

*Eldership and the Mission of God:  
Equipping Teams for Faithful  
Church Leadership*

Available March 2015

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## Embracing the Hard Questions of Church Eldership

Every church needs leadership. But leadership should not reside in a single pastor. The biblical model for church leadership is found in teams of elders who together guide the community into God's mission.

Church leaders J.R. Briggs and Bob Hyatt provide a comprehensive picture of elders as agents of mission for their communities. Healthy eldership structures a church for mission. Elder teams model the kind of community the local church is intended to be, stewarding the gospel in a local context.

"The elder team ought to be a 'community within the community' that displays the good news in how they relate to one another and the church body as a whole. They are to be focused wholly on the mission God has given to the church, and how they lead and serve their church should be governed by advancing that mission."

Looking at eldership through a missiological lens, Briggs and Hyatt unpack the role, character and posture of a mission-oriented elder. Elders oversee, shepherd, teach, equip and model for God's people what life with Jesus looks like in a particular context. The authors provide practical guidance for how elders are selected, work together, make decisions, protect the congregation and invest in the lives of others. *Eldership and the Mission of God* looks at such questions as:

- What are the primary functions of an elder?
- Who appoints elders?
- What are the qualifications to be an elder?
- How should elders make decisions?
- What does team leadership look like?
- How should elders be involved in touchy topics like church discipline and internal strife?
- What about the question of female elders?
- What does the Bible have to say about elders and the mission of God?
- How are elders to be spiritually encouraged and educated?

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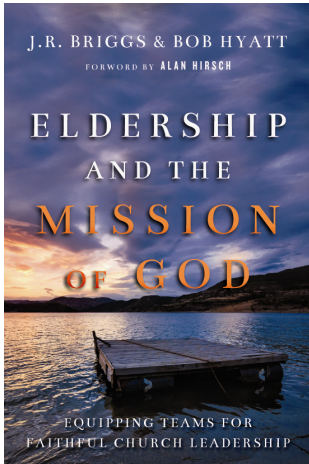
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# ENDORSEMENTS



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*The biblical model for church leadership is found not only in pastors, but also in teams of elders who oversee, shepherd, teach, equip and guide the community into God's mission. J.R. Briggs and Bob Hyatt unpack the role, character and posture of a mission-oriented elder in this practical guide.*

## *Eldership and the Mission of God: "Biblical, Practical, Warm and Inspiring"*

"The church has been in need of an updated understanding of eldership. With seasoned wisdom and theological rigor, Hyatt and Briggs team up to shift the role of elders from being a domesticated business board that focuses on maintenance, to a daring community of servant leaders who equip the whole church to join God's mission in the world. This is the best book I've read on eldership."

**JR Woodward**, national director, The V3 Movement; author of *Creating a Missional Culture*

"If your church's eldership basically operates like the board of directors of a small religious enterprise, get them to read this book. Quick. J.R. Briggs and Bob Hyatt not only outline the biblical functions of eldership but they do so through the missional prism that the original biblical writers used. For them, eldership is missional insofar as elders are called to not only equip the church for mission but to eliminate as many factors as possible that could derail the missional orientation of the church. Biblical, practical, warm and inspiring."

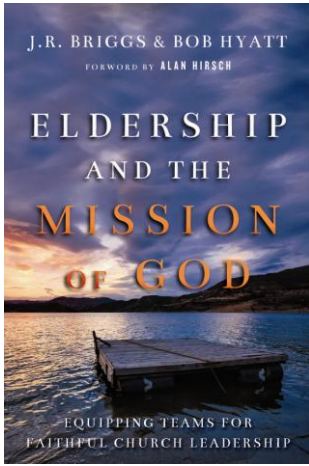
**Michael Frost**, Morling College, Sydney; author of *The Road to Missional, Incarnate and Exiles*

"Intensely practical, thoroughly rich in wisdom, *Eldership and the Mission of God* is a book on church leadership that defies its stereotype. As well-honed practitioners and careful thinkers, Briggs and Hyatt recast everything about elder work for its call to mission. I wish I'd had this book twenty years ago."

**David Fitch**, Betty R. Lindner Chair of Evangelical Theology, Northern Seminary

"J.R. and Bob give us something that few – if any – books on church eldership have offered before: an accessible mission-directed primer on faithful leadership in localized, contextualized Jesus communities. . . . My hope is that this book will compel us to forego the prevalent version of decaffeinated Christianity and instead cultivate a missionary ethos that ignites faith communities to participate in the unrestrained and uncorked adventure of life with Jesus."

**From the foreword by Alan Hirsch**, missiologist, speaker, founding director of Forge Network and author of *The Forgotten Ways*



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## Understanding *Missio Dei*

Much has been talked about regarding *imago Dei* (the image of God) and *missio Dei* (the mission of God). These concepts are crucial to developing an accurate understanding of God that has implications on our identity and calling. Elders are called to cultivate a people that cares the most about the things that Jesus cared about. Sadly, some churches reflect either *missio die* – all talk, but no mission – or *missio me* – selfish ambition and self-centered pursuits veiled in spiritual language. This grieves the heart of the founder of our faith and the creator of the church.

Instead of “the image of God” and “the mission of God,” a better translation of these two phrases might be the “imaging God” and the “missioning God” – a definition more rooted in God’s character. The role of mission-oriented elders is to model a humanity that is broken yet redeemed and given incredible value (*imago Dei*) while reflecting the sending/sent heartbeat of a missioning God in the world (*missio Dei*). They see themselves not as preservers of tradition, but instead as shepherds of God’s people, image bearers aligned with God’s mission and culture cultivators within his kingdom. The call of elders in a local church context is to *faithfully lead God’s people by imaging the character of a missioning God*.

Sending is built into the DNA of the triune God. The Father sends the Son and the Spirit. Jesus didn’t merely show up; his Father sent him, and Jesus lived in confidence of his sentness. The Son sent the Spirit and the apostles. And the Spirit sends Jesus and the apostles. If elders are seeking to display the character of God to a world in need, then we, too, will emanate the sending nature of the God we worship, the Jesus we follow and the Spirit we join.

In Acts, the “mother church” in Jerusalem experienced incredible growth, but it was not the only center of mission. Antioch became the mission center for the north and west. Additionally, the church in Philippi was the gateway to the spread of the gospel throughout Europe and the supporting center for Paul’s missionary endeavors to the south. These churches had a sending culture because they caught the heartbeat of our sending God.

In his book *The Mission of God*, Christopher Wright wrote, “It is not so much the case that God has a mission for His church in the world, as that God has a church for His mission in the world. Mission was not made for the church; the church was made for mission – God’s mission.” We must remember that God has not called us to the sacred task of leadership to oversee a religious institution or a weekly spiritual event. Elders are called to shepherd a flock in pursuit of the heart of God, to seek the kingdom and to join faithfully in God’s mission in a movement of discipleship that is both personal and corporate. If mission is to be pursued, elders must make a wholehearted commitment to leading differently.



# BOOK EXCERPT

Graham Buxton called ministry a dance with God. Local churches are invited to dance with the Spirit – to let him lead the dance, trust his embrace and let him teach us how to do it. We dance with God while joining hands with others and inviting them to dance with us.

—Taken from chapter one, “Mission-Oriented Elders”