

When God Calls

A STUDY ON ELDER LEADERSHIP

Adult Bible Class Curriculum

November 2023

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INTRODUCTION

The Central Church of Christ and its current leadership has begun a process to identify individuals that God is calling to join the eldership team to lead, shepherd, and oversee this congregation in the coming years.

It has been the goal of the leadership to undergo this process every two to three years. As a point of reference, Central added elders to the leadership in 1996, 1999, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2013, and 2017. As you might note, there are gaps greater than our goal of 2-3 years in 1999-2004, 2008-2013 and our current 2017-2023. These gaps coincide with transitions within our pulpit/senior minister. (See page 21 in the Appendix).

Our current gap of seven years includes the senior minister transition and the COVID period. As the body of Christ at the Central Church, we will dedicate the first three months of 2024 to undergo the process of identifying the men whom the Holy Spirit has prepared to lead. In Acts 20:28, Paul's instructions to the Ephesian eldership states, "*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.*"

This eldership fully believes in the working of the Holy Spirit both in our individual lives and within our body as a whole. We ask that each of you join us in our journey to identify the men the Holy Spirit has prepared to serve at this point in our great history.

During the four Sundays in November, our Bible classes will look at seven traits or characteristics which we feel define the men God is preparing for service. We have titled our study "WHEN GOD CALLS."

Week 1 – WHEN GOD CALLS: ELDERS, JESUS, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

- Trait One – Follower of Jesus
- Trait Two – Spirit Led

Week Two – WHEN GOD CALLS: WHAT DO ELDERS DO?

- Trait Three – Shepherd
- Trait Four – Overseer
- Trait Five – Wise Teacher

Week Three – WHEN GOD CALLS: QUALITIES OF AN ELDER

- Trait Six – Qualities of an Elder

Week Four – WHEN GOD CALLS: WHO IS GOD CALLING HERE?

- Trait Seven – Central Church of Christ Focused

WEEK 1

WHEN GOD CALLS: ELDERS, JESUS, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

OPENING QUESTIONS

- Who is someone that has had a significant impact on your faith? Describe how they influenced you.
- How has your understanding of the Holy Spirit changed over your lifetime?
- In practical terms, what does it mean to be a follower of Jesus? Give examples.

LESSON FOCUS

In Paul's farewell address to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20, he begins his instructions to the elders with: "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." Jesus bought the church with his own blood and the Holy Spirit appointed the elders as shepherds and overseers of the flock. We, at Central, you and I, were bought by Jesus' blood!

Each one whom the Holy Spirit will appoint as shepherd of the Central Church of Christ, must be both a follower of Jesus, the Chief Shepherd, and one who is led by and full of the Holy Spirit.

LESSON

ELDER TRAIT ONE: FOLLOWER OF JESUS

Jesus is the head of the body, the church, and the ultimate example of Christian leadership.

- Ephesians 1:22-23— "And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way."
- Colossians 1:18-20— "And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross."

Elders are asked to have the same mindset as Jesus, doing nothing out of self-gain and arrogance but rather out of service, humility, and sacrifice. Jesus leadership is not always easy. It requires compassion, grace, forgiveness, and a deep commitment and love for all.

- In Matthew 20:26-28 and Mark 10: 42-45, Jesus was asked to place James and John as his #1 and #2 guys in his Kingdom of glory. To their surprise Jesus replied in Mark 10: 42-45—"You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the **Gentiles lord it over them**, and their high officials exercise

authority over them. **Not so with you.** Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

- In Philippians 2:1-11 Paul encourages the saints to imitate Christ’s humility. Verses 4-5 state, “...not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.”
- Whatever understanding we have of leadership (which will always be shaped by our experience with leadership in our culture and personal lives), we should begin with Jesus’ counter-cultural teaching on leadership as humble service (Mark 10:35-45).
 - Outside the Church, rulers lord over others and exercise authority.
 - Within the Church, those who serve as leaders are those who follow Jesus and go first in laying their life down to serve others.
 - We don’t give people the title “elder” to give them power or honor.
- Question: In our world today, what does the “mindset of Christ Jesus” look like?

ELDER TRAIT TWO: SPIRIT-LED

When selecting leadership, the church must identify individuals empowered by the Holy Spirit.

- In the early stages of the church, when all members were still Jewish, the Hellenistic (Grecian) Jews—those born outside of the holy lands—complained that their widows were being overlooked. The explosive growth of the early church led to problems both within and outside the church. When brought to the twelve apostles, they agreed and in Acts 6:3-6 they gave these instructions. “Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you **who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom.** We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.”
- Have you ever known an individual who is captivated and empowered by the Holy Spirit? What are the characteristics of that individual?

Spirit-driven leaders are missional, bold, seeking God’s mind and purposes, and attentive to the ways that God works, even if it takes them to unfamiliar destinations.

- At the beginning of the book of Acts, before his ascension into heaven, Jesus is giving instructions to his apostles, and in Acts 1:8 Jesus told them, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”
- During Paul’s missionary journeys, the Holy Spirit’s guidance is often mentioned.
 - Acts 13:4 states of Paul and Barnabas, “The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit...”
 - When it was obvious that Paul would be unable to return to Ephesus, in Acts 20:22-23 he called the Ephesian elders to come to Miletus and Paul states, “And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem,” and again, “...in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me.”

- Paul obviously listened to the Spirit and was a servant to instructions—even the unfamiliar, through difficulty and imprisonment.

- In 1 Corinthians 2:10-16 Paul discusses the role of the Spirit for our lives and the church.
 - “These are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who knows a person’s thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words. The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit. The person with the Spirit makes judgments about all things, but such a person is not subject to merely human judgments, for, ‘Who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?’ But we have the mind of Christ.”

Spirit-driven leaders purposely devote and attend to the fruit it bears.

- In Galatians 5:13-22, Paul discusses life by the Spirit. In verse 16, he says, “So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh,” and then he discusses the fleshly desires.
- But in verses 22-26 Paul describes life in the Spirit and how we know one is led by the Spirit.
 - “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.”
 - Note: “the fruit of the Spirit” is singular and not plural. As such, if led by the Spirit we will have all the fruit listed, some more than others, but it is not a list that we pick and choose from.

CONCLUSION / FINAL QUESTIONS

Consider the men among our body who are clearly followers of Jesus and are captivated and empowered by the Spirit. This is the beginning, the starting point for those who will join our current shepherds.

In Acts 20 while addressing the Ephesian elders, verses 28-31 gives specific instructions. Verse 28 states “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers...”

- How does Paul begin his instruction? “Keep watch over yourselves...” Why these instructions from Paul to keep watch over yourselves?
 - The first duty of leaders is to ensure their own integrity and character.

- How does a plurality of elders help each elder “keep watch over themselves?”
 - The elders follow the following: “I may be an elder, but as an elder, I am in full subjection to the eldership and I will support wholeheartedly their decisions.”

WEEK 2

WHEN GOD CALLS: WHAT DO ELDERS DO?

LESSON FOCUS

In our first week, we discussed that each man whom the Holy Spirit will appoint as elders of the Central Church of Christ, must be both a follower of Jesus, the Chief Shepherd, and one who is led by and full of the Holy Spirit.

This week we will dwell in three biblical descriptions of elders:

- Elders as Shepherds
- Elders as Overseers
- Elders as Teachers

OPENING QUESTIONS

- What is the job of an elder? What does an elder do?
- Name a person you know of great faith. How do you know he/she has great faith? In what ways do you wish to be like him/her?
- If our current society does not look naturally and automatically to age for wisdom, what challenges do we face as we seek church leadership?

LESSON

ELDER TRAIT THREE: SHEPHERD

One of the key biblical descriptions of elders is that of a shepherd.

- Returning to Paul's communal time with the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:17-35, verses 28b-31 give the following instructions: "**Be shepherds of the church of God**, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears."
 - The shepherd identity has become one of the primary terms we use for church leaders today. The biblical meaning of a shepherd is often lost in our modern, 21st century non-agricultural lifestyle.

- Verse 29 indicates that the shepherd’s task will be to protect the flock from wolves that threaten. The imagery of wolves points to false teaching.

Jesus’ description of himself as the Good Shepherd (John 10:7-9) provides another dimension: the selflessness of the shepherd.

- John 10:1-18
 - Throughout the Old Testament Scriptures, God described himself as a shepherd.
 - Psalm 23— “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.”
 - Psalm 80:1— “Hear us, Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock.”
 - Isaiah 40:10-11— “See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power...He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.”
 - In Ezekiel 34, God is condemning the shepherds of Israel “who only take care of themselves,” and in 34:11-31 God says, “I myself will search for my sheep,” and he then gives explicit instructions of the shepherd’s role.
 - Yet, in John 10, as Jesus is addressing the Pharisees (the supposed religious leaders of the day), he says in verse 6, “...but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.” With such a rich heritage of shepherding and a supposed dedication to scripture, how could the “religious leaders” not understand Jesus’ teaching?
 - Jesus then goes on to say in verse 11, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” And again, in verse 14, “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me.”
- 1 Peter 5:1-4 again draws on the imagery of a shepherd as Peter addresses the elders.
 - “**To the elders** among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ’s sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: **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; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And **when the Chief Shepherd appears**, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.”

Elders as shepherds are sacrificial, pastoral, protective, compassionate, seeking the lost, and guiding their flock towards terrain of spiritual wellbeing.

- Discussion: What images come to mind when we speak of the Christian leader as a shepherd?
 - A shepherd is someone who has a flock.
 - What is the difference between a shepherd with a flock and a leader with no flock? The leader without a flock is like the stranger or the hired hand in Jesus’ teaching. The sheep in John 10 refuse to follow the stranger, and the hired hand runs away when trouble comes.
 - If time allows, give examples of someone who fulfills the role admirably.

ELDER TRAIT FOUR: OVERSEER

A description for church leaders is overseers. The Greek word *episkopos* is commonly understood as bishop. It was a common secular term for a supervisor at work or in the field.

The term suggests that elders have authority in the local church. Paul uses the word shepherd and overseer (bishop) interchangeably.

- Acts 20:28
 - Some use the image of overseer/shepherd to emphasize tender care, but not the authority or responsibility. We should keep in mind that the overseer/shepherd is responsible for the flocks' nutrition and protection from wolves, i.e., they need a deep understanding of the Christian faith with a willingness to sacrifice for the members.

This would imply that we select those whose management style is based upon serving, caring, empowering, and tending.

- Our challenge is to take roles that first developed in house churches and small communities and apply them to a large church.
 - Discuss the challenge of shepherding in this situation where it is difficult to know all the people.
 - Discuss the challenge of protecting the church against the wolves (false teachers).

ELDER TRAIT FIVE: WISE TEACHER

The term “elder” comes from the word *presbyteros*, which means older person. In the ancient world, the older generation were treated with the utmost respect and considered wise teachers. This does not mean elders are to be “old,” but it does mean that we select those wise individuals that are thoughtful, listeners, experienced, theological, rooted in scripture, and always willing to learn and think critically.

A “teacher” does not have to be a great orator or even an effective presenter; instead, they are the antithesis to false teachers. False teachers are hypocrites, liars, divisive, envious, greedy, desiring power, and proclaiming a doctrine that is oppressive and contradicts the gospel.

- 1 Timothy 6:2b-5 includes the following warning:
 - “These are the things you are to teach and insist on. If anyone teaches otherwise and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, they are conceited and understand nothing. They have an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction between people of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.”
- In Titus 1:9-11, after listing the qualities of an elder, Paul describes a teacher as one who can encourage by sound doctrine.

- “He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it. For there are many rebellious people, full of meaningless talk and deception, especially those of the circumcision group. They must be silenced, because they are disrupting whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach—and that for the sake of dishonest gain.”
- 1 Corinthians 1:22-24 describes our teaching as Christ crucified.
 - “Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”
- 2 Timothy 2:24-25
 - “And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth.”
 - What is the threat to the Church? How do elders guard against it?

CONCLUSION / FINAL QUESTIONS

As we seek God’s guiding in the selection of additional elders, look to the descriptions discussed today.

For individuals you would consider suggesting as additional shepherds, ask yourself:

- Are they shepherds as described in the Word and do they have a flock? As a shepherd, are they able to oversee and care for their flock?
- Do they oversee as one with a flock or do they lead without a flock?
- Are they able to teach in their shepherding and oversight?

WEEK 3

WHEN GOD CALLS: QUALITIES OF AN ELDER

LESSON FOCUS

Today's discussion will center around Paul's instructions regarding the appointing of elders in 1 Timothy 3:2-7 and Titus 1:5-9. Our study bibles often put these scriptures into a list and refer to them as "Qualifications for Elders." These lists then become a check list—those with a check in every box must then be qualified.

These two passages are about the qualities or characteristics of men to be appointed as elders within the church. The qualities of an elder are filtered through "above reproach" in 1 Timothy and "blameless" in Titus.

OPENING QUESTIONS

- What are the job qualifications of an elder? What kind of person does an elder need to be?
- Have you ever been part of a church, where an elder should never have been made an elder? How does that happen?

LESSON

ELDER TRAIT SIX: QUALITIES OF AN ELDER

When the Apostle Paul was identifying local leaders, he was very interested in ensuring that the integrity and success of God's mission remain intact. Paul knew that there were both internal and external threats challenging the health of these churches. The list of qualities we find in 1 Timothy 3 and briefly in Titus 1 is not an effort to provide a complete job description for an elder but to offer a framework in identifying those who can lead a local church towards discipleship and mission. Paul lets these churches know that elders should be above reproach (1 Timothy) and blameless (Titus) to its church and surrounding community, and that they have done well in fostering a healthy home. In addition, they are self-controlled, respectful, a practitioner of hospitality, gentle, blameless, devout, and not a disrupter or contrarian. And it's important to note that they have been a disciple of Jesus for some time.

The Lists – What kind of men should serve?

Read Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9 using the side-by-side comparison of these two Scriptures provided (see page 22 in the Appendix). We suggest providing a copy as a handout.

The characteristics of each city to which the letters were specifically written are included at the top of the comparison document.

- 1 Timothy was written by Paul to Timothy as instruction to the church at Ephesus (see 1 Timothy 1:3-5).
 - Ephesus – civilized, well-educated culture with a Jewish influence
- Titus was written by Paul to Titus while he was in Crete.
 - Crete was a rough city – Titus 1:12 “One of Crete’s own prophets has said it: ‘Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons.’” This is the culture to which Paul was writing.

Are the lists identical?

- No, they are not; they were written to different groups of people (city and culture).

Should they be considered a flat check list of qualifications for an elder? Check Yes or No!

- If considered qualifications with a check box, only two are somewhat measurable—faithful to his wife and obedient children.
- The remaining lack a consistent way of measuring. How hospitable does a man have to be to be qualified? How good of a teacher? How self-controlled, how quick-tempered, how gentle, how disciplined?

Each list basically represents a list of qualities or Christian characteristics.

- This type of quality/character list was common in the literature of the time that 1 Timothy and Titus were written. They were a list of traits describing (**not prescribing**) the type of person needed for certain positions.
- How such a literary list worked was that the first item on the list is considered to be the primary qualification. The remaining list explains the primary qualification. The first item served as the filter through which all the other qualities were sent.
- Although not all lists worked like this, it was very common for the time of Paul’s writing. The way Paul uses the qualities/characteristics in 1 Timothy and Titus suggests he is using this style of writing.

Note the preceding instructions before each of Paul’s lists.

- In Titus, Paul begins: “The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you”, and here are the qualities and characteristics of the men to appoint as elders.
- In Timothy, Paul says in 3:1, “Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task”, and here are the traits of the man who should aspire the noble task.

In Titus, the primary (first) qualification is **BLAMELESS**.

- Verse 6 – the elder must be blameless in his marriage and family life.
 - In his marital life, he does not bring reproach on the Church, and he is blameless in the eyes of the community.

- In his family, his children “believe” or are faithful to their father and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.
 - Note the city to which the “wild and disobedient” language is directed – Crete. The idea is that his children do not bring him a lot of criticism.
 - Note in 1 Timothy, an elder’s children are not required to be “believers.”
- Why the marriage and family restrictions?
 - Because as verse 7 says, “...an overseer manages God’s household.” (Also, 1 Timothy 3:5)
 - A man’s family is the best test of his ability to lead God’s family. The early church is often described and functioned like a family unit, and who better to be considered an elder than those who led their families well.
 - Lynn Anderson states, “So the question is not ‘Did he get ‘em baptized before High School?’ but ‘Did he give them a faith that determines the way they live for a lifetime?’”
- Verse 7 and following – BLAMELESS appears again.
 - An elder must be blameless in the individual qualities and characteristics.
 - Paul lists five vices followed by seven virtues which are filtered through the quality of blameless.

In 1 Timothy, the primary (first) quality is ABOVE REPROACH.

- The elder does not bring reproach upon the church in his actions and life.
- So, how hospitable must an elder be? Enough not to bring reproach. In his handling of finances (money), enough not to bring reproach on the church. And so on.
- As far as family, verse 4 states, “he must manage in a manner worth of full respect.”
- In 3:6, Paul’s instruction to the Ephesians includes, “He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil.” The Church in Ephesus was an established church whereas the Church in Crete was not, and therefore the Titus list does not include the same “recent convert.” But Titus 1:9 does say, “He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.”
- Note twice in 1 Timothy 3:6-7, Paul refers to “judgement as the devil” and “devil’s trap.” This is confirmation of his beginning filter “overseer is to be **above reproach.**”

Note that “blameless” and “above reproach” does not mean sinless. If so, there would be no one who could serve as an elder.

See Appendix for Week 3 Resources if your class desires additional discussion on the individual qualities and characteristics. We encourage you to complete the lesson without getting sidetracked on individual qualities and as time allows you can then return to individual qualities.

CONCLUSION / FINAL QUESTIONS

- While no one can claim to be all these things all the time, we need only to find those whose conduct and reputation in these matters is blameless and above reproach.
- What kind of a person is the elder? Is it one of Christian character who portrays BLAMELESS and ABOVE REPROACH within the church and within the community where he lives?
- Titus and 1 Timothy are not a list of qualifications but are about the Christian character and qualities of the man.
 - Why is this distinction between qualities and qualifications important?
 - How are these lists helpful in nominating men to serve as additional elders at Central?
- In what ways would looking ONLY at these lists be detrimental? In other words, how are these lists alone inadequate for selecting elders?
- What are the qualities we look for in an elder that might not appear in an official “biblical” list anywhere?

WEEK 4

WHEN GOD CALLS: WHO IS GOD CALLING HERE?

LESSON FOCUS

The purpose of this study is to offer instruction and facilitation for the Central Church to discern and consider Central's next elders that support Central's vision and God's mission in our context. Central has a rich history with identifying elders that understand the mission and vision of Central and are willing to collaborate with the greater eldership team. Identifying individuals that understand the importance of plurality, collaboration, and team synergy helps the leadership team function at a higher level.

OPENING QUESTIONS

- What type of traits or qualities do you feel are important for an elder to have in the church today? What type of leader do you identify with?
- What has been your experience with our elders here at Central Church of Christ? Can you describe a time when you witnessed their ability to lead effectively?

LESSON

Early on in Christianity, as the gospel spread beyond Jerusalem and to all the ends of the earth, local churches launched out of a variety of locations, cultures, and circumstances. Through the Holy Spirit, Churches were then to identify the right local leaders that would direct their church community towards a vision that fit their context. Elders were established in Jerusalem (Acts 21), Crete (Titus), Ionia (1 Timothy), all the provinces of Asia Minor (1 Peter 5), and more. Notice the variety of locations, contexts, and cultures. Each of these specific locations required their own style and type of leadership.

A rhetorical question worth exploring in this lesson today: What type of elders is God calling to the Central Church of Christ today?

As we think about who God is calling to be our next leaders at Central, let's read **Ephesians 4:11-13 (NIV)**:

“So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the **pastors** and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

In Ephesians 4:11-13, Paul identifies a variety of leaderships types, including those called pastors (shepherds) to:

- equip the saints for service.
- to build up the body of Christ
- to bring unity to the faith.
- and help mature disciples into the full stature of Christ.

WHO GOD IS CALLING AS AN ELDER AT THE CENTRAL CHURCH

Equip the Saints for Service/Ministry: Here at Central, we have a rich history of leadership that has done an effective job in creating opportunities to equip saints for service.

- What do you believe are some of Central's greatest opportunities of ministries, service, and contributions to the kingdom? (Think about our local and global mission works, discipleship opportunities like bible classes, Faith Forum, small groups, or our worship hour, the variety of programs like children and youth, etc.)
- What role do elders have that ensures we maintain and grow in these areas that make Central vibrant and healthy? (Think about how our current elders serve in missions, bible classes, small groups, etc.)

Building Up the Body: There are a lot of ways to think about how our Elders are charged with building up the body (the Church). In 1 Corinthians 12, we learn that the Church body in Corinth is weakening because of a divisive and competitive spirit towards giftedness in worship. Paul calls on them to heal their church body by acquiring the greatest gift, being love.

- Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. Consider why church leadership should exemplify this type of love in a local church.
- Why would this type of love be critical when identifying future elders?

Bring Unity to the Faith: One of the great virtues of the Central Church of Christ eldership is unity. The elders are charged with making a variety of decisions on financial stewardship, governance, staffing, mission, doctrine, worship, and more. Our elders are diverse with different perspectives, but when a decision is made the eldership decides as one group. This is an incredible blessing and witness towards unity, civility, listening, and understanding.

- Why is a unifying eldership important to have today?
- Why would we want to identify elders that maintain a spirit of unity?

Maturing Disciples: In a recent Barna Research Article, church leaders were asked what they believe the church's role is in the community. The top two answers were 1) Tell others about Jesus and 2) Help Christians

Grow¹. In other words, elders are to create churches that make and mature disciples. It's about focusing on the spiritual wellbeing of both those who have not yet encountered Jesus and those who have known Jesus.

- What role does the eldership have in nurturing a church that prioritizes making and maturing disciples?
- Who are leaders in your life right now that are helping you grow as a disciple? What do they do to help you grow/mature in Christ?

In this lesson we talked about how it's important to identify leaders that understand and prioritize the mission and vision of the Central Church of Christ. We looked specifically at how Central's elders are called to equip, build the church body up, bring unity, and mature disciples. Can you think of people who are already equipping, building the church, cultivating unity, and developing disciples?

CONCLUSION

These last four weeks we talked about elders being followers of Jesus, Spirit-led, Shepherds, Overseers, Teachers, Above Reproach, Blameless, and Faithfully Grounded.

Beginning January 2024 our church community will enter a season of prayerfully considering who God is calling and identifying as the next elders of the Central Church of Christ. In the meantime, we ask that you prayerfully consider the type of elders that God is calling to lead our church today. We are blessed to have a variety of leaders, but who among us will help shape our vision for the next coming years? What type of church do we want to be 10 years from now? And who do we feel God is calling to help us with that?

End with this prayer on church leadership (author unknown):

*Lord Jesus Christ,
watch over those who are leaders in your Church.
Keep them faithful to their vocation
and to the proclamation of your message.
Teach them to recognize and interpret the signs of the times.
Strengthen them with the gifts of the Spirit,
and help them to serve their community,
especially the poor and lowly.
Give them a vivid sense of your presence in the world
and a knowledge of how to show it to others.*

¹ Barna Research Group. "How Pastor's and Non-Christians See the Church's Role."
<https://www.barna.com/research/church-pastor-role/>

APPENDIX

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE MATERIALS

WEEK 1 RESOURCES

Year	1996	1999	2004	2006	2008	2013	2017
Number of Existing Elders	10	9	11	10	10	12	11
Number of added Elders	3	4	3	4	4	3	3
New total	13	13	14	14	14	15	14
Age of New Elders Added	42	46	52	55	60	45	66
	45	44	49	46	55	50	66
	52	43	61	57	50	52	61
		63		53	49		
Avg age of existing eldership	59	57	59	58	59	62	60
Avg age after new elders added	55	54	58	57	57	58	61

As stated in our lessons, it has been the goal of the eldership to complete the process of selecting new elders every 2 – 3 years. As you can see, between 2013 and 2024, once complete of our current process, we will have added new elders only twice in an eleven-year span. As we move from our COVID period and into ministry with Mic, we anticipate we will once again add new elders in the 2026 year also.

To provide teachers with resource material for questions that may arise, we included the years new elders were added since 1996, the number of existing elders at each selection, the number of elders added. Also included is the age of the new elders and the average of the existing eldership before and after the additions. Currently we have 11 elders including the two who are on sabbatical.

WEEK 3 RESOURCES

COMPARISON OF SCRIPTURE IN 1 TIMOTHY AND TITUS

1 Timothy 3:2-7

Written to Timothy for the Ephesian Church. Ephesus was the most important city in Asia Minor (now Turkey). It had a harbor with access to the Aegean Sea and was located on an intersection of major trade routes, thus Ephesus became a commercial center. It had a pagan temple to the Roman goddess Diana. Very educated with an influential Jewish community.

Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task.

- Now the overseer is to be above reproach,
- faithful to his wife,
- temperate,
- self-controlled,
- respectable,
- hospitable,
- able to teach,
- not given to drunkenness,
- not violent
- but gentle,
- not quarrelsome,
- not a lover of money.
- He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?)
- He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil.
- He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.

Titus 1:5-9

Written to Titus while he was in Crete. Crete is the fourth largest island in the Mediterranean Sea. In NT times life in Crete had sunk to a deplorable moral level. The dishonesty, gluttony, and laziness of its residents were proverbial.

The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint[a] elders in every town, as I directed you.

- An elder must be blameless,
- faithful to his wife,
- a man whose children believe[b] and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.
- Since an overseer manages God's household,
- he must be blameless—
- not overbearing,
- not quick-tempered,
- not given to drunkenness,
- not violent,
- not pursuing dishonest gain.
- Rather, he must be hospitable,
- one who loves what is good,
- who is self-controlled,
- upright,
- holy and
- disciplined.
- He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

Footnotes

- a. Titus 1:5 Or *ordain*
- b. Titus 1:6 Or *children are trustworthy*

QUALITIES OF AN ELDER

1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9:

Here is a brief overview of the qualities—these are not qualifications!—in Paul's two lists. Please use this material only as a supplement to your own serious study of these important passages.

temperate (1 Tim. 3:2) – This word does not refer only to the drinking of wine; its meaning must always be determined by context. In verse 11, the same word modifies malicious talk and gossip. It just means “careful” or “responsible.”

self-controlled (1 Tim. 3:2, Titus 1:8) – Again, this word must always be determined by context. The application here is intended to be broad. Lots of these terms should be recognized as expressing commonly understood virtues that were similar to everyday moralistic writings of that time and culture. To exercise control over one's emotions and actions was/is seen as a commendable character trait in the public eye.

respectable (1 Tim. 3:2) – Good reputation in the community, both within and outside the congregation.

hospitable (1 Tim. 3:2, Titus 1:8) – In the first century, this meant much more than just having friends over for dinner. This was demonstrating selfless service to care for travelers or the marginalized in society. It meant blessing others out of one's own abundance.

able to teach (1 Tim. 3:2, Titus 1:9) – This refers to ability, not knowledge. I think knowledge is going to be assumed here. This was especially true in Ephesus where false teachers were attacking the gospel. This doesn't mean the elder has to be a skilled public speaker or a larger-than-life personality who commands attention in crowded Sunday morning classrooms. Some of the greatest shepherds set souls on fire sitting across a breakfast table with just one or two people and an open Bible. The point is that the elder lives in God's Word and regularly shares it with others. As he teaches, we get a sense of his wisdom and a feel for his heart. We more fully trust his leadership when he reveals his life to us in his teaching. I'll quote Anderson here: “The best teachers of Scripture will hold a larger view and firmer grasp of the Bible so they can perceive the implications of the sound and unsound uses of Scripture. When you or I bring a major spiritual problem to a man of God, we do not so much need a proof text as we need a principle; not so much a reference as a resource; not so much a verse of doctrine as a vision of deity.”

not given to drunkenness (1 Tim. 3:3, Titus 1:7) – By implication, this would allow moderate use of alcoholic beverages—we're all familiar with Paul's instructions regarding wine for Timothy in 5:23. Again, this has a whole lot to do with reputation and character.

not violent, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money (1 Tim. 3:3, Titus 1:7) – These three traits probably are a direct contrast to what the church and the city were seeing in the false teachers there in Ephesus. The manner of argumentation and the attitude toward money that characterize true and false teachers are addressed again in 6:3-10.

not a recent convert (1 Tim. 3:6) – The church in Ephesus had been established for a while; there were plenty of mature men to choose from as elders. Notice this same quality isn't listed in Titus, where the church in

Crete was brand new and filled with nothing but recent converts. Also, this isn't as much about doctrinal immaturity as about a character flaw: conceit.

good reputation with outsiders (1 Tim. 3:7) – Another general admonition that the overseers of God's church must be seen as men of good character by the entire community.

blameless (Titus 1:6) – “Above reproach” in 1 Timothy 3:2 is better translated “cannot be criticized.” In Titus 1:6, “blameless” is better translated “cannot be accused.” The dominant idea at the front of both lists is that an elder must have an untarnished reputation. He's not perfect; but nobody can criticize him or accuse him of not being serious about living his life the correct way.

not overbearing (Titus 1:7) – Can also be translated “arrogant” or “self-willed” or “stubborn.” This same word is used to describe false teachers in 2 Peter 2:10.

not quick-tempered (Titus 1:7) – This adjective means more than just losing one's temper. It describes someone who is inclined to anger, someone who leans toward an emotionally angry response as a first instinct.

upright, holy, and disciplined (Titus 1:8) – The words for upright and holy can also be translated “righteous” or “pure” or “devout.” The word for disciplined doesn't appear anywhere else in the New Testament, but other forms of it do, including the word for “self-control” in the fruit of the Spirit passage in Galatians 5.

A man whose children believe (Titus 1:6)

- As noted, the Titus instructions are that a man must be blameless in his family relations. Titus 1:7 says, “...an overseer manages God's household.” Timothy says, “He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect.”
- The Greek word “believe” in Titus 1:6 is *pistos* which can be translated actively as “believing” or passively as “faithful,” “trustworthy,” or “dutiful.” The translation is better translated as “having faithful children” which is used in the KJV version.
- The contrast is not between believing or unbelieving children but between obedient, respectful children versus wild, disobedient, and uncontrolled children. Note that Paul is talking about older children and probably adult children, not young ones.
- Those who interpret this qualification to mean an elder must have believing (baptized) Christian children place an impossible burden on a father. One can lead his children to an understanding of God and everyone's need for him, but the decision to make him Lord of their life must lie with the child and can't be made by the father. Have you ever known a child who jumped into the baptistry, so the father was qualified, and missed the entire point of making Jesus Lord of their life?
- On the other hand, a man who aspires to be an elder but has wild and reckless children and is unable to manage his family, is most likely not a viable candidate for the eldership who is tasked with taking care of God's household.
- Lynn Anderson states, “So the question is not ‘Did he get ‘em baptized before High School?’ but ‘Did he give them a faith that determines the way they live for a lifetime?’”
- The early church is often described as, and functioned like a family unit, and who better to be considered an elder than those who led their families well.

“Faithful to his wife” also “husband of one wife” (Titus 1:6 and 1 Timothy 3:2). The phrase is as ambiguous in Greek as it is in English.

- Teachers Note: some may note, the 1984 version of the NIV renders this passage as “Husband of one wife.” It was changed in the 2011 to “faithful to his...” rather than “husband of one...” Please don’t get off into a debate on the changes between the 1984 and 2011 versions; I just list it so you are aware of the changes.
- The Greek here literally means a “one-woman man” or “one woman husband”.

Probably not about polygamy

- Very few polygamous marriages in Greek and Roman Culture.
- Jews allowed polygamy, but very uncommon by first century.
- Exact same requirement applies to list of widows in 1 Timothy 5:9 (wife of one husband)
 - Polyandry—woman with multiple husbands—unheard of in Roman Empire
 - If “wife of one husband” doesn’t refer to polyandry, “husband of one wife”...
 - Matthew 19 and 1 Corinthians 7 prohibit polygamy.

Probably not about remarriage after death of spouse

- Romans 7 is clear that death dissolves a marriage and it’s no sin to remarry.
- Paul instructs young widows to remarry in 1 Timothy 5:14.
- Nothing in Law of Moses suggests that remarriage after death is wrong.
- Remarriage after death of spouse is fine in rabbinic teachings.

Probably not about remarriage after previous divorce

- Some take a view of divorce that never permits remarriage.
- Some say a man cannot remarry even if innocent of sin and occurred prior to conversion.
- Contrary to our understanding of Scripture.
- What is the premise for our discussion? An elder must be blameless. At the time this was written Jew and Gentile men alike could get a divorce for almost any reason. In a divorce situation today as far as elder characteristics are concerned, is the man “blameless?” Will his situation bring blame and reproach on the Church? If the answer is yes, then the man should not even consider serving as an elder.

English Translation

- The Greek wording is ambiguous; most English translations are not.
- *Mias* (of one) *gunaikos* (woman or wife) *aner* (man or husband)
- “Husband of one wife” is possible, conceals entirely reasonable translations.
 - “Man of one woman” or “man with one woman” or “one-woman man” or “faithful to his wife”

An Elder is a man who is maritally and sexually above reproach or blameless in all aspects of his relationship with his wife!

- In his book *They Smell Like Sheep*, Lynn Anderson states, “A godly spiritual leader is a covenant keeper in all his relationships, above all in marriage”.

“Faithful to his wife”

This interpretation fits the Scriptures and the function of an elder better than an arbitrary rule that bans capable men from using their gifts for God and may not reflect at all on their moral character or capacity for the office. The circumstances of a man’s divorce are not irrelevant. If he sinned in his marriage, he may well fail other qualifications (blameless, loves what is good, self-controlled, upright, holy, disciplined). Is the divorce a past sin that has been confessed, repented of, and forgiven? Are those sins evident in the man’s life today or is he known as a product and example of the Spirit’s transforming power?

“The verb is in the present tense: ‘He is currently the man of one woman.’ This understanding emphasizes the character of the man, not his marital history. It places the emphasis on his behavior currently as a result of Christ and not on the past when he was unredeemed. He is not a playboy; he is loyal and sexually pure. If he is married, he is faithful to his wife in all things.”

— from *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership*, by J. Stephen Sandifer

Husband of One Wife

- “Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife...” —1 Timothy 3:2
- “An elder must be blameless, the husband of one wife...” —Titus 1:6

From NIV Application Commentary, 1 Timothy, Walter Liefeld, Zondervan, 1999:

“As is often observed, the expression used here literally translates ‘man [or husband] of one woman [or wife],’ but this needs careful interpretation. Does it mean ‘husband of but one wife’ (NIV), ‘husband of one wife’ (NASB), ‘married only once’ (NRSV), or something like ‘committed to his wife’ (Message), or ‘faithful to his wife’ (NLT)? The same expression occurs in 1 Timothy 3:12, where each of the translations cited uses the same terminology noted here. However, the converse phrase occurs in 1 Timothy 5:9, ‘woman [or wife] of one man [or husband],’ and the NIV does not translate by a phrase corresponding to the one used here, but rather by ‘faithful to her husband.’ It is better to translate the phrase in question as ‘faithful to his wife.’

In an attempt to apply this passage about elders to the church today, positions may vary widely from each other as the following: 1) a person who has been divorced cannot be an elder even if not remarried, because divorce indicates some failure in the relationship. 2) Those who have been remarried after divorce are ruled out simply because they have been married more than once. This position is usually taken more strongly regarding someone whose former spouse remains unmarried. 3) Such a person may be an elder if the divorce occurred before conversion. 4) Such a person may become an elder if fault lies with the former spouse, especially if that spouse committed adultery. 5) Such a person may be an elder only after making earnest

attempts at reconciliation. 6) Divorce in itself does not prevent service as an elder. 7) Those who have been divorced and remarried may serve because God forgives and heals, and perhaps also because such persons can effectively counsel others because of their experience.

The following observations may be useful:

- 1) On the one hand, conversion makes a difference because the person is new in God's sight. On the other hand, marriage is a social, not just a Christian relationship, and while the person may be renewed, the circumstances have not changed and one or two families may continue to be adversely affected.
- 2) On the one hand, even if the proposed elder was converted and even if major fault lay with the former spouse, divorce may indicate some personal flaw, lack of wisdom, or other characteristic in the proposed elder that needs counseling and healing. On the other hand, such consideration should apply to any elder candidate, because avoidance of divorce does not guarantee that the individual, the marriage, and the family are healthy.
- 3) In today's complex society, blame is often hard to determine, and the state of a former spouse is likewise sometimes elusive. If the question is not only whether the former spouse has remarried but has had relations with another person, the whole matter becomes very cloudy.
- 4) Is the ideal that an elder has had a perfect marriage and is an outstanding example, or has he had an imperfect marital experience, perhaps even because of former sin, and can therefore identify with and be a help to others in the church likewise troubled?

It is possible to be legalistic in such matters, and one does not want to legislate regarding internal church decisions on the pages of a commentary. This much, however, can be suggested: The standard that an elder should be 'blameless' surely refers to one's present life (emphasis added). Paul himself writes of his former sins as forgiven, so that he could be an apostle. At the same time, sometimes a divorce and remarriage produce continuing effects that can hinder the testimony and work of an elder. Some matters may need to be cleared up before considering such a person for eldership.

Whether or not a person has been divorced is not the major issue. The issue is whether the individual's life and care of his family now exemplify faithful Christianity."

Adapted from Lynn Anderson's They Smell Like Sheep, Howard Publishing, 1997:

- 1) **moral purity** – An elder cannot be one who chases women or even has lust in his eyes. Few factors shatter trust as deeply as sexual sin. His commitment to sexual purity—even his emotional marital fidelity—must be obvious and without question to his wife and to all who know him.
- 2) **healthy marriage relationship** – These verses not only describe what an elder will not do, they tell us what he will do. A one-woman man manages and nourishes a healthy intimate relationship with his wife. They are happy together. He knows how to communicate openly with his wife. His healthy marriage shows evidence that he will be able to manage and nurture healthy, successful relationships and open communication in the church. Good shepherding definitely depends on such skills. How comfortable we feel around an aging couple

who love and respect each other and who obviously enjoy being together. And what a healthy environment such people spread in a church.

3) **love** – An elder knows how to love his wife, how to make her feel securely cherished and valued. Why would we expect a man to love God's church when he has not done a good job of loving his own wife? Conversely, how warmed and enriched we feel under a shepherd skilled in the art of love. A man who brings a glow to the face of his wife will brighten the lives of his flock as well.

4) **keeping covenant** – An elder is a promise keeper. He will keep his marriage commitment—no matter what—because he is a covenant-keeping man. And he is a covenant-keeping man because he worships and honors a covenant-keeping God. Covenant-keeping in marriage assures the flock that this shepherd is also going to keep his commitments with the church, that he is going to be there, consistently, with the best interests of the church at heart—no matter what it costs him. The shepherd will “lay down his life” for the sheep. He is not like the hireling who runs from trouble. He will not check out of the kitchen when the temperature rises.