



1 Timothy 3:1-7

I received so many positive comments from last Sunday that I decided to do a series on *The Roles of Women in the Church* stretching out at least one hundred sermons. I plan to cover such topics as the proper length of women's skirts, advanced foot massage techniques for your husband and the precise temperature for cheese dip on Super Bowl Sunday.

Obviously, I am joking but last week's message was foundational for this morning's as we look at the role and qualifications for elders and being "equipped to serve". As we do so, we can begin with the understanding that God reserved this role specifically for men.

The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. 2 Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, 3 not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.

4 He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, 5 for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? 6 He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. 7 Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

This passage is the place every evangelical church turns to when considering the selection of their elders. This passage is written into the by-laws of our church. This passage forms the basis of our elder selection committee when we meet each summer to consider elder candidates. Along with its sister passage in Titus chapter one, this is the go to passage for understanding the qualifications of elders.

This passage will answer two key questions.

- Why is the desire to be an elder a good thing?
- How are elders chosen?

However, before we can answer these questions, we need a larger context that this passage does not provide in a complete manner. We first need to answer these three questions.

- Why is the position of elder so important?
- What is an elder?
- What does an elder do?

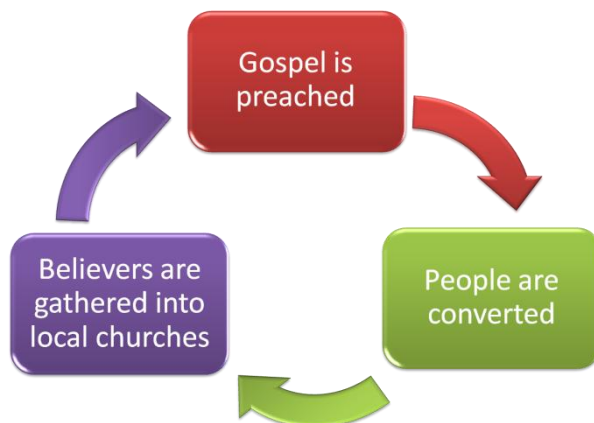
1. Why is the position of elder so important?

If we do not answer this question first, we will never understand why the qualifications for an elder are so stringent. And since elders are leaders of local churches, we need to see the Biblical priority of the local church. The Greek word for church is ἐκκλησία (ekklesia) and it appears 112 times in the New Testament. If you had to guess, do you think this word is used more commonly for the universal (invisible) church or to represent the local Church? Here is a chart summarizing the appearances of the word.

Local Church = 88
Universal Church = 19
Local or Universal = 3
Temple/assembly = 2

Therefore, 82% of the times this word refers to the local church. You might think that this does not prove the importance of the local church because after all, most of the New Testament was written to local churches so naturally this would become the most common use of the word. But

The Great Commission Process



that just proves my point. The reasons that all of these letters were written to local churches is because there was a fundamental priority on starting and growing local churches.

There is a basic three step process described in the book of Acts as a method for fulfilling the Great Commission. The gospel was preached which resulted in people being converted and as soon as that happened, these new believers were gathered into local churches and the entire process continues. This is the Great Commission process and it reveals, among

other things, the priority of the local church. Salvation immediately brings you into membership in the universal/invisible church but it was never God's intention to only provide this global, amorphous, massive blob of believers to try to find one another or to manage on their own.

If you read through the book of Acts in context with the entire NT, you must draw the following conclusion about Great Commission process and the Biblical priority of the local church.

The local church is the...

- God ordained
- Christ purchased
- Holy Spirit empowered

...strategy for reaching the world, fulfilling the Great Commission and building His church.

Since this is true, then it becomes clear that there must be structure within these local churches in order to accomplish these magnificent goals and this is why God ordained that elders lead the local church in this endeavor.

This naturally leads to our second question.

2. **What is an elder?**

You know that I serve as one of four elders at our church so am I functioning more as a pastor or as an elder? To prod you along, how many times do you think the word "pastor" is used in the NT? In reality, there is not a single instance of the word pastor in the entire Bible. Most English translations have the word pastor in Ephesians 4:11. *And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers* (NASB). However, I prefer the ESV which has the word 'shepherd' instead of 'pastor.' *And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the **shepherds** and teachers.*

This raises an important point regarding the Biblical definition of an elder. The following four words are all used interchangeably in the NT: elder, overseer, shepherd and pastor. In fact, it is quite clear that they all mean exactly the same thing. This is why I prefer the ESV translation of Ephesians 4:11. The Greek word in this verse is 'shepherd.' It is the same word for an actual shepherd who tend real sheep. So then why do most translation use the word 'pastor' instead of 'shepherd'?

The first English translation of the Scriptures by John Wycliffe in 1382 used the word shepherd¹ but when the King James Bible was published in 1611, the word was changed to pastor² and almost all English translations have been following this pattern for the past four hundred years. The word "pastor" is derived from the Latin word *pastorem* which means...what would you guess? It means 'shepherd.'

Therefore, now we know that shepherd and pastor are identical and we will also see that Elder = Overseer = shepherd = pastor
Three passages can make this clear.

Passage #1

*Paul sent to Ephesus for the **elders** of the church. Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers**. Be **shepherds** of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. (Acts 20.17-28 NIV—1984)*

Paul called for the ‘elders.’ Then he referred to them as ‘overseers’ and proceeded to give them the task or role of ‘shepherds.’

Passage #2

*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: **2 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; **3** not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. **4** And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory (1 Peter 5:1-4).*

Peter used the same three words. His exhortation was directed at the elders who were given the task of shepherding the flock. Furthermore, the word translated as “exercising oversight” is the same word as overseer.

Passage #3

*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— **6** 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. **7** 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, **8** but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. **9** 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 1:5-9)*

Paul used both elder and overseer and then gave a description of qualifications that is almost identical to the one in 1 Timothy 3.

Of the four words, elder is the most common word, followed by overseer and shepherd. As I said before, technically, the word pastor does not even appear in Scripture

Elder = 15

Overseer = 5

Shepherd = 3³

Pastor = 1

But the roles of elder and shepherd did not originate in the New Testament. “Elder” is used in the Old Testament 129 times to refer to elders of Israel, elders of a city and elders of a nation.⁴ (And “elder” is used 28 times in the gospels and Acts to refer to “Elders and scribes,” the leaders of the Jewish people.⁵) The elders and rulers of the Jewish people were to function as shepherds over God’s people.

*“Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the Lord may not be as sheep that have no **shepherd**.” So the Lord said to Moses, “Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him. Make him stand before Eleazar the priest and all the congregation, and you shall commission him in their sight. You shall invest him with some of your authority, that all the congregation of the people of Israel may obey. (Numbers 27:16-20)*

Elders and shepherds did not start with the New testament church but rather is built upon God’s care for his people throughout Israel’s history. Moreover, God himself is called a shepherd. Any guesses as to where the first instance of God being called a shepherd is found? We find it in none other than the beloved 23rd Psalm. The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

In the 23rd psalm, David referred to God as his shepherd but the first instance of God calling himself a shepherd is Jeremiah 31:10 *“Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, and declare it in the coastlands far away; say, ‘He who scattered Israel will gather him, and will keep him as a shepherd keeps his flock.’”*

The prime example of God as shepherd has to be John chapter ten.

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13 He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me.

Summary—What is an elder?

- An elder is an overseer is a shepherd is a pastor. All four terms are synonymous.
- An elder/shepherd did not begin with the NT church but was first founded upon 2000 years of Israel’s history before it transitioned into two thousand more years of church history.
- An elder/shepherd flows directly from the Lord as our shepherd. We shepherd others because God shepherds us.

After that long description, the next question ought to be much easier.

3. What does an elder do?

If you had to use one word to describe the task of a NT elder and the responsibilities of elders in local churches, including our own, what word would you choose? I don’t think the obvious answer is ‘shepherd.’ Though it is not about elders, per se, the classic text on shepherding is John 21.

*15 When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “**Feed** my lambs.” 16 He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend (**shepherd**) my sheep.” 17 He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was*

grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. (John 21:15-17)

We know this passage so well because it is known as Peter's restoration after his amazing failure. Jesus predicted that Peter would deny the Lord three times and he followed the script to a tee. Peter was bold and impetuous and was convinced that Peter would not deny the Lord. He would die before such a horrible thing happened. But it did happen. Peter wept bitterly over his denial and Jesus knew that Peter's repentance was fully genuine.

Then days or perhaps weeks later, Jesus restored Peter to service by asking him three times, "Peter, do you love me?" We rightly tend to focus on these penetrating questions which obviously were painful to Peter. Each time Jesus asked if Peter loved him, it was more painful reminders of his denial. These questions and Peter's response are extremely important but we end to gloss over the Lord's replies. Feed my lambs. Shepherd my sheep. Feed my sheep. Jesus was not only restoring Peter he was giving him his marching orders.

I love this passage because it lays out the role of a shepherd. A shepherd, leads his flock, a shepherd feeds his flock and the natural outcome of leading and feeding is that the flock will be protected. Next Sunday we will talk in depth about what it means for elders to shepherd the flock of a local church, but to finish this morning I want to remind you that shepherding is not just for elders. Remember that the theme of 1 and 2 Timothy is Letters to a Shepherd and that includes all of us. We shepherd ourselves, our families and our church. Leading, feeding and protecting—is that not the essence of parenting? And it applies to our other relationships as well.

I received an encouraging email yesterday from Brittney Sandvick. Many of you know Brittney, the daughter of John and Bonnie Hatfield. Brittney has been at the school founded by David Wilkerson for the past 3 years and is finishing up the internship portion of her education. While at school, she has been seeking to minister to troubled young women and specifically to a young gal named Rosalea. Apparently, Rosalea would isolate herself from others and not even talk with Brittney. Much of the time, all that Brittney could do is pray for her. Finally, Rosalea quit school and returned to her home in California.

This is where Brittney's email picks up in the story.

A month later we received a very sad announcement that Rosalea had passed away. She took her own life. I believe with all my heart that because she couldn't understand God's love she went back to what was familiar and what made sense. She needed someone to disciple her personally.. I believe that I am called to help these types of women: women that are broken and, need discipleship. I experienced a big attack from the enemy telling me that I failed at what God asked of me. I went through a week of crying and asking God why did you call me to her and then not stop this. I carried a big guilt on my shoulders but, God sent his holy spirit to give me comfort. God showed me that I can't change people. He only can, but you have to stay willing for God to do that in your life.

Brittney has been through some tough times in her young life. She has been broken but you can see that she is ministering through her brokenness. This is what the Lord did for Peter, isn't it?

Peter was a broken man. Peter flat out denied Christ but following his repentance, the Lord immediately put him back into active service and said, “feed my sheep...shepherd my sheep.” In effect, Jesus was saying, “Peter, I am not going to wait three years until you feel that you can do this. I am not going to wait until you think you are ready. I want you to do this through your brokenness.

Can you do this? Can lead your family through your own brokenness? Can you lead others through your own brokenness? That’s all a local church elder really is in the end. We say to you, “I want to follow Christ with all my heart, but ultimately I am not so much following Christ as I am stumbling along after him. Will you join me so we can stumble after Christ together?”

Rich Maurer
February 17, 2013

¹ And he yaf summe apostlis, summe prophetis, othere euangelistis, othere scheepherdis and techeris.

² And he gaue some, Apostles: and some, Prophets: and some, Euangelists: and some, Pastors, and teachers:

³ When the word is not referring to literal sheep-herders or to Jesus, the “Good Shepherd” (John 10:14), the “Great Shepherd (Hebrews 13:20) and the “chief shepherd” (1 Peter 5:4).

⁴ 2205 זָקֵן [zaqen /zaw·kane/] adj. From 2204; TWOT 574b; GK 2418; 178 occurrences; AV translates as “elders” 115 times, “old” 23 times, “old man” 19 times, “ancient” 14 times, “aged” three times, “eldest” once, “ancient man” once, “senators” once, and “old women” once. 1 old. 1A old (of humans). 1B elder (of those having authority). Strong, J. (2001). Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

⁵ The first time that the word elder is used in a Christian context is in Acts 11:27-30. *Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius). 29 So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. 30 And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.*