



CONTENTS

Foreword	11
Acknowledgments	15
Introduction: “Who Leads the Church?”	17
Part 1: Foundations	
1. Flying in Formation: A Community Project	23
2. Our Frame of Reference	33
3. Discovering Supracultural Principles	39
Part 2: The Biblical Story	
4. The <i>Ekklesia</i> of God (A.D. 33)	47
5. The Elders in Jerusalem (A.D. 45)	53
6. A Prayer and Healing Ministry (A.D. 45–47)	61
7. The First Church-Planting Mission (A.D. 47)	65
8. The Law-Grace Controversy (A.D. 49)	71
9. Character-Based Judgments (A.D. 49–50)	75
10. Respect and Esteem (A.D. 51)	81
11. The Ephesian Elders (A.D. 58)	87
12. Leadership Qualifications (A.D. 63)	93
13. Assistants to Elders/Overseers: Deacons (A.D. 63)	101

14. A Woman's Role in Ministry (A.D. 63)	111
15. The Household Model (A.D. 63)	123
16. Financial Support (A.D. 63)	131
17. Protection and Discipline (A.D. 63)	139
18. Shepherding God's Flock (A.D. 63)	147
19. A Doctrine of Character (A.D. 65)	155
20. Marriage and Family Requirements (A.D. 63, 65)	163
21. Serving with Joy (A.D. 66–70)	173
 Part 3: Scriptural Observations	
22. Titles and an Overarching Function	183
23. Specific Leadership Functions	191
24. Selecting and Appointing Elders	201
25. Plurality in Leadership	209
26. The Need for a Primary Leader	217
27. Accountability, Delegation, and Forms	227
 Part 4: Supracultural Principles and Practical Applications	
28. Principles for Leadership Appointments (Part 1)	237
29. Principles for Leadership Appointments (Part 2)	249
30. Principles for Leadership Functions (Part 1)	261
31. Principles for Leadership Functions (Part 2)	273
32. Principles for Leadership Functions (Part 3)	281
33. Age Requirements	287
34. Leadership Selection	293
35. Board Size and Length of Service	301
36. More Form Questions	307
37. A Succession Plan	317
 Appendices	
A. Use of the Word "Church" (<i>Ekklesia</i>) in the Book of Acts and the Epistles	325
B. A Biblical Perspective on Healing	331
C. Determining a Candidate's "Maturity Quotient"	341
D. Apostles, Prophets, and Teachers	345



FLYING IN FORMATION: A COMMUNITY PROJECT

Hopefully, the cover design team at Moody Publishers captured your attention as they did mine when they chose a flock of geese to illustrate the contents of this book as well as the process that brought the book into existence. Perhaps you even asked yourself, *What does a flock of birds have to do with leadership?* That's a valid question, especially for those of us who haven't studied their instincts and behavior.

So consider the following rather startling facts about a flock flying in formation:

- ❑ As each goose flaps its wings, it creates an “uplift” for the birds that follow. By flying in a “V” formation, the flock adds 71 percent greater flying range than if each bird flew alone.

- ❑ When a goose falls out of formation, it suddenly feels the drag and resistance of flying alone. It quickly moves

back into formation to take advantage of the lifting power of the bird immediately in front of him.

- When the lead bird tires, it rotates back into the formation to take advantage of the lifting power of the bird immediately in front of it.
- The geese flying in formation honk to encourage those up front to keep up their speed.
- When a bird gets sick, wounded, or shot down, two geese drop out of formation and follow it down to help and protect it. They stay with it until it dies or is able to fly again. Then they launch out with another formation or catch up with the flock.

LEADERSHIP LESSONS FROM GEESE

“Look at the birds of the air,” Jesus said while teaching a group of disciples on a hillside in Galilee (Matthew 6:26). When we look at the geese that fly in formation, we can learn much about leadership. This marvelous metaphor from nature offers several obvious lessons about teamwork and leadership—lessons that hardly need to be explained. However, because I’ve experienced some very significant lessons in a specific way serving with my fellow elders at Fellowship Bible Church North (FBCN) in Plano, Texas, I want to clarify why these facts about geese flying in formation are so important to me personally.

First, over the years, my fellow elders and I have had the wonderful opportunity to serve together, moving in a common direction. We’ve all felt the “uplift” that has enabled all of us to continue our journey and to achieve far more than if I or any one of them had been “flying alone.”

Second, we’ve all felt the “drag” of falling out of formation and how refreshing it is to once again join the team and feel the “lifting power” of a community effort.

Third, as I reflect back on our ministry together, there have been times when I as the primary leader have needed a break. In short, I’ve gotten weary and even discouraged. How refreshing it is to have one or more

fellow leaders temporarily share the lead, particularly during times when “the winds of resistance” are rather overpowering and exhausting.

Fourth, the leaders I have served with have given positive feedback—not just to encourage me, but also to encourage one another. Just recently, one of these men penned a letter to me personally that has motivated me to continue to lead out strongly—particularly during a rather difficult challenge in our ministry.

Fifth, one of the great benefits of serving together is to have leaders who bear each other’s burdens, especially when we face difficulties, not only in our ministries, but also in our lives generally. Over the years, we’ve experienced family challenges—illnesses and even deaths. In fact, one of our most faithful men suffered deeply from cancer and eventually entered heaven’s gates to receive his reward. How encouraging to see our leaders and their families encourage this man and his own family as they faced this traumatic event in their lives.

So, what can we learn from a flock of geese? Perhaps the most striking lesson of leadership to take from a “flock of birds” is that they carry out their purpose on earth as God designed them. But this distinct species can only operate with God-created instincts. Those of us who are made in God’s image have far greater potential to practice these lessons consistently and creatively. We are uniquely designed and if we know Christ personally as Lord and Savior, we have the capacity to be empowered by the Holy Spirit to function as one, as Jesus Christ was one with the Father. This, of course, was Jesus’ prayer for the apostles as well as for all of us who have come to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ “through their message” (John 17:20–23).

DOING THEOLOGY IN COMMUNITY

What you’re about to read is the product of an exciting group effort—“flying in formation” if you will. It has been, and continues to be, a community project. I’ve had the privilege of guiding this research and putting thoughts on paper. In this sense, I feel we have been involved in a process that Stanley Grenz described in his very thought-provoking treatise *Renewing the Center*. In this postmodern world, he challenges Christian leaders at all

levels—in academic centers and particularly in local churches—to be involved in theological study and dialogue in the context of community.¹

Personally, as a former Bible college and seminary professor for twenty years and a church-planting pastor for the past three decades, I agree with this challenge. I've been involved in both learning environments. Though the academic community has always been very intellectually stimulating and personally rewarding, it's the local church setting that provides the grassroots context for doing theological studies that relate to the total person—mind, emotions, and will. Furthermore, it's in this unique God-designed environment that we as leaders particularly can “all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13). As the *total* body of Christ “grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (v. 16), so a body of spiritual leaders can experience the same community dynamic.

Twelve of us who serve as elders at FBCN accepted the challenge to do “theology in community”—namely, studying carefully God's plan for local church leadership. Some of us have ministered together in this role for more than twenty years, and all of these men have been active in the business world except two of us—yours truly and my associate pastor—who will, Lord willing, eventually become my successor as senior pastor.

FINDING ANSWERS

To carry out this stimulating process, we met regularly for a number of months to ask and answer the following questions:

1. What does the New Testament teach us about local church leaders?
 - Who were they?
 - How were they identified?
 - What did they do?
 - How were they selected?
 - What were their qualifications?

- How long did they serve?
 - How did they function as a team?
2. How did local church leaders in the New Testament churches relate to those who were identified as apostles, prophets, and teachers?
 3. What can we learn from church history, particularly during the centuries following the New Testament era?
 4. What have we learned in our journey together as local church leaders?

In answering these questions, we've used a very basic research paradigm involving three perspectives. Though serious students of the Scriptures describe this design in various ways, we've used the three-lens metaphor (depicted in figure 1).

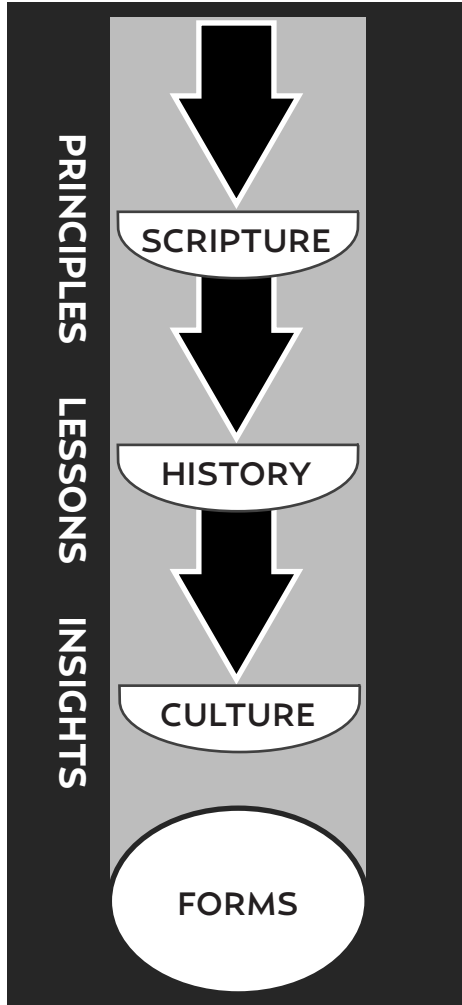
A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

To answer the questions we've outlined earlier, our first step was to look through *the lens of Scripture*, looking carefully at everything the Bible says about local church leaders. This narrowed our focus primarily, but not exclusively, to the book of Acts and the New Testament letters. It's here we encounter local churches and two groups of leaders: elders or overseers (two titles that are used interchangeably) and deacons, including both men and women.

This "focus," of course, also includes those leaders who were called and gifted to have an *itinerant* church-planting ministry (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers), who were often involved in planting local churches and appointing leaders—men like Peter, John, Paul, Barnabas, Silas, Luke, Timothy, and Titus. As we've looked through the lens of Scripture, we've been able to make observations that have enabled us to formulate supracultural principles—principles that endure in all cultures and that we believe are foundational to help in carrying out local church leadership functions today.

To quote Grenz, the Bible must be the "primary voice" in any "theological conversation" in order to be true to our evangelical heritage.² We must not look first and foremost to the systematic outlines and categories

Figure 1
A Biblical and Pragmatic Perspective on Eldership
(Research Paradigm)



made by theologians—no matter how astute they may be. Rather, we must take a fresh look at what God has said in the pages of Scripture. This has been our goal in this study.

AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Scriptural history flows naturally into extrabiblical church history, which helps us understand what happened in local churches following the New Testament era. From the early church fathers we've learned valuable lessons that gave us important glimpses into what transpired beyond the period described in the sacred text of Scripture.

We look through *the lens of history* to consult those who have gone before us, realizing, as Grenz states, that “we are not the first generation since the early church to seek to be formed into the community of Christ in the world.” We must understand that our theological heritage provides a reference point for us today. “This heritage offers examples of previous attempts to fulfill the theological mandate, from which we can learn.”³

Perhaps one of the greatest benefits of studying history is to eliminate those things in our present approach to leadership that are out of harmony with biblical functions and directives and to accentuate those approaches that have been in harmony with scriptural principles. Again Grenz says it well—“Looking at the past alerts us to some of the pitfalls we should avoid, some of the land mines that could trip us up, and some of the cul-de-sacs and blind alleys that are not worth our exploration.”⁴

A CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

Gaining insights from the third lens—*the lens of culture*—is absolutely essential. Without an ongoing understanding of the way people think, feel, and function in a given culture, it's impossible to both interpret Scripture properly and to apply biblical principles in various cultures of the world. Jesus, of course, understood this notion perfectly in His ministry to people from various cultural backgrounds. And Paul stands out as our most dynamic example in becoming “all things to all men so that by all possible means [he] might save some” (1 Corinthians 9:22). Paul understood culture

and used cultural insights without compromising divine absolutes. So should we!

Here Grenz offers a word of caution—with which we agree wholeheartedly. We must never look to what we think is the “Spirit’s voice in culture” when it contradicts the text of Scripture. Rather, we must evaluate cultural insights against the backdrop of biblical truth—not the other way around. Though insights from culture may challenge us to evaluate historic interpretations of Scripture, these insights must not drive the process. If they do, we’re in danger of making judgments that are out of harmony with God’s revealed will in the Word of God.

A PRAGMATIC PERSPECTIVE

No leader can *function* without some kind of *form*. For example, we cannot “teach” and “preach” (functions) without some kind of methodology (forms). In fact, we cannot carry out *any* God-ordained function without developing ways to do it (see figure 1).

It’s here that the Scriptures are basically silent—and by divine design. If the Holy Spirit had designated specific forms for carrying out specific functions, we would be severely limited in practicing biblical Christianity in other cultures of the world and at different moments in history.

This leads us to the essence of this study. If we, as local church leaders, are to develop the best possible forms for implementing biblical functions, we must first of all clearly comprehend these functions and understand how they span history and culture. This means we must see clearly the supracultural principles that emerge from this kind of biblical study. Once we are able to state these principles clearly and understand them, we are ready to evaluate current forms and to create new patterns in our own local churches that are in harmony with God’s plan that unfolded during the first century—no matter where we are located in the world and regardless of the nature of our community, the size of our church, and/or other socioeconomic dynamics. If they are indeed supracultural, these principles will work in communities that are rural or urban, primitive or modern. More specifically, they’ll work in the heart of a large city or in a small Indian village in the heart of the Brazilian jungle.

If they do not work in such diverse communities, either they are *not* truly supracultural or we simply don't know how to apply them. It's possible that we can be so influenced by our own culture that we have difficulty thinking and functioning beyond those parameters. That's why it's so important to have a total perspective when doing ministry—biblically, historically, and culturally.

REVIEWING FUNCTIONS AND RESHAPING FORMS

Let me say that this study includes the biblical story and our own story at FBCN. Though I've recorded the results of our process thus far, we are continuing to discuss implications for our church—even though what we've learned has grown out of our own believing community. We firmly believe that learning to do effective ministry is an ongoing experience. Together, we want to continue to study the biblical story, review our observations, and refine the supracultural principles we believe have grown out of this study. Pragmatically, our goal is to continue to develop and reshape “forms” to be in harmony with biblical principles. Not only must we continue to evaluate our conclusions regarding principles through fresh biblical, historical, and cultural studies, we must always make sure that our forms *never* become ends in themselves, but only a means to achieve the divine ends that were revealed by God Himself.

NOTES

1. Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 206–11.
2. *Ibid.*, 206.
3. *Ibid.*, 208–9.
4. *Ibid.*, 209.