PASTOR  
CHILD OF PASTOR



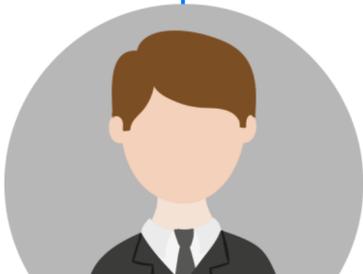
YOUTH PASTOR  
CHILD OF PASTOR



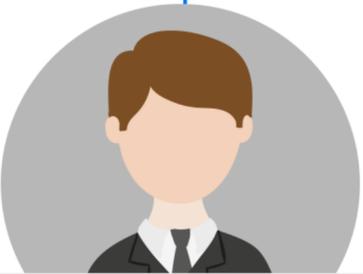
KIDS PASTOR  
MARRIED TO PASTORS SON



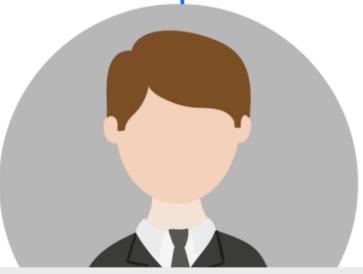
ASSOCIATE PASTOR  
SPEAKS IF PASTOR ON VACATION



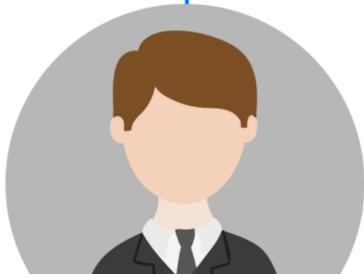
ASSISTANT PASTOR  
CARRY THE BAG FOR PASTOR



EXECUTIVE PASTOR  
KEEPS STAFF IN LINE SERVING  
SENIOR PASTOR



PASTORAL PASTOR  
MEETS THE LAY PEOPLES NEEDS  
BECAUSE PASTOR TOO BUSY



ADMINISTRATIVE PASTOR  
ANSWERS THE PHONE  
BOOKS VACATIONS FOR PASTOR

ELDER  
(BOARD YES MAN)

ELDER  
(BOARD YES MAN)

ELDER  
(FAMILY MEMBER)

ELDER  
(FAMILY MEMBER)

ELDER  
(BOARD YES MAN)

# BIBLICAL CHURCH LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE



ELDER

DIRECT THE AFFAIRS OF THE CHURCH  
1 Timothy 5:17

PROTECT THE FLOCK  
Acts 20:28



ELDER

CONTINUE  
IN  
THE  
FAITH  
ALWAYS POINTING TO  
JESUS



ELDER

PRAY FOR THE SICK  
James 5:14-15

PREACHING AND TEACHING  
Titus 1:9



ELDER

The term "Elder" is used interchangeably with pastor, overseer, shepherd.

AND FINALLY

**“FIRST AMONG EQUALS”**

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Not equal in their giftedness, biblical knowledge, leadership ability, experience, or dedication.

Think Peter

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or dedication.

Think Peter

1 Tim 5:17 (AMP)

The elders who perform their leadership duties well are to be considered worthy of double honor (financial support), especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching [the word of God concerning eternal salvation through Christ].

# THIS IS NOT ABOUT HIERARCHY

Mark 9:33-37 The Message

33 They came to Capernaum. When he was safe at home, he asked them, “What were you discussing on the road?”

34 The silence was deafening—they had been arguing with one another over who among them was greatest.

35 He sat down and summoned the Twelve. “So you want first place? Then take the last place. Be the servant of all.”

36-37 He put a child in the middle of the room. Then, cradling the little one in his arms, he said, “Whoever embraces one of these children as I do embraces me, and far more than me—God who sent me.”

# **IF THEY ARE EQUAL THEN WHO MAKES THE DECISIONS?**

## **ACTS 13:2**

2 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."

## **FINAL WORDS - God's structure is the best, best for the elders and for the church.**

We operate differently - we introduce as "one of the pastors".

We have different gifts, strengths and callings in the position of elder that we fulfill

We provide accountability to each other (so we don't go rogue)

We encourage confidence to speak the truth and not back down.

We correct each other and create a stable environment for sustained growth without  
burn-out

We prevent the attention from being on a "senior pastor" (when they leave half the church  
leaves)

We prevent the focus from being on a certain teacher, speaker but rather the truth of the  
word of God.

We have more ability to protect, nourish, pray, teach, equip than what the common  
business model provides.

## **FURTHER STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS**

Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership -  
by Alexander Strauch (Author), Stephen Sorenson (Editor), Amanda Sorenson  
(Editor)

A brief discussion guide for small groups by Paul Santhouse Biblical Eldership  
Discussion Guide (Lewis and Roth Publishers)

40 Questions about Elders and Deacons (Kregel Publisher, 2008).

Why Elders? A Biblical and Practical Guide for Church Members (Kregel Publisher,  
2009)

Eldership In Action, by Richard Swartley. A practical guideline to effective elders  
meetings, especially useful for larger churches with many elders.

Embracing Shared Ministry: Power and Status in the Early Church and Why It Matters  
Today,

The Prodigal Church: A Gentle Manifesto against the Status Quo..

[biblicaleldership.com](http://biblicaleldership.com)

Letters To The Church - Francis Chan