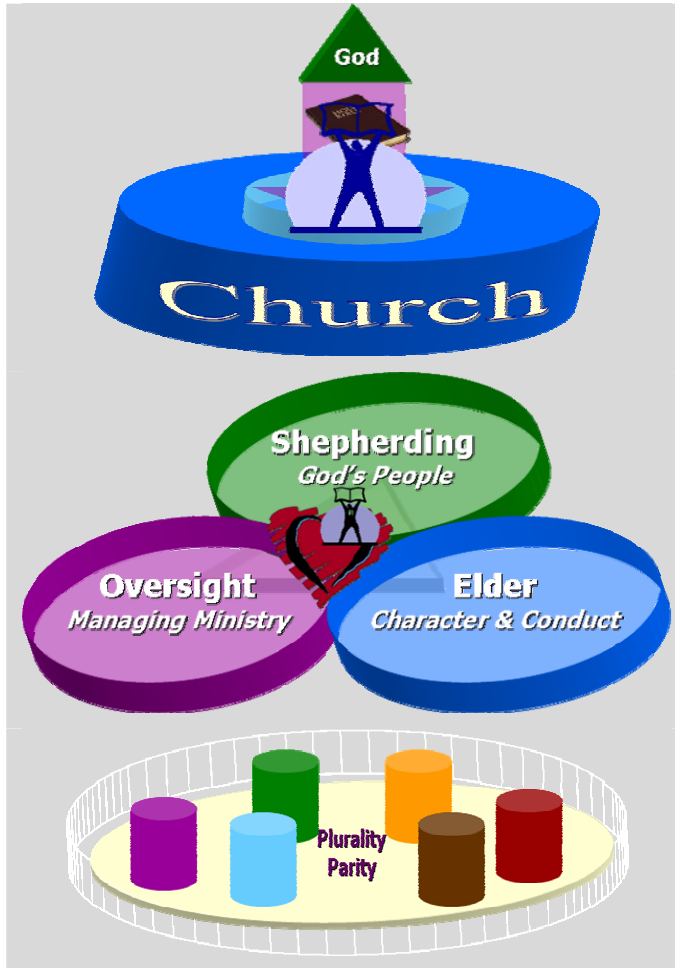


Qualifications for the Elder

Russ Kennedy

Introduction We have been talking about Biblical Leadership in the church.



Authority

Authority from God who creates and is the Shepherd and Overseer of the church. He governs the church through the Word of God. He has committed that shepherding and oversight through the Word to the Elders as a body or council.

Words and Spheres

The leadership of the church is committed to office bearers who are identified by three words in the New Testament:

Shepherd (Pastor)
Overseer (Bishop)
Elder

The leadership of the church is established in plurality and parity.

The Eldership is to be plural.
The Elders are to be equal

The Bible places a high value on the qualifications for spiritual leadership. In this day of résumés, credentials, degrees and CEO style leadership, we must return to the Bible's emphasis on character. Every church can be shepherded by men who strive by grace to be these kind of godly men, whether they have all the skill or charisma or credentials we usually look for. So our study of the qualifications for elders will be dominated by the attitude and character emphasis in the Scriptures. We will also examine the aptitude and ability areas that are delineated or implied by the Bible texts.

The Gender of a Biblical Elder

1 Timothy 2:9-3:7

Only qualified males are to be Elders in the church. Note how the qualifications of elders speak in masculine not feminine pronouns. Also, the elder is to be the "husband of one wife," a one-woman kind of man. Both the principles and practices of the early church demonstrate that only qualified men were appointed elders.

1 Timothy 2:12 is particularly significant. What is forbidden women here expressly prevents women from serving as elders. She may not teach or exercise authority over men, but must quietly receive instruction. This is based upon trans-cultural arguments from the order of creation and then the fall.

The Mentality of a Biblical Elder

1 Peter 5:1-4

A shepherd's credentials focus on attitude not accomplishments.

Voluntarily	not out of obligation.
Obediently	we are not free to make up our own rules.
Freely	not using a spiritual office as a platform for personal profit.
Eagerly	with enthusiasm.
Humbly	recognizing that it is God's flock, not mine.
Exemplary	being a model of what God would have the people become.

When an elder and an elder body are shaped by these attitudes, many of the problems associated with church leadership are not present. These attitudes are manifest in the lives of servant leaders.

Characteristics

- ☞ Example - As a shepherd
- ☞ Attitude - With eagerness
- ☞ Method - By example

Controls

- ☞ Not forced into it
- ☞ Not for money or financial gain
- ☞ Not by dictatorship

The Qualifications of a Biblical Elder

The qualifications for the eldership are character-based requirements with one exception. Though it is desirable to have elders with a variety of skill, experience and ability on the Elders, it is far better to have men whose lives are generally characterized by these qualifications

These qualifications are not extraordinary ones. These are what all the men of the church ought to be striving for by grace. It ought to be that we will have many men who meet the qualifications except that the Holy Spirit has not placed a desire to Shepherd in their hearts or they are not able to teach.

These qualifications are illustrative, not exhaustive. We glean through the Scriptures and look for the qualifications for eldership. We also establish some for our own serving together. Thus, these Biblical qualifications are the minimum standard.

Comparative Listing

Note the following comparison of the qualifications for an elder from the two primary texts.

1 Timothy 3	Titus 1
above reproach (v.2)	above reproach (v.6)
husband of one wife (v.2)	husband of one wife (v.6)
temperate (v.2)	self-controlled (v.8)
prudent (v.2)	sensible (v.8)
respectable (v.2)	
hospitable (v.2)	hospitable (v.8)
able to teach (v.2)	able to exhort in doctrine able 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)	
uncontentious (v.3)	not quick tempered (v.7)
free from loving money (v.3)	not fond of sordid gain (v.7)
ruling household well (v.4)	
having dignified control over his children (v.4)	having children who are not wild or rebellious
not a new convert (v.6)	hold fast to the Word as he has been taught (v.9)
has a good reputation (v.7)	above reproach as God's steward (v.7)
	not self-willed (v.7)
	loving what is good (v.8)
	just (v.8)
	devout (v.8)

Most of the qualifications are around Christian character. He is also to be one who both knows the Word, the truth from the Word and how to articulate it in teaching and refuting those who teach error.

Category Listing

Note the following positive and negative qualifications.

The elder must be/have

-a male	-eager to serve
-above reproach	-the husband of one wife
-temperate (not excessive)	-prudent
-respectable	-hospitable
-able to teach	-gentle
-humble	-good household managers
-children under control	-good reputation outside church
-lover of good	-devout
-self controlled	

The elder must not be

-a new convert	-addicted to alcohol
-pugnacious	-contentious
-lover of money	-fond of sordid gain
-accused of dissipation	-accused of rebellion
-self willed	-one who lords it over others

Elder Self-Examination

The following pages consist of a chart used in the recommendation and the examination of an elder. Every man aspiring to become an elder is required to examine himself by filling out and turning in an Elder Examination Form.

The Requirements for Biblical Elders

Although the Bible does not specifically list aptitude, ability and experience requirements, it is evident from the Scriptures that there are requirements in these areas. Not all elders will be equal in meeting these requirements. Those who minister the Word publicly to the congregation as a whole, will have a greater capacity and ability in these areas. But there must be, by grace and the Holy Spirit, a basic capability or the work of the ministry will be hindered. It is imperative to note that in each of these areas, elders should be willing and able to humbly depend on the Holy Spirit and mentoring in order to grow and mature in their work.

Attitudes – Ways of Thinking Needed

What we call attitudes are the dynamic of our internal picture of ourselves and the sum of the way we think. There are some very important attitudes required of an elder.

View Oneself as a Pastor (Shepherd)

In this day where a distinction is made between the pastor(s) who have a special, vocational call to the leadership and those who do not, it is imperative that true elders discard this whole notion. If a man are unable or unwilling to be called Pastor then he has to analyze whether he truly understands Biblical eldership. The argument that this is something deeply ingrained from culture and personal experience is difficult, but needs to be overcome.

View Oneself as a Part of a Team

As an elder, each is part of a team. Each has an equal voice in decisions and carry equal responsibility and accountability to God. There is no "The buck stops here" on any single elder's desk. This also means that each one must be willing to submit to the general will of the body of elders. It is imperative that an elder be willing to set aside personal opinion, particularly if they are the lone voice of that opinion.

View Oneself as Serving God First

This is subtle but critical. In our teaching, governing and shepherding, we are involved with people. But that involvement does not mean that we are to place serving them over serving God. Our serving of the flock is an expression of our loving and serving God. The primary way this works itself out is in who sets the agenda and determines what real needs are.

Aptitudes – Internal Capacities Needed

An elder is responsible for teaching and shepherding his flock. Even though he shares this responsibility with all the other elders, he must have the requisite aptitudes comparative to his responsibility.

To Read and Learn the Scripture

It is almost self-evident that an elder must have an ability to read well with comprehension, retention and application. Due to his responsibility to accurately handle the Word of God for the sake of his flock, he needs the mental and spiritual faculties to learn and communicate the Word.

To Shepherd and Disciple the Flock

An elder will be responsible to care for and train his flock. This requires an enablement by the Spirit to identify with and care for people. Being an elder is first about knowing and loving and obeying God. Then it is about knowing and loving and caring for people from the heart. Then it is about structure and governing and the daily, weekly tasks of getting ministry done. Regardless of one's role among the elders, there must be some capacity to be involved in people's lives.

Abilities – The Skills Needed

For an elder to function well, he needs some basic skills. Some of these are imparted by the Spirit and then improved by practice, discipline and mentoring by other elders who are more able in those skills. Others are matters of training ourselves and overcoming habitual patterns and internal weaknesses.

Able to Teach

This is an ability that is imparted by the Holy Spirit. He may give it to one who has no natural ability or He may enhance by His inward work the natural ability God designed into the elder or the elder developed by training and experience. This ability distinguishes elders from deacons. An elder will constantly be working with the Word in the context of corporate and individual needs. Most of those needs require an ability to understand and communicate the Word, even among the other elders. The primary aim of the basic ability of all elders to teach is to explain Scripture, defend doctrine and disciple the flock.

In this ability, men will differ. It is evident that not all elders must have the gift of teaching. In every congregation, at least one elder should have that gift so that he can fill the role usually defined for one to regularly expound the Scripture publicly to the church. Other elders may have the gift to varying degrees. But every elder, even those who do not have a gift of teaching, must have some ability that is being cultivated and honed by study and practice.

Able to Manage

This ability arises from the requirement that all elders oversee or govern. The Holy Spirit imparts a special enablement to those whose role should be focused on administration. But every elder is responsible to areas of ministry. Overseeing ministry means a certain amount of organization and planning.

Once again, there are those who have a natural ability to be organized and then there are those who are administratively challenged. Frankly, it is my observation over 30 years of consulting and ministry that any person who simply will not (and it is almost always a matter of choice and self-discipline) organize themselves should not be overseeing others. Usually, disciplining oneself to plan, execute and carry out tasks is usually a matter of committing oneself to a process that is simple, effective and usable. What is usually lacking is one of these core elements: a good structure, self-discipline or accountability.

Able to Disciple

If the primary responsibility of the elder is to shepherd and train his flock, then he must demonstrate a growing ability to disciple others. Again, the Holy Spirit may give a gift of exhortation or mercy so that an elder is able in discipling above his peers. But all elders must be able to use the Word to equip, enable, exhort and admonish others in the midst of the mess.

Thus elders may need to dedicate themselves to becoming more skilled in dealing with the issues of life in his people. This may involve training, mentoring and a huge

time commitment. Elders at the Chapel are expected to disciple and counsel their flock as their ability allows. We do have men who are particularly gifted in this area who can help and who will come alongside elders to enable them to do the work God requires of them.

Chapel Implementation

The Bible establishes the organization, qualifications, responsibilities and the authority of the Eldership. But it leaves the implementation in many areas open. So, we must wisely work out processes to function as an Eldership. In conclusion, here is our own implementation, how we do it:

Raising up and equipping elders

- Mentoring and general discipleship
- Serving and leading responsibilities
- Teaching and counseling opportunities

Qualifying and calling elders

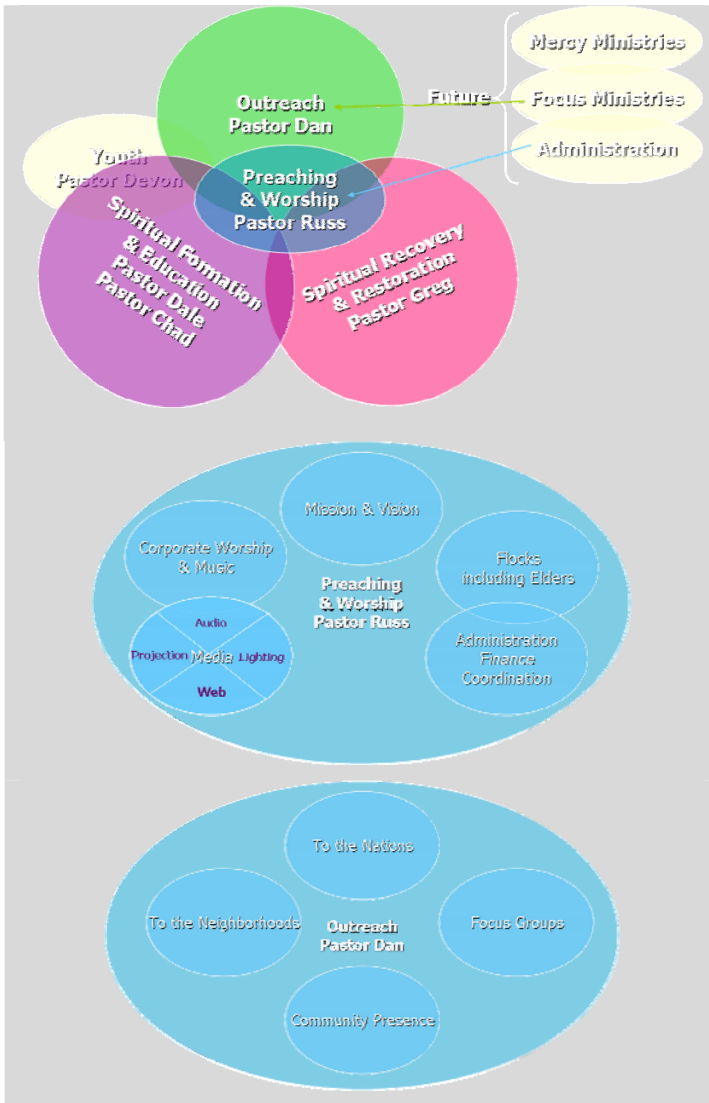
- Identifying men with a desire
- Informal period of mentoring
- Formal examination

Practical shared governance

- Humility
- Unanimity
- Collegiality

Overlapping spheres as foundational model

- No hierarchy diagrams
- No senior pastor over the elders
- No pastor-teacher among the elders



Oversight Spheres

Reflects current assignments and responsibilities and illustrates how we treat overlaps.

Shows the strength of thinking in Venn diagrams.

Oversight Assignments

Reflects the assignments and responsibilities of two of the vocational elders. These are used to illustrate the variety of assignments and the value of vocationally supporting elders.

Deacons & Deaconesses

- Manage ministries as office bearers
- Serve in ministries as office bearers
- Report to an elder
- Diaconate but, no deacon board

Two monthly meetings

- Administrative – Oversight/Management
- Shepherding – Pastoral/Counseling

Flocks for Shepherding

Geographical (5 flocks)

Shepherding

Gathering

Conclusion Hebrews 13:7-8; 17

7 Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. 8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Even great and godly elders may come and go – love them, follow them, obey them, imitate them. But Jesus never changes.

We desire that you will respond like this:

- ✦ Pray for us
- ✦ Serve with us
- ✦ Grow with us
- ✦ Encourage us
- ✦ Suffer with us