

# The 4 Elements of Healthy Churches

**All four of these elements—  
Integrity, Passion,  
Servanthood, &  
Imagination—will  
be evident in a  
healthy, growing  
church.**

**TOM THATCHER**



## IDENTIFYING THE 4 CRITICAL TRAITS

All healthy churches are characterized by four key traits: **Integrity**, **Passion**, **Servanthood**, and **Imagination**. While different churches will be stronger in some of these than others, all must be present and effectively balanced.

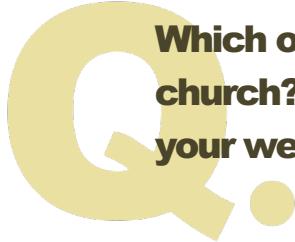
**Integrity** means that systems and processes all function to achieve the church's goals. A church with integrity has a clear sense of purpose and maintains systems that leverage resources toward fulfillment of its mission. What we do is in line with what we say, and what we say is in line with what we truly value.

**Passion** means that people support the church's mission. When a church has passion, the mission isn't just on a poster in the lobby. People know it and invest their time, effort, and money in it. When disagreements arise, they relate to whether the mission is being accomplished. A widespread sense of ownership is evident in a passionate church.

**Servanthood** means that the church demonstrates outward focus. When a church is service-minded, energy is invested in meeting needs, not just in running the machine. We want to survive so we can reach more people, not for sake of surviving. Relationships are healthy because people put others before themselves.

**Imagination** means that the church can change to stay relevant. Imaginative churches can envision futures that differ from the way things have always been. They see the world changing around them and adapt to meet the real needs of today. People are open to new possibilities and innovation is rewarded.

All four of these elements—**Integrity**, **Passion**, **Servanthood**, and **Imagination**—will be evident in a healthy, growing church. Your church is likely stronger in some than others—maybe very strong in one and very weak in others. But all must be present and, as much as possible, the four must be balanced.



**Which of these four elements is strongest in your church? Which is weakest? How could you strengthen your weakest element?**



### **ELEMENT #1: INTEGRITY**

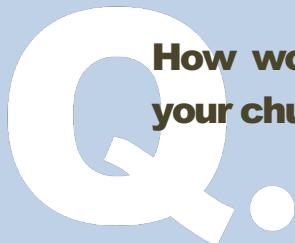
When a church has **Integrity**, its actions proceed from its true values in tangible ways.

We know what we believe and what we want to do. We clearly state those beliefs and goals regularly and without hesitation. We allocate resources in ways that support our mission. We maintain systems and processes to ensure that everything works and that everything we do reflects who we want to be.

Key questions relating to a church's Integrity element include:

- **Do you have a clear and current mission statement?**
- **Would most people in your church agree that the mission statement actually drives what you do?**
- **Are there hidden agendas and/or invisible hierarchies that drive decisions?**
- **Would a review of your use of resources—people, money, facilities—prove that you invest in what you say you believe?**
- **Could a person who had never seen your mission statement guess what it might be by looking at your budget and church calendar?**
- **Does your org chart unify the efforts of different ministries to support higher goals?**
- **Do your volunteers understand how their individual efforts serve a larger purpose?**

Without Integrity, the other elements of Passion, Servanthood, and Imagination will build a church that sows much but reaps little.



**How would you answer each of the above questions for your church?**

## ELEMENT #2: PASSION



When a church has **Passion**, people support the mission. They don't just talk about the mission. They invest their time, skills, and money to accomplish it. Passionate churches generate and sustain energy.

Key questions relating to a church's Passion element include:

- Are people usually excited about new initiatives, or skeptical?
- Do staff members and key volunteers seem energized, or tired?
- Do people regularly invite friends and family members to events? Do they want others to experience what they've experienced in your church?
- Would staff members encourage friends to apply for a position at your church?
- Are your worship services energetic? Can people "feel it" when they walk into a weekend service?
- Are you growing numerically? It's hard to grow without Passion.

Without Passion, the elements of Integrity, Servanthood, and Imagination will build a showcase church. It all looks great, but nobody cares.

**Passionate  
churches  
generate  
and sustain  
energy.**



**How would you answer each of the above questions for  
your church?**

## ELEMENT #3: SERVANTHOOD



Churches with **Servanthood** exhibit outward focus. Energy is invested in meeting real needs, not just in running the machine. Service-minded churches look outside their preferences to reach people beyond the walls.

Servanthood is so countercultural that there's really no word to describe it. There's a word for "passion" and a word for "integrity," but not for this.

"Servanthood" would mean something like "the state of being a servant." It means that you serve your community and the people in it without expecting anything in return. And that people within the church serve one another. We rarely do that, so why bother having a word that describes it?

Key questions relating to a church's Servanthood element include:

- **If your church closed down tomorrow, who would care? How many people in your community would feel sorry you were no longer there?**
- **How would people characterize your church? What do they think you're all about? Do they think you're about helping? Do they know anything about you at all?**
- **Do you work well with other organizations? Does your church partner with other entities to serve them and the community?**
- **Does your church have good systems to help people find opportunities to serve?**

Without Servanthood, the other elements of Integrity, Passion, and Imagination will build a church that is solid but self-serving.

Nobody cares if the people in your church are happy except the people in your church. The rest of the world cares about how you are helping them.

**How would you answer each of the above questions for your church?**

#### **ELEMENT #4: IMAGINATION**



**Imagination** means that the church can change to stay relevant. This element is sometimes confused with "creativity." For sure, creativity is a critical asset, and lack of creativity can lead to real problems. But Imagination is more than creativity. It refers to your church's change capacity. Are you able to leverage creativity to keep up with the world around you?

**Imagination refers to your church's "change capacity"**

Imaginative churches do two things well.

**First**, they take time to step back and look at their contexts. They pay attention to what's happening around them. This enables them to adapt to the world as it actually is, rather than pretending the world is the way they wish it would be.

**Second**, imaginative churches localize good ideas. They don't just copy what other churches are doing. They don't come back from conferences with programs that were built for a totally different context on a totally different ministry platform. Instead, they think about ways to adapt what has worked elsewhere to their unique situations.

Imaginative churches are able to meet real needs because they are aware of real needs and willing to change their methods.

Key questions relating to a church's Imagination element include:

- Do you encourage staff members and volunteers to try new things? Or do you make it hard to rock the boat?
- Does you encourage collaborative thinking on ways to do things better? Or do some people feel stifled by a top-down approach?
- How long has it been since you launched a new, church-wide initiative?
- How long has it been since you stopped doing something you've always done?
- Do innovators feel affirmed or frustrated in your church? What would they say if you asked them?

Without Imagination, the elements of Integrity, Passion, and Servanthood will build a church that is great for its members but irrelevant to everyone else.

**How would you answer each of the above questions for your church?**



### **THE CHALLENGE: BALANCING THE ELEMENTS**

Each of these elements is important. But it's also essential that the four be balanced. Churches that are strong in two or three of these areas will face special problems relating to the imbalance between their strengths and weaknesses.

For example, imagine a church that is strong on **Imagination** but weak on **Integrity**.

This church will celebrate creativity and innovation. Staff members and volunteers will have opportunities to improve existing programs and explore new projects. Things will change all the time, sometimes just for sake of change.

But very little will actually get done, because the critical systems that integrity brings will not be operational.

Big ideas will not be supported by realistic budgets. Individual ministries will do great things on their own, but in isolation from what everyone else is doing. Volunteers will feel like they've just learned a new system and language and now things are changing again. Networking will produce opportunities that you have no capacity to move on.

The church needs imagination and creativity, but it also needs solid systems to ensure that what we dream can be done.

Or picture a church that rates very high on **Integrity** but has lost its **Passion**.

This church will have rock solid systems. The bylaws and org chart are posted on the website, and members of the Board know staff job descriptions. They use the latest project management software to track progress toward objectives. They review revenues and expenses at regular staff meetings. Every proposal is carefully vetted through multiple levels.

But no one cares. People trust that money is well managed, but don't give. They are confident in the paid staff, and also content to let the staff do the work. Volunteers serve from a sense of obligation but wish they could be doing something else. Small groups form and are mapped by zip code but last about six months before fizzling out. Most people would feel good about inviting a friend to church but can't remember the last time they did.

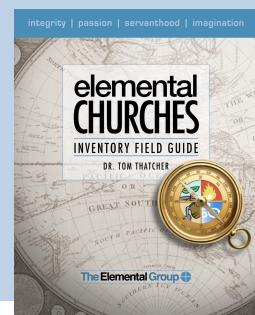
The church needs solid systems that support clearly stated goals (Integrity). But it also needs people to care about those goals and invest in them (Passion). Integrity and passion must go hand in hand.



**Which of these four elements is strongest in your church, and which is weakest?**

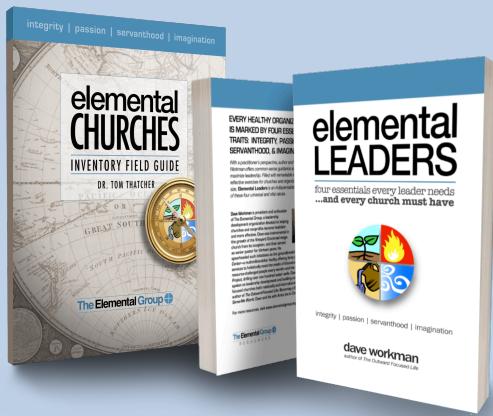
*Want to see where your personal leadership style falls on the Four Elements scale? Take our free self-assessment at [www.elementalgroup.org/inventory](http://www.elementalgroup.org/inventory).*

*Excerpted from the **Elemental Churches Field Guide** by Tom Thatcher. Tom is Co-Founder and Chief Analyst at Elemental Churches, a consulting group devoted to developing tools to help churches become healthier and more effective. The **Field Guide** is part of an inventory to measure church health and effectiveness through a comprehensive team-based audit. For a free 12-page summary of the **Elemental Leaders** book the **Field Guide** is based on, visit [www.elementalgroup.org](http://www.elementalgroup.org)*



## INTRODUCING THE ELEMENTAL CHURCHES INVENTORY

The **ELEMENTAL CHURCHES INVENTORY** is a unique web-based assessment to measure church health and effectiveness. Combining individual and team learning through online surveys and videos with personalized coaching, the Inventory provides a comprehensive report with action steps. It's a roadmap based on your own uploaded reports and surveys as you and your team work through the personal and group exercises. For more info and pricing, visit [www.elementalgroup.org/inventory](http://www.elementalgroup.org/inventory).



### THE ELEMENTAL CHURCHES INVENTORY includes:

- 12 ELEMENTAL LEADERS BOOKS
- 12 ELEMENTAL CHURCHES FIELD GUIDES (85-page workbook)
- 16 online videos
- web access to organization assessments & surveys
- interactive team exercises
- personalized consulting
- a comprehensive report with action steps

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