

Why Elders? (Acts 20:26-32)

GIST: *Elders serve Jesus and His flock by modeling, teaching, leading, and praying.*

As we laid out in our previous discussion, elders are one of the two prescribed offices in the Bible. It also lays out the expectation of having a plurality or multiple elders; and it also seems to at the very least imply that at least one of those elders be the main teacher, and possibly even the only one financially supported: *"Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and "The laborer deserves his wages.]"* (1 Timothy 5:17-18)

However, this will likely feel like new territory in many ways because we have only ever functioned with a single-pastor model. What I am proposing is **a lead pastor who serves alongside several lay elders.**

"26 Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, 27 for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. 28 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. 29 I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31 Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. 32 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 20:26-32)

A Word On Calling.

Last week we talked about the baseline qualifications for these offices and established how central character is to both. However, even if you are a diligent follower of Jesus→

Eldership is not for everyone...and that's ok. Knowing you should be involved in church work and aspiring to eldership are not one and the same. Many will actively serve and play vital roles in a congregation and never be an elder.

Also, because I know this will be asked, let's address the elephant in the room. Yes, *these are positions the Bible tells us are intended for men.* I know that can be a difficult position to hold in our modern context because it can seem "old fashioned" at best or discriminatory at worst. Nonetheless, we have to be very careful not to try and force God into our current cultural climate, assuming we are somehow more evolved now. We are not, and God's ways are still higher than ours. Let me give you two quick thoughts on this.

1- This does not mean women cannot or should not have vital roles in the church. This is absolutely not the case. Women have always been and will always be vital parts of any spiritually healthy church. Yet, this particular leadership role is one God has told us men should fulfill.

2- In my personal opinion, I think God, at least in part, designed this to stretch all of us. I think this goes all the way back to the Fall in the Garden of Eden, and it continues to this day. If men weren't told to fill these roles, I think many wouldn't. Traditionally, women have been far more active in churches than men. Nonetheless, research shows us that families flourish most when men step up and lead their families spiritually. You know who else told us that would be the case? God.

Let's also be clear here, though, *not every man is meant to be an elder either.* James reminds us: *"Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged*

with greater strictness." (James 3:1). I don't say that to discourage you from praying about this. I say it to remove any compulsion you may feel to "fill a gap".

The Bible is clear, however, that this should be done willingly. 1 Timothy 3:1 tells us anyone who "... *aspires to the office of overseer... desires a noble task.*" Likewise, Peter tells elders their work and their leadership should be done *not under compulsion*, but *willingly*, and even *eagerly* (1 Peter 5:3). So, this is the result of desire. It should be something you want to do. So, let's just make sure we→

Aspire Humbly. For what it's worth, remember: "Feeling called" does not necessarily mean you will become a pastor. Bobby Jamieson in his book *The Path to Being a Pastor* (which I *highly* recommend) pointed out that when we use the language of calling instead of aspiring, we can actually frame the situation in a potentially unhealthy way. If you say you're called to a particular place of ministry, a church not calling you is either opposing the will of God or demonstrating you were wrong about your calling. I don't want to play with semantics here, and I have definitely used the word calling in this way before. However, I want to urge you as you think and pray about entering anything, really, but definitely service within the church→

Focus on Your Heart & Trust God to Open the Doors. Seek Him diligently and walk through whatever doors He opens. *If your energy is spent trying to gain a specific position instead of desiring to know God more and be changed by Him so you're equipped to be used however He chooses to use you, then you will find yourself far less useful and floundering often.*

That all being said→

How Do Elders Serve The Church?

This is noble work, but it is work.

- "1 *The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.*" (1 Timothy 3:1). *To lead God's people is a great blessing, but it is not easy.*

Three-Fold Expectation.

- Elder- Spiritual Maturity
- Overseer- Oversight and Leadership
- Pastor- Shepherding and Care

1. An Elder Should Be An Example/Model For The Flock

"28 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. 29 I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them." (Acts 20:28-30)

- They are held to a high standard.
- They are subject to higher visibility.
 - "Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness" (James 3:1).
- They cannot be a new convert (1 Timothy 3).

2. An Elder Should Teach/Feed The Flock

"26 Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, 27 for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.... fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31 Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. 32 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 20:26-32 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: **preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.** For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry." (2 Timothy 4:1-5)

- They are responsible for getting the Word of God to the people of God.
- They must know the Word--and keep on knowing it.
 - *Elders should be marked by a deep love for and a solid understanding of Scripture.*
 - *"The temptation will be to let the pulpit drive you to the Word, but instead you must let the Word drive you to the pulpit. Prepare the preacher more than you prepare the sermon."*
(Preaching, Tim Keller)
- They should share the Word **intentionally**.
 - Could be in different settings: Sunday School, small groups, prayer meetings, one-on-one discipleship, church membership/new believers classes, guiding the song selection of the church...etc.
 - Elders are not necessarily scholars (though that is allowed ☺), but they will know God's Word and be able to share it effectively with others. In addition to this, they will be ready at all times due to their steady personal diet of Bible.
- They will defend the Truth & lead people from itching ears and silly myths.
 - Elders should be committed to talking with people about the truth of Jesus with both the conviction and compassion our Savior exemplified.
 - Elders will guard what is taught in the church **zealously!**
 - That means overseeing what is done in every context where the Bible is taught: the pulpit, small groups, Sunday School, music ministries, etc.
 - Hebrews 13:17 tells us that elders are "keeping watch over your souls".

3. An Elder Should Lead/Guide The Flock

"28 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)

"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." (1 Peter 5:1-4)

- Elders should prayerfully provide vision and spiritual direction for how the congregation can serve and grow together.
 - This includes overseeing the financial and physical aspects of the church's ministry as well as the spiritual direction it takes.
- Elders should be involved in the training of leaders to ensure continued growth and guidance.
- Elders should oversee church discipline.
 - Admittedly, this is a larger topic than the context of these messages allow for, but the elders should be on the front line of making sure the church reflects the character of God and following Jesus' directions on how to address sin within the church.
- Elders should lead like a Shepherd.
 - Not domineering, but walking alongside.
 - Carrying the truth in love, they will be both compassionate and unwaveringly gospel driven.
 - They will both care *about* the sheep and care *for* the sheep.
 - They will work diligently to provide opportunities for spiritual growth through forms of instruction and ways to practically apply God's teachings (ministries and missions).
- The example of this leadership is meant to be set at home.
 - That's the implication of all the passages that reference having submissive kiddos. That could be a longer conversation, but the thrust remains: *if a man does not lead for Jesus at home, they are not qualified to lead for Jesus at church.*

4. An Elder Should Pray/For Yourself, But Also... For The Flock

In Acts 6, where we're given the first example of what later became diaconal ministry, we're told the apostles set these men aside to meet this vital ministry specifically so that they could devote themselves to **prayer and the ministry of the Word** (Acts 6:4). Both of these were crucial to effective shepherding. Yet, prayer is often treated as a secondary part of pastoral ministry.

I love how Bobby Jamieson put it: *"Prayer is not mere preparation for a pastor's work; prayer is a pastor's work."* Mark Dever, pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist church, has put it like this: *"[Pastors should] devote so much time to prayer in church that nominal Christians will grow bored talking to the God they only pretend to know."*

Pastors prioritize prayer because all people need Jesus.

Some Words on Wives

1. The calling of a pastor's wife isn't easy: Bobby Jamieson put it perfectly→"Pastor's wife" is not a biblical office. The role has no biblical qualifications or job description. Nevertheless, being married to a pastor typically exposes a woman to difficulties and demands that she would not otherwise face. Her household management, her children's behavior, her schooling choices, the food she serves, and much more are scrutinized and commented on, both to her face and behind her back. Her husband's schedule is often inconvenient and irregular. His ministry can place extra demands on the family, even at times, such as holidays, when other families can relax. She must support a husband whose work can embroil him in conflict and drain his emotional reserves. And she is never far from the pressure of other church members', especially other women's, expectations of what a pastor's wife should be and do. Pastor's wife is not an office, but it is work."

To The Wives of Elders (or Prospective Elders): Thank you; your role is vital and vastly underappreciated. Saturate your hearts in God's Word. He will be your refuge.

To The Church: Please be gracious.

2. Elders are still called to Jesus' high standard of spousal love: Again, Jamieson nailed it: "Your charge as a husband is to give yourself up for your wife. Sometimes that means sacrificing a ministry ambition or opportunity in order to serve her. Your wife is not a tool for you to use to advance your ministry. She is not a resource for you to spend on pastoring. Your church can always get another pastor; your wife can't get another husband."

History is littered with men sacrificing their responsibilities at home in service to the church – learn from that. Neglecting your family is *not* a mark of a spiritual leader.

TAKEAWAYS

How Can The Church Support Its Elders?

1. Remember, these are the expectations.

- Desire
- Godly Character
- Established Believer
- Leads Well At Home/In Other Circumstances
- Able To Teach
- Male

2. Remember, these are their roles: modeling, teaching, leading, and praying.

3. Pay attention to your leaders: Care about who they are and what they teach you.

- Live like their character matters.
- Desire to be fed the truth of God's Word.
- Provide opportunities for training.

4. Follow their leadership. Support and encourage them as they strive to lead you well for the glory of Jesus.

- "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)

5. Pray for your elders.

- Appoint them prayerfully. It's easier to be intentional about appointing the right men now than to be intentional about removing the wrong men later.
- Lift them up to the Lord regularly.

6. Pray for their wives & children.

- It's not easy to be a ministry family.