

The Role of ELDERS

Both the Old and New Testaments repeatedly employ the metaphor of "shepherding" to describe the spiritual leadership of God's people. Not surprisingly, the New Testament views elders as shepherds as well (e.g. [Acts 20:28](#); [1 Peter 5:1-4](#)). The elders' mission is to lead, teach, protect and love their church members the way shepherds care for the sheep in a flock, so that the church members will grow up into spiritual maturity ([Ephesians 4:11-13](#)).

Elders are pastors.

This second point restates the first, but it bears repeating. The word "pastor" means "shepherd." We often call paid preachers "pastors" and lay leaders "elders." This distinction can subtly shape our thinking so that we view pastors as the professional ministers and elders as the church's board of directors who support the ministers. But a pastor is an elder, and an elder is a pastor. Elders should do those things in a local church that they assume a pastor would do, even if they spend fewer hours per week than the paid pastor.

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Elders are plural.

We always find elders (plural) in New Testament churches (e.g. [Acts 15:4](#); [20:17](#); [Titus 1:5](#)). Each congregation should have a team of shepherds.

Elders must be godly.

The New Testament job descriptions for elders focus largely on character qualities (e.g. [1 Timothy 3:1-7](#); [Titus 1:5-9](#)). Elders must be self-controlled, sensible, holy, and hospitable. They can't be drunkards or bullies or money-grubbers. Elders must be "above reproach."

Should model godliness.

Elders are shepherds.

The elders' character matters because the elders model Christian maturity for the church ([1 Peter 5:3](#); [Hebrews 13:7](#)). Church members should be able to see in their elders inspiring, albeit imperfect, examples of the character of Jesus.

Elders should teach.

Elders must be able to teach ([1 Timothy 3:2](#)) so that they can build up the church in sound doctrine and refute false teachers ([Titus 1:9](#); cf. [Acts 20:30-31](#)). Elder teaching can take lots of shapes: one-to-one instruction, small groups, classes, or preaching. An elder doesn't need a PhD in biblical studies, but he does need to be able to faithfully explain biblical truth.

Elders must lead.

Elders have a measure of authority over the local church. That's why the New Testament also calls them "overseers."

The elders' authority is not absolute or unquestionable, nor should it be exercised in a domineering manner. Yet God calls his shepherds to provide leadership for the flock, and, in general, God expects the church to submit to that leadership ([Hebrews 13:17](#)).

LAYING ON OF HANDS

First-Covenant Foundations

Throughout the Bible, we find both positive and negative senses of “the laying on of hands,” as well as “general” (everyday) or “special” (ceremonial).

In the Old Testament, the general use is most often negative: to “lay hands” on someone is to inflict harm (Genesis 22:12;), or in Leviticus 24:14 to visibly lay God’s curse on the person who will bear it. We also find a special use, especially in Leviticus (1:4; 3:2, 8, 13; 4:4, 15, 24, 29, 33; 16:21;

also Exodus 29:10, 15, 19; Numbers 8:12), where the duly appointed priests “lay hands” on a sacrifice to ceremonially place God’s righteous curse on the animal, instead of on the sinful people. For instance, on the Day of Atonement, the climactic day of the Jewish year, the high priest “Shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the

people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness.”
(Leviticus 16:21)

Jesus’s Hands and His Apostles

When we come to the Gospels and Acts, we find a noticeable shift in the typical use of “the laying on of hands.” A small sampling still conveys the general/negative sense (to harm or seize, related to the scribes and priests seeking to arrest

Jesus, Luke 20:19; 21:12; 22:53), but now with the Son of God himself among us, we find a new positive use of the phrase, as Jesus lays his hands on people to bless and to heal.

Jesus’s most common practice in healing is touch, often described as “laying his hands on” the one to be healed (Matthew 9:18; Mark 5:23; 6:5; 7:32; 8:22–25; Luke 13:13). Jesus also “lays his hands” on the little children who come to him, to bless them (Matthew 19:13–15; Mark 10:16).

Purpose— To Transmit

1. Blessing (Matthew 19: 13-15)
2. Authority (Numbers 27 15-20)
3. Wisdom (Deuteronomy 34:9)
4. The Holy Spirit (Acts 19 4-6)
5. Spiritual Gifts (1 Timothy 4:14)
6. To Set apart for Ministry (Acts 13:2-3)
7. Commissioning (Numbers 27:18-20)
8. Healing (Mark 16:17-18)

Dangers: do not lay hands hastily!

“Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, and do not participate (share) (κοινωνει ἁμαρτίας) in the sins of others; keep yourself pure.” (1 Tim 5:22)

Warning: do not hastily receive the laying on of hands!

If blessings can be imparted, the opposite can happen. (If you are half stepping.) See Acts 19 13- 16

Alexander William Ness, in his book Transference of Spirits has observed the dangers of a negative transference of spirits by ministers with various problems.

A minister with sexual immorality problems, counseling couples who start having similar problems.

Leader of prayer group with a very critical spirit, ministering to the prayer group who become equally as critical and developed an unholy faithfulness to this critic.

“A layman who went far astray in doctrine, laid hands on followers, ministered to them and soon they were deceived and accepted his false doctrines, hook, line and sinker.”

Be careful of what kind of spirit you submit yourself to when you ask someone to lay hands on you.

There are lying spirits in false prophets, the spirit of man

“The spirit that now works in the children of disobedience” (Eph 2:2)

1.Unclean spirits (Matt 10:1) 2.Seducing spirits (1 Tim 4:1) 3.Read: 2 Cor 11:13-15

Make sure the person laying on of hands is trustworthy, has integrity, knows the word of God, “You shall know them by their fruit” Matt 7:16

1.Be alert, on guard in your Spirit... tune in to the Holy Spirit asking for discernment of Spirits. If you feel a check, you can pray protection over yourself or refuse the laying on of hands. 1 Peter 5: 8, 9 “be sober, be vigilant because your adversary the devil as a roaring lion walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.”

2.This danger can be avoided by walking rightly and humbling before the Lord, reading the word of God regularly, praying, loving the Lord, worshipping, being obedient to submit where God plants to you under godly order and leadership.

3.If you are walking rightly with the Lord, you need not fear inadvertently picking something up.

4.If you can remember, back to a time when prayed over and something did not seem right or you picked up something, not of the Lord. Submit to God, Identify it, renounce it, take authority over it and command it to go. (James 4:7-11)

Safeguards

“First, this ministry should never be exercised lightly or carelessly, but always in a spirit of prayer and humility.

Second, the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit should be sought at every stage: With whom to pray? When to pray? How to pray?

Third, the believer who lays on hands must know how to claim on behalf of his own spirit the continual purifying and protecting power of the Blood of Christ.

Fourth, the believer who lay on hands must himself be so empowered by the Holy Spirit that he is able to overcome any kind of evil spiritual influence seeking to work in or through the one upon whom hands are laid.

When they four safeguards are not carefully observed, there is a real danger that harmful spiritual results may follow, the practice of laying on of hands – either in the one who lays on hands, or in the one on whom hands are laid, or in both.” (Derek Prince, “Laying on of Hands” booklet (Fort Lauderdale: Derek Prince Publications

