

Michael d'Offay

THE ART OF ELDERSHIP

LEADING WITH SKILFUL HANDS & A SERVANT HEART



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by Michael d'Offay

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Introduction

There is no higher call or weightier task than to be an elder. To be called to work with God to help prepare the church for the return of Jesus is an unimaginable privilege. As the saying goes, "If God has called you to be an elder, don't stoop to become a King." (Charles Spurgeon)

And so, the purpose of this manual is to help equip, inform and upskill future elders as to the expectations and biblical requirements of the high calling of eldership. Because of the nature of the manual and being a 'handbook' - not every statement is unpacked or nuanced comprehensively. The material here is a supplement to the training one would receive through exposure to leaders' training times, personal mentoring, and, as mentioned earlier, the discipline and training the Lord gives through passing tests we all need to face.

CHAPTER 1

The Calling of an Elder

"Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand." - Proverbs 19:21

Since the birth of the New Testament church over 2000 years ago, there have been many man-made ideas of how the church should be governed. These ideas are often rooted in the systems of the world or traditions of men. Our aim, however, is to follow the New Testament model, which we believe God has given as a blueprint to grow Jesus-centred, healthy churches. Just as we desire to have the power and grace of the early Christians, so we go back to glean from the practices of the early Church.

In Titus 1, Paul sends Titus to the island of Crete, where several churches had been birthed. These fledgling churches were filled with immature believers, divided by bad teaching, and surrounded and infiltrated by an immoral and pagan culture. The churches needed stability and health. How was Titus to do this? Paul tells him how:

"... put what remained into order and appoint elders in every town as I directed you." Titus 1:6

God's way of bringing health to His local church is to have godly men who are called to lead His people. Without good leadership, the church will flounder.

Calling

"Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood." Acts 20:28

Some key points we see from this Scripture:

- God calls those who are to be elders.
- Not all are called to be elders. Only some are called to eldership.
- God has designated the different leadership positions within the church – they are not man-made concepts or structures.
- Being an elder is not something you merely volunteer for. The Holy Spirit leads mature men to reveal those whom he has called to be elders.

How Do You Know if You Are Called?

One: There is a desire for the work

"The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task." - 1 Timothy 3:1

We must remember that in the context Paul is writing, Christianity was a persecuted movement. To be an elder meant being willing to be first to suffer when persecution came. In light of this, he is lifting up the high calling of desiring eldership.

To "aspire" for something means to direct your hope and ambition towards this office.

To "desire" involves emotions. It involves a strong feeling of wanting to walk in this calling.

If God has called you to this office, then there should be a genuine desire to want it, even at great personal cost.

We must be careful of desiring it for the wrong reasons or trying to grasp for eldership, such as:

- Promoting yourself. *"Do nothing from selfish ambition..."* Philippians 2:3
- Desiring it out of a competitive drive (Philippians 1:15).
- Desiring eldership to find the approval and applause of others.

There are many leaders today who have found their identity and worth in ministry rather than in Christ!

Two: There is an ability/aptness for the work

If God has called you, you will have an aptness for the task. This essentially means that the Lord will give you a disposition or an inherent ability to grow into eldership in your own unique way.

In 1 Samuel 17, when David went up to fight Goliath, King Saul first tried to put his personal armour on David. But the armour weighed him down, and obviously didn't fit him. The armour was made for Saul's calling, not David's. God had uniquely been equipping David with the skill to slay Goliath throughout his shepherding years, protecting his sheep from lions and bears.

God equips each leader for the specific and unique position he has been called to. Saul's armour was customised for him; for David to wear another man's armour would have probably caused his defeat instead of victory. Similarly, we can't try to "put on" or walk in another man's calling and think that we can fit into his role, or walk in the anointing that another has received. We each must walk in the calling and anointing that we have received from God.

The Lord empowers His leaders with abilities such as:

- The ability to shepherd and care for people.
- The ability to carry the wisdom of God into situations.
- The ability to lead others/have an influence over others.
- The ability, according to 1 Timothy 3:2, to be “able to teach.”

Some of these areas will be discussed in more detail later.

[illegible]

Three: There is a recognition and confirmation from others

The principle from Acts 6:3 (with the choosing of the first deacons) is that others should recognise the evidence of God's grace on your life for the call.

"Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty." Acts 6:3

Regarding 1 Timothy 3, we see that for elders and deacons, they had to show evidence of Christlikeness. Chapter 3 uses the word 'Blameless' ('above reproach') numerous times. Others would need to see some kind of fruit/evidence of godliness in their lives.

In other examples, we see that when the call of God was upon a man's life, God confirmed it through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in and upon his life, and a confirmation of this calling by other church leaders.

Barnabas and Saul: *"While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off." Acts 13:2-3*

Appointing elders at Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch: *"...strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed." Acts 14:22-23*

Timothy: *"Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you." 1 Timothy 4:14*

Being Released Into the Call of Eldership

As mentioned earlier, we take the New Testament early church practices as our model. The book of Acts describes how Paul and others from his apostolic team travelled from city to city evangelising, baptising, discipling new believers, and establishing local churches. They would appoint elders in each local church, which ensured that after the apostles moved on to other areas, each congregation would continue to thrive and grow.

In practice, how does this happen in our churches? This happens, not through elders appointing elders, or the congregation voting in new elders. Those who are called into this office are set apart, as is described in Acts 14:23, ideally through the laying on of hands by apostles, or by someone on a translocal team who has been delegated authority from an apostolic grace (as we see in Titus 1 when Paul delegates this role to Titus).

CHAPTER 2

The Position and Role of an Elder

How the Bible Defines Elders

The word 'elder' finds its roots in the Old Testament. In ancient Israel, the elders would be men who would sit at the gates of a city where they would govern who could enter, pass judgment on matters concerning the citizens of that city, and interpret laws. Each city would have its elders who would administer the affairs of their own city. This is a helpful picture for us as we apply this to New Testament elders, who provide leadership in each local church.

The New Testament uses three words for elders:

Presbuteros: translated as 'elder'

Poimén: translated as 'shepherd' (or pastor)

Episkopos: translated as 'overseer' (or bishop)

As we will see from Scripture, all three functions actually describe the role of an elder.

We see an example of this in 1 Peter 5, where Peter instructs the elders to shepherd (pastor) and to exercise oversight (be bishops) in their local context.

"So I exhort the elders (presbyteros) among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd (poimainō) the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight (episkopeō), not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory." 1 Peter 5:1-4

Another example of all three roles describing what an elder does is found in Acts 20.

“Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them”. Acts 20:17; 28-30

Let’s look more specifically at these three different words:

Elder

The word elder comes from the Greek word ‘presbuteros’, which, when translated, refers to one who is older in years and mature in age. Although we sometimes ordain elders who are fairly young in age, ultimately, they need to have spiritual maturity. Age itself is not the main factor.

Shepherd

‘Shepherd’ comes from the Greek word ‘Poimaino’. A shepherd is one who cares, guides, and protects those given into his care.

In 1 Peter 5:4, Jesus is called the Chief Shepherd and in John 10:11, the Good Shepherd. Throughout Scripture, the term shepherd was often used to describe the role of the man that God had called to lead the nation during Israel’s history. Moses tended real sheep and then the whole nation of Israel; David tended actual sheep, and as king, oversaw the nation of Israel.

It is essential that every flock of sheep has a shepherd who is faithful to his duty to protect, nourish and care for them. How much more crucial it is to have godly elders who are faithful to protect, nourish and care for the flock of God, His Church (Acts 20:28-30).

Overseer

Jesus is called the ‘*Shepherd and Overseer of your souls*.’ An overseer is one who overlooks, inspects and supervises in the church in a leadership role. He is to watch over the lives and souls of those who are given into his care.

“For you were straying like sheep but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.” 1 Peter 2:25

“The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.” 1 Timothy 3:1

Responsibilities of an Elder

The oversight of the local church is the duty and responsibility of the local elders. According to the New Testament, the elders are given various roles: to rule, lead, manage, teach, pray for the sick, encourage, discipline, set an example, and several more. Let's now look at what the Scriptures say about these responsibilities.

Rule

Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine." 1 Timothy 5:17 (KJV)

Definition: This means that they must direct, maintain, give attention to the people in their care, preside over them, and practice doing this with diligence (Strong's Greek Lexicon #4291)¹.

In 1 Timothy 3:4, Paul states that a qualification of an elder is that *"he must manage his own household well"*. Here, the same word used for 'rule' is translated as 'manage'. It is used in the same context as how a father must manage his own family.

In the context of the church, the meaning extends beyond his own biological family. He is to manage, maintain and preside over the family of God, given into his care.

"But we ask you, brothers and sisters, to recognize those who diligently labor among you and are in leadership over you in the Lord, and give you instruction..." 1 Timothy 5:17 (NASB)

"We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves." 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13

Therefore, the same respect that is given to the father of a household is the same that we are to give to the elder/s that are called to manage the household of God. They, in turn, must take the task as seriously as if each member were their own son or daughter.

¹ James Strong, "Greek Dictionary of the New Testament," The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), strong's no. G4291

Lead

Everything rises and falls on leadership. It is not an exaggeration to say that poorly led churches will quickly become unhealthy and sick. The Lord Jesus has given the authority to the elders to lead and to set direction. As much as it is up to the obedience of the flock to follow well, it is more important that the elders lead well. It has been said that good leaders are able to take people where they don't want to go, and make them want to go there! But where do we take people to? Elders are to lead people towards obedience to Christ (Matthew 28:20), and their leadership should inspire saints to love Jesus, love the church, and love the lost.

"Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the Word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith." Hebrews 13:7

"Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you." Hebrews 13:17

Be God's manager or house steward

"For an overseer, as God's steward (oikonomos), must be above reproach." Titus 1:7

Elders are charged with the responsibility of looking after the church. The word "oikonomos" means a house-distributor (i.e. manager), or overseer (i.e. an employee in that capacity); by extension, a fiscal agent (treasurer); figuratively, a preacher (of the gospel) — chamberlain, governor, steward.

Remember that no student is above his master. Elders are merely managers of God's house – Jesus and His Word are the final authority in all matters. We take ownership of God's house, but we do not own it. It is essential that every elder understands this, or else his heart will grow with pride, and the church will become part of his domain of personal ambition and ungodly gain.

God's managers/stewards are therefore participants in the lives of the people who wisely deal with prudence, the financial affairs of the church.

- Participants in the lives of the people:
- Watch over, care for (Acts 20:28);
- Shepherd and know the state of the flock.

"Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve;" 1 Peter 5:2 (NIV)

Wisely dealing with prudence, the financial affairs of the church:

- Ensuring there are godly men skilled in financial affairs to guide and direct, with wisdom.
- Making use of accountants and such skilled workers to assist him in this task.
- Having a high standard of accountability when it comes to giving an account of the finances of the church. Not using it for personal gain, but for the building up of the church.
- Ensuring his personal finances are all in order and he himself is debt-free. As he rules his own house, so shall he rule in God's house.
- It is important that there are measures of accountability in place (e.g., not one person alone handles the tithes collected). The enemy will seek every opportunity to discredit those who are working with the finances in God's House.

Able to teach

"The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching." 1 Timothy 5:17 (NIV)

It's important that all elders are able to teach on a basic level. Not all will be gifted to necessarily preach to large groups, but we should all have the desire to upskill ourselves and grow in this ability.

Unfortunately, many elders don't feel the need to master the craft of preaching. But those who are "able to teach" effectively have the opportunity to have greater influence for Christ. It is the duty of an elder to ensure that the congregation has a healthy, well-balanced, regular 'diet' of the Word of God. We don't need the theories and philosophies of men, but the Scriptures skilfully broken open, which point back to Jesus.

This topic will be discussed further under the 'The Skills of an Elder' section.

Pray for the sick

"Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord." James 5:14

Visiting and praying for the saints when they are sick or in the hospital is an important role of an elder. This is one of the most practical ways in which saints experience an elder's care and the love of Christ.

Encourage and correct

“Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.” 2 Timothy 4:2

Encouraging and urging those under your care is essential for the health of the Church. It is easy to focus on the ‘wrongs’ and neglect to build up and exhort the Body of Christ. Rather, the saints should always ‘feel your smile’, so to speak. They need to know you are for them, and that you love them. Words of encouragement are a simple and powerful way to build others up. Of course, the ultimate way that we can encourage others is to point them to Jesus, as Barnabas did in Acts 11:23.

By encouraging and building the Church, she is strengthened and motivated to continue to run the race that has been set before her, *“looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith.”* Hebrews 12:2.

It is also vital that elders “reprove and rebuke” at times. This should always be done in love and gentleness (Galatians 6:1) and never out of frustration. Like a parent who disciplines his children, elders need to be faithful to patiently speak the truth in love. Of course, we need to model receiving correction as well, and seek it. Giving correction (pointing out faults/sins) should be done ideally from the bridge of a relationship which has been built up over time. In this way, a saint or leader is much more likely to receive ‘a hard or heavy truth’ if there is a bridge of relationship. Sometimes this is not possible, especially when there is sin that must be addressed. More of this will be discussed in the section dealing with exercising church discipline.

Set an example

“So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.” 1 Peter 5:1-3

“Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.” 1 Corinthians 11:1 (NIV)

Ensure that your life, public and private, is a model and example that those you lead can follow. This also means setting an example in vulnerability and even a willingness to confess sin. Those who follow us aren’t looking for perfect leaders, but for people who are consistent in their faith in Jesus and love for the Church.

There is great power in leading by example. Rather than trying to drive people or assert God’s will in a domineering way (1 Peter 5:3), good leadership inspires change by modelling what a disciple of Jesus looks like. You might be able to preach or communicate truth in a powerful way, but if there is no power of example, all our preaching is ultimately ineffective.

Exercise church discipline

“For the Lord disciplines the one he loves and chastises every son whom he receives.’ It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.” Hebrews 12:6-8

Elders are like fathers in the household who take responsibility for discipline. Church discipline, when Spirit-led and rooted in love, can beautifully display the Father’s heart towards the one who has sinned.

The purpose of godly discipline is to restore and show love. Discipline is needed when there is rebellion, defiance, and disobedience to the Word of God. Be cautious to differentiate between spiritual immaturity versus **persistent** spiritual defiance or rebellion, which is sin.

We do not discipline in areas where the Bible has no clear commandments. For example, having an alcoholic beverage is not in itself sin, but drunkenness is.

As a disclaimer: dealing with church discipline is, by its very nature serious. Therefore the eldership team, once they have prayerfully considered the issue, should get perspective and input from translocal and apostolic gifts (see Chapter 7).

Persistent violations of God’s moral commandments (1 Corinthians 5:10-11; 6:9-10; 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:3-5).

The Scriptures give us clear guidelines when elders are to implement church discipline:

- Violations of God’s moral commandments (1 Corinthians 5:10-11; 6:9-10; 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:3-5).
- Unresolved relational sins, such as gossip, slander, anger, and abusive speech (Matthew 18:15-20; Ephesians 4:25-31; Galatians 5:19-21; Colossians 3:8).
- Divisiveness in the church (Romans 16:17-18; Titus 3:10; 3 John 9-10).
- False teaching on major doctrines (Galatians 1:8-9; 1 Timothy 1:20; 6:3-5; 2 John 9-11).
- Disorderly conduct and refusal to work (2 Thessalonians 3:6-15; 1 Timothy 5:8).

The procedure for church discipline according to Matthew 18:15-18:

- Step 1: A private meeting (vs 15) - if no repentance;
- Step 2: Calling two or three witnesses (vs 16) - if no repentance;
- Step 3: A public announcement to the church (vs 17) - if no repentance;
- Step 4: Public exclusion from the church (vs 17b).
- Step 5: Public restoration when there is genuine repentance (2 Corinthians 2:6-11).

What is included in the discipline process:

Instruction: Inform and patiently teach them from the Scriptures that their actions are sinful. The phrase in Matthew 18:15, “*go and tell him his fault*”, implies (in Greek) that one would need to go more than once if need be. Sometimes a person needs time to see their sin.

Exhortation: Encourage and try to persuade/convince them that through the power of the Holy Spirit, they can stop sinning, and that forgiveness and grace are available to them from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Admonition: Warn them of the consequences and price their sin has for them, and those that their sin impacts. The effect of sin is never isolated just to the sinner but to the whole body of Christ. When one hurts, all hurt. (See 1 Corinthians 12:26.)

Reproof: This is when we expose someone’s sin to help them repent.

Rebuke: In love, it is needful for them to receive a sharp, direct and severe reprimand from the eldership for their sin, especially if there is no repentance yet.

Excommunication: “*A little leaven leavens the whole lump.*” Galatians 5:9

- Sin left in the body of Christ will have a devastating effect on other members of the body.
- Cut off the person from any participation or privilege.
- Withdrawing from the offender.
- Handing the offender’s flesh over for discipline.

Note: This is the most severe discipline and shouldn’t be taken lightly. It should only be considered after all the aforementioned disciplinary steps have been taken. One must be very sure of the facts before applying this discipline.

“If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame.” Proverbs 18:13

The eldership team, in agreement with the apostolic, should apply the latter two aspects of discipline. Read: Proverbs 15:10, 1 Corinthians 5:5, 11:1; 1 Timothy 1:19-20, 6:3-5 and Titus 3:10-11.

Lastly, we need to consider what happens if an elder sins:

- Scripture says: “*Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear.*” 1 Timothy 5:19-20
- All accusations against elders must be taken seriously, particularly when there is evidence from others.
- Because of the public nature of eldership, the elder, if guilty, must be disciplined publicly before the church “in the presence of all”. This is to create a healthy sense of the fear of God, that we deal with sin, and walk in transparency in these matters.
- When an elder sins, sexually or morally, it is important that the apostolic is involved in the disciplinary process.

CHAPTER 3

The Qualifications of an Elder

"The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. he must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? he must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil." 1 Timothy 3:1-11

"If anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. he must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. he must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it." Titus 1: 6-9

"So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." 1 Peter 5:1-5

The New Testament clearly lays out the requirements that are essential qualifiers for eldership, as well as those things that would disqualify him. These lists of qualifications are, in a sense, what every Christian should walk in. They are not special characteristics only an elder should have, but are what every Jesus-lover should walk in. So if ordinary saints want to see what a mature, godly Christian should look like, they should see it in the life of an elder.

Qualifiers

Above reproach

This speaks of one who is not deserving of blame or criticism. Someone who is not subject to discredit, and there is no reason to find fault with him. When their lives are properly scrutinised, no reason is found to convict them of any serious sin or fault.

Blameless does not mean that we are perfectly sinless or faultless, for only the Lord Jesus lived a sinless life. Being blameless means that elders should not live a “double life”, living one way publicly and another privately. There should be no secret sins or areas that they have allowed the devil to have a foothold in their lives.

Husband of one wife

Literally a man of one woman; a man who has monogamous fidelity. Someone who is faithful and devoted to his wife alone. It is therefore also implied that the role of elder is to be fulfilled by a man, and that marriage is between one man and one woman only.

Sober-minded

To be sober-minded speaks of one who is not given to extremes. Some versions refer to being temperate. It also implies that they are not captivated by any influence that would lead them away from sound judgment.

An elder must be even-tempered, not given to any extremes in thinking or behaviour. His life should be one of sober-mindedness, not given to silliness, irresponsible choices, or foolish experimentation. Any of these things would hinder him from making godly, Spirit-led decisions as he oversees the House of God.

Self-controlled

This is the ability to control desires. To say “no” to the sinful nature; self-control is a fruit of the Holy Spirit that God gives to us as we walk with Him. Having self-control also means that we surrender our own will and yield to the help and will of God. This is an essential virtue of every elder, for an elder who does not exercise self-control cannot lead others.

Respectable

This speaks of a life that is upright, honourable, fulfilling the duty that has been given to one. Possessing the qualities and worth that are worthy of others' respect. Having conduct, conversation and a lifestyle that is honourable and upright.

It is important that the entire sphere of an elder's life must be one that is worthy of the respect of others. This is important to note, especially when ministering cross-culturally. It involves being sensitive in different cultures when there are different standards of dress, speech, conduct and actions. An elder cannot be given to lewd behaviour. Elders must exhibit behaviour that is pleasing to our King, whether that be in meetings or in 'everyday life,' in public and in private.

Hospitable

Being hospitable literally means to ‘love strangers’. It is being a person who is welcoming, friendly and generous, receiving and caring for the needs of strangers, visitors and family.

Hospitality defined the lifestyle of the early Church. Being hospitable, specifically by welcoming people into our homes, gives us a platform to show brotherly love and the affection of Christ. The fruit will be the building of sincere and genuine relationships, which should be the heart of every elder. This is also an exceptional tool of evangelism. We can open our homes and hearts to the unsaved, that they may experience the love and warmth of Jesus and his people.

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:34-35

An elder sees the church as family and acknowledges that it is his responsibility to draw people into the life of the family and to do so without prejudice or favouritism (James 2:1-4).

Able to teach

This is the ability to communicate, explain, and apply the Word of God with clarity, understanding and application for the hearers.

This is the one qualification that involves gifting. As discussed previously, one of the most important responsibilities of the elders is to feed and build up the Body of Christ through teaching. This is not merely the imparting of information, but opening and explaining the Word of God, and giving practical application that others can grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Throughout Scripture, we see how it is the eldership team’s responsibility (along with apostolic oversight) to protect the sheep from deception. Failure to do so will result in much damage to the church and to many individuals. Indeed, much of the New Testament is given over to refuting false teaching. The apostles were not reluctant to condemn what they saw as heresy and to warn the church to avoid the teachings of certain men whom they were even willing to name (1 Timothy 1:20; 2 Timothy 4:14).

Manages his own household well

The word ‘manage’ speaks of ruling or leading others as he has been delegated authority to do so. The home is the training and proving ground for a man to qualify to take on the responsibility of ruling and leading, with loving, servant leadership, the Church of God.

“he must manage his own family well, having children who respect and obey him. For if a man cannot manage his own household, how can he take care of God’s church?” 1 Timothy 3:4-5 (NLT)

If a man cannot be faithful with his wife and children, how can he be expected to be faithful with the family of God? It is in our home where our faith and leadership are first demonstrated.

Submissive/believing/faithful children

This speaks of having children that are brought up in the faith and teaching of the Lord, taught the ways and values of God's Word.

"... having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination" Titus 1:6 (NKJV)

The word translated as 'believing' here can also be rendered as 'faithful'. We do not believe that a man is disqualified from eldership if his children grow up to become unbelievers, for it is not in anyone's ability to make someone a believer in Christ. They must choose to follow Jesus Christ themselves, but they must be raised in Christian values and teachings.

If young and teenage children are rebellious and disrespectful to their parents or others in authority over them (i.e. Sunday school teachers, school teachers, deacons, elders, older people), this can often be attributed to a lack of guidance and discipline from their parents, especially the father.

Every child is free to make their own choices, yet if a man's children are rebellious, it should raise questions about his ability to be a father in the household of God.

Is well thought of by outsiders

This speaks of having a good reputation with people from outside of the church, including other Christians and especially non-believers.

"Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil." 1 Timothy 3:7

An elder's character and lifestyle must be above reproach according to the standards clearly set in the Word of God. To anyone who would scrutinise or watch his life, such as neighbours, colleagues, and those he encounters daily, they must not be able to find any reason to accuse him of not upholding his integrity. This does not mean that a man must be without enemies or accusations from those outside the church (for the devil himself is the accuser of the saints of God), for this would disqualify the Apostle Paul and our Lord Himself.

It stresses the consistency of an elder's character – that he is not to live with double standards or walk in hypocrisy.

Does he act the same way in front of his unsaved work colleagues as he does with his church friends? Is he a good employee or an honest businessman? Does he work hard and live a life of integrity? Do people know that he is a believer? Does he share his faith? Do his wife and children consider him suitable for the position of an elder by the way he treats them at home?

These are all questions that need to be asked of an individual before he is brought into eldership. Consider this: if it is valid to ask for a reference from a previous employer before recruiting a person into a secular job, is it not even more important when ordaining someone into eldership, in the Household of Faith?

Paul tells us in this Scripture that if the elder gives people outside the church reasons to speak badly of him, it will bring disgrace to God's church and to the gospel. And he will fall into the devil's trap, whose aim is to disqualify him and cause him to increase in sin.

A lover of good, upright, holy

An elder should love all that is good because that is what every Christian should love.

A man's heart is revealed by what he loves. Whatever he loves will consume his passion, devotion and time. It will dominate his thoughts, motivations and determine what is most important to him. For example, if one is passionate about a certain sport, one is willing to make sacrifices financially to attain what is required for the sport. A whole day is easily given up, ensuring time is available for that sport or game.

Every believer is called to live a life that is holy – set apart for the way and will of God. We do not do things to make us holy, but we are able to live holy lives by the power of the Holy Spirit living within us. A leader needs to let his life be an example for others to follow, a life that loves what is good and desires to yield every area of his body, heart, mind, and ways to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Like the Apostle Paul, he should humbly be able to say: *"Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ."*
1 Corinthians 11:1

Self-controlled and disciplined

This speaks of the ability to be able to control one's own emotions, desires, wants, ways, will and actions – in any and every situation. The fruit of being able to control these things will result in a disciplined lifestyle. This is ultimately displayed in the choosing to obey God's will over one's own desires and will.

Being self-controlled is essential to our obedience to God and our resistance to the influences of the world, our sinful flesh, and the devil. Our loving Father, knowing our nature, has given us His Holy Spirit to enable us to have His power to resist the temptations to which we once yielded, before accepting Christ as our Saviour. As we grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, self-control is a fruit of the Holy Spirit that God produces in us as we walk with Him (Galatians 5:22-23).

Lacking self-discipline will disqualify a believer from the calling that he has received from God. To be a follower of Jesus means to subject oneself to discipline. We must master our flesh, with the Spirit's help, or else our flesh will master us. We aim to discipline our time, our thoughts, our emotions, and our actions. An elder must lead by example in the spiritual disciplines such as prayer, worship, studying the Word, giving, fellowship, etc.

Holds firm to the trustworthy Word as taught

“Holds firm” - Refusing to change what one has been doing or believing. To remain determined and unyielding in one’s position and opinion.

“The trustworthy Word” - The Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation. Also, “the trustworthy Word” can refer to the preaching of the gospel and the Lordship of Jesus, which is what the Apostles taught.

“as taught” - Every elder needs to have one from whom he is always learning and receiving instruction about God’s Word. It is prideful to think that we are beyond the need of learning from godly men of the previous age and the present age. They must be students of God’s Word. The reason for this is given by Paul as he instructs Titus in his eldership role, “He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.” Titus 1:9 (own emphasis added)

“Sound teaching”- Healthy teaching from the Word of God that produces godly living, promotes healthy faith and love, and brings together all the Scriptures on every topic/teaching that the Bible addresses. Teaching Scriptural truths in the context in which they are found.

An elder needs to know how to give instruction, and give an answer for what he believes and what he is teaching. For many false teachers and doctrines will try to enter the church, and he must be able to “fight” back by giving answers to those who ask or challenge the Word of God.

Disqualifiers

“For an overseer, as God’s steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain...” Titus 1:7-8

As we go through these disqualifiers, we must note that it doesn’t just apply to your public life at church, but just as equally and essentially in your private life at home, with your wife and children.

Arrogance

Being arrogant speaks of behaving in a manner that makes others feel inferior to you. Having an overinflated sense of self, which can reflect in speech, talk, actions, and motives.

Humility is an essential quality of a godly leader. A helpful scale to measure this in your own heart is to think about the conversations that you have with others. Do you talk more about yourself than about showing an interest in others' lives? Do you boast about what "God is doing in your ministry" and feel jealous when you hear how the Lord is blessing another man's ministry/church?

As leaders in God's house, we should embrace humility and never let her go! Remember what happened to King Nebuchadnezzar when he looked over the great city of Babylon, exclaiming, "... Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?" Daniel 4:30

For seven years after that, he lived as the cows in his fields; eating grass, dishevelled, moving on all fours until the day his heart was properly humbled, and he was able to declare that the God of the Hebrews alone is king, master and creator of all heaven and earth.

"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, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned." Romans 12:3

Being quick-tempered

One who is easily irritated or angry and is inclined towards angry responses or outbursts. Such a person is also prone to finding faults in others to justify their responses and anger.

As leaders in God's Church, we should always reflect the nature of Jesus Christ in sincerity and truth. Despite excuses used to justify your anger due to your culture or upbringing, Jesus has given us His Holy Spirit to live within us, enabling us to be self-controlled and patient. Don't make excuses for sinful behaviour.

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law." Galatians 5:22-23

A drunkard

A drunkard is a person who drinks too much wine, or any strong drink, to the point that they are intoxicated, no longer able to be in control of their person, words and actions.

Whilst it is self-evident that an elder should not be an alcoholic, it is fair to say that we could interpret this as a general requirement that an elder should not be addicted or under the control of any form of drug/narcotic or alcoholic beverage. An elder must be able to exercise control over the 'desires of the flesh' (Galatians 5:16-26), and not over-indulge, should he feel he can have an alcoholic beverage.

He must not be mastered by anything except Christ. Elders must remain sober and always be ready "in and out of season" to be able to fulfil their obligations with clarity and a sound mind. In addition, we also need to take note that our liberty doesn't cause anyone else in our leadership or congregation to stumble or be tempted in any way. Paul teaches this in 1 Corinthians 8:1-13, stating that we must, *"take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak."* 1 Corinthians 8:9

Violent

Being violent speaks of using physical force to harm, damage, hurt or destroy another person or an object. It can also refer to the emotions felt in a situation. The direct Greek translation, “a striker” (Strong’s Greek)².

An elder should not be known for his physical violence, either publicly or privately. He certainly shouldn’t be aggressive towards his wife or children. A violent man would hinder the work of God in the church, creating discord, not peace and unity. As a side note, this does not mean that a man can’t defend himself or his family when attacked or assaulted, in self-defence.

Should an elder be prone to violence, it will make him unapproachable to those he is supposed to be serving. An elder must have a gentle spirit, and he must be approachable (2 Timothy 2:24).

A lover of money

One who is in love with personal gain and is never satisfied with what he has.

“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” Matthew 6:24

An essential prerequisite to being a follower of Jesus is the denial of self and living for the glory of God and His Kingdom. Not only will the pursuit of wealth distract you from your calling as an elder, but in Matthew 16:24-26, Jesus gives a stern warning for those who choose to gain the world’s riches and ways: *“Then Jesus told his disciples, ‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?’”* Matthew 16:24-26

² James Strong, “Greek Dictionary of the New Testament,” The New Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), strong’s no. G4131.

This does not mean that we shouldn't be wise stewards with the money that the Lord gives us and wisely invest, plan and prepare for the future. As a workman is certainly worthy of his wage (1 Timothy 5:18). It is important to care and provide for the needs and expenses that you and your family have. But when gaining more money, a better vehicle or a larger house is your sole motivation, it distracts you from your calling, and you know that your heart has shifted out of the place of loyal devotion to Jesus. In that place, repentance and faith in His provision is needed again.

Scripture also speaks against showing favour to wealthy members and neglecting the poorer members of your church (James 2:1-4).

"Those who love money will never have enough. How meaningless to think that wealth brings true happiness!" Ecclesiastes 5:10 (NLT)

Quarrelsome

A person who has a contentious nature, who often starts or gets involved in arguments, is defined by this weakness. Often, the arguments are over petty and non-consequential matters.

In Matthew 12:25b, Jesus says, *"every city or house divided against itself will not stand"* (NIV). If an elder is contentious, it is likely that most elders' meetings will end in disagreements, especially as a person of this nature doesn't like to be proven wrong. The sin of pride is at the root of this.

And if there is no unity amongst the leadership, or between the elder and the members of his congregation, and especially if there is discord between him and his wife and children, the Lord can't bless that work. Psalm 133 speaks clearly to us about how the Lord blesses those who dwell in unity, agreement, and peace.

Being a kind, patient elder who corrects people with gentleness may be the means that God uses to bring people to salvation and liberate them from the bondage that the devil has had them in. As Paul says to Timothy;

"Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will."
2 Timothy 2:23-26

Not a recent convert /novice

The word “novice” is taken from the Greek word ‘neophutos,’ which literally means “newly planted” (Strong Greek Concordance)³. It refers to a person who is new and inexperienced in a specific area or job.

"He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil." 1 Timothy 3:6

Being a recent convert is certainly a disqualification to become an elder or leader in the church, and Paul argues this fact with two warnings:

- He may become puffed up with conceit/pride.
- He may fall into the condemnation of the devil.

It is for the safety and protection of a young believer not to put him in this position. He is not spiritually mature enough to cope with the office and the spiritual weight which it carries. He will be an easy target for the enemy when it comes to pride and condemnation, as he isn't mature in the Word of God and his relationship with Christ.

Paul doesn't mention a specific age, for some men may get saved later in life, and a younger man may have been walking with the Lord for many years, thus being more spiritually mature and grounded in the Word of God.

This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal dotted lines, typical of primary school writing paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

³ James Strong, "Greek Dictionary of the New Testament," *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), strong's no. G3504.

CHAPTER 4

The Heart of an Elder

At the core of our being, our hearts should be rooted and grounded in the love of Christ, for out of this endless well we will be able to minister and lead the flock of God that he has put into our care. Any word, action, or thought that is not embraced and motivated by love will cause pain and hurt for those involved. Therefore, we should be praying always, for the love of Christ to fill us, and overflow through us.

The motivation for our serving and leading people is love. Paul says, “... *through love serve one another.*” Galatians 5:13

As we study 1 Corinthians 13, we can learn what biblical love looks like, and how it changes the way we lead, live and reflect Christ.

“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” 1 Corinthians 13:1-8

“So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love...Pursue love...” 1 Corinthians 13:13;14:1a

The more we abide in Jesus, in His Word, in worship and in prayer, His Holy Spirit will transform us from within and begin to fill us with the heart and nature of the Lord who loves.

The Characteristics of Love

Patient

This is the ability to endure disappointment, trials, misfortune, and delay without complaint, anger or irritation.

Patience is a vital characteristic of every leader. Being part of people's lives is one of the privileges of serving as an elder. Rarely will people respond quickly to correction, direction or repentance. We could get frustrated, which could end up hurting them and damaging the relationship between you and a church member. We must rely on the Holy Spirit to help work in us the fruit of patience.

It is essential that you exercise patience in your home. How would your wife and children describe you? May the Lord help us not to walk in the sin of hypocrisy.

Let us see every opportunity as from the Lord to grow us in this attribute of love. We need to lovingly and patiently guide people in their life's journey. Considering and following the example of Jesus towards us, knowing how patient He was with us; *"Don't you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Does this mean nothing to you? Can't you see that his kindness is intended to turn you from your sin?"* Romans 2:8 (NLT)

"The greatest sin of leadership is impatience." - Henry Blackaby

Kind

To be kind is to be selfless, merciful, and compassionate. It's loving others – even our enemies – treating all people with respect, and being willing to help those who are in need.

Consider the life of Jesus, and the kindness He showed towards those whom society considered outcasts and not worthy of attention. Jesus touched the lepers, conversed with the adulteress, and showed his kindness in every merciful healing.

"Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."
Ephesians 4:32

We serve a kind God, a God of grace and mercy! And it was His kindness towards us that led us to Him to receive forgiveness and salvation.

"Don't you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Does this mean nothing to you? Can't you see that his kindness is intended to turn you from your sin?" Romans 2:4 (NLT)

Therefore, considering what we have received, as leaders, above all others, we must be showing great acts of kindness to both the saved and the unsaved. Your family, church, colleagues, and all

whom you encounter daily – lavishly and abundantly. When the Apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians and said, “*be kind*”. It was a command, not a suggestion.

“Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay.” Matthew 10:8

Does not boast, is not proud

To boast is to talk with excessive pride and self-satisfaction about one’s accomplishments or achievements. Boasting walks hand-in-hand with pride, as together it causes the heart to focus on self, and to take all the credit and glory for what has been done in and through one’s life.

Suffice to say, boasting and pride should have no place in the life of any Christian, and especially a Christian leader. The Lord makes it very clear how He feels about pride;

“The Lord detests the proud; they will surely be punished.” Proverbs 16:5 (NLT)

Pride is the original sin that got Lucifer and a third of the angels expelled from heaven (Luke 10:18, Revelation 12:4,9, Isaiah 14:12–14; Ezekiel 28:12–18). Right from the start of humanity, the devil appealed to Adam and Eve’s pride, to want to be like God, and caused the entrance of sin into humanity.

In absolute contrast, we read of the nature and attitude of the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, when He came down to save us;

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” Philippians 2:5–8

The result of Christ assuming this humble posture: *“Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Philippians 2:9–11*

Daily, and if need be, hourly, we must keep our hearts in check! The root of pride is just waiting to be fed and destroy the good work that God wants to do through a humble life. The pathway to grace is through humility, and the road to destruction is paved with pride.

“God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.” James 4:6 (NKJV)

Is not rude

As we speak into people's lives and reflect the heart and nature of Christ to them, this should be done in a manner that isn't rude, coarse, bad-mannered, improper, discourteous, nasty or impolite. Doing this will most certainly lose their heart and damage our testimony. Amongst your family and friends, consider the jokes you tell, or the words that you use, and be careful of the kind of banter and sarcasm that break others down.

"To speak evil of no one, to avoid quarrelling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people." Titus 3:2

If you are struggling with inappropriate speech or conduct towards others, whether in your home or in your church, this is something urgent that you need to bring towards the Lord. The way we speak is transformed by what we feed our minds. Therefore, *"Don't copy the behaviour and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect."* Romans 12:2 (NLT)

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God." Colossians 3:16

Is not self-seeking

The world preaches that we must put self-first. Jesus made it very clear in Matthew that, *"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."* Matthew 16:24

As Christ laid down His life for us, we are called to lay our lives down for Him. Church leadership is not a stepping stone to more authority and power over the lives of others! It is a path to humility, of growing in Christlikeness, and modelling Christ's heart. As we mature in our years, as leaders, the role of servanthood should grow stronger and stronger, as we are continually being made into the image of Christ through sanctification.

"Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others." Philippians 2: 3-4

Is not easily angered

If it doesn't take much to make you angry, you are easily angered. Whether the car in front of you takes three seconds longer than you think it should to move, or the slightest word of rebuke gets your defensiveness up, you are easily angered. You cannot blame or justify it by genetics or cultural peculiarities; it is a sin that should be repented of.

Consider what other areas of love are displayed when you aren't easily angered: patience, kindness, goodness, keeping no record of wrong, gentleness. Therefore, surely, to fall short in this area is to fall short in all the areas of true love.

In any form of leadership in the church, you will most certainly encounter people who either disagree with you, don't like the way you do things, or have unresolved issues in their lives that you will bear the brunt of. How you respond is crucial to your testimony and witness of Jesus. Consider these times as opportunities to be tested to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ, and when "your buttons are pushed" - pause and pray. Ask the Holy Spirit for His power to enable you to be "not easily angered."

"A gentle answer deflects anger, but harsh words make tempers flare." Proverbs 15:1 (NLT)

Keeps no record of wrongs

"For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." Jeremiah 31:34

One of the endless blessings of being a New Covenant Christian is that God forgives our sins and remembers them no more. In Jesus, we are loved and accepted by God.

Our sinful human nature can recall and recount every wrong ever done against it. But, filled with the Spirit of Christ, He who has broken the curse of sin and death, enables us to forgive and forget even the greatest wrongs done against us! If someone has wronged you, and they come and ask you for forgiveness, confessing that what they did was a sin, following the example of Jesus, you must forgive and forget. For we have all sinned, and certainly ourselves wronged another.

Consider Jesus words; *"You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye."* Matthew 7:5

However, in some contexts, you must seek wisdom and godly counsel should the person be unrepentant, or it is more than just an unkind word. Where the law has been broken, justice must prevail, and the correct legal proceedings must be followed. But God, even then, will enable forgiveness and even forgetfulness in those dire circumstances.

Modelling this in your life will encourage and comfort those you lead to be able to come and confess and seek counsel for any wrongs that they have committed. Giving them the same hope that we have all received through the blood of Jesus Christ.

Does not delight in evil

We must be leaders who will not compromise with sin, excuse or accommodate it; in our lives, and in the lives of the members of our church. With each passing year, what was sin in the past, the world now applauds as good. Such things shouldn't happen amongst the people of God. His timeless Word has clearly revealed to us what is evil, and under no circumstances must we compromise, changing with the times, and take great pleasure (delight) in it.

"Who rejoice in doing evil and delight in the perverseness of evil." Proverbs 2:14

"Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them." Romans 1:32

In the above verse, the Holy Spirit leads Paul to write that a person is guilty even if they are not actually practising the sin, but approving (have a positive opinion, admiring, favourable) of the one doing it. Consider what you watch - which websites you visit - the places you go?

Rejoices with the truth

Confronted by the riotous mob of angry Jews, face to face with the beaten and bloodied Christ, Pilot asked, *"What is truth?"* (John 18:38, NIV).

According to dictionary.net, truth is defined as; "Conformity to fact or reality; exact accordance with that which is or has been; or shall be."⁴

There is no middle ground with truth. There is no such thing as a "half-truth."

In John 14:6, Jesus declares that He is The Way, The Truth, and The Life. Therefore, to delight and rejoice in truth is to delight and rejoice in Jesus, in all that He is, says and does. In doing this, we find relationship with God (John 14:6), freedom (John 8:32), intimacy with God (Psalm 145:18), One who is our Shield and our Defence (Proverbs 30:5), guidance and direction (John 16:13), and so much more.

To walk in the truth means to "walk in the light", and in doing this, we will have unbroken fellowship with God and with others. When there is "darkness" or sin in our lives, that light is shaded, and it reflects brightly into every area of our lives!

"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin." 1 John 1:7

⁴ <https://www.dictionary.net/truth>

Always protects

Our English word ‘protects’ has its origins in an old French word that means “a covering over.” Shepherds of the flock of God are called to be a covering over their lives. We are responsible for the state of our sheep, and we fulfil this duty by:

- Ensuring that they are fed on a healthy diet of God’s Word⁵.
- Protected from the enemy and equipped to withstand him in times of warfare.
- Taught how to navigate the ways of the world.
- Keeping watch over them as a shepherd does his sheep.
- Having a healthy church body and a place where they can flourish, mature, and be fruitful and multiply (sheep beget sheep).

Unprotected, uncovered sheep will most likely be devoured by the enemy of our souls, the temptations of the world, and the various lusts of their flesh. It is our solemn duty to protect, feed, teach, train and cover those that are in our care.

“So guard yourselves and God’s people. Feed and shepherd God’s flock—his church, purchased with his own blood—over which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as leaders.” Acts 20:28 (NLT)

Always trusts

When we truly love someone, our default posture is not one of suspicion or always thinking the worst. Elders aim to give them the benefit of the doubt until proven otherwise.

This essentially means choosing to believe the best of the person. Of course, we still have to exercise discernment and wisdom with people. For example, when a newcomer wants to be involved in a ministry of the church, we would need to take time to get to know them. We don’t blindly trust everyone who walks through our doors.

Always hopes

Elders are custodians of hope. Through the gospel, we deal with the currency of hope in a world that lacks certainty. Hope is the feeling, desire and expectation that something better will happen. Time and again, this world proves that we cannot put our hope in its ways and people, hence the escalating rise in depression and suicide. For there is but One in whom we can hope. In Christ and His Word is the absolute certainty that all He has promised will come to pass, and He won’t fail. He is the God of Hope (Romans 15:13).

As leaders, the more you have immersed yourself in the Word of God and filled your soul with the hope of His promises, the more impact you will be able to have on others.

“I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth, you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.” John 16:33 (NLT)

⁵ <https://www.dictionary.net/truth>

Always perseveres

To persevere means that we don't give up on the given task or person, regardless of obstacles, delays, hardships, trials or unexpected events.

As Spurgeon once stated, “By perseverance the snail reached the ark.”

It is easier to give up than to persevere. As leaders, there will be many hardships and trials that we will face in the ministry. We must adopt the mindset that “defeat is not an option.” When leading and loving people, it is easier to give up on those who consistently fail or repeatedly disappoint you. But true love perseveres with them, or within the circumstances sent by the Lord. Nothing is out of the control and direction of the Lord.

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” James 1:2-4 (NIV)

Persevering involves developing a resilient attitude. This means being a leader who can, by the grace and power of God, withstand and recover quickly from the difficult circumstances that you are going to go through. When you serve in eldership, very quickly you discover not everyone likes all you do or agrees with you. People, even Christians, can be very cruel and thoughtless in the things they say. We need to be able to get back up after trial or tragedy, with a pure heart, not harbouring bitterness or grudges.

[illegible]

How Are You Loving?

What areas of love do you need the Holy Spirit to grow you in? Being completely honest – as the Lord knows all your weaknesses – use the simple chart below to reveal areas of your life where you need to grow in love. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you the secrets of your heart, and be open to hear and obey Him in what He instructs you to do. Consider each aspect of love in the context of both your family and ministry relationships.

LOVE IS...	NEED TO GROW	DOING WELL	REASON WHY?	ANYTHING TO REPENT & PRAY INTO
Patient				
Kind				
Does not envy				
Does not boast				
Is not arrogant				
Is not rude				
Does not insist on your own way				
Is not irritable				
Is not resentful				
Does not rejoice in evil				
Rejoices in the Truth				
Bearing all things				
Believes all things				
Hopes all things				
Endures all things				
Love never ends				

CHAPTER 5

The Skills of an Elder

Psalm 78 tells us how David led God's people with a heart of integrity and with skilful hands. The qualifications of a leader, as we learn from David, involve not just being a person of character but also being a skilful leader. There are many skills required to be an effective and consistent elder who represents the Lord Jesus well. Of course, we spend a lifetime growing into these skills, but this is what we aim for and work to improve in.

The Skill of Leading a Meeting

"Everything must be done so that the church may be built up." 1 Corinthians 14:26b (NIV)

- When you lead as an elder, make sure you are spiritually, mentally and physically prepared.
- Be rested and informed about all that is happening during the meeting that you are leading (e.g., communion, baby dedications, testimonies, etc.).
- Pray and seek the Lord's heart for the meeting. You can never be too "prayed up."
- Come to the meeting with faith.
- If you are having personal struggles that morning/evening, find another leader to pray for you beforehand, and stand with you in prayer as you lead.
- Expect that God wants to work in the lives of His people.
- Don't use the excuse not to be prepared that you are "just going to rely on the Spirit". You must always be listening and always be yielding to the work and will of God for His church.
- Have faith and confidence in God's calling upon your life as you lead.
- Jesus Christ has promised to be present where there are more than two or three gathered in His Name, so you can be assured of His Presence, and take comfort in that fact (Matthew 18:20).

- The more time that you personally spend reading the Word of God, getting to know Jesus, His ways, His words, His heart, the more sensitive you will be to know His voice. The more you know the Word of God, the more you will be able to discern His will in situations. When someone comes to you with a word to share, does it carry the heart and life of Jesus? Knowing the Spirit of Jesus through His Word is crucial for your discernment when leading any meeting or church service.
- Essential; Jesus said, *"I will build my church"* (Matthew 18:18). Elders are called to be faithful messengers and conduits for the Lord to use and speak through. Keep praying throughout the meeting and listen to his voice and leading.
- The leader of the meeting is the one who guides and directs the flow of the meeting. God is a God of order; creation tells us that, so everything in the worship service must be done in an orderly fashion, *"To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."* Corinthians 12:7. Common is *'symphoneo'* in Greek, which is where we get our English word for symphony. It takes all members of the Body to make up the whole – it's beautiful when the worship, the words shared, and the message all flow together. When being led by the Spirit, He does that for us.
- The leader should know what the leaders can do. It helps to know what the spiritual gifts are that are available amongst your leaders. The eldership team must be available to get counsel and advice from on words or direction. Lean on them. Church is a team sport.
- If the words people are bringing aren't in alignment or seem to be "all over the place", stay with the last thing you heard. Don't get confused and panicky.
- Follow God. Be flexible even when it is totally against what you had planned.
- When the flow of your service changes, explain and take the congregation with you. Don't leave anyone behind, by them not understanding.
- If you have a visiting preacher or a leader, ensure that they are given the maximum time for that service. Honour them with time.
- Get input from others.
- If someone brings a word to you and you are unsure whether you should release it or not, ask an elder or a mature saint. Draw from those who are ahead of you.
- As a team, make sure that you honour the authority of the one who is leading.
- Don't grab the mic if you have something to share. Submit and honour their duty to lead.
- Be prepared and ready to engage, in and out of season.
- Be alert as to what is going on around you while you are leading, stopping any distractions before they distract you from the worship of God.
- If you invite someone up to share a short testimony, and they are going on too long, or off the topic, gently interrupt them and thank them in a way that doesn't make them feel humiliated. As a tip, hold the microphone while they are talking, which allows you to comment or affirm what they've said subtly. Thus, keeping to the time and point of the testimony.
- When you are not going to speak, put the microphone down so that the worship leader knows that they can carry on with worship.
- Don't go on too long in the meeting/worship.
- Stop things before they lose life. In worship, end on a high. Seek God for what He wants for His church that day.
- We want the manifestation of the gifts of the Spirit in a Christ-honouring biblical way.

The Skill of Dealing With People in Error

Dealing with sinful situations is a skill that all elders need to learn. This is because sinful people, misunderstandings and sinful situations are a part of church life, which God uses to shape and sanctify His people. We see that many of the epistles were written to deal with error and conflict situations in local churches.

Some principles in dealing with a person who is in error

“And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.” 2 Timothy 2:24-26

- During these encounters/meetings, we must not be quarrelsome, combative or contentious.
- We must maintain an attitude of kindness even in such a situation.
- We must be patient. Sometimes it takes time for people to see the error of their ways.
- We must correct those who are opposing God’s Word or us with gentleness.
- We must be praying that God would intervene and truth would prevail.
- In certain extreme cases, a sharp rebuke is needed (Titus 1:13), where we strongly warn and reprimand, perhaps even publicly exposing their error if it has affected others.
- We must listen carefully to the person to properly understand the issues at hand.

“Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.” Galatians 6:1

- If it is a matter of sin in the life of a believer, the matter should be dealt with by a spiritually mature leader.
- We should approach them in a spirit of gentleness.
- Paul cautions us to keep a guard on our own hearts when we do confront, as dealing with their sin may cause us to be tempted in like manner. For example, if they confess that they are struggling with pornography, and they describe some of the sexual acts that they have fallen into, the devil will gladly tempt you. The devil would desire to destroy your testimony and try to get you to walk into sin. Keep close watch on yourself. How? Have your wife pray with you over the matter, and share it with another leader that you are accountable to. Don’t drop your guard in your thoughts or conduct. Be on guard, like a soldier, aware that the enemy is trying to attack you.

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The Skill of Dealing with Offences

The Bible often describes leaders and saints who were in conflict. For example, the first deacons in Acts 6 are appointed because of conflict between the Hebraic and Greek-speaking Jews. Other examples include Euodia and Syntyche in Philippians 4, and of course Paul and Barnabas in Acts 15:36-40. Often, conflict arises because of people taking offence.

As elders, we need to help people learn to first overlook minor offences, and if that's not possible, then teach them to confront offences. Our desire and aim is always to pursue peace and aim for health in our relationships in our churches.

This section is adapted from Ken Sande's excellent book, *The Peacemaker*.⁶

Overlooking a minor offence

Refer to Proverbs 19:11; Ephesians 4:32.

Overlooking an offence is not just about being quick to forgive, but is also about not being hypersensitive or easily offended.

Those who might get offended easily:

- It is often because of an overly sensitive attitude.
- They have a tendency to dwell on what others have done. e.g., someone not greeting them in a shopping centre or at church.

We have to learn to cover someone's weaknesses and sins. Especially a leader you follow or a spouse you live with. God does not deal harshly with us when we sin. He does not count our sins against us. Yet we do it to one another.

When is someone's sin too serious to overlook?

When that thing becomes 'like a barrier' between you and another person, it is so big that it affects everything. We have to deal with offences when it dishonours God in a serious and public way, or when it damages your relationship. For example, the person is not treating others with respect. They are controlling, sarcastic, overbearing, or, when they are hurting others in an abusive way – verbally, physically, or sexually.

Overlooking a minor offence is an active process. It is not passive, where you remain silent, causing the person to build up internal resentment or be in denial. It is a deliberate decision not to talk about it, dwell on it or let it grow into bitterness or anger. Apply the gospel in the situation as we see the sin, forgive the sin, and seek the person's good.

If you can't let go of an offence this way, then you need to go to confront/talk about it. This leads us to confronting an offence.

⁶ This section is adapted from Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004).

Confronting an offence in four steps

Firstly, you must take the initiative.

Jesus gives two scenarios in Matthew 5 and Matthew 18.

- Firstly, someone is offended by you; *“So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift.”* Matthew 5:23-24. Interestingly, we see that context is worship. Your worship will be meaningless if you have unforgiveness or a broken-down relationship that you can fix.
- Secondly, you are offended by someone else. *“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.”* Matthew 18:15

So with both scenarios, if you know of a barrier that cannot be overlooked between you and another person, it is your responsibility to pursue peace.

Secondly, go personally and privately.

“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone.”
Matthew 18:15a

This is just between you and him alone. The first confrontation is with him alone.

Exceptions to the personal and private approach would include a scenario with an abused person going to the abuser (they must take others with them, or the abuser can manipulate the victim), and where there is a difference in position of authority/verbal skills. The person might feel too intimidated.

Thirdly, go with a gentle and humble attitude

Gently, “Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.” Galatians 6:1

Fourthly, go persistently if need be.

Persistently. The word “go” in Matthew 18:15 suggests continuing to keep going. You need to be prepared that your first meeting might not be successful. So give the person time to think it over. It is not about bluntly describing their wrongs. Rather, have a heart to restore the relationship.

What if they don't want to listen?

Then make sure you have done all you can. Release them if you can't reconcile, or else consider church discipline if they refuse to repent or listen.

What if it's you?

If you are the one who receives correction or someone comes to you offended by you, what must you do?

In Matthew 18:15-17, three times in four verses the word "listen" is used to describe the person who receives correction. Often, if someone has an issue with us, we simply put up defences and don't listen! We should also be open to receiving criticism.

Other ways to practice peace-making

- Mediation: When two people can't reach an agreement in private, get someone to help them. If the issue is not a personal issue but a material issue, then consider arbitration.
- Arbitration: When two people can't agree on a material (e.g., financial, business, etc.) issue. We have at times appointed elders and skilled individuals to judge. Their decision is binding.

The Skill of Giving Advice and Counsel

"Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger" James 1:19

When someone comes to you seeking advice or counsel, if it is a matter where God's Word is very clear (living with your partner), turn them to the Scriptures, guide them to obey it and pray with them.

If it is a matter that God's Word gives guidance on, but not specifics (e.g. Should I move to this new town? Change my job?), turn them to the Scriptures where they can receive and trust God for guidance (Proverbs 3:5-6; Psalm 32:8; John 10:27 and more). Then encourage them to go home and pray and ask God to show them His will. Teaching them to wait on the Lord for His answer.

We must not spoon-feed our people. They must seek God for themselves. Unless their decision is clearly in direct opposition to the Word of God, they must make their own decision and own it. If you tell them what to do, and things go wrong, they can end up blaming you, and ruining not only your relationship with them, but possibly their relationship with the church or the Lord.

Listen and pray, don't be quick to speak. A good way to end a conversation like this is to say, "I'm going to go and pray with you on this matter, so that the Holy Spirit may lead you as you seek Him in His Word."

The Skill of Handling God's Word

It's important to understand what theology and doctrine are when we speak about handling Scripture.

Theology is the study of God. It's our thoughts on God and how we view God. On some level, each person is a theologian. We all have views of God, and we see everything through those lenses. It's important to keep in mind that we see in part, and therefore we know in part. People get their theology from parents, media, TV, pastors, experience, the Bible, church, etc. We read the Bible through the grid of our theology.

We express our theology in our doctrine. Doctrine is the set of beliefs held on a certain topic or matter. We teach our people biblical doctrine so that they can live as God has spoken in His Word.

In Titus 1:9, we read, *"he must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it."*

So part of the skill of an elder is to be able to teach and instruct others in sound doctrine. Having biblical doctrine ensures the health and fruitfulness of a church. Elders must have, at the very least, a good grasp of what the Bible teaches on gospel issues.

In every area of your ministry – counselling, discipleship, leading, preaching, teaching, and fellowship – as leaders, you must have sound teaching and doctrine.

Your doctrine

It is important to note that your doctrine should be:

Unoriginal

"What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us." 2 Timothy 1:13-14

We are delivery men, not inventors of new things, when sharing the Word of God. We deliver His word as faithful stewards. A faithful steward does not add or take away from the message of his master.

"This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful." 1 Corinthians 4:1-2

Don't read new things into the Scriptures. Read what the author originally wanted to say. Who was his audience? What was his framework? Anything "new" is usually heresy.

Held with conviction

You must own it, hold firmly to it. If you don't believe it, nobody else will.

"And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet this is no cause for shame, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day." 2 Timothy 1:11-12 (NIV)

Are you able to say the same about the Word of God? As leaders representing the Lord, we must hold fast to His Word of Truth. There are certain areas of Scripture we must be immovable on: the Trinity, the virgin birth of Christ, the death and resurrection of Christ, the centrality of the Church, etc. And then there are other areas where we can agree to disagree, such as certain end-time views, or whether you are eternally secure or could lose your salvation.

Robust

Our theology is to be robust, which means it is able to help people through suffering and the hardships of life.

It is essential as a shepherd of God's flock that you personally are grounded in the Word of God. Your faith will be tested by trials and storms, either personally or from within the church. You need to be firmly planted on the Rock, Jesus Christ. This will be an encouragement and model to those whom you lead.

Full of grace

The Gospel can be summarised into one word: grace. Grace is receiving what we don't deserve through the work of Jesus on our behalf. It is his unmerited favour towards us in Christ as well as His empowering presence in us through the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Grace (Hebrews 10:29). We are saved by grace, and we are to live by grace. And as leaders, we must lead and preach with grace. This means that just as God, in Jesus, deals with us graciously, so we should deal with people graciously. We learn to be gentle and patient with saints, just as God is patient with us.

Teaching and Preaching

"Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching." 2 Timothy 4:2

As mentioned earlier, elders are called to be able to teach. An elder needs to invest himself in growing in preaching. This could be through:

- Seeking constructive feedback after leading or preaching.
- Reading good books on preaching. We recommend Martyn Lloyd-Jones' Preaching and Preachers.
- Listening to Andrew's leaders equipping resources on how to preach: <https://youtu.be/xT4QbBT3-Co>.

Some broad points on preaching

Preparation: No matter how many years you have been in ministry, preparation is always essential. To quote Martyn Lloyd Jones, “the Spirit generally uses a man’s best preparation.”

Language: Don’t use high and lofty words, thinking you are impressing people with your knowledge. Jesus, the Source of all Wisdom and Creator of all, spoke to the people in the commonly spoken dialect of the time, so that even children could understand. Remember, you are preaching to sheep, not giraffes!

Anticipating: One of the skills of a preacher is to anticipate the hearers’ thoughts, objections, ideas, questions and hindrances to the truth he is trying to teach them. Try to anticipate what they are thinking and answer the questions they have in your sermon before they have even thought of them.

To the heart: Whenever Jesus spoke, even when He was teaching on deep and profound doctrines of God, Salvation and God’s purpose for humanity, He always spoke to the heart of the people. Appeal to the hearts of your audience, not just their intellect. Jesus cares about every area of our lives, and the doctrines of the Scriptures are not just to fill our heads, but to satisfy every longing of our hearts and souls. We don’t teach people for the sake of gaining knowledge, but for the glory of God and that the truths would sanctify and make them more like Jesus.

Bold: If you are by nature an introvert, but you know that God has called you to preach - fear not; for where God guides you, God will provide for you! If you step out in faith for Him, he will give you His Spirit of boldness to proclaim His Word. Consider how timid the disciples were, running and hiding for three days after the crucifixion. But when the Holy Spirit came upon them, they were transformed from fearful and timid fishermen to bold, fearless proclaimers of the Risen Christ. The Holy Spirit wants to do the same for you! Ask God to do this work in your life.

“And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness.” Acts 4:29

Do you know your congregation? When you are preaching to the church you are leading, or are part of, you should be very aware of what the needs and state of your flock are, and you should address the needs in your preaching. Ensure that you find out what the most pressing unmet needs are in the congregation and speak God’s Word into that. Keep on the “pulse” of the congregation you are leading.

Grounded in Truth: When you preach, people need to feel safe and know that they can trust what you are saying to them. Whether it is a rebuke or an exhortation, the same principle applies. Everything you say must be validated by the Word of God! If you don’t back up what you say/instruct/direct with the Word of God (in context), it weakens your argument/rebuke or exhortation, and people are less likely to trust you. For then you are bringing the mere wisdom of man, versus the Truth of the Living God.

Don’t let popular culture define your theology. God’s Word defines what you teach and believe as truth, not the current trends, no matter how loud others shout! If you please God, it doesn’t matter who you displease; but if you displease God, it doesn’t matter who you please!

Putting a preach together

What to preach

Pray that the Lord will show you His heart for the people you are leading for Him. Seek His will for the topic/passage of Scripture that you feel God is leading you to preach on.

Consider the following:

- What are the current needs of my congregation?
- Any major events currently happening in your country/globally that need to be addressed? Perhaps to settle fears or highlight that God is in control.
- Are there currently any doctrinal errors or sin issues that have filtered in amongst the church? Address those swiftly and biblically.
- Is there a specific topical series that would benefit the body?
- A word of caution: Be careful not to rely on what God is saying to you in your devotional time with Him and turn that into a preach. It could be on occasion, but exercise discernment. The Lord is working uniquely in your own heart, and what God reveals to you devotionally may just be for you.
- It is beneficial to speak to other elders outside of your team to hear their perspective on a matter.

Personal preparation

"Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me and lead me in the way everlasting!" Psalm 139:23-24

Prayer is the best preparation. Ensure that your heart is right before the Lord. Like David in the above Psalm, ask the Lord to reveal any sins you need to repent of. Sin can grieve the Holy Spirit and can keep you from clearly hearing what the Lord wants to say. If you need to seek counsel and prayer from another elder on the matter, do so urgently.

As part of your personal preparation, make sure you are spending time in the Scriptures, reading them and soaking in them. You are not preparing as a professional, but as a servant and a son. In other words, the Word of God must convict and cut you and comfort you before you deliver it to people.

The journey and the destination

- What do you want your hearers to “take home”?
- What is the purpose of your sermon?

Have a central truth and a central Scripture that the sermon is based on. This will keep you from theological buckshot – making a lot of noise, but missing the point.

Repetition

When repeating and reenforcing your central truth, this enables your hearers to remember and later to recall what was taught.

In your preparation, ask the Lord to reveal to you any questions people might have on your topic.

Also, for the unsaved, what objections would they have to the truth they are hearing? Objections are a wall that will stop people from listening and receiving what you are preaching.

Use Illustrations

Whenever Jesus was teaching the people, He always used illustrations and parables. The human mind engages better when you are illustrating the truth this way. It brings better understanding and remembrance. Ask yourself, “How could I explain this to a ten-year-old child?” No matter our age, people love illustrations and parables.

Introduction

Have a clear “hook” (a statement, briefly defining why it is essential they give their full attention/a profound thought) in your introduction.

Don’t become a slave to a formula.

Quotations

Make sure that you have your facts straight. If someone picks up that your quotes are wrong, or not credited to the right person, they might wonder what else you are saying that isn’t true.

Jesus-centred

Every preach should have Jesus Christ at the centre. He should be the hero of every preach, not you. Always make it about God and how great He is.

Delivery

Fluctuate your tempo, tone and volume while you preach. There are times you need to speak gentler, other times with a firm tone, other times with a fatherly tone. Don’t be monotone.

Application

It is essential to connect the heart to the Word that has been taught, to apply the truths to your hearers. Don't just leave the congregation with knowledge; share with them how they can apply these truths as those that they can live by. Paul devotes almost half of his writing to applying the truths he taught. We need to give people tools. Do it in such a way that they remember it and that it changes their heart.

Reduce

Set a time limit for yourself and speak through your notes beforehand. Gathering Scriptures and information is the easy part. Discerning what to say and what to leave out is the hard part. You want to feed Christ's sheep, not overfeed them.

Be able to summarise your preach into a 2-minute summary. If you can't, then you are covering too many areas.

As a rule, fewer Scriptures are better than more. Anchor your message in one specific passage or verse and find two or three additional Scriptures to add weight to the truth you are sharing.

Use Scripture to defend and define Scripture. Use Scripture to bring understanding to a text. You want to share the mind of God on the matter, not the futile wisdom of man.

If you are covering a challenging topic, hide behind the Scriptures where you think you will get resistance.

Techniques

- One-liner statements. Make sure that they are relevant to your topic and are soundly biblical.
- Statistics. Ensure they are accurate. Ensure they are useful to the truth you are teaching. Unpack the statistic and make sure it connects to your sermon.
- If you make a comment to provoke a reaction, make sure that it is not irreverent and that it is relevant.
- Humour is a wonderful tool when used in the correct context and not used excessively. Don't tell jokes at a funeral.
- Remember, you have a mixed group of believers in your church.

Some are newly saved, others maturing, others quite mature; keep a balance. Also, keep in mind that there may be many people in your church where English is their second or third language.

The Practical in Closing

Whether you are a guest preacher or at your home church, make sure that you know what the ideal service closing time is and respect that. As a tip, set your phone on a timer (a vibration alarm and not a ringing alarm) or put your watch on the pulpit in front of you. If you are only a quarter of the way through your notes, and you see you have only 10 minutes left, cut out parts of your message and ask the Holy Spirit for immediate guidance. It helps if you mark on your notes time guidelines, as it helps to keep you at a good pace. This will also help you not to go off on tangents. Keep the main point, the main point.

During your preach make it easy for people to respond at the end by exhorting and encouraging them throughout your preach. Prepare them by mentioning “there is going to be a time later to respond ...”. This way, they don’t get caught off guard when the time comes.

Your conclusion is to summarise and reinforce the truths you have been teaching. Don’t bring in new components in the conclusion. Quickly restate the truths/points that you have made and prepare the people for a solid, clear landing.

When you throw out the net, connect it to your audience; *“some of you may feel...”* or *“some of you may think ...”*, etc. Personalise the call to Christ. When Jesus called Matthew, or Peter, James and John, He called them personally and engaged directly with them (Matthew 4:19). When Jesus spoke to Nathanael, He spoke to him directly, *“‘How do you know me?’ Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, ‘I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.’”* John 1:48 (NIV)

Jesus is always concerned about the one. Pray for wisdom and discernment, or words of knowledge into the lives of those that you are teaching/preaching to.

If you don’t get a response when you throw out the net for salvation or a call to believers to respond to a specific need, don’t be discouraged. You have been faithful, and God is the one who brings growth (1 Corinthians 3:6).

Don’t mix up your altar calls. Don’t make so many different altar calls, just so that eventually someone will respond.

The Skill of Leading People

Addressing another man/elder’s wife

Be careful how you speak to another man’s wife and another elder’s wife. Ideally, aim to address her with her husband present, and if possible, have your wife present as well. Her husband is her head, and you want to make sure that her covering is present when you feel you have something to discuss with her. Perhaps, on occasion, you should ask the husband for permission to speak to his wife before you approach her. God has made women with a completely different emotional makeup, and it would be wise not to approach a matter with her with the same directness and tone that you would use with the men in your congregation. In the case of a member being from another culture, be very sensitive to cultural differences. As much as possible, let your wife speak to the women if it is a female matter.

Don’t compromise in any area of respect towards her. Ensure that your conduct and counsel are above reproach, and no accusation can be brought against you by how you approached her, where you spoke with her, or what you spoke to her about. Sadly, we live in an age where we are daily hearing about leaders who have discredited themselves before God and the world due to sexual immorality. We need to be men who live lives above reproach – publicly, privately and in what we watch. Such sins are not only against your wife, but against God Himself.

Maturing saints

As our children grow, our parenting style adapts and grows as they mature. We do not relate to our toddler the same way we relate to our 16-year-old. They have different responsibilities and duties in the home. They are different in maturity. As people grow in spiritual maturity, your shepherding style should adjust accordingly, along with their responsibilities and duties. Giving those who are

now mature opportunities to share and use their gifting, encouraging them in their gifts, and even coming alongside them to strengthen and direct them as they grow in the grace and knowledge of God's will for their lives. Some sheep will grow into shepherds.

Your wife

Listen to your wife, she will often discern things at church or amongst people that men don't see. Whenever you share a story about your wife, it's wise to get her permission first and to tell it respectfully, in a way that honours her. Always set an example to the other husbands in your church in how you speak to and treat your wife, for they will follow your lead. Be cautious about telling a joke where she is the brunt of the story; this could be very hurtful for her without you realising it.

People, not projects

In the busyness of ministry, it is easy to fall into the mindset that people are projects. Or "another name" to tick off that you've seen this week. A key to great shepherding and creating a healthy biblical pastoral community is that people feel like people and that we lead them as individuals in everything God has for them.

Remember the one! Obviously, as the church grows, it becomes harder for an elder to meet with every member, but that is why it is essential to work in a team. To serve the Lord should be a blessing, not a burden. When Moses was leading the people of Israel, his father-in-law saw that he was burning himself out dealing with all the issues of the people of Israel alone by himself (around three million people).

Jethro's counsel was the following; *'Moses' father-in-law said to him, "What you are doing is not good. You and the people with you will certainly wear yourselves out, for the thing is too heavy for you. You are not able to do it alone."* Exodus 18:17-18 . Read the full account in Exodus 18:13-27.

The Skill of Leading Yourself

Check out these resources, which deal with self-leadership. The skill to be able to lead yourself is such a vital aspect of being an elder.

Paul says to Timothy, *"Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by doing so you will save both yourself and your hearers."* 1 Timothy 4:16

Jonathan Stanfield and Michael d'Offay both have helpful teachings on this topic.

- Leading Yourself | Jonathan Stanfield
<https://four12global.com/resources/regional-equips/2023-regional-equip-netherlands/02-leading-yourself/>
- How to Lead Yourself | Michael d'Offay
<https://four12global.com/resources/series/youth/2022-global-youth-leaders-equip/02-how-to-lead-yourself/>

CHAPTER 6

Elders Working in Team

When we speak of 'team', we speak of the combined action of those unified in doctrine, goals, values, disciplines, heart and vision. There is no greater joy than being in a team where there is genuine love and affection for one another, while working together for the Glory of God.

"Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity." Psalm 133:1

"Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind." 1 Peter 3:8

The power of a diverse leadership, each bringing their own unique gifts into the mix, humbly working together, will be a "good and pleasant" church leadership. As with any team dynamic, we see there must be a lead elder who leads, directs and builds the team in the will of God.

It is said that "anything with two heads is a freak"! There should be one lead elder to guide the team, and the team leads the body of Christ. All men are equals, but he is the first among equals. The dynamic between the team and the lead elder is unpacked later.

The Necessity of Team

Scripture sets the model of plurality:

- Paul addresses the elders (plural) in Ephesus. *“Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called elders of the church to come to him.”* Acts 20:17
- Paul instructs Titus to appoint elders (plural) in every town. *“This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you.”* - Titus 1:5
- The book of Acts describes how Apostles planted churches and appointed “elders” to oversee them (Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:2; 20:17).

It is the model of the Trinity (see section below on Trinity)

Ministering in a team brings in a variety of “grace gifts” that each one has been given. Thus being able to operate as a team, with all/most of the gifts available, and operating in the leadership of the church.

Team leadership protects the church from being led in the manner of a dictatorship. This is when one man has total power and absolute authority. Of course, we do keep this in tension with the reality of having a team leader (lead elder) who needs to lead and, at times, make certain calls even if the team is not in complete agreement.

Benefits of Team Leadership for the Church

- There is unified protection from any false teachers/doctrines or one man holding all the authority, offering a variety of perspectives and giftings.
- There is a unified vision, thus giving direction that they can be confident in.
- As a team, they can engage and work within the gifts that God has given to the Church.
- It models humility and submission.
- It gives credibility to the direction and decisions that the leaders make in unified agreement.
- By the nature of its structure, the men must model the unity that should ultimately characterise the church (John 17:23; Romans 15:5; Ephesians 4:3, 13; Colossians 3:14).
- It creates a defined venue of accountability for the members, as well as the leaders, to be open and accountable to one another (1 Timothy 4:16; Titus 1:6; James 5:16).
- As with every team, there does need to be one voice within the unity of the team, which is where one elder (the lead elder) can speak authoritatively on behalf of the team. If there is no lead elder, the problem will arise where members will gravitate to particular elders (those that they “connect” with), cultivating independent identities within the church.

Should there be a breakdown of delegation and accountability when working in a team, one can’t blame one man. It is the team that needs to work in this area, and if need be, repent and change the way things are done.

Ephesians 4:7 tells us, *“But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift.”*

Each elder, according to God's grace, has been given specific gifts. These specific gifts are needed especially for the area that God wants him to minister in. Not all elders have a leadership gift; we should build around what God has graced each man with, and where and how their gifting can best be used so that each part of the body (even within the leadership) does its work. If a lead elder is insecure, he won't create space for another elder to flourish in his gifting (e.g., teaching/preaching/evangelism). There will be inefficiency, lack of growth and movement in the church, and lack of clarity and fruit in its members.

Teamwork Within the Trinity

The concept of team leadership is not something new that humanity thought was a good idea. On the contrary, it is a God-revealed concept! Although the word “Trinity” is not used in the Scriptures, it came from a Latin word “trinitas” which means “threeness”.

Trinity Definition: “Theological term used to define God as an undivided unity expressed in the threefold nature of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.”⁷

The Word of God confirms this repeatedly. Here are some of the verses:

- *“Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness.”* Genesis 1:26 (NKJV)
- *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...”* Matthew 28:19
- *“Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.”* John 14:13
- *‘But of the Son he (God the Father) says, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom.”’* Hebrews 1:8 (Underscore added for meaning by writer.)
- *“Come near to Me, hear this: I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; From the time that it was, I was there. And now the Lord GOD and his Spirit have sent me.”* Isaiah 48:16 (NKJV)

The example of teamwork seen within the Trinity

[illegible]

7 Trinity - Holman Bible Dictionary - (studylight.org)

The Father

"But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God." 1 Corinthians 11:3

The Son

"who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." Philippians 2:6-8

The Holy Spirit

"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you." John 14:16-17

"And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment." John 16:8

Teamwork in Apostolic Partnerships

Paul and Barnabas

"So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians." Acts 11:25-26

Paul, Luke, Timothy and Mark

"Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry." 2 Timothy 4:11

Peter and the other Disciples

‘But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words.”’ Acts 2:14

Being Under Authority

“But the centurion replied, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes, and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” Matthew 8:8-9

“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he will lift you up.” James 4:10 (NKJV)

It is God who ultimately caused you to be placed in your position. A prideful attitude and an inflated view of self, needs to be repented of.

“He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding.” Daniel 2:21

Throughout the Scriptures, we see that men who were greatly used by God were first under the authority of another leader above Him, or they were part of a team, learning humility and teamwork. God allows this in their (and our) lives to prepare us to lead, to work in a team, and to walk always in humility.

Biblical examples of men under authority:

- Moses was under Pharaoh
- Joshua was under Moses
- Joseph was under Potifar
- Paul was under Barnabas
- David was under Saul

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Trust and Obedience in Team

“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.” Hebrews 13:17

Trust

God chooses who will be our leaders. How well we serve and obey our leader is a direct reflection on how much we serve and obey God. For example, King Saul had become a wicked king, and subsequently, Samuel had anointed David as God had instructed him to. Yet, in 1 Samuel 24, when King Saul had come into the tent where David and his men were hiding, and David’s men had urged him to kill Saul, David knew from his heart that King Saul was under God’s authority. David would not dishonour his king and his God that way.

How much I trust and submit to my leader reflects how much I trust God. David knew he was anointed as the next king, but still, he waited for God to give it to him, not trying to take it by force.

Obedience

Biblical obedience is to hear, trust, submit and surrender to God and His Word. Christ’s example of obedience: “And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” Philippians 2:8

One day, we will stand before the Father and give an account for how we led those we had authority over.

“Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore, be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.” Acts 20:28-32

Teamwork

As much as we are now one body in Christ, and one team, serving one God and Saviour, we are still individuals, and we still have separate lives that we live with our wives, children and relatives.

One of the greatest weaknesses humanity wrestles with is our prideful comparison or jealous bitterness towards those in higher positions or graced with more gifts than us. Since childhood, we instinctively compare whose toy car was bigger and faster, whose grades were higher. You know your list!

Don't be caught off guard. Just because you are now serving God, you cannot afford to think that you won't be tempted to compare what you have to what they have, and naturally, pride or jealousy may start to grip your heart. This will certainly hinder the fruitfulness of real teamwork.

Don't compare yourself to other leaders when it comes to material resources, free time, salary, glory, credits, recognition, respect, opportunities they get given, etc. More often than not, there are beautiful God stories about how they got that house, or even that car, or how God provided for their kids' education. God looks after His children! Don't miss out by allowing sin into your heart through pride and jealousy. The disciples struggled with this same issue, and Jesus' answer to them was clear in Scripture: 'Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remains until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!"' John 21:22

Humility is the pathway for fruitful teamwork

For Jesus to accomplish all that He did whilst on earth, and obviously fulfil His ultimate purpose – to die as our Sacrificial Lamb – He began and ended His journey here on earth with HUMILITY.

As you serve in the ministry and lead in the church, you will experience things that will feel unfair. You will be misunderstood. Everything inside of you will want to take offence. You will want to justify yourself to prove you are right and they are wrong. All these and more were experienced by our Lord and Saviour, and considering the extent of His humility, He endured so that we could be with Him for all eternity. Not only do we have a High Priest who can sympathise with us in all our weaknesses (Hebrews 4:14-16), but He has given us His Holy Spirit to live by His power. Not by our might, or by our strength, but by His Holy Spirit.

"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Philipians 1:21

"For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it." Mark 8:35

"For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live." Romans 8:13

"And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." Luke 9:23

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." John 12:24

"For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God." Colossians 3:3

The Team and the Lead Elder

Lead elders are those who lead a team of elders in a local congregation. They are all equal in value, but the lead elder is the 'first among equals' in the sense that he leads the team. The dynamics of how the elders work with the lead elder are vital to the health of the team, which in turn directly affects the congregation they lead. Here are some important dynamics that are worked out between an eldership team and their lead elder:

In Relationship: They have a genuine relationship and friendship with their lead elder.

In Obeying: Elders submit and follow the directions and instructions given by the lead elder. This must be qualified however. A skilful lead elder will create a culture where the elders (and others) can vocalise disagreement and offer different perspectives. Ideally, the decisions made by elders should be done in consensus. When a team cannot find consensus, either the lead elder makes the final call and the team obeys; or in serious cases they get apostolic input.

In Acting on Behalf Of: Elders can act on behalf of the lead elder, as he sends or delegates to them.

In Teaching: As one of the requirements of an elder is to be able to teach, it's healthy to submit what they have to the lead elder when required to teach, and they must do it with wisdom from the Holy Spirit and from the Lord.

In Respect: Elders show respect towards them and serve them well. Don't be a burden to your lead elder. Serve them well!

In Support: Lead elders, full-time elders, and others serving the Lord (each situation evaluated) should receive financial support for their work (1 Timothy 5:17).

The Role of Lead Elders

- Develops the team of elders into a leadership team.
- Guards unity and maintains the forward movement of the team.
- Cares for the eldership team, which is multifaceted (spiritual, emotional, practical, etc.).
- Facilitates and finalises decision-making with his church community, especially in crises.
- Close relationship with the other elders to ensure true relationship and mutual accountability.
- Identifies, acknowledges and encourages the use of the individual spiritual gifts amongst the other elders. Working as a team, with each one operating in their specific grace gifts.
- Delegates responsibility and the duties and leadership of ministry areas within the life of the church. The lead elder utilises his team to divide the load of responsibilities.
- Continues/facilitates eldership training/development.
- Acts as a spokesman for the elders.

Characteristics of Lead Elders

- A leader amongst equals.
- The lead elder is not necessarily the most gifted elder (the one holding the most gifts), but he is the one recognised to lead the eldership team and the church.
- Other elders recognise his godly character, calling, gifting and competence as the leader.
- He must lead with passion and commitment, “...*the one who leads, with zeal.*” Romans 12:8
- God graces many individuals with the gift of leadership, but the capacity and type of leadership may vary. For example, Moses was called to be the leader of all Israel as they made the exodus from Egypt, but then he appointed another 70 elders to lead under him. This enabled Moses to attend to the issues only he could carry, and the others dealt with the multitude of issues brought by the people (Numbers 11:16-30).
- A humble, God-seeking, Spirit-Filled, immersed in the Word of God, lead elder will empower his team with wisdom and godliness, to work in unity, with one heart, and one mind in their leadership and decision making that is edifying the church, and glorifying God.
- He is honest with himself as a lead elder. He is who God made him and gifted him to be. He doesn't try to carry a gift that hasn't been given to him.
- He is a humble leader – letting the other elders function in their gifting – without feeling threatened or insecure. He is secure in his identity and position in Christ.

Bringing feedback to lead elders

When you bring a different perspective or point of view to your lead elder, or another elder, ensure that you do it with:

- Humility
- A teachable heart (your view could also be wrong).
- Patient. If he doesn't feel what you shared was correct, but you still disagree with his point of view, pray about it and take it to him a second time.
- If you believe it is an issue of sin, then ask him (the lead elder) to contact apostolic oversight, so you both can sit with the apostolic oversight, and bring the matter to him.
- What if the whole team disagrees with the lead elder? Contact your church's apostolic oversight and request that they attend an elders meeting. Be sure to let your lead elder know that the eldership team has requested the attendance of apostolic oversight to attend the meeting, so that all things are done in the open and in the light.

Elders Working With Translocal Gifts & the Apostolic

This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal dashed lines, typical of primary school writing paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Benefiting From Outside Voices

How you, as an elder, work with and get maximum benefit from the apostolic.

Why do we need an apostolic perspective?

Because we see it as the biblical model described in the New Testament. Eldership teams are not to be isolated and autonomous, but are linked to other churches and to other gifts through apostolic partnership.

“They preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith.” Acts 14:21 (NIV)

Reasons for translocal gifts and apostles visiting

There are a few reasons for translocal gifts or apostles to visit:

Relationship

There are at least three references to apostolic trips into churches in the Bible. There is a relationship that develops between the apostolic, the elders and the church. Apostles carry the churches in their hearts.

“It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.” Philippians 1:7

Audit

Some things you are doing may need to change. The apostolic has a different perspective and comes to bring correction with biblical authority. It is good to let them look at what you are doing and building. We might think we are doing well, but what does Jesus think? Be open to correction and advice.

Come to supply what is lacking in faith

"...we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith?" 1 Thessalonians 3:10

"For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you." Romans 1:11

Sometimes changing one aspect will completely turn around the church.

Train

"...and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." 2 Timothy 2:2

Model

"because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake." 1 Thessalonians 1:5

Other reasons

- Start-up of a church – sometimes dig up old foundations and build new ones
- Times of transition (growth, buying a new building)
- To ordain elders or church planters
- Times of crisis

Receiving translocal gifts and apostles

As churches, we need to receive the gifts and apostles well. How you receive a person will often determine the extent to which the gift that is on their lives is poured out amongst your church. Receive a prophet in the name of a prophet and receive a prophet's reward (Matthew 10:41).

As you receive a translocal gift or apostle, bear the following in mind:

- Receive them well and value highly what they bring in.
- They can't lord it over you. Authority is still given.
- Before you receive them, have you done what they said last time?
- Prepare your church. It is a really big deal. Announce it early. Ask the congregation to give it priority. They are not guest speakers.
- Make space for them to speak (it is not time for three hours of worship).
- Be open to a long preach.
- Make sure all your leaders are there. Allow the lead guy to make the call for you to cancel your plans. Expose your leaders to the apostles and translocal gifts. Sell it; you don't want people to be there because you told them to be there.
- If you are dealing with something, bring it into the light. Tell them.
 - Ungodly elder?
 - Accusations?
 - Tithing dropping?
 - People leaving?
 - No commitment?

How often should the gifts visit?

It would be ideal to invite the gifts in at least three times a year. More often, if there are problems. Different seasons need different input, and a crisis changes everything. Maintain other points of contact such as in person meetings, online meetings, phone calls and messages consistently.

"That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church." 1 Corinthians 4:17

"and though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me, but received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus." Galatians 4:14

"And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town." Matthew 10:14

"But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium." Acts 13:51

We recommend the following two articles that help differentiate between grace gifts and the apostolic, as well as how to work as elders with the apostolic.

- <https://four12global.com/articles/offices-grace-gifts/>
- <https://four12global.com/articles/authentic-apostolic-partnerships-part-1/>

CHAPTER 8

The Role of an Elder's Wife

The New Testament describes the role and qualifications of an elder, but does not have much to say about the role of an elder's wife. This is because her role is deeply connected to her husband, unlike being a deacon, in which women serve in their own right. Elders' wives have the privilege, unlike other types of women leaders, to share something of the call of eldership since they are "heirs with you of the grace of life" (1 Peter 3:7).

We must make clear that not all elders' wives need to carry a strong leadership gift or need to be able to oversee ladies' ministries. An elder's wife should first be a support and help to her husband, but she should also not hide behind him in an unhealthy way. She can exercise the gifts God has given her to build others up, and she also carries a unique influence among the women because of sharing something of the call of her husband.

In light of the above, we can then look at some texts that deal with women who carry influence and leadership from Titus and 1 Timothy. Although the passages we will discuss don't directly address an elder's wife, they give us insight into the character qualifications of women who have been called to be leaders in the church.

As elders are called to carry spiritual maturity, so their wives should ideally be spiritually mature and not a new convert. This, of course, is not a rule since Scripture doesn't prescribe this, but it is true as a principle.

Pray daily for your husband. Scripture tells us that if the enemy of our souls can take out the shepherd, the sheep will scatter (Matthew 26:31). He needs your prayer, respect and support. God has called your husband into a different position than he has called you; equal yet different. Don't try to do his job or fight every decision he feels led to make. It is not a competition. You will undermine him, and dishonour God's given order of creation.

Character Qualifications From Titus and Timothy

“Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the Word of God may not be reviled.” Titus 2:4-6

“Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things.” 1 Timothy 3:11

“In the same way, the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.” 1 Timothy 3:11 (NIV)

Titus 2:4

“Older Women”

In the original Greek, this refers to women who are literally senior in age. The implication here is that for women to grow in God, they need older women to help them do so through teaching them by example and through words. If we apply this today, it doesn't mean that we should only have older women in leadership roles. We sometimes have older women who are spiritually immature, while some younger women have been walking with Christ longer and are gifted with wisdom beyond their years.

In our context, we often have younger couples coming into eldership. This is easier to handle in a young congregation (with students, for example) where a young elder's wife would still be older than most of the ladies in that congregation. But in a more established context, rather than feeling that the elder's wife has to play the 'older woman' role, sometimes it is better for the elders to learn to delegate and utilise the wisdom of older ladies in the congregation who have gone through the parenting stages, been married for longer, gone through menopause, etc. But even a younger elder's wife who carries God's wisdom can help disciple an older lady if need be.

“Reverent in behaviour”

This denotes that such a woman should be marked by holy behaviour; not tainted by secret sin, or involved in speech or conduct that is questionable or brings shame to the name of Christ.

Such character traits go against everything this world tells women that they should be, but remember, we are called to be in this world, not of this world (1 John 2:15-20).

“Not slanderers”

When Paul uses the word “not”, he is saying literally - rule out all possibility of you being a slanderer. As extreme as this is, the word “slanderer” is the Greek word ‘diábolos’ which is the direct translation for the name of the devil.

Satan, who makes accusations against all believers, exploits a Christian’s weaknesses and failures, and continually attempts to discredit a believer’s faith and devotion to Christ. This is a serious command by Paul to women. Paul is referencing a woman who should not be a backbiter, a slanderer of others, unjustly criticising to hurt them.

Every leader should pray daily

“Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.” Psalm 139:23-24

“(not) Slaves to much wine.”

This would be a similar qualification to the men. Ladies can drink in moderation but must show self-restraint.

Linking this to the phrase “sober-minded” (1 Timothy 3:11), the “sober” doesn’t refer to drinking, although no believer should abuse any substance. The example and teaching of the older women should bring a maturing and “sobriety” of heart and mind to their hearers. The fruit of their teaching brings a maturity and “growing up” in behaviour and maturity, ensuring that they fulfil their duties and responsibilities as godly women in church life and in their own homes.

This should apply to every area of a woman’s life. She must not live in excess in any area. Whether it be social media, television, exercise, shopping, eating – the list goes on. Self-restraint is what separates believers from unbelievers.

“They are to teach what is good”

To simplify the complexity of what the original text gets into, simply put, to teach what is good is to teach Jesus and what it means to live a life honouring Jesus.

“And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.”” Mark 10:18

“and so train the young women”

Every athlete knows that training doesn't happen in one session. If you are training for a marathon, it is a long, repetitive process. The fact that the Holy Spirit led Paul to use the word “train” shows how compassionate and understanding the Lord God is to the fragility of our human nature.

The older women are to train the younger to learn to love their families and others, which involves regular discipleship and building strong bridges of relationship. The church is family and community. Any parent knows that no child grasps the lesson/discipline that they are being taught the first time around. Rarely do any adults either.

“to love their husbands”

What a beautiful picture Paul uses here again. Note that the context is only for women. He doesn't say women should teach men to love their wives, but women to love their husbands.

The picture here is that the spiritually mature are to teach the younger women to embrace their husbands as their calling and stewardship from God. It also implies she must be training to love the man, who is her lifetime mate. Since marriage is a picture of Christ and His Church, divorce should not be a word used in a Christian home. Yes, Christ has made singular allowances, but even then, it is not a certainty that divorce must become the outcome of a broken marriage; we serve a Saviour who is a Master of making broken things new and better.

This command could perhaps be one of the least taught areas in the New Testament church. Yet many women can be inspired to learn how to love their husbands through the example of godly women.

“(to love their) and children”

This is a straightforward instruction: train the women to love their children. For many, it might seem a peculiar topic to theme a women's meeting, but loving rebellious teenagers, or self-willed toddlers, can push even the godliest women to an emotional place she thought she could never experience.

We can learn from Susanna Wesley, the mother of John and Charles Wesley, who birthed 19 children (sadly, nine of her children died as infants, one was accidentally smothered, and only eight of her children were alive when she herself went to be with her Saviour). She offers us much wisdom about rearing and loving our children and pointing them to Christ.

It is said of her that, ‘The Wesley house ran on a tight schedule. “The children were always put into a regular method of living,” she wrote. Times were assigned for naps, education, meals, and bedtime.’

When it came to their spiritual condition, her view was, “Self-will is the root of all sin and misery,” and she worked to help her children develop self-control. Her chief priority was their spiritual education. “The children of this family were taught, as soon as they could speak, the Lord's prayer, which they were made to say at rising and bedtime constantly.”⁸

Considering that Christ Himself has said that in the last days children would become disobedient to parents (2 Timothy 3:2), truly, this is an area we need to give much prayer and attention to.

⁸ <https://www.umc.org/en/content/mother-knows-best-parenting-tips-from-susanna-wesley>

“to be self-controlled”

The root meaning here is that wives should be reflecting a life that has God-defined balance. Not “lukewarm”, not compromising, but controlled and balanced.

Godly women should aim not to compromise on the movies or series they watch, the company they keep, the thoughts they entertain, their sexual purity and faithfulness and more. All these can dim the fire of the Spirit in your life.

“pure”

Let your life always be in a condition ready to worship the King. Don’t hold onto sins that feed your flesh or breed bitterness or malice in your heart. Maintain purity inside and out, even down to the centre of one’s being, where there is nothing condemnable in your heart, mind or life. A woman’s beauty is ultimately found in her purity.

“working at home”

In the original Greek, Paul phrases it “keepers at home”. This means ensuring that your house is neat, clean, well-run, and that the children are cared for. Again, this is one of the areas that the mature are to teach the younger women. Even though today many ladies work full-time in the marketplace, you can still make it a place where your husband and children want to be, and where church family delights in hanging out.

Our homes are places where discipleship happens since this is where others get to see how we live, even imperfectly. We invite people into our lives and seek to show hospitality.

“kind”

To be good in nature, whether others are watching or not. Perhaps one of the most encouraging verses to motivate the desire for this depth of kindness, especially when kind acts are done, and no one sees, whether loving your kids, caring for others, making meals, counselling ladies and building friendships. The writer of the book of Hebrews reminds us:

“For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do. And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” Hebrews 6:10-12

This level of kindness originates not from within your own self-will, but it is a kindness that is sourced in Christ, and fulfilled in us by the power of his Holy Spirit.

“and submissive to their own husbands”

Being submissive means that as women of God, you willingly place yourselves under the authority of one who carries headship. This does not mean in any way that women are less valued. On the contrary, we have seen how Christ elevated and honoured women throughout the Scriptures. It means that women have been given different callings and gifts. God wired women differently, and anything in opposition to how He made you will be stepping outside of the divine will of God.

Submission to your husbands is not a man-made concept but is designed and decreed by God Himself since the creation of the world. It is His arrangement, and His plan. Let no godly woman hear the same words as Saul of Tarsus heard on that day of his conversion: *“It is hard for you to kick against the goads.”* Acts 26:14b . The phrase means that you are hurting yourself by trying to go against God’s ordained order of mankind, which is a representation of Christ and his Bride.

“that the Word of God may not be reviled.”

We see that if the younger women aren’t able to be taught and mentored by older women, then they will begin to live just like those in the world. Values are taught and caught. The implication is then, if good discipleship happens, the Word of God will “not be reviled”. In other words, women who live godly lives will not put the gospel or God’s Word to shame. They will honour it and reflect the wonder and beauty of Jesus, which will be attractive to all.

Practical Wisdom and Advice for Elders’ Wives

“Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.” 1 Timothy 4:12

It’s not what you do that determines who you are or your worth. It’s who you are in Christ that determines your worth. Don’t compare yourself to another woman’s spiritual gifts. This will only cause the sin of covetousness, jealousy, and discontentment with the gifts that the Lord has chosen to give to you. Don’t let the devil get a foothold in any area of comparison or jealousy. Both are sins.

We are going to make mistakes, we are human! Be humble, repentant and open. Making yourself real to the women in your fellowship will enable them to relate to you and deepen their trust and friendship with you, as you lead by your humble, honest example.

Take the lower road, as long as Christ is glorified. It’s all for Jesus, not us. We are building His Kingdom, not our own. Study the women in Scripture that God used, see the thread of humility and Christ-likeness, which will challenge and direct you on how you are to live your life.

We live in a fallen, sinful world serving and loving fallen and sinful people. Not everyone is going to like you or even approve of your husband. Grasp tightly onto Romans 8:31; it will keep your heart from crumbling every time someone assumes you intentionally didn’t greet them, visit them, or say unkind things about your husband: *“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?”*

But should you be guilty of sinful attitudes, words or actions, repent fast! Don't try to gain pity when you are guilty. 1 Peter 2:23 shows us that when they hurled their insults at Jesus ... He did not retaliate. We must always follow the example of Christ and not fight to defend ourselves.

Pray daily for your husband. Scripture tells us that if the enemy of our souls can take out the shepherd, the sheep will scatter (Matthew 26:31). He needs your prayer, respect and support. God has called your husband into a different position than He has called you; equal yet different. Don't try to do his job or fight every decision he feels led to make. It is not a competition. You will undermine him and dishonour God's given order of creation.

For elders: how to lead and protect your wife

Remember, the church is Christ's bride, not yours. Don't neglect your bride or your children. Doing either or both, will disqualify you in your calling. Remember, your first church is in your home, where you are called to first.

There is a huge role to play on the team as a wife, but there is not the same weight of responsibility as an elder carries. The other extreme is when a woman shares no heart to serve the church in her role. "My only job is to look after the kids, home, etc." Wives must be in step with the Spirit and have their husband's protection as a part of the church to lead them in what God has for them. Their involvement will vary between the home and the ministry. It is important for wives to often be present in elders' meetings; to be part of the process and hear for themselves, especially when there is apostolic input. God has gifted many women with prophetic insight and angles on things that bring a beautiful, gentle wisdom to some church planning and thoughts.

Remember, not every elder's wife is gifted in the same way. Don't compare her to another elder's wife. You will be placing burdens on her that she was not graced to carry. We are a body, each with a different role, each as valuable, each as essential.

Remember your children. Prioritise time with them where they have your full, undivided attention. Set a day that is just for them where you put your phone away, and ensure that they know that they always have access to your life and heart.

Make time to court your wife. Many a leader spends more time "courting" and winning the hearts of his elders and members, whilst neglecting his wife.

Conclusion

If you have diligently worked through this manual, you've probably felt inadequate and maybe even overwhelmed! This is actually a normal response. Who are we that He would call us? Even the Apostle Paul, when considering the awesome task of ministry exclaimed, *"Who is sufficient for these things?"* (2 Corinthians 2:16). Who is adequate for this high calling?

On a human level, none of us are adequate to lead God's people. On our own, we lack the wisdom, grace, humility and power needed. But if we read a few verses on, in 2 Corinthians, Paul confidently says,

"Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit..." 2 Corinthians 3:5-6 (ESV)

In other words, what qualifies us to serve as elders is God Himself. As we are dependent on Christ and the Holy Spirit for our salvation and our ongoing holiness, so in the same, we depend on the Lord to help us walk worthy of this calling of eldership.

We desperately need the Lord's help to do the work of the Lord. We are not super-saints or slick professionals who have it all together. We identify with Paul who acknowledged, even as an Apostle, that he was the chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15) who needed Christ. This doesn't mean we have an excuse to sin, but we understand that we fall short and don't always love God or others as we should. This should humble and comfort us. God is so kind to choose us! And while we must aim to grow to become skilful and wise shepherds, we know there is only one great Shepherd who upholds the church and enables us to love. The result is that He gets the glory. As Andrew Selley says, when referring to how Jesus is using us to build His church, "Surely it must be God!"

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