

Better Church Elders: Study Guide

A New Zealand made online training resource for Eldership groups and Church Boards. Comprising of a series of six videos (15-20 minutes each) about Eldership, with group discussion questions included in a study guide for each video, a suggested 'action' to do as an eldership or board, and a reading as an 'extra'. The video content is provided in an interview format led by Charles Hewlett (New Zealand Baptist National Leader) with experienced practitioners: viewers have the opportunity to hear from multiple voices adding to this topic of forming healthy Eldership and church Board teams.

The idea is for Eldership/Board groups to work through these training videos together, perhaps one a month for six months: setting aside 40 minutes at the start of normal Elders meetings to watch a video and discuss the questions: applying the content to their local context. The video series could also be a resource for prospective elders and board members to watch before they join the team.

To watch the trailer or purchase the series go to: lifelonglearning.nz/elders

Topics

Six training sessions designed to help elders understand their role and lead the people of God well:

1. **The Bible and Eldership:** *What does the Bible have to say about our function as elders? What is it that we are meant to be and do?* Charles Hewlett talks with Dr George Wieland.
2. **Eldership and Governance:** *What is it that makes good governance? What do governors actually do?* Charles Hewlett talks with Mel Wilson.
3. **Models of Eldership:** *Big, medium or small – does one eldership model fit all churches? What are some of the options? Where does the pastor fit in to all this?* Charles Hewlett talks with Reti Ah-Voa and Grant Harris.
4. **Bringing the Bible into Decision Making:** *How does the Bible remain the foundational guide for our belief and behaviour as a church? What practical things can we do to keep the Bible central in our leadership?* Charles Hewlett talks with Dr John Tucker.
5. **Maintaining Healthy Eldership Relationships:** *What things contribute to healthy relationships? What are some of the pitfalls we must try and avoid?* Charles Hewlett talks with Jonny Weir.
6. **Strengthening our Eldership Team:** *Where do we find new elders? What training will make us even better? How can we support our pastor and staff more?* Charles Hewlett talks with Dr Mike Crudge.

The Framework

Each training session has the following 4 components:

- WATCH: a 15-20 minute conversation online with experienced practitioners.
DISCUSS: 3 questions from the study guide.
DO (ACTION): 1 activity for your eldership team to complete.
EXTRA (READING): 1 chapter or article of reading to go a little deeper.

Better Church Elders Episode 1: The Bible and Eldership

Hyperlinks on this page can be accessed online at lifelonglearning.nz/elders/episode-01

What does the Bible have to say about our function as elders? What is it that we are meant to be and do?

WATCH

A 23-minute conversation online between Charles Hewlett and George Wieland.

DISCUSS

As an eldership or board, discuss the following question together after watching the video:

1. How are the functions of oversight and care being exercised in our fellowship/church?
2. How does our church recognise people who can model authentic discipleship?
3. In our appointments how may we give due weight to both competence for tasks and qualities of life and character?

DO (ACTION)

Here is one activity for your eldership team to complete:

Over the next month, on your own as elders/board members, consider all of the people who are part of your local faith community/church that you are part of – perhaps go through the phone directory or database. Ask the following questions and see if some names emerge. In a month compare your names with the other elders in your group:

1. Who are the people in our church we can trust to see God together?
2. Who in our faith community gain respect and trust?
3. Who do we recognise among us who are embodying the faith?
4. Who is not around the eldership table that should be?

EXTRA (READING)

If you would like to go a little deeper with this topic, George Wieland has provided a Bible Study that looks at all of the references to elders in the New Testament. This reading is a 6-page PDF that can be downloaded by clicking on the link below.

[Elders in the New Testament by George Wieland \(2019\)](#)

Better Church Elders Episode 2: Eldership and Governance

Hyperlinks on this page can be accessed online at lifelonglearning.nz/elders/episode-02

What is it that makes good governance? What do governors actually do?

WATCH

An 18-minute conversation online between Charles Hewlett and Mel Wilson.

DISCUSS

As an eldership or board, discuss the following question together after watching the video:

1. Talk about what makes good governance. What are some of the things your eldership group is doing well?
Talk about what makes bad governance. What are some of the things your Eldership group is/isn't doing that hinders good governance?
(Are there any elephants in your room?)
2. Discuss the concept of stewardship versus ownership. For the question: "who are we stewarding this for?" consider your stewardship as Elders for: current members, future members, current young people, etc.
3. Legally [in New Zealand] church Elders have certain compliance expectations. Discuss this within your eldership group. If you're not sure of the law, set someone the task to find out and report back.

DO (ACTION)

Here is one activity for your eldership team to complete:

Either do this now, or set some time aside when you next gather: Go around the room and explain why you're on this eldership or board group. Talk about how you are contributing to the mission of this church.

Now as a group, start developing a skills based matrix of your current group of Elders – get someone to draw it up on a piece of paper, or open a new spreadsheet on a computer or device... In a column down the left list skills/gifting/character, then add columns across the page - one for each Elder or board member... Focus on one person at a time and as a group list what you see each person bringing to the group – let this be an encouraging and affirming exercise!

Now, from what you know of the needs of the church from a governance perspective, is there anything missing within your current Eldership group skills matrix?

Another thing to consider around this is succession planning: How are we looking to develop new leaders who can continue our role in years to come?

EXTRA (READING)

If you would like to go a little deeper with this topic, Mel Wilson recommends reading chapter 7 of the book: *Good Governance is worth the effort – a handbook for Christian charities and churches in Aotearoa*, by Martyn Norrie (2019, Archer Press). In fact, Mel recommends you purchase the book. This reading is a 6-page PDF that can be downloaded by clicking on the link below.

[How do we inspire and motivate? \(Ch 7, Good governance is worth the effort by Martyn Norrie, 2019\)](#)

You can purchase the book, *Good governance is worth the effort – a handbook for Christian charities and churches in Aotearoa*, by Martyn Norrie (2019) online here:

[Archer Press](#)

Better Church Elders Episode 3: Models of Eldership

Hyperlinks on this page can be accessed online at lifelonglearning.nz/elders/episode-03

Big, medium or small – does one eldership model fit all churches? What are some of the options? Where does the pastor fit in to all this?

WATCH

A 20-minute conversation online with Charles Hewlett, Reti Ah-Voa and Grant Harris.

DISCUSS

As an eldership or board, discuss the following question together after watching the video:

1. Identify a couple of unique things in your church's wider context that has an impact on the eldership or board group.
2. Has your church changed over the last decade? Has your eldership changed over the last decade?
3. Grant talked about the engagement, transparency, and honesty of the elders. Talk about how your own eldership or board could be measured against these three words.

DO (ACTION)

Here is one activity for your eldership team to complete:

If someone in your church is considering becoming an elder or board member for the first time, or you are encouraging somebody to do so, what resources do you have to help outline expectations and "onboard" or orientate them to the role? If these resources haven't been revised for a while, set someone the task to do so. If no resources exist, discuss the need for them, which may lead to a plan to create them.

EXTRA (READING)

If you would like to go a little wider with this topic, we have put together a document containing information from various public sources, showing firstly the guidance about leadership and governance from one particular expression of churches: the Baptist Union of New Zealand, and then examples from three New Zealand Baptist churches showing how they publicly define their eldership or governance groups (from their websites). This reading is a 25-page PDF that can be downloaded by clicking on the link below:

[Models of Eldership \(reading for Better Church Elders online video series Episode 3\)](#)

Better Church Elders Episode 4: Bringing the Bible into Decision Making

Hyperlinks on this page can be accessed online at lifelonglearning.nz/elders/episode-04

How does the Bible remain the foundational guide for our belief and behaviour as a church? What practical things can we do to keep the Bible central in our leadership?

WATCH

A 13-minute conversation online between Charles Hewlett and John Tucker.

DISCUSS

As an eldership or board, discuss the following question together after watching the video:

1. How do you view the bible (individually and together as a group of elders or board members)?
2. At the moment, do you (personally) feel nourished by 'The Word'?
3. When did you *last* encounter the Living Jesus through Scripture as an eldership?

DO (ACTION)

Here is an activity for your eldership team to complete after watching the video and discussing the questions above:

1. Take 5 minutes on your own to reflection on the last 7 days:

Where or how have you heard God's Word through scripture?

(Eg: Was it in the worship on Sunday? Was it at a home-group/Lifegroup? Was it in your own personal devotional time? Or maybe through a podcast you listened to on the way to work...)

What have you heard God say in the last 7 days?

2. Then as a group together:

Is there one thing you would be willing to share with the others in the group? Go around the group, sharing your reflections. Listen for any common themes or threads that come through the group reflections (Eg: signs of nourishment, formation, transformation, challenge, encounter).

Through the Word that you've encountered over the last week, has God been speaking to you as a group of Elders?

3. Continue this exercise:

One way to continue this conversation would be to individually conduct a weekly audit over the next month as described above. In your next Elders meeting, take 15 minutes to reflect on how God has been directing you through his Word. As you share those experiences, listen for any themes or patterns that emerge.

Is the Spirit saying something through the Word to you as Elders and a church?

EXTRA (READING)

If you would like to go a little deeper with this topic, John Tucker suggests reading about Lectio Divina as a practice that could be tried with eldership or board groups. He recommends chapter 7 of the book: *Eat this book: a conversation in the art of spiritual reading*, by Eugene Peterson (2006, Eerdmans Publishing). In fact, John recommends you purchase the book. This reading is provided as a 16-page PDF that can be downloaded by clicking on the link below.

[“Ears thou hast dug for me” \(Ch 7, Eat this book, Peterson 2006\)](#)

You can purchase the book, *Eat this book: a conversation in the art of spiritual reading*, by Eugene Peterson (2006, Eerdmans Publishing) online from the following places:

[Amazon](#)

[The Book Depository](#)

Better Church Elders Episode 5: Maintaining Healthy Eldership Relationships

Hyperlinks on this page can be accessed online at lifelonglearning.nz/elders/episode-05

What things contribute to healthy relationships? What are some of the pitfalls we must try and avoid?

WATCH

A 19-minute conversation online between Charles Hewlett and Jonny Weir.

DISCUSS

As an eldership or board, discuss the following question together after watching the video:

1. What are your thoughts about the connection between the relational health of the elders and the quality of life within the wider church?
2. Can you identify some relational characteristics in your church that are also evident in your leadership team (both positive and negative)?
3. Jonny says to welcome disagreement and to wrestle from different perspectives. Talk about how your eldership or board responds when there is disagreement among you. Do you have a strategy for handling difference?

DO (ACTION)

Here is one activity for your eldership team to complete:

Over the next month, as individual elders or board members, think about the “3 core commitments” Jonny talked about (listed below). For each of them, come up with one way your eldership or board could increase commitment to the value. After a month, spend some time together comparing each other’s suggestions and talk about how they might be implemented:

1. Clear commitment to honour God
2. Clear commitment to valuing each other
3. Clear commitment to the flourishing of the church

EXTRA (READING)

If you would like to go a little deeper with this topic, Jonny Weir recommends chapter 9 of the book: *The tortoise usually wins: biblical reflections on quiet leadership for reluctant leaders*, by Brian Harris (2013, Paternoster). In fact, Jonny recommends you purchase

the book. This reading is provided as a 10-page PDF that can be downloaded by clicking on the link below.

[From leadership to leaderships: getting teams to work in the same direction \(Ch 9, *The tortoise usually wins*, Harris 2013\)](#)

You can purchase the book, *The tortoise usually wins: biblical reflections on quiet leadership for reluctant leaders*, by Brian Harris (2013, Paternoster) online from the following places:

[Amazon](#)

[The Book Depository](#)

Better Church Elders Episode 6: Strengthening our Eldership Team

Hyperlinks on this page can be accessed online at lifelonglearning.nz/elders/episode-06

Where do we find new elders? What training will make us even better? How can we support our pastor and staff more?

WATCH

A 16-minute conversation online between Charles Hewlett and Mike Crudge.

DISCUSS

As an eldership or board, discuss the following questions together after watching the video:

1. Brainstorm a bunch of fun learning things to do together as an eldership or board.
2. What practical things could we do to care for our pastor/s?
3. Who could we invest in and how? (discipling, and potential future elders or board members).

DO (ACTION)

Here is one activity for your eldership team to complete:

Arrange a time for your families to get together for a meal.

EXTRA (READING)

If you would like to go a little deeper with one of the topics mentioned in the video: getting to know each other through team personality tools, Mike Crudge recommends reading the online PDF: *Become Like Jesus While Being Yourself: A discipleship guide for the 16 Myers-Briggs Personality types*. This free resource is provided by the Jesus Film Project and includes a link to a free online personality type test. This resource focuses on the strengths and challenges each personality type faces while living out the gospel. From the introduction:

Increasing your awareness of various personality types can help you:

- *Resolve conflict*
- *Discover unique strengths in yourself and others*
- *Identify gaps in your teams*
- *Lead others productively*
- *Empathise more effectively*
- *Improve your church culture*

This 25-page PDF comes from the [Jesus Film Project](#) and is available free from their website here:

Become Like Jesus While Being Yourself: A discipleship guide for the 16 Myers-Briggs Personality types

Expert help is available to work with your eldership group or board, such as the examples below, or search the internet for specialists with experience working with church leadership groups:

[Nicky Gumbrell: 3D Personality](#) (Auckland, New Zealand, will travel)

[Clare Ayers: People Matters](#) (Christchurch, New Zealand)

Clare and Nicky are both certified Personality Type consultants and can assist your eldership team to:

- understand your personality preferences and those who differ from you (especially important in relation to decision making)
- understand your eldership team preferences (a team analysis revealing your strengths and challenges)
- reflect on your faith community and what preferences are catered for within a service of worship and/or activities throughout the week