

A Guide to Identifying Elders

BIBLE DISCOVERY

INTRODUCTION:

For any church or movement to become healthy and maintain health, identifying, equipping, and commissioning qualified shepherds/elders/overseers in the church must be a high priority. Doing so according to Scripture is just as important. We've designed this guide to help churches and movement leaders identify those whom God is calling to lead His church.

SHEPHERDS/ELDERS/OVERSEERS

In the New Testament, the terms "shepherd," "elder," and "overseer" are used interchangeably to describe the same office within the church (e.g., Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 5:1-2). These leaders are entrusted with the care, guidance, and protection of God's people. Their role is crucial because they are called to reflect Christ's shepherding heart, ensuring that the church remains faithful to the gospel and grows in spiritual maturity.

Elders must exhibit godly character and also possess several core competencies. As overseers, they shepherd the flock with love and humility while they provide direction for the church's mission. Their faithful leadership ensures that the church remains rooted in Scripture, united in purpose, and effective in making disciples of Jesus Christ.

CONTEXT MATTERS:

When it comes to identifying the leaders who are going to continue, preserve, and shepherd the churches planted by a missionary team, the context each church is planted in is crucial. It matters because it mattered to the earliest of Jesus' disciples, especially the Apostle Paul. In Scripture, Paul made a distinction between two contexts and how they dictate the qualifications of new shepherds/elders/overseers. These contexts were MATURE churches (existing believers) and the other is NEW churches (new believers).

Elders for MATURE Churches

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I TIMOTHY 3:1-7 (ESV)

"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."

CONTEXT:

Paul is writing to Timothy in Ephesus, where the churches are 10-15 years old. In MATURE settings, qualified men must ASPIRE to the office.

CHARACTER OF ELDERS

1. Above Reproach: not open to critique or charges
2. Covenant Keeper: Husband to one wife
3. Sober-Minded: living focused solely on the kingdom
4. Self-controlled: God-glorifying self-restraint, meekness
5. Respectable: Dignified, decent, well-behave, put-together
6. Hospitable: Welcoming of outsiders, open door policy
7. Not a Drunkard: NOT a prohibition but a warning
8. Gentle: not fighting, dealing gently with conflict
9. Not quarrelsome: Not arguing about petty, secondary issues.
10. Not a lover of money: not greedy for gain, has proper motives
11. Not a Recent Convert: temptation to become puffed up with leadership
12. Well thought of by Outsiders: has a good reputation within the broader community

COMPETENCIES OF ELDERS

1. Able to Teach: Skilled and able to "rightly divide the Word of Truth" (2 Tim. 2:15)
2. Manage Household/Submissive Children: shepherds family and disciples children

Elders for NEW Churches

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CONTEXT:

Paul is writing to Titus in Crete, where the churches are just weeks or months old. In churches made of NEW believers, elders are APPOINTED to the office.

CHARACTER OF ELDERS

Many of these are the same, but some are slightly, yet importantly different...

1. Above Reproach: not open to critique or charges.
2. Husband to one wife: the elder is a covenant keeper.
3. Not arrogant: Marked by Christ-like humility.
4. Not Quick tempered: not easily offended.
5. Not a Drunkard: again, NOT a prohibition but a warning.
6. Not violent: Gentle, uses words to resolve conflict.
7. Not Greedy: Not in it for the money.
8. Hospitable: Welcoming of outsiders, open door policy.
9. Lover of Good: Interests in line with New Identity in Christ.
10. Self-Controlled: Marked by Self-restraint.
11. Upright: Moral, Integrity, Just.
12. Holy: Life marked by obedience to God, devout in practices.
13. Disciplined: Not Lazy or idle.

COMPETENCIES OF ELDERS

1. Hold firm to the word: able to instruct in sound doctrine and rebuke/correct those who teach in error.
2. Believing Children: faith-filled children with good morals/conduct. Faithful to make disciples in their first mission field (family).

TITUS 1:5-9 (ESV)

"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— 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."

Additional Scripture on Eldership

BIBLE DISCOVERY

1 PETER 5:1-5 (ESV)

"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.' "

OBSERVATIONS

1. Elders are called to be shepherds of the flock of God
 - a. The shepherd realizes the flock is not their own, but God's
 - b. Shepherds care for and serve the flock for the good of the sheep, not the good of the shepherd
 - c. Shepherds follow the Great Shepherd, Jesus, and are willing to lay down their lives for the sheep
2. Shepherding is a calling not a position. It is given by God for His Glory.
3. Do not shepherd for your own gain (Shameful) but because you desire to lead God's people to be more like Christ.
4. Shepherd and lead by example. Be a "Do as I Do" leader and not a "Do as I Say" leader.
5. Younger = younger in faith.
 - a. It is not a requirement for elders to be literally older than the ones they shepherd.
 - b. Younger believers are not expected to stay young! Identify, equip, and commission new elders/leaders into the mission field!
6. Strong case for humility in leadership...
 - a. Elders/leaders who are proud are opposed to God and his design for eldership.
 - b. It is dangerous to operate in opposition to God...

Additional Scripture on Eldership

BIBLE DISCOVERY

2 TIM. 4:1-2 (ESV)

"I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: 2 **preach the word**; be ready in season and out of season; **reprove, rebuke, and exhort**, with complete patience and teaching."

OBSERVATIONS

1. Elders should be committed, practicing intercessors on behalf of the flock
 - a. Prayer is the anointing of oil...

OBSERVATIONS

1. When elders preach/teach the flock, they ought only preach the Word.
 - a. Anything other than the bible as the source of teaching/preaching will not do.
2. Preaching is an exercise of Patience with the flock...
 - a. Reprove: convince, refute, disprove, conserve
 - b. Rebuke: strongly warn, restrain
 - c. Exhort: strongly urge, encourage to do something

JAMES 5:14 (ESV)

"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."