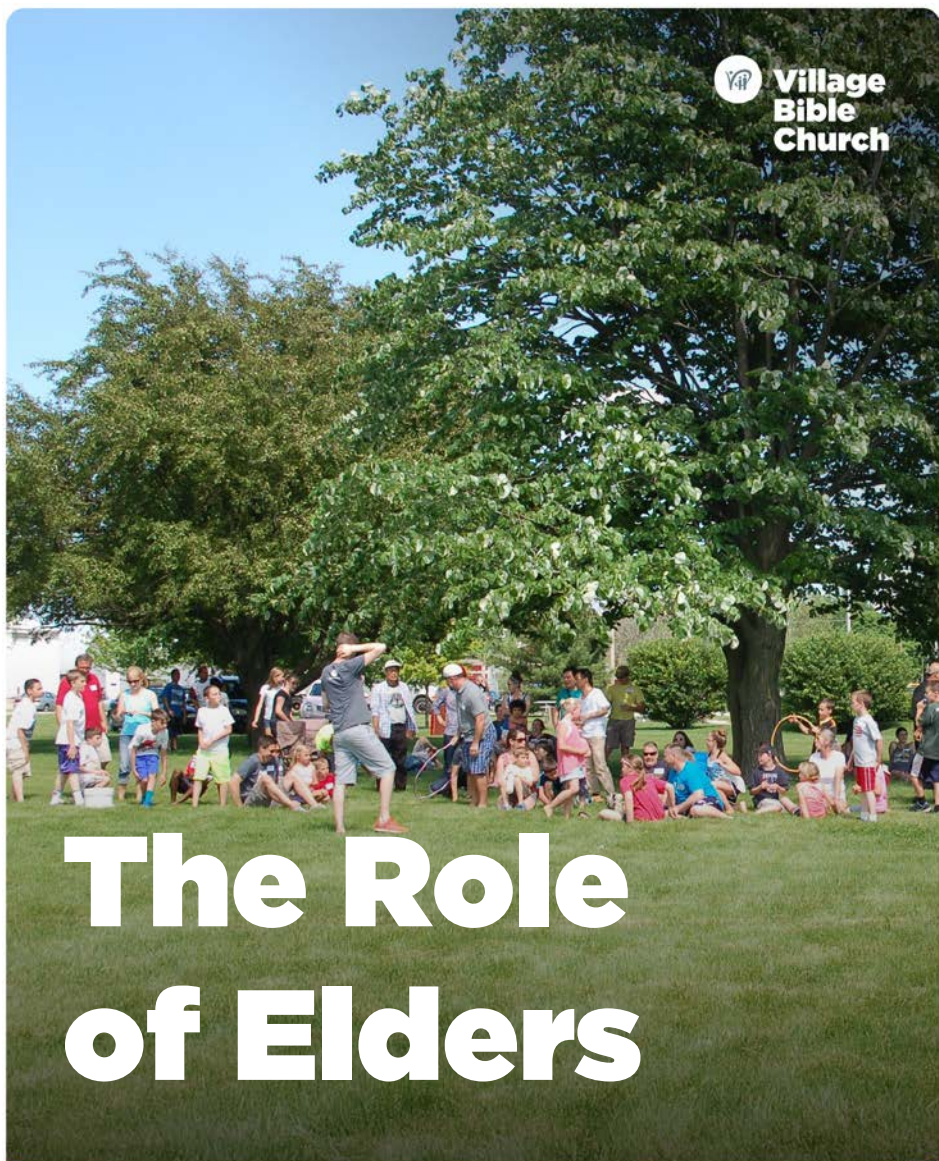




**Village  
Bible  
Church**



# The Role of Elders

**A VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH DISTINCTIVE**

The *Distinctives* series articulates key biblical and theological convictions of Village Bible Church.

[villagebible.org/distinctives](https://villagebible.org/distinctives)

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Answering the Key Questions about Elders.....	4
What is the proper understanding of the term <i>elder</i> ?.....	5
How is the term <i>elder</i> used in reference to the church?.....	6
How is the term “elder” related to the terms “bishop” and “pastor”?.....	7
What are the qualifications of an elder? .....	12
How are elders to be set apart for their service?.....	15
Are elders to be supported financially by the church?.....	20
Is the pastorate a team effort? .....	22
Does government by elders eliminate the role of special leaders?.....	22
What is the elder’s relation to the congregation?.....	24
The Ministry of Elders at Village Bible Church .....	25
Selection of Elders .....	28

# THE MINISTRY OF ELDERS

Proper biblical government by elders strengthens the church, and the biblical norm for church leadership is a plurality of God-ordained elders. (This is the only pattern for church leadership given in the New Testament. Nowhere in Scripture do we find a local assembly ruled either by majority opinion or by a single pastor.)

The New Testament Scriptures give examples of local churches being led by a plurality of godly men called elders. These elders functioned as members of teams, rather than as individuals, in directing the affairs of local congregations. Elders in New Testament times served as the spiritual leaders of their congregation and were given the ultimate authority and responsibility to ensure that their church remained on a Biblical course and that its mission was carried out.

Elders were selected on the basis of specific moral and personal criteria. And while the Scriptures do not go into great detail regarding the various responsibilities and functions of elders, they do enumerate the essential qualifications for this office and provide us with at least a basic framework of what it means to be an elder.

In light of this biblical teaching, Village Bible Church is led by elders who focus their efforts on shepherding and meeting the needs of individual church members through prayer, discipleship, outreach, visitation and other means.

At Village Bible Church, some elders also serve on the *Guiding Elder Team*, which makes decisions concerning the overall course of the ministry of Village Bible Church. The members of this team, in accordance with the laws of the State of Illinois, serve as the trustees of the church and constitute the oversight board for all matters of spiritual, financial and legal service rendered on behalf of the church. For corporate purposes, the Guiding Elder Team is the board of directors of the church.

## ANSWERING THE KEY QUESTIONS ABOUT ELDERS

The strength, health, productivity and fruitfulness of a church directly reflect the quality of its leadership.

Under the plan God has ordained for the church, leadership is a position of humble, loving service. Those who would lead God's people must exemplify purity, sacrifice, diligence and devotion. And with the tremendous responsibility inherent in leading the flock of God comes potential for either great blessing or great judgment. Good leaders are doubly blessed; poor leaders are doubly chastened, for "from everyone who has been given much, much will be required" (Luke 12:48). James 3:1 says, "Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly." And of greatest weight, elders are held accountable before God for the spiritual health of the people of their church (Hebrews 13:17).

Biblically, the focal point of all church leadership is the elder. It is the elders who are charged with teaching, feeding and protecting the church, and it is the elders who are accountable to God on behalf of the church. Below are some key questions, the answers to which are fundamental for a proper understanding of the ministry of elders.

## WHAT IS THE PROPER UNDERSTANDING OF THE TERM *ELDER*?

The word *elder* is of Old Testament Hebrew origin. The primary word for *elder*, *zaqen*, was used, for example, in Numbers 11:16 and Deuteronomy 27:1, of the seventy tribal leaders who assisted Moses. There it refers to a special category of men who were set apart for leadership—much like a senate—in Israel. Deuteronomy 1:9-18 indicates that these men were charged with the responsibility of serving as judges. Moses communicated through them to the people (Exodus 19:7; Deuteronomy 31:9). They led the Passover (Exodus 12:21) and perhaps other elements of worship.

Later, the elders of Israel were specifically involved in the leadership of cities (1 Samuel 11:3; 16:4; and 30:26). Still, their function was decision making—applying wisdom to the lives of the people in resolving conflicts, giving direction and generally overseeing the details of an orderly society.

The Old Testament refers to them as "elders of Israel" (1 Samuel 4:3), "elders of the land" (1 Kings 20:7), "elders of Judah" (2 Kings 23:1), "elders...of each city" (Ezra 10:14) and "elders of the congregation" (Judges 21:16). They served in the capacity of local magistrates, and as governors over the tribes (Deuteronomy 16:18; 19:12; 31:28).

Another Hebrew word for *elder* is *sab*, used only five times in the Old Testament, all in the book of Ezra. There it refers to the group of Jewish leaders in charge of rebuilding the Temple after the Exile.

The Greek word for *elder*, *presbuteros*, is used about seventy times in the New Testament. Like *zaqen*, which means "aged," or "bearded"; *sab*, which means "gray-headed"; and our English word *elder*, *presbuteros* has reference to mature age. For example, in Acts 2:17 Peter quotes Joel 2:28: "Your old men will dream dreams." The Hebrew word used for "old men" in Joel is *zaqen*, and the Greek word used in Acts is *presbuteros*. Used in that sense, *elder* does not constitute an official title; it simply means "an older man."

In 1 Timothy 5:2, the feminine form of *presbuteros* is used to refer to older women. There, older women are contrasted with younger ones: "[Treat] older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity." In that context, the term again signifies only mature age, not an office in the church.

First Peter 5:5 contains a similar usage: "Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older." There, as in 1 Timothy 5:2, the word is used to contrast age and youth. In such a context, *presbuteros* is generally understood to mean only "an

older person," not necessarily an officeholder of any kind. That is the primary meaning of the term in general Greek usage.

At the time of Christ, *presbuteros* was a familiar term. It is used 28 times in the New Testament to refer to a group of *ex officio* spiritual leaders of Israel: "the chief priests and the elders" (Matthew 27:3); "the teachers of the law and the elders" (27:41); "the officers of the temple guard, and the elders" (Luke 22:52); and the "rulers and elders of the people" (Acts 4:8). In each of these instances and in every similar usage, *presbuteros* refers to recognized spiritual leaders in Israel who aren't defined as priests of any kind. These seem to be the Sanhedrin, the highest ruling body in Judaism in Jesus' time.

Matthew 15:2 and Mark 7:5 use the phrase "the tradition of the elders" (cf. Mark 7:3). There *presbuteros* refers to an ancestry of spiritual fathers who passed down principles that governed religious practice. These were the teachers who determined Jewish tradition. In this sense, *elder* is equivalent to *rabbi* and may or may not signify official status.

There are twelve occurrences of *presbuteros* in the book of Revelation. All of them refer to the 24 elders who appear to be unique representatives of the redeemed people of God from all ages.

## **HOW IS THE TERM ELDER USED IN REFERENCE TO THE CHURCH?**

The New Testament church was initially Jewish, so it would be natural for it to adopt the concept of elder rule for use in the early church. *Elder* was the only commonly used Jewish term for leadership that was free from any connotation of either the monarchy or the priesthood. That is significant, because in the church each believer is a co-regent with Christ, so there could be no earthly king. And unlike national Israel, the church has no specially designated earthly priesthood, for all believers are priests. So of all the Jewish concepts of leadership, that of elder exemplifies the kind of leadership ordained for the church.

The elders of Israel were mature men, heads of families (Exodus 12:21); able men of strong moral character, fearing God and possessing truth and integrity (Exodus 18:20-21); men full of the Holy Spirit (Numbers 11:16-17); capable men of wisdom, discernment, and experience--impartial and courageous men who would intercede, teach, and judge righteously and fairly (Deuteronomy 1:13-17). All of these characteristics were inherent in the New Testament term *presbuteros*. The use of this term to describe church leaders emphasizes the maturity of their spiritual experience, as shown in the strength and consistency of their moral character.

*Presbuteros* is used nearly 20 times in Acts and the epistles in reference to a unique group of leaders in the church. From the very earliest beginnings of the church, it was clear that a group of mature spiritual leaders was identified to have responsibility for the assembly. The church at Antioch, for example, where believers were first called "Christians," sent Barnabas and Saul to the elders at Jerusalem with a gift to be

distributed to the needy brethren in Judea (Acts 11:29-30). This demonstrates both that elders existed in the church at that very early date, and that the believers at Antioch recognized their authority.

Since the church at Antioch grew out of the ministry at Jerusalem, elders probably existed there as well. In fact, it is likely that Paul himself functioned as an elder at Antioch before stepping out in the role of an apostle. He is listed in Acts 13:1 as one of that church's teachers.

Elders played a dominant role in the Council of Jerusalem, as recorded in Acts 15 (see vv. 2, 4, 6, 22, 23; and 16:4). Obviously, they were very influential in the foundational life of the early church.

As Paul and Barnabas began to preach in new areas, and as the church began to extend itself, the process of identifying church leaders became more clearly defined. And throughout the New Testament, as the church developed, leaders were called elders.

As early in the biblical narrative as Acts 14, we see that one of the key steps in establishing a new church was to identify and appoint elders for church leadership. "Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust" (Acts 14:23).

Nearly every church we know of in the New Testament is specifically said to have had elders. For example, Acts 20:17 says, "From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church." It is significant that the church at Ephesus had elders, because all the churches of Asia Minor—such as those listed in Revelation 1:11—were extensions of the ministry at Ephesus. We can assume that those churches also identified their leadership after the Ephesian pattern—a plurality of elders.

Peter wrote to the scattered believers in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia: "To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder...be shepherds of God's flock" (1 Peter 5:1-2). Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia were not cities, but rather territories. Thus Peter was writing to a number of churches scattered all over Asia. All of them had elders.

### **HOW IS THE TERM "ELDER" RELATED TO THE TERMS "BISHOP" AND "PASTOR"?**

Bishops and pastors are not distinct from elders; the terms are simply different ways of identifying the same people. The Greek word for *bishop* is *episkopos*. The Greek word for pastor is *poimen*. The textual evidence indicates that all three terms refer to the same office. The qualifications for a bishop, listed in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, and those for an elder, in Titus 1:6-9, are unmistakably parallel. In fact, in Titus, Paul uses both terms to refer to the same man (1:5, 7).

First Peter 5:1-2 brings all three terms together. Peter instructs the elders to be good bishops as they pastor: "To the elders [*presbuteros*] among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be

revealed: Be shepherds [*pomaino*] of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers [*episkopeo*]*—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be.*"

Acts 20 also uses all three terms interchangeably. In verse 17, Paul assembles all the elders [*presbuteros*] of the church to give them his farewell message. In verse 28, he says, "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers [*episkopos*]. Be shepherds [*pomaino*] of the church of God."

In general usage the term *elder* is preferred because it seems to be free of many of the connotations and nuances of meanings that have been imposed on both *bishop* and *pastor* by our culture.

*Episkopos*, the word for *bishop*, means "overseer," or "guardian." The New Testament uses *episkopos* five times. In 1 Peter 2:25, Jesus Christ is called the *episkopos* of our souls. That is, He is the One who has the clearest overview of us, who understands us best, and He is "the Shepherd and Overseer of [our] souls." The other four uses of *episkopos* have reference to leaders in the church.

*Episkopos* is the secular Greek culture's equivalent to the historic Hebrew idea of elders. Bishops were those appointed by the emperors to lead captured or newly-founded city-states. The bishop was responsible to the emperor, but oversight was delegated to him. He functioned as a commissioner, regulating the affairs of the new colony or acquisition.

Thus *episkopos* suggested two ideas to the first-century Greek mind: responsibility to a superior power, and an introduction to a new order of things. Gentile converts would immediately understand those concepts in the term.

It is interesting to trace the biblical uses of *episkopos*. It appears in the book of Acts only once, near the end (Acts 20:28). Of course, at that time there were relatively few Gentiles in the church, and so the term was not commonly used. But apparently as Gentiles were saved and the church began to lose its Jewish orientation, the Greek culture's word *episkopos* was used more frequently to describe those who functioned as elders (1 Timothy 3:1).

The New Testament bishop, or overseer, is in a unique leadership role in the church, specifically responsible for teaching (1 Timothy 3:2), feeding, protecting, and generally nurturing the flock (Acts 20:28). Biblically, there is no difference between the role of an elder and that of a bishop; the two terms refer to the same group of leaders. *Episkopos* emphasizes the function, *presbuteros* the character.

*Poimen*, the word for *pastor*, or *shepherd*, is used a number of times in the New Testament, but Ephesians 4:11 is the only place in most English translations where it is translated "pastor." Every other time it appears in the Greek texts, it is translated "shepherd" in most English versions.

Two of the three times it appears in the epistles, *poimen* refers to Christ. Hebrews 13:20-21 is a benediction: "May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd [*poimen*] of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will." First Peter 2:25 says, "For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd [*poimen*] and Overseer [*episkopos*] of your souls."

In Ephesians 4:11, *pastor* [*poimen*] is used with the word *teacher*. The Greek construction there indicates that the two terms go together—we might hyphenate them in English ("pastor-teacher"). The emphasis is on the pastor's ministry of teaching.

*Poimen*, then, emphasizes the pastoral role of caring and feeding, although the concept of leadership is also inherent in the picture of a shepherd. The focus of the term *poimen* is on the person's attitude. To be qualified as a pastor, a person must have a shepherd's caring heart.

So the term *elder* emphasizes who the person is. *Bishop* speaks of what he does. And *pastor* deals with how he feels. All three terms are used of the same church leaders, and all three identify those who feed and lead the church, but each has a unique emphasis.

## WHAT IS THE ROLE OF AN ELDER?

As the apostolic era came to a close, the office of elder emerged as the highest level of local church leadership. Thus it carried a great amount of responsibility. The elders were charged with the care and feeding, as well as the spiritual guidance, of the entire church. There was no higher court of appeal, and no greater resource to know the mind and heart of God with regard to issues in the church.

First Timothy 3:1 says, "Here is a trustworthy saying: if anyone sets his heart on being an overseer [*episkopos*], he desires a noble task." In verse 5, Paul says that the work of an *episkopos* is to "take care of God's church." The clear implication is that a bishop's primary responsibility is that of being caretaker for the church.

This involves a number of more specific duties. Perhaps the most obvious is the function of **overseeing the affairs of the local church**. First Timothy 5:17 says, "The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor." The Greek word translated "direct" in that verse is *proistemi*, which is used to speak of the elders' responsibilities four times in 1 Timothy (3:4, 5, 12; 5:17), once in 1 Thessalonians 5:12 (where it is translated, "have charge over"), and once in Romans 12:8, where leadership is listed as a spiritual gift. *Proistemi* literally means "to stand first," and it speaks of the duty of general oversight common to all elders.

Elders operate by consensus, not by majority rule or vote. If all the elders are guided by the same Spirit and all have the mind of Christ, there should be unanimity in the decisions they make (1 Corinthians 1:10; Ephesians 4:3; Philippians 1:27; 2:2). If there



is division, all the elders should study, pray and seek the will of God together until consensus is achieved. Unity and harmony in the church begins with this principle.

With the elders lies the responsibility to **preach and teach** (1 Timothy 5:17). They are to determine doctrinal issues for the church and have the responsibility of proclaiming the truth to the congregation. First Timothy 3:2-7, listing the spiritual qualifications of the overseer, gives only one qualification that relates to a specific *function*: he must be "able to teach." All the other qualifications are personal *character qualities*.

Titus 1:7, 9 also emphasizes the significance of the elder's responsibility as a teacher: "[A]n overseer...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." Already in the church, the threat of false teachers was so great that a key qualification for leadership was an understanding of sound doctrine and the ability to teach it. *Encourage* in this verse is the Greek word *parakaleo*, which literally means "to call near." From its uses in the New Testament, we see that the ministry of encouragement, or exhortation, has several elements. It involves persuasion (Acts 2:14; 14:22; Titus 1:9), pleading (2 Corinthians 8:17), comfort (1 Thessalonians 2:11) and patient reiterating of important doctrine (2 Timothy 4:2).

Acts 20:28 says that another function of an elder is **shepherding**: "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God." Involved in the concept of shepherding are the twin responsibilities of feeding and protecting the flock. Verses 29 and 30 reemphasize the fact that the protecting ministry of the overseer is essential to counter the threat of false teachers.

The elder acts as a caring and loving shepherd over the flock, but never in Scripture is it spoken of as "his flock," or "your flock." It is "God's flock" (1 Peter 5:2), and he is merely a steward—a caretaker for the possession of God.

Elders, as the **spiritual overseers** of the flock, are to determine church policy (Acts 15:22); oversee (Acts 20:28); lay hands on, or ordain, others (1 Timothy 4:14); direct, preach and teach (1 Timothy 5:17); encourage and refute (Titus 1:9); and act as shepherds, setting an example for all (1 Peter 5:1-3). These responsibilities put elders at the core of the work of the New Testament church.

***Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve. - 1 Peter 5:2***

- **Relating:** Elders should purposefully seek to build relationships with people both in the church and in the community. It is important that elders and those whom they guide know one another. In keeping with the biblical analogy of the shepherd and his sheep, elders must be recognizable, approachable, steadfast and trustworthy. They should interact with people at the natural points of contact afforded by our church structure.

- **Feeding:** Elders should challenge those whom they shepherd to move into a deeper and more personal relationship with Jesus. Because elders have the opportunity to be personally involved in the lives of those who call VBC their church home, they are able to help ensure that needed spiritual sustenance is available (Acts 20:28-31; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:2).
- **Instructing:** Elders should equip and edify the church by teaching and preaching the Word of God while, at the same time, they model godly living (Ephesians 4:11-13; 1 Timothy 4:12, 5:17b; 2 Timothy 4:1-2; Titus 2:7).
- **Leading by example:** It is often assumed that the function of a shepherd is primarily that of a guardian. In reality, however, a shepherd leads the flock. A flock left too long in one place will quickly strip a pasture of all sources of nourishment (1 Peter 5:3).
- **Encouraging** through correct teaching: Elders should encourage the members of the flock to remain consistent and to grow in their relationship with the Lord. At times sheep stray by falling into sin or by walking away from the church. Shepherds pursue and encourage stragglers and wanderers (Titus 1:9).
- **Discipling and Counseling:** Elders should develop one-on-one relationships with the flock, providing discipleship, mentoring and counseling (2 Timothy 2:2).
- **Mediating:** Elders are to be thoughtful leaders, always ready to give an appropriate response when encountering discord or division in the church. It is beneficial to have someone who is known and respected by some or all who are involved to speak into such situations. This is a natural function of elders, given the personal relationships that typically develop between elders and those they lead.
- **Caring and Interceding:** The elders are a resource for those who seek partnership in prayer. James wrote, "Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord" (James 5:14). Elders are to care for the spiritual well-being of members and regularly pray for and with the sick. They should give spiritual comfort during trials and pray with and for those who are part of the flock. This is a significant responsibility, and the reference in James 5:14-16 to praying for the restoration of health can apply to a wide range of needs, including people's physical, emotional and spiritual health (1 Samuel 12:23; Romans 1:19; 2 Corinthians 1:3-7; Ephesians 1:15-21; Philippians 1:9-11; Colossians 1:9-12; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; James 5:14-15).
- **Advising:** Elders should offer objective Biblical guidance with regard to conflicts, distortions in thinking and difficult decisions (2 Timothy 3:16-17).
- **Unifying:** Elders are responsible for creating and maintaining unity within the church. This is in accordance with the high priestly prayer of Jesus as recorded in John 17.
- **Protecting:** Elders are to guard the body against harmful influences, confronting those who are contradicting Biblical truth or who are following patterns of sinful behavior. They should warn the sheep of danger and discipline them in love and humility when they become rebellious, following the processes of church discipline outlined in Scripture (Matthew 18:15-20; Acts 20:28-31; Romans 16:17; 1 Corinthians 5; 2 Corinthians 2:5-11; Galatians 6:1-4; 1 Thessalonians 5:14;

1 Timothy 5:17-25; 6:20; 2 Timothy 4:1-5; Titus 1:9; 3:10; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:1-5).

- **Being Accountable:** Elders have a responsibility for the souls of their flock and will give an account before God (Hebrews 13:17).

## WHAT ARE THE QUALIFICATIONS OF AN ELDER?

First Timothy 3 and Titus 1 identify the qualifications of an elder. First Timothy 3:1-7 says,

*Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one 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 with proper 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.*

There, the single, overarching qualification of which the rest are supportive is that he is to be above reproach. That is, he must be a leader who cannot be accused of anything sinful. All the other qualifications, except perhaps teaching and management skill, only amplify that idea.

An elder must be above reproach in his marital life, his social life, his family life, his business life and his spiritual life. "The husband of but one wife" (lit. "a one-woman man") does not mean simply that he is married to only one woman—that would not be a spiritual qualification. Rather, it means an elder is to be a man who is utterly single-minded in his devotion to his wife. If he is not married, he is not to be the type who is flirtatious. "Temperate" seems to imply the idea of a balanced, moderate life. In the original Greek, the word translated "Self-controlled" can also have the connotation of being "wise." "Respectable" means that he has dignity and the respect of his peers. "Hospitable" means that he loves strangers—not necessarily that he has a lot of dinner parties, but rather that he is not cliquish. "Able to teach" is *didaktikos*, or "skilled in teaching." Other characteristics are that he be "not given to drunkenness" (Timothy himself apparently did not drink at all; 1 Timothy 5:23); not "violent" (not one who picks fights or is physically abusive); "gentle"; "not quarrelsome"; and "not a lover of money."

All these must be proven, demonstrated qualities and abilities, and the first place he must manifest them is in his home. He must manage his own family well, and keep his children under control with proper respect. "Family" in verse 5 probably refers to an extended household, including servants, lands, and possessions and may include in-laws and other relatives. All these were elements of a household in the first century, and a great deal of leadership skill and spiritual character were required to manage

them well. If a man could not manage his household, how could he be charged with managing the church?

The qualifications of an elder, then, go far beyond good moral characteristics. An elder must be demonstrably skilled as a teacher and manager. If anything in his life signifies a weakness in these areas, he is disqualified. If he has excessive debt, if his children are rebellious, if anything in his handling of business affairs is not above reproach, he cannot be an elder.

Understandably, he cannot be a new convert, for it takes time to mature, as well as to examine one's life and evaluate one's qualifications. In addition, elevating a new convert to a position of leadership runs the risk of making him become conceited.

To wrap all this up, he must have an impeccable reputation with those outside the church. His business and social activities in the community must also be above reproach.

In Titus 1:5-9, Paul lists similar qualifications. Writing to Titus, to whom he had given the responsibility of overseeing the appointment of elders on the island of Crete, he says:

*The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, 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.*

Most of these qualifications either echo or parallel the ones given in 1 Timothy. Again Paul says that an elder is to be a one-woman man, having children who believe and whose lives are not characterized by wildness or disobedience. In other words, his children are not rebelling against him or the values of a righteous home and family, and they are not living lives of profligacy.

The overseer must be "blameless," having been "entrusted with God's work" Again, this implies that he is proven in the ministry already. He is "not overbearing," seeking his own things. He is "not quick-tempered," "not given to drunkenness," and "not violent." He does not seek to get money through illicit or questionable means. He is "hospitable," fond of what is good, and "self-controlled," or discreet. He is righteous, devoted to God, and "disciplined."

And in addition to all that, he must demonstrate skill in handling the Word of God, so that he can both "encourage others by sound doctrine" and "refute those who oppose it."

The two lists of qualifications are strikingly similar. Notice the parallels and the differences:

<b>1 TIMOTHY 3</b>	<b>TITUS 1</b>
desires to serve (v. 1)	
above reproach (v. 2)	blameless (v. 6)
husband of but one wife (v. 2)	husband of but one wife (v. 6)
temperate (v. 2)	self-controlled
prudent (v. 2)	sensible
respectable (v. 2)	
hospitable (v. 2)	hospitable (v. 8)
able to teach (v. 2)	able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict (v. 9)
not addicted to wine (v. 3)	not addicted to wine (v. 7)
not pugnacious (v. 3)	not pugnacious (v. 7)
gentle (v. 3)	
peaceable (v. 3)	
free from the love of money (v. 3)	not fond of sordid gain (v. 7)
ruling his household well (v. 4)	above reproach as God's steward (v. 7)
having children under control with dignity (v. 4)	having children who are not accused of dissipation or rebellion (v. 6)
not a new convert (v. 6)	
of good reputation outside the church (v. 7)	
	not self-willed (v. 7)
	not quick-tempered (v. 7)
	loving what is good (v. 8)
	just (v. 8)
	devout (v. 8)

Additionally, at Village Bible Church, an elder would also affirm and carry out the Membership Commitments that we make to each other as well as the Elder Commitments affirmed to each other and to the church.

## THE INDIRECT QUALIFIER – THE ELDER’S WIFE

Additionally, if a man is married, there is an additional qualification – according to 1 Timothy 3:11, his wife *“must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things;”* and Titus 2:3-5 is fitting here also, that she *“be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things-that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.”* All Christian wives should seek to achieve these attitudes and behaviors, but Paul said the wives of elders and deacons are required to possess them.

While this passage is situated in the midst of the continued instructions concerning the deacons' qualifications, it cannot be ignored with respect to elders. Such a conclusion would be both unlikely and illogical. It doesn't make sense to assume that this divinely ordained requirement applies only to the wives of deacons. The example set by an elder and his family relationship is all the more crucial in leading, correcting, and overseeing God's local flock.

An elder must demonstrate the ability to lovingly lead, rule, and guide in the context of his family – both with his wife and with his children. It is one thing to authoritatively direct one's children, who are children. It is another matter to examine how a man has performed in choosing a godly mate, exercising loving leadership, and creating an environment for godliness. As it will be in leading a congregation, so it is in leading a wife. It isn't accomplished solely by issuing commands.

And, without considering the husband's direct role, it will be important that the elder's wife be a true helper with his work.

She won't be performing the same function as the elder himself, but she may necessarily be privy to much of that with which the elder will be dealing. So, we certainly can see why she should not be a malicious gossip.

The elder's work is sometimes enormous. He needs a companion who is as dedicated to the cause of the Lord as he is.

## SHE CAN'T BE INDIFFERENT TO HER DUTIES

She is to be “dignified” (ESV), “reverent” (NKJV), or “serious” (NRSV). These words suggest a person who is prudent, dignified, quiet, of sound judgment, and not giddy. The jobs of wife, mother, and Christian all require a certain seriousness.

This doesn't imply that such a woman can't enjoy a joke or possess a sense of humor, but it does clearly assert that she must not be foolish or indifferent toward any of her responsibilities.

Fulfillment of this requirement is reflected in her language, dress, and manners.

## **SHE MUST CONTROL HER TONGUE**

An elder's wife can't be a woman who is a "slanderer" / "accusing falsely" (1 Timothy 3:11), where the reference is to those who are given to finding fault with the demeanor and conduct of others, and spreading their innuendos and criticisms in the church."

Women, or men, with such a weakness wreak havoc in any church. How much more so a woman whose husband is an elder, who may know more about the spiritual problems of some members than other women, and who, along with her husband, is being looked to as an example of Christ-like living?

If elders see their work as that of shepherds and not mere administrators, they will be regularly working with members who have weaknesses, who are involved in sins that need to be privately admonished in the teaching phase of an overall process of positive discipline. Such efforts will be turned completely upside down and damaged by slanders, inappropriate and ill-timed criticisms, and the like.

Elders' wives are not church officers themselves but they are "one flesh" with the men who do serve in that capacity. So, the sinful conduct of such a wife won't stand alone, at least as regarding its impact.

## **WIVES NEED TO USE SELF-CONTROL**

The ESV uses the word "sober-minded," and the NASB the word "temperate" to describe an approach to life that is discreet, chaste, moderate, in control of oneself, and able to curb one's desires and impulses. Interestingly, this is the exact same qualification required of their husbands, who serve as elders (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8).

Elders, by reason of age, likely will have wives who are older as well. So, this makes Paul's admonition in Titus 2:3-5 fitting here also. He wrote, "The older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things—that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed."

That makes it demonstrably clear that an elder's wife, as an older woman, certainly has an active, though authoritatively subordinate, role in the work of the local church. Her example, like that of her husband, will be observed and used as a model. And that being the case, she must be sober or temperate in her life.

## **SHE MUST BE FAITHFUL IN ALL THINGS**

This, of a certainty, is a broad-ranging qualification. It covers:

1. Faithfulness to the Lord in behavior, worship, and teaching; and
2. Faithfulness to her husband, morally, as a suitable helper, in obedience, and in the care of children still at home.

At the risk of being redundant, it is worth emphasizing again that God expects all women to be faithful in all things. But if a woman is still working on achieving this, she isn't yet the woman that an elder must have to be able to do his work effectively.

## **NEED FOR SUCH WOMEN MOST CRITICAL TODAY**

God did not create man to be alone. He needs help. At times, being an elder is hard, strenuous work. He needs support. He can't effectively do his work if his own wife is one of his greatest problems. Sometimes, after discussions, studies, confrontations, and meetings, he will come home quite stressed. He critically needs a woman who understands that stress, who can help him avoid becoming discouraged by failures and setbacks, and who helps in whatever way she can.

An elder is to be hospitable. It may not be impossible for an elder to be hospitable without his wife's assistance, but it certainly would be difficult.

Additionally, the elder's wife has a critically important role to as she serves alongside her husband in shepherding the flock- specifically the women who are in the flock. While the elder will shepherd both men and women, in-depth discipleship or counseling with a woman in a one-on-one manner is not appropriate, effective or permitted. Titus 2:3-5 instructs that they should "admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed."

Elders will be ineffective in shepherding the whole church if their wives are not proactively shepherding alongside them. The wife's role is vitally important.

## **HOW ARE ELDERS TO BE SET APART FOR THEIR SERVICE?**

The New Testament clearly indicates that elders were uniquely set apart or appointed to their office. The term normally used for the appointing of elders in the New Testament is *kathistemi*. This term implies official recognition by the leadership of the church and a public announcement setting men aside for special ministry.

In 1 Timothy 4:14, Paul says to Timothy, "Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you."

Interestingly, the laying on of hands comes from the Old Testament sacrificial system. When a sacrifice was given, the hands of the offerer were placed on the sacrifice, to show identification. So the laying on of hands became a means by which one could identify himself with another.

In the same way, the New Testament appointment ritual demonstrated solidarity between the elders and the one on whom they laid their hands. It was a visible means of saying, "We commend you to the ministry. We stand with you, support you and affirm your right to function in a position of leadership in this church."



Paul writes to warn Timothy, "Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure" (1 Timothy 5:22). This emphasizes the seriousness of the statement of solidarity. In other words, Paul is saying, "If you lay hands on a man who is sinning, and thereby appoint him for pastoral ministry, you have entered into his sin. If you don't want to be a participant in sin, don't fail to seek the mind of the Lord in the process."

A man should be considered for appointment as an elder only after he has proved himself suitable for a ministry of leadership through a period during which he is *tested*. Then he may be *tempered* for a time, during which he is observed functioning in a limited position of delegated oversight. If he demonstrates capability in leadership and loyalty to the message, he can be publicly acknowledged as one who is to be *trusted* in the service of leadership. The church should have men in this proving process as it looks to the future.

Biblically, the laying on of hands was done by the recognized leaders of a church. In this way they identified themselves with those who were becoming leaders. But the process of identifying leaders may also have involved the people. Acts 14:23 says, "Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust." The word for "appointed" in this verse is *cheirotoneo*, which literally means "to choose by raising hands." It is the same word used to describe how votes were taken in the Athenian legislature. It came to mean "to appoint."

Some feel that the use of *cheirotoneo* implies that an actual congregational vote by show of hands was taken, but this is forcing the word. The context of Acts 14:23 indicates that only Barnabas and Paul (the antecedents of the pronoun *they*) were involved in the choosing.

Second Corinthians 8:19 uses *cheirotoneo* to describe the appointment of an unnamed brother "appointed by the churches" to travel with Paul. There the plural "churches" indicates that he was selected not by a single congregational vote, but rather by the consensus of the churches of Macedonia—probably as represented by their leaders.

So using the term *cheirotoneo* in an exaggerated, literal way is not sufficient to support the idea of the election of elders by congregational vote, although the assent of the congregation may be implied.

Acts 6:5 is often submitted as proof for congregational selection: "This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism." Note, however, that those chosen were not called elders. They were servers whose task was to free the apostles for spiritual leadership. And the people brought them to the apostles for approval—not the reverse (v. 6). The congregation recognized them men as godly and qualified men, but the apostles appointed them to their task.

The New Testament church is seen in transition. Patterns of church leadership developed as the first-century church matured. We can trace three steps in the process of appointing leaders. Initially, it was the apostles who selected and officially appointed elders (Acts 14:23). After that, elders were appointed by those who were close to the apostles and involved in their ministry. For example, Paul specifically charged Titus with the appointing of elders (Titus 1:5). In the third phase, the elders themselves ordained other elders (1 Timothy 4:14). Always the ultimate responsibility for appointing elders was part of the function of church leadership.

Today there are no apostles or men who have been closely associated with apostles, but the biblical pattern still holds. Church leaders—whether they be called elder, bishop, pastor, missionary, evangelist, apostolic representative, or whatever—should have the responsibility of identifying and appointing other elders.

Those who would be elders must desire to serve in this capacity. First Timothy 3:1 says, "Here is a trustworthy saying: if anyone *sets his heart on* being an overseer, he *desires* a noble task" (emphases added). The starting point in identifying a potential elder is the desire in the heart of the individual. First Peter 5:2 says, "Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be."

In other words, we are not to go out and coerce men to become elders. One who is qualified to be an elder will be eager to give his life to the teaching of the Word of God and the leading of the flock of God, without any thought of gain at all. He will desire the office, pursue being set apart, and devote himself to the Word of God. No one will have to talk him into it; it is his heart's passion.

Furthermore, he serves "because [he is] *willing, as God wants [him] to be*" (emphases added). His service as an elder is a calling from God. The desire to serve as an elder is in his heart because God put it there.

If a man has the desire, feels he is called and has all the qualifications, one thing is still necessary before he can be appointed as an elder. The elders must together seek God's will and affirm that He is in the decision. Acts 14:23 describes the process the apostles followed in selecting elders: "Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust." Before they appointed any elders, they gave themselves over to prayer and fasting. They viewed eldership with great seriousness as the very highest calling.

Acts 20:28 affirms the Holy Spirit's work in the selection of elders: "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock, of which *the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.*" (emphasis added). In response to His call, God plants in a man's heart a passion for the ministry, and then confirms it by the leading of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the leadership through prayer and fasting. A man should not become an elder just because

he has a vague notion that he would like to use his gifts and abilities to help the church. He should be motivated by a burden that causes him to seek God earnestly.

Acts 13:2 says that the instructions from the Holy Spirit to set apart Paul and Barnabas came "while they were worshiping the Lord and fasting." The call of God is not to be taken lightly, and the will of God is not to be sought superficially. God's will in the matter of appointing church leaders will be expressed through the collective sense of God's working among the leadership. They must be sensitive to it. The church is where the call is confirmed.

So elders are a group of specially called and chosen men with a great desire to lead and feed the flock of God. Their choice is initiated by the Holy Spirit, confirmed by prayer, and qualified through the consistent testimony of a pure life in the eyes of all.

### **ARE ELDERS TO BE SUPPORTED FINANCIALLY BY THE CHURCH?**

Even in the early church, some elders were paid by the church for their labor. First Timothy 5:17-18 says, "The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages." "Honor" in verse 17 is the Greek word *time*, which, as the context shows, refers to financial remuneration. (Notice that Paul quotes an Old Testament verse [Deuteronomy 25:4] and a New Testament verse [Matthew 10:10] and calls them both Scripture.)

In 1 Corinthians 9:1, 3-9 Paul says,

*Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord?...This is my defense to those who sit in judgment on me. Don't we have the right to food and drink? Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas? Or is it only I and Barnabas who must work for a living? Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk? Do I say this merely from a human point of view? Doesn't the Law say the same thing? For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it about oxen that God is concerned?*

In other words, it is bound into the very nature of the ministry that those who minister should be supported. Soldiers are supported by the government. Farmers eat of their harvest. Shepherds drink milk from the flock. Even oxen get fed through the work they do. So those engaged in pastoral ministry are to be supported by the church. Paul adds in verse 13, " Don't you know that those who work in the temple get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar?" Just as the priests lived off the offerings of the people, so those who minister under the New Covenant should be supported by those to whom they minister.

Nevertheless, Paul also establishes the fact that such subsidy is optional. It is a right, not a mandate. In verse 6, he says, "[I]s it only I and Barnabas who must work for a living?" He and Barnabas were supporting themselves through work outside the scope of the church. They had given up their right to refrain from working outside the context of ministry. Paul is clear that as ministers, they had a right to be supported by the church, even if they chose not to exercise that right. Their working was out of choice, not necessity, because they wanted to offer the gospel free of charge (v. 18), and they did not want to place the burden of their support on the church (1 Thessalonians 2:9).

Every elder has the same right. If his eldership is a calling from the Lord, if the church has recognized that, and if his calling has been confirmed through the Spirit of God to the leadership, he has the right to be supported by the church. If he senses the leading of the Spirit of God to seek subsidy so that he can be more free to do what God has put in his heart to do, the church is obligated by the recognition of his eldership to support him.

But the "tentmaking" role is also an option. If an elder chooses to gain income in another way, that is within the latitude of Scripture. Elders may choose to support themselves by working outside the church, as did Paul, for a number of reasons. They may not wish to put the burden of their support on the church. They may feel their testimony has a greater impact if they do not seek support. In a church with a plurality of elders, it is likely that some will support themselves, and others will be supported by the church. This will be determined by the group. Either way, it does not affect the man's status as an elder.

While the terms *lay* and *clergy* are not biblical terms, this doesn't mean they aren't helpful. In certain circumstances, it may be useful to distinguish between those whose full support comes from their service to the church and those whose main source of income is another occupation; but in Scripture, no such artificial distinctions are drawn. There are not different classes of saints, and in terms of position, there is biblically no difference between a lay elder and a pastor. Each elder is charged with the oversight, care, feeding, protection and teaching of the flock. All the elders together constitute the leadership and example for the rest of the church. All have been ordained by the church, called by God and set apart by God to a shepherding function as defined in the Scriptures. They are all called to the same level of commitment and to the same office. Subsidy should not be a dividing issue. Every elder has the option to receive support, or to support himself—whichever reflects God's will.

In fact, those who choose not to accept support from the church may have an advantage in the ministry they could not enjoy if they were paid by the church. They are uniquely in a position to display to the world their testimony of being above reproach. They are more exposed to unbelievers in the workplace and are on the cutting edge in a different dimension of life, able to interface with people with whom the church might otherwise have no contact. They may bring a greater degree of credibility to the entire group of elders. So an elder's subsidy is optional; his spiritual qualifications are not.

## IS THE PASTORATE A TEAM EFFORT?

Clearly, all the biblical data indicates that the pastorate is a team effort. It is significant that every place in the New Testament where the term *presbuteros* is used, it is plural, except where the Apostle John uses it of himself in 2 and 3 John, and where Peter uses it of himself in 1 Peter 5:1. The norm in the New Testament church was a plurality of elders. There is no specific reference in all the New Testament to a one-pastor congregation. This is not to say there were none, but none is mentioned. It is significant that Paul addressed his epistle to the Philippians "to all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers [pl. *episkopos*] and deacons" (1:1).

Some have said that Revelation 1 supports the one-pastor concept. There, the apostle John speaks of "the angels of the seven churches" (v. 20). *Angel* can mean "messenger," and those who argue for the single-pastor church say that the messengers here and in chapters 2 and 3 are the pastors of the churches. There are a number of problems with this interpretation. First, it cannot be proved that *angelos* refers to a pastor. These "angels" are never called "elder," "bishop," or "pastor." In fact, it is debatable whether they are human messengers at all. *Angelos* is nowhere used in the New Testament to refer to a pastor, elder, or bishop, and every other time *angelos* appears in the book of Revelation, it refers to angels.

Second, even if it could be demonstrated that these angels were pastors, this still would not prove that they were not representatives of a group of pastors. The clear New Testament pattern for church government is a plurality of elders. Acts 14:23 says: "Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust" Titus 1:5 says: "The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you." It may be that each elder in the city had an individual group over which he had oversight. But the church was seen as one church, and decisions were made by a collective process and in reference to the whole, not the individual parts.

Much can be said for the benefits of leadership made up of a plurality of godly men. Their combined counsel and wisdom helps assure that decisions are not self-willed or self-serving to a single individual (see Proverbs 11:14). In fact, one-man leadership is characteristic of cults, not of the church.

## DOES GOVERNMENT BY ELDERS ELIMINATE THE ROLE OF SPECIAL LEADERS?

No, it does not eliminate the unique role of special leaders. Within the framework of elders' ministries there will be great diversity, as each exercises his unique gifts. Some will demonstrate special giftedness in the areas of administration or service; others will evidence stronger gifts of teaching, exhortation, or other abilities. Some will be highly visible; others will function in the background. All are within the plan of God for the church.

The twelve disciples are a good example of how diversity functions in a unified system. The disciples were all equal in terms of their office and privileges. With the exception of Judas, they all will reign on equal thrones, all to be equally respected and honored (Matthew 19:28). And yet within the Twelve, there was a tremendous amount of diversity.

Scripture includes four lists of the disciples—in Matthew 10:2-4, Mark 3:16-19, Luke 6:14-16, and Acts 1:13. Each list divides the Twelve into three groups of four names, and the three sub-lists always contain the same names, although the order may be altered. Generally, the names appear in descending order, beginning with those who were most intimate with Christ, and always ending with Judas Iscariot.

The first four listed are always Peter, James, John and Andrew. We are more familiar with them, because they were closest to Christ, and the Gospels tell us more about them. The second group comprises Philip, Matthew, Nathaniel, and Thomas, while the last group includes James, both Judases, and Thaddeus.

It is significant that although the order within the sub-lists differs from one account to another, the first name in each group always remains the same. In the first group, the leading name is always Peter. The first name in the second group is always Philip. And James always leads the listing of the third group.

Apparently, each of the groups had a recognized leader. His position as leader was not necessarily by appointment, but because of the unique influence he had on the rest of the men. Peter, the name at the beginning of every list, became the spokesman for the entire group, as we see repeatedly throughout Scripture. Almost every time the disciples wanted to ask Jesus a question, Peter was the mouthpiece.

They had an equal office, equal honor and equal privileges and responsibilities. They were all sent out two by two. They all preached the Kingdom. They all healed. They all had access to Jesus. But while none of them was less than the others in terms of office or spiritual qualification (except for Judas), nevertheless, some of them stood out over the others as leaders among leaders.

A position of leadership does not imply spiritual superiority. It seems unlikely that Peter was the most spiritually qualified of the disciples. Perhaps James and John came to Jesus to ask for the highest places because they thought Peter was not qualified. Even though he was a leader, he certainly was not spiritually superior to the others. It could be that James the Less was the most spiritual of all. He may have had marvelous gifts that we just don't read about, because Peter, as the spokesman for the group, was so dominant. We don't know. But it does no disservice to the equality of the Twelve that one of them would give special leadership to the group.

The same phenomenon can be observed in the book of Acts. James, for example, was apparently regarded as a leader and spokesman for the entire church (Acts 12:17; 15:13). Although he was not in any kind of official position over the other elders, they seemed to look to him for leadership, at least at the church in Jerusalem. Peter was

present, yet James was in charge. Their roles clearly differed. But no one was *the* leader of everything.

Peter and John are the two main characters in the first twelve chapters of Acts. Yet there is no record that John ever preached a single sermon. Again, Peter seemed to do all the talking. It wasn't that John didn't have anything to say; when he finally got it out, he wrote the Gospel of John, three epistles and the book of Revelation. But Peter had unique gifts, and in the plan of God, Peter was to be the spokesman. John's was a supporting role—not a less important role, but a different one.

Beginning in Acts 13, Paul and Barnabas become the dominant characters. And although Barnabas was probably the leading teacher in the church before Paul came along, Paul totally dominated the duo. The Greeks even named him Mercury, because he was the chief spokesman. Barnabas undoubtedly did some teaching and preaching, but his sermons are not recorded. His was a different—less visible, perhaps, but no less important—role in their joint ministry.

Every ministry we see in the New Testament is a team effort. Paul seems continually to commend the people who worked with him. Some of them were, no doubt, co-teachers. Others of them carried out servants' tasks. None of that eliminates the unique roles of leadership. But it does prevent the independent, non-accountable, self-styled leader from dominating—people such as Diotrephes, "who love[d] to be first" (3 John 9).

## **WHAT IS THE ELDER'S RELATION TO THE CONGREGATION?**

Elders are called and appointed by God, confirmed by the church leadership and assigned the task of leadership. To them are committed the responsibilities of being examples to the flock, giving the church direction, teaching the people and leading the congregation. Scripture implies that anyone at a lower level of leadership involved in decision-making as it relates to church policy or doctrine should be under the elders' authority.

Because they share unique responsibility and position in the church, elders are worthy of great respect. First Thessalonians 5:12-13 says: "Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work."

The word translated "respect" in this passage means "to know intimately." Along with the rest of this passage, it implies a close relationship involving appreciation, respect, love and cooperation. And the reason for this great feeling of appreciation is "because of their work." We are to respect them because of the calling that they are fulfilling—not only because of their diligent labor and the task they have, but primarily because of the calling to which they have been called.

Hebrews 13:7 says, "Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith." This emphasizes both

the elder's responsibility to live as an example, manifesting in his life the result of virtue, and the church member's duty to be mindful of those who have led them in this way.

Verse 17 adds another dimension of the congregation's duty toward their spiritual leaders: "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage you." In other words, the congregation is spiritually accountable to the elders, and the elders are accountable to God. The congregation should submit to the elders' leadership and let the elders be concerned with their own accountability before the Lord. If the congregation is submissive and obedient, the elders will be able to lead with joy and not with grief, which is ultimately unprofitable for everyone.

This does not mean, however, that if an elder sins openly his sin should be ignored. First Timothy 5:19-21 says,

*Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses. Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning. I charge you, in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, to keep these instructions without partiality, and to do nothing out of favoritism.*

An accusation of sin against an elder is not to be received lightly. Nor is it to be overlooked. Elders are to be disciplined for sinning in the same way anyone else in the church would be. In no way are they to receive preferential treatment.

The testimony of the church is most visible in the lives of the elders. If they ignore the biblical mandate for holiness, the church will suffer the consequences. Equally, if the church is not submissive to the leadership God has ordained, its testimony will suffer, its priorities will be unbalanced, and ultimately its savor as the salt of the earth will be lost.

Our desire is to see God's church functioning as He has ordained, with strength and purity in the midst of a weak and wicked society. Our strong conviction is that when the church submits to God's pattern for leadership, we will experience His blessing beyond measure.

## **THE MINISTRY OF ELDERS AT VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH**

Village Bible Church is led by elders who focus their efforts on meeting the needs of individual church members through prayer, outreach, visitation, networking and other means.

All elders will be called to fulfill the biblical mandate of shepherding the flock. Some elders will also be called to serve on the Guiding Elder Team, which makes the guiding decisions determining the course of our church and its ministry. Some elders also fill their role in paid staff position.



## Shepherding Elders

Shepherding is a specific and vital responsibility of those who accept the call to become elders. "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God." (Acts 20:28) Involved in the concept of shepherding are the twin responsibilities of feeding and protecting the flock. All elders serve as shepherds of the flock, a role that is defined under "Shepherding" on page 9-10 of this document.

## Guiding Elders

Paul, in his first letter to Timothy, makes reference to "the elders who direct the affairs of the church" (5:17). The meaning of the Greek word translated "direct" is "to preside over" or "govern." As a church grows, it seems appropriate and even necessary for there to be a group of elders who focus particularly on the affairs and spiritual health of the church as a whole. In our model, such elders, in addition to shepherding the members of a local flock in a more personal way, also exercise a governing function. We therefore refer to such elders as Guiding Elders. The Guiding Elder Team is a subset of the full body of elders and is entrusted with the responsibility of decision-making with regard to the overall vision, strategy, direction and ministry of Village Bible Church.

In addition to their various roles as shepherds, those who function in the role of Guiding Elder serve the church body in the following ways:

1. **Governance:** Ultimate decision-making authority resides with the Guiding Elder Team, which has been entrusted with the responsibility of overseeing the overall ministry of this church.
2. **Guidance and Envisioning:** Proverbs 11:14: *Where there is no guidance, the people fall.*

The Guiding Elder Team is charged with discerning the values and vision that ought to guide the overall ministry of VBC and with formulating goals and strategies that will facilitate the carrying out of that vision. Following are some of the ways the Guiding Elders are to carry out this responsibility:

- a. Through constant prayer and by searching the Scriptures, they are to seek direction and guidance from the Holy Spirit.
- b. They are to empower the staff to implement the vision, goals, doctrine and values of the Church.
- c. They are to participate in envisioning, blessing and empowering new ministries that are consistent with the vision, goals, values and doctrine of Village Bible Church.
- d. They have a responsibility to communicate matters of importance to the body.
- e. Interaction and communication between the Guiding Elders and the staff should reflect a recognition of and respect for the staff organizational chart.

3. **Direction:** The Guiding Elder Team ensures that the direction of the church is consistent with its statement of purpose and core values. With the assistance of other spiritually mature individuals, they guide the life of the church (1 Timothy 3:8-12; 5:17a).
  - a. The Guiding Elder Team oversees the nominating process for members of the Shepherding Elder team.
  - b. It is also the responsibility of the Guiding Elders, in conjunction with the staff, to identify areas in need of deacon oversight.
  - c. Church discipline is administered under the oversight of the Guiding Elder Team.
  - d. The Guiding Elder Team reviews and approves the annual ministry budget to ensure that it is in line with the mission, vision and strategic emphases that have been agreed upon for the coming year.
  - e. The Guiding Elder Team reviews, directs and approves all financial transactions.
  - f. The Guiding Elder Team is responsible for keeping the full body of elders informed about the overall affairs and direction of the church.
  - g. For each local congregation, a Guiding Elder will oversee the Shepherding Elder team focused on that location.

### **The Full Body of Elders**

All Guiding Elders and Shepherding Elders together comprise the Full Body of Elders. The full body of elders is not a decision making body. Meetings of the full body of elders are for the purpose of sharing wisdom, for communication and for discussing and understanding the needs of the church body.

1. **Size:** The number of elders will be as many as are qualified and needed to carry out the ministry of elders in the church. The Guiding Elder Team will determine that number.
2. **Equality and Plurality:** While elders may differ in terms of giftedness, spiritual maturity, training and Biblical knowledge, they all have equal authority and responsibility. No one elder is to be considered the “first among equals” overall. We believe, rather, that each elder will rise to be the “first among equals” in specific areas of giftedness, while other elders will rise to be “first among equals” in other areas.
3. **Decision Making by Consensus:** It is the responsibility of the elders to discern the leading of the Holy Spirit. Since we believe the Holy Spirit will lead us in unity, decision-making will be through consensus and not through a voting process. Where agreement among the elders is not obvious, decisions will be postponed or proposals may be reevaluated, modified or withdrawn. Consensus is defined as “total agreement by the elders to support a decision.” No elder has veto power, however, and in certain instances, an individual

member of the elder board may need to defer to the collective decision of the remaining elders.

4. **Accountability:** In the New Testament elders are exhorted to maintain accountability among themselves. All spiritual leaders in this church should hold each other accountable for their spiritual lives, their doctrine and the way they carry out their ministries. (Acts 20:28-30)

## **SELECTION OF ELDERS**

**Selection:** The Scriptures indicate that the first elders were appointed under the authority of the Apostles (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). However, no specific guidelines are given in the New Testament as to how this selection process was to be done after the Apostolic Age. It would appear therefore that local churches are free to develop a process that will best serve their own needs in their particular cultural context.

At Village Bible Church, the Guiding Elder Team will determine the number of positions to be filled. If it is determined that additional elders are needed, the following process(es) will be followed:

1. Nominations will be accepted by the Guiding Elder Team from other elders and from members of the congregation.
2. The elders will prayerfully oversee the examination process to determine if a potential elder:
  - a. aspires to the office (1 Timothy 3:1);
  - b. is above reproach in all areas of his life (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9);
  - c. affirms his agreement with the Statement of Doctrine and Constitution of this church and demonstrates competency of Biblical doctrine so as to be able to teach, encourage and refute false doctrine; (Titus 1: 9)
  - d. demonstrates the heart and ability to shepherd the flock and to serve alongside the existing elders. (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-3)
3. The names of anyone whom the Guiding Elder Team desires to add as an elder will be made known to the members of the congregation. Members will be reminded of the Biblical requirements for elders and will be given 30 days to speak personally with the nominee(s), should they wish to express their concern about any potentially disqualifying factors. If their concern is not resolved, they should then approach a member of the Guiding Elder Team and share that concern.
4. **Vote of affirmation:** The Guiding Elders will present candidates to the members of the congregation for a vote of affirmation. Affirmation by three-quarters majority vote will be required for the approval of an elder.

# ELDER NOMINATION PROCESS & FORM

If you wish to nominate someone to the position of elder at Village Bible Church:

You must be a current member of Village Bible Church.

The person you nominate should, in your opinion, meet the requirements as laid out in 1st Timothy Chapter 3 and Titus Chapter 1 in reference to elders.

## **NAME OF NOMINEE**

---

## **NOMINATED BY**

---

Are you a member of Village Bible Church?  Yes  No

Please fill out this information form to the extent of your knowledge of the nominee.

## **SPECIFIC QUALITIES**

Qualities for elders are found in 1 Timothy and Titus 1. The following questionnaire probes at these qualities and considers how one measures up to these standards. Please select the answer which best describes your response to the question. Feel free to add any additional comments to your answers.

### **Above Reproach**

Do you have reason to question his character or morals?

Always  Usually  Sometimes  Rarely  Never  Don't Know

### **Husband of One Wife**

If married, does he have a healthy, Christ-centered marriage?

Always  Usually  Sometimes  Rarely  Never  Don't Know

**Temperate**

Does he have any habits he cannot control?

- No     Yes (If yes, please explain.)

**Respectable**

Does he fulfill his duties at home and at work in an orderly, respectable manner?

- Always     Usually     Sometimes     Rarely     Never     Don't Know

Is he respected by his peers?

- Always     Usually     Sometimes     Rarely     Never     Don't Know

**Prudent**

Is he a good thinker, demonstrating wise judgment?

- Always     Usually     Sometimes     Rarely     Never     Don't Know

**Hospitable**

Does he meet new people and strangers well?

- Always     Usually     Sometimes     Rarely     Never     Don't Know

Does he use his home to minister to the needs of Christians and non-Christians alike?

- Always     Usually     Sometimes     Rarely     Never     Don't Know

**Able to Teach**

Please rate his ability to communicate the truths of Scripture in a small group setting:

- Excellent     Good     Average     Poor     Don't Know

Please rate his ability to communicate the truths of Scripture in a large group setting?

- Excellent     Good     Average     Poor     Don't Know

Does he demonstrate consistency in personal Bible study and in reading Christian books?

- Excellent     Good     Average     Poor     Don't Know

**Not Addicted to Wine**

Is he self-controlled in the area of food and drink?

- Always    Usually    Sometimes    Rarely    Never    Don't Know

**Not Pugnacious**

Is he prone to strike out at others when provoked, either physically or verbally?

- Always    Usually    Sometimes    Rarely    Never    Don't Know

**Free From the Love of Money**

Is money a primary motivator and object of concern for him?

- Always    Usually    Sometimes    Rarely    Never    Don't Know

Is he a model of Biblical living?

- Always    Usually    Sometimes    Rarely    Never    Don't Know

**Manage His Household Well**

Are family prayer and Bible reading regular features of his homelife?

- Always    Usually    Sometimes    Rarely    Never    Don't Know

Are his wife and children responsive to his leadership?

- Always    Usually    Sometimes    Rarely    Never    Don't Know

**A Good Reputation with Those Outside**

Do unchurched people respect him even though they may disagree with his religious views?

- Always    Usually    Sometimes    Rarely    Never    Don't Know

Has he given unchurched people legitimate occasion for criticism or blame?

- No    Yes (If yes, please explain.)

**Not a New Convert**

Do you believe he is too young a believer to be an officer in the church?

- No    Yes (If yes, please explain.)

**Not Contentious/Not Self-Willed**

Is he an argumentative person?

- Always    Usually    Sometimes    Rarely    Never    Don't Know

Is he willing to submit to the majority opinion if it differs from his personal opinion?

- Always    Usually    Sometimes    Rarely    Never    Don't Know

**Devout**

Does he demonstrate consistency in personal Bible study, prayer and meditation?

- Always    Usually    Sometimes    Rarely    Never    Don't Know

Is he pursuing personal and practical holiness in all areas of life?

- Always    Usually    Sometimes    Rarely    Never    Don't Know

**Not Double Tongued**

Does he say one thing and mean another?

- Always    Usually    Sometimes    Rarely    Never    Don't Know

**Loving What Is Good**

Does he look for and expect the best in other people?

- Always    Usually    Sometimes    Rarely    Never    Don't Know

**The Indirect Qualifier**

If married:

Does his wife take her God given responsibilities seriously?

- Always    Usually    Sometimes    Rarely    Never    Don't Know

Does his wife control her tongue?

- Always    Usually    Sometimes    Rarely    Never    Don't Know

Does his wife speak well of others and refrain from gossip and slander?

- Always    Usually    Sometimes    Rarely    Never    Don't Know

Is his wife self-controlled?

Always  Usually  Sometimes  Rarely  Never  Don't Know

Is his wife faithful to the Lord and to her husband in behavior, and to her children?

Always  Usually  Sometimes  Rarely  Never  Don't Know

## **CONCLUSION**

What reservations do you have concerning this man as an officer of Village Bible Church?

Would you willingly submit to his leadership?

Any other comments concerning this nominee's overall fitness for serving as an officer of Village Bible Church?