

## THE CHRISTIAN TRANSFORMATIONAL TEAM LEADERSHIP MODEL (CTTL): LEADING AND COMMUNICATING WITH A PAULINE EMPHASIS

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Ephesians 4:12-13 instructs Christian leaders to “equip the saints for the purpose of ministry” (Eph 4:12 ESV). Paul’s call is not for pragmatic results or greater productivity, while such outcomes may rightfully occur. He instead proposes equipping’s end as a transformation into “the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:13). As such, this article builds a transformational team leadership model, Christian Transformational Team Leadership (CTTL), based on individual and environmental transformation in Jesus Christ. The CTTL argues an appropriate and Christian team-building process follows these steps: 1) For God’s glory through gospel transformation (purpose/why), 2) calling (mission/what), 3) character (values and beliefs/who), 4) competency (strategy/how), 5) and convictional discipleship into environmental transformation (vision/where). Scripture and modern Christian and secular academics support the thesis.

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### INTRODUCTION

Building construction and architecture are complicated tasks in Japan. Frequent earthquakes and typhoons plague the island nation. Building a house in Japan requires a more profound commitment to foundation integrity, building materials, and construction practices than in other parts of the world. For example, most residents living in Okinawa, Japan, reside in solid concrete boxes. While Okinawans may not win architectural awards, most remain confident in their houses’ strength when the ground shakes or the winds blow. Much like an Okinawan house’s construction, wise Christian leaders are purposeful in building teams, starting with a solid foundation (purpose), choosing strong building resources (mission, values/beliefs), competently putting these resources together (strategy), before finally moving in the kitchen table to sit around and

map out where the team is going (vision). This leadership pathway proposes a Christian team-building model based on the team's transformation in Christ and expresses theological foundations on collaborative or team leadership. The model is named the Christian Transformational Team Leadership (CTTL) model, which is centered on Ephesians 4:12-13 where Paul calls believers to "equip the saints for the purpose of ministry," and in that team equipping process, believers transform into "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (ESV). The CTTL argues an appropriate and Christian team-building process follows these steps: 1) For God's glory through gospel transformation (purpose/why), 2) calling (mission/what), 3) character (values and beliefs/who), 4) competency (strategy/how), and 5) convictional discipleship into environmental transformation (vision/where). The categories in parentheses within the steps correspond to Justin Irving's commentary on how to align organizational culture. The CTTL proposes that leaders build their teams in sequence. However, steps two, three, and four contain some overlap. Communication is vital to team building. Therefore, certain sections will address communication and how it relates to the section's topic. Scripture and modern Christian and secular academics support the thesis. Formal Christian ministry settings and the broader context among Christian leaders in the secular workforce are appropriate for implementing the CTTL model.

### GOD'S GLORY THROUGH GOSPEL TRANSFORMATION (PURPOSE)

The purpose of Christian-led teams is twofold. First, God creates glory for himself through image-bearers. The CTTL model proposes that all team activity is rightly directed for the glory of God. God's glory is the foundation of the CTTL building. The Westminster Catechism summarizes mankind's purpose succinctly, biblically, and clearly: "Man's chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy him forever." A team's purpose rooted in God's glory is primary for Christian leaders guiding the collaboration process, for a team without a purpose is a team placed on a sandy foundation. The Apostle Paul implores individuals, including Christian team members, "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31 ESV). God created man in his image, shining his image across his creation and bringing order to his creation through humankind (Gen. 1:27-28); thus, even in the sometimes mundane work of organizing meetings, Christians understand the magnitude and honor found in fruitful endeavors. Christian workers comprehend the gift of work, rest in his sovereignty, asking, "Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands upon us" (Ps. 90:17). Perhaps the greatest motivator (purpose) for the Christian team member is the modeling of the Trinity. As Ryan Hartwig and Warren Bird note, "Christianity is unique among major religions in presenting one God who eternally exists and functions as a divine team [the Trinity]. This fact certainly undergirds the idea of God's people working in unity through teams."

Secondly, God achieves glory, in part, through individual and corporate gospel transformation, without which humanity "exchange[s] the *glory* of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things" (Rom. 3:23, my italics). Christians are made into new creations in Christ at salvation (2 Cor. 5:17). The Spirit transforms the mind to look more like Christ (Rom. 12:2). While sin still has effect in a broken world (Gen. 3; Rom. 3:23), Christians remain confident that Christ's

imputed righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21) and the Spirits guidance and power (Rom. 8:5) ensure sin has no ultimate power in each individual's life.

Furthermore, like the Trinity, Christians live in community. The New Testament both prescribes and describes the common good of life within the Church, especially the local church, "for the body [of Christ] does not consist of one member but of many" (1 Cor. 12:14). As Christian communities grow in Christlikeness, there is a further burden to spread Christ's kingdom. As D. A. Carson notes, Christians are called to interact with the surrounding world. He suggests:

Because creation gave us embodied existence, and because our ultimate hope is resurrection life in the new heaven and new earth, we will understand that being reconciled to God and bowing to the Lordship of King Jesus cannot possibly be reduced to privatized religion or a form of ostensible spirituality abstracted from full-orbed bodily existence now.

In other words, Christ's work, the knowledge of that work, and the reality of that work in the Christian's life today compel Christians living in the community to co-create shalom in the world around themselves in the present. As Carson suggests, gospel transformation will rightly branch out into our teams and community. Still, before environmental transformation is considered (application), the CTTL model must continue to build the team's metaphorical house of calling, character, and competency.

## CALLING

God's glory through gospel transformation is a team's foundation. Now, the CTTL model considers the building material. These next two steps may occur simultaneously within the group and form the cohesive structure of the team. Without it, the team will lack integrity and God's direction.

The second step in the CTTL model is calling. Calling aligns with Irving's cultural alignment categories of the team's mission or asking, "*What* is the team called to do?" Take, for instance, a church's mission statement: "We exist to know Jesus and make him known." The purpose (why) is that church members exist to know Jesus and, by implication, give him glory. The mission, or *what* church members are *called* to do, is to make him known. Calling can be considered the external and visible concrete blocks of the CTTL building, providing strength against misalignment and misdirection.

Jesus leaves his apostles and future followers with a simple calling: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19). While Christians may find themselves pursuing different and good callings throughout life, Jesus's great commission should remain the central calling to what the team endeavors. This is not to suggest Christians in a workplace outside the Church are doing unworthy work. God calls Christians to be fruitful and create order (Gen. 1:28). Making disciples that look like Jesus should be the central calling to all Christian endeavors.

### *Calling and Communication*

Like Jesus's clear and concise calling in the Great Commission, Christian leadership teams create and communicate the team's mission with clarity. Justin Irving found as a research theme that organizational leaders prioritize mission communication and focus. Irving suggests mission statements "must be clear and easily accessible," combating mission drift. Team members seek clarity in their language, avoiding what sociolinguists call powerless speech. Powerless speech, such as hedges ("I think") and tag questions ("wouldn't it?"), undermine and muddy credibility and competence in the mission. James, likewise, calls believers to clarity in commitment when corporately agreeing, such as developing a mission: "Let your 'yes' be yes and your 'no' be a no, so that you may not fall under condemnation" (Jas. 5:12).

Not only should the mission be clearly communicated, but there should also be a consistent and repetitive voicing of the mission, calling the leadership team and others in the organization to expected behaviors and outcomes. Communicated mission helps create a culture. Secular and Christian theorists place importance on aligning followers toward a common mission and *creating*, not just sustaining, the culture. Completing this step requires leaders to "[maintain] the drumbeat of ideology." John Kotter suggests keeping mission communication free of jargon, repetitive, and distributed through multiple platforms. The Apostle Paul exemplifies a concise, consistent, and repetitive mission statement directed toward both the divisions in the Corinthian church and those external opponents: "We preach Christ crucified" (1 Cor. 1:23).

Mission development and communication should focus on both external and internal team communication. Internally, healthy teams develop missions democratically. Craig Johnson and Michael Hackman note, "Democratic leadership communication contributes to relatively high productivity (whether or not the leader directly supervises followers) and to increased satisfaction, commitment, and cohesiveness."

### CHARACTER

If calling is the visible, concrete block used in building the symbolic CTTL house, then character is the more intangible and hidden mortar and rebar holding the concrete block together. While character may be less visible, wise leadership teams understand organizations will eventually crumble without honest and reliable membership. Character defines *who* makes up the team by installing team members based on their *values and beliefs*. Scripture is clear on character and leadership. In writing to his mentee, Timothy, Paul encourages Timothy to build a church leadership team focusing on character. Church elders must be "sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money" (1 Tim. 3:2-3). These character traits align with biblical morality, supporting the Great Commission's call to learn and observe Christ's teachings. In short, Paul and the Great Commission align purpose, calling (mission), and character (values and beliefs). Likewise, with clearly stated values, "leaders and organizational

members are able to go about their work [the mission] with a freedom that flows from this clarity.”

Secular theorists conclude that character plays a vital role in team development. Leadership team coach and academic Peter Hawkins defines transformational leadership as “the process of collectively engaging the commitment and participation of all major stakeholder groups to radical change in the context of shared purpose, values, and vision.” The key to Hawkins' definition is “shared values,” which promote courage, lifelong learning, endurance through ambiguity, and the ability to see oneself as a change agent. Christians should keep a critical eye when reading Hawkins and other secular promoters of TL. These scholars base their idea of transformation on a secular worldview. Christian leaders pursue the transformation of themselves and their followers unto Christlikeness, grounded in God's word for his glory. Unbelievers may be present on the team, especially outside the local church context. Through God's common grace and building a culture, non-believers can align with a godly character. Ultimately, gospel transformation for all team members should be the goal within the CTTL model. Likewise, Ephesians 4:12-13 calls Christian endeavors (ministry) to a character standard (stature of the fullness of Christ) and not to outcomes like the number of Sunday worship service attendees or production efficiency.

### *Character and Communication*

Promoting and communicating a biblical ethic and morality can be challenging, even within a Christian context. Team members may feel pressure to deceive, coerce, or intimidate for better short-term outcomes. Christian leadership teams swim against such currents and courageously stand firm in their character commitments. Christian academics Mark McCloskey and Jim Louwsma build their leadership model around the seven virtues. They argue that influential and righteous leaders must maintain dynamic determination, courageous character, and emotional maturity when working in relationships. McCloskey and Louwsma note, “Courageous Character is the strength to do the right thing when it's not the easy or popular thing to do—to stand strong for the people, organizations, and causes in their care. Courage and love are inseparable.” Thus, wise leadership team members stand firm on their convictions. Christian team members lovingly build relationships on the team and with those they lead based on Scripture and the leading of the Spirit.

## COMPETENCY

Returning to Ephesians 4:12-13, Paul affirms the outcome of the equipping process to be transformation into Christlikeness for both the leaders and the followers. The Spirit's means to cause the transformation is “equipping the saints for the work of ministry” (Eph. 4:12). Equipping ensures teams are competent in resourcing and team make-up. *Competency* provides a *strategy* for *how* the team will get where it is going. The CTTL model defines team leadership competence as embracing, assessing, and including a variety of God-given giftings that increase team efficiency and innovation, all while pursuing ongoing learning and healthy communication. In the CTTL model house,

leaders have poured a firm foundation (purpose—God’s glory) and gathered their building resources on site: calling and character. Now, it is time to begin assembling these resources with purposefulness.

Equipping requires intentionality and direction in how leaders resource and point individuals and teams toward a goal. For example, consider a local church switching from a more programmatically driven strategy to a direct equipping strategy. The pastors desire that congregants begin seeing themselves as the primary disciplers of their families and others in and outside the church. Focusing on secondary church staff and core leaders who are not pastors, the pastoral team would begin to equip these leaders with resources and teaching methods to disseminate the new mission. Throughout that process, the pastors would encourage secondary leaders to take on new leadership roles, increasing their influence over congregants encountered throughout the week. Pastors would place secondary leaders in areas that accentuate their giftings and present critical feedback throughout the process. These changes might be uncomfortable and stretching, but these environments often allow for a deeper trust in God’s goodness among secondary leaders. Within the scenario, young leaders would likely grow in how to influence others righteously while allowing the pastors to model clearly communicated objectives (calling), ensuring the team would be correctly resourced (competency).

Scripture calls for leaders and teams to be competent. For example, Paul outlines a minimal threshold for Christian competency for one to be a member of an elder team. First, 1 Timothy 3:2-7, the commonly cited biblical leadership text, only explicitly names one competency—teaching (1 Tim. 3:2). Secondly, Timothy 3:4 gives the implied competency of managing his household well. The home is a microcosm of the relational management of the greater world outside the house. If a Christian leader fails to manage his home properly and lovingly, how is he expected to manage others? William Mounce correctly observes, “The core competency Paul cites is that the elder must be a proven manager of people...While any qualified elder will grow through ‘on-the-job training,’ his managerial ability must be to some degree visible before appointment [as seen among his family].” Paul makes the point that to be a competent elder team member, elder candidates must also competently manage the team closest to themselves: their family.

While leadership teams should pursue faithfully equipping their team members and those they lead, the Bible also describes healthy teams as assessing and affirming individual backgrounds and giftings. First Corinthians 12 highlights the reality of the Church’s diversity in make-up and giftings: “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit, we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:12-13). Here, Paul states that the body of Christ comprises different ethnic and national groups. Later in the chapter, he designates that each individual within the church has gifts to bless the church (1 Cor. 12:27-31). Likewise, Paul sought to invite more diverse and poorer groups of people to the table in places like Phillipi by subverting the normal hierarchical social norms of the

Roman Empire. Therefore, Paul highlights the strength of diversity. Christians should also find great hope in the diversity of roles in the Trinity. Stan Ott notes:

The members of the Trinity share a common vision for ministry. They enjoy fellowship in wonderfully loving relationships. And each member of the Trinity has a unique “task” or role in the process known as salvation history [or God’s work in revealing salvation]. They are the essential fusion of relationships and work—the missional fellowship.

Researchers confirm the strength of diversity, suggesting that “team member diversity promotes vigorous and constructive debate, increases creativity, prevents groupthink, normalizes the appreciation of differences as an undergirding team value, and produces better decision making.” Embracing diversity also produces more innovation. Innovation requires both new ideas and an avenue for those ideas to be introduced to the team. One such method is brainwriting, in which team members write ideas down before disseminating those ideas to the team, ensuring quieter members’ ideas are considered.

The assessment of competence is inherent in Paul’s description of the elder onboarding process and the sifting of church gifts in 1 Corinthians 12. A wise leadership team reflects and accounts for each member’s competency, value, and limitations. Justin Irving and Mark Strauss offer wise counsel on “sober self-assessment,” through Paul’s words in Romans 12:3: “For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment.” Irving and Strauss give an apt example: “Just as the captain of a ship can operate a vessel best when fully aware of its strengths and weaknesses, ... so leaders will be most effective when they are self-aware, fully cognizant of their strengths and weaknesses, their potential and limitations.” A team of only administrators may keep the organization following established protocols. Still, to the team’s detriment, it lacks others gifted in casting vision, inspiring others, and teaching well.

Wise leadership teams take assessment results seriously and pursue growth in areas of weakness that inhibit team effectiveness. One avenue may be opening the team to professional team coaching. Peter Hawkins defines team coaching as “enabling a team to function at more than the sum of its parts, by clarifying its mission and improving its external and internal relationships.” While external expertise may provide an outside perspective, leadership teams should continue to pursue ongoing leadership equipping internally as well. Albert Mohler suggests that good leaders, including leadership teams, grow in learned competencies through deep thinking, strategic reading, and practicing writing.

### *Competency and Communication*

While teams are wise to pursue competent individuals and ongoing education, team competency falls apart without clear and defined communication. Returning to the church direct equipping example at the beginning of the section, the core leadership

would provide clear and emotionally stable ways to communicate both internally and externally with easy-to-remember models and mission statements. Effective and transformational teams pursue competent approaches to communication. Timothy Franz notes research that “Good communication processes— the right message through the correct medium with as little interference as possible to the proper receiver— can certainly help groups and teams to yield higher performances.”

Good leaders consider all communication and input, even suggestions from newcomers to the team. In the spirit of Paul writing to the Galatians, “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone.” Christian leadership teams value and honor other team members' ideas, even when conflict arises. Allowing and reinforcing candor respectfully increases team trust and commitment.

### CONVICTIONAL DISCIPLESHIP INTO ENVIRONMENTAL TRANSFORMATION (VISION)

The last step in the CTTL process places the kitchen table inside the imaginative house. The kitchen table is often where relationships are fostered, both inside the family (team) and in welcoming visitors. It often intersects with the team's thoughts and the external culture. Here is the application or vision of *where* the team is and *where* the team is going. This process is two-fold. First, the team still focuses on internal consistency and mission, but the broader organizational transformational process is added and enacted here.

Evaluating *where the team is* means assessing the team's spiritual health. Ephesians 4:12-13 points to the Christian leader's goal among his or her followers: Christlikeness. Good leadership teams are not satisfied with the status quo. Even secular scholars Johnson and Hackman agree: “Transformational leaders ignore the adage, ‘If it ain't broke, don't fix it.’ Instead, the transformational leader adopts the attitude, ‘If it ain't broke, you're not looking hard enough.’” Secular transformational leaders look to transform and motivate leaders through such pursuits as conserving the Earth's resources. While such secular pursuits might be honorable (or even biblical), Christian transformational leaders first start with the convictional discipleship among each team member. Convictional is used here as a modifier to discipleship to emphasize a deep-seated yearning to lead others that can only be provided through one's own transformed mind and desires (Rom. 12:2; Phil. 2:13). Team members call one another in the same, yet imperfect sense, as Paul calls the Corinthians: “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1). Transformation must start with individuals at a team level. Duane Litfin notes about ongoing learning, “Our primary motive for doing so must not be the transformation of culture. Our prime motive must be *obedience to Jesus Christ*. Then, if the living Christ graciously chooses to use our efforts to mold our culture into more of what he wants it to be, we will be grateful [original italics].” Likewise, leading is intricately intertwined with teaching and learning. Christian leadership teams concern themselves with deep pursuits of God's truths and teaching those among the group and those they lead.



Evaluating *where the team is going* shifts the vision outward. Transformed teams should joyfully and obediently interact and disciple the team itself, organizational culture, all organizational stakeholders, and the world at large (Rom. 1:14-17; Acts 1:8). Transformed teams proclaim and seek a peace that only the gospel brings. Nicholas Wolterstorff (1988), in his short work on reason, relays a similar message: “The goal of human existence is that man should dwell at peace in all his relationships: with God, with himself, with his fellows, with nature, a peace which is not merely the absence of hostility, though certainly it is that, but a peace which at its highest enjoyment.”

## CONCLUSION

As leadership (imperfectly) creates shalom, order, and gospel transformation through their guidance, the helix of the CCTL continues its upward journey. God is glorified as his image bearers carry out the tasks he provides. Through convictional discipleship, more organizational members experience gospel transformation (step 1). A new CCTL house is under construction as leaders “equip the saints for the purpose of ministry...to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:12-13).

## About the Author

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