



HEBRON

Wednesday, April 17, 2019

Dr. Landon Dowden

**WHAT IS A HEALTHY CHURCH?  
LESSON 8**

**BIBLICAL CHURCH LEADERSHIP  
What is a Healthy Church – Lesson #8**

**I. ARE ELDERS BIBLICAL?**

- a. Three terms:
  - i. Episkopos – overseer/bishop
  - ii. Presbyteros – elder
  - iii. Poimen – shepherd/pastor
  - iv.
- b. Key passages: Acts 20:17-38; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; 5:17; Titus 1:5-9; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:1-4
- c. New Testament churches with elders:
  - i. Jerusalem (Acts 15:22)
  - ii. Ephesus (Acts 20:17)
  - iii. All the towns of Crete (Titus 1:5)
  - iv. All the churches James wrote to (James 5:14)
  - v. All the churches of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia that Peter wrote to (1 Peter 5)
  - vi. All the churches Paul founded on his first missionary journey (Acts 14:23)

**II. HOW DO ELDERS RELATE TO DEACONS AND PASTORAL STAFF?**

- a. A helpful picture from Dever:
  - i. Elders determine the direction of the bus.
  - ii. Staff help steer the bus in that direction on a weekly basis.
  - iii. Deacons make sure the bus has enough gas.
- b. What are key differences between elders and deacons?
  - i. Elders Teach (Ephesians 4:11; 1 Timothy 3:2, 5:17; Titus 1:9)
  - ii. Elders Lead (Acts 20:28; 1 Timothy 3:4-5, 5:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:12; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:2)



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**III. WHO ARE ELDERS? (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9)**

- a. Men who desire to be an overseer because of the Spirit's leadership (Acts 20:28; 1 Timothy 3:1)
- b. Men who are beyond reproach (1 Timothy 3:2-7)
- c. Men who are able to teach and manage their household well (1 Timothy 3:2, 4; Titus 1:9)
- d. Men and not just man – a plurality of qualified men rather than just one man (Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:2, 4, 6, 22-23; 16:4; 20:17; 21:18; Philippians 1:1; James 5:14; 1 Peter 5:1)
  - i. There is no verse describing anyone as “the” elder of a church.
  - ii. 1 Thessalonians 5:12 – respect **those** who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord.
  - iii. Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24 – “**leaders**”
- e. How did we end up with one pastor/elder churches?
  - i. The neglect of biblical teaching.
  - ii. The rapid spread of the church into the frontier regions of the nation.
    1. Newton “The Baptist emphasis on congregationalism, combined with the early American emphasis on individualism, likely resulted in the decline of churches being governed through elder plurality.”
  - iii. This is what Baptists used to practice:
    1. The Baptist 1689 Second London Confession – “Bishops or Elders and Deacons”
    2. The Baptist 1833 and 1853 New Hampshire Confession – the church’s “only proper officers are Bishops or Pastors, and Deacons.”
    3. The first president of the Southern Baptist Convention, W. B. Johnson, wrote a treatise in 1846 calling Baptist churches to use a plurality of elders since the practice was biblical.
    4. 1925 Baptist Faith and Message – “Its Scriptural officers are bishops or elders and deacons.”
    5. 1963 Baptist Faith and Message – “elder” was dropped and the phrase now reads “pastors and deacons”
- f. Aren't the elders the paid pastoral staff? Four reasons why they are not the same:
  - i. Not all paid pastoral staff qualify to be elders.
  - ii. Not all paid pastoral staff function as elders (some have responsibilities outside the realm of overseeing, teaching, or caring for the congregation).



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- iii. Not all paid pastoral staff stay in the same location.
- iv. Creates an unbiblical system where only the men with seminary degrees can lead the congregation because of their “professional training.”
- g. What three pastors have to say about a plurality of elders (both paid and non-paid):
  - i. Dever: Probably the single most helpful thing to my pastoral ministry among my church has been the recognition of the other elders. The service of the other elders along with me has had immense benefits. A plurality of elders should aid a church by rounding out a pastor’s gifts, making up for some of his defects, supplementing his judgment, and creating support in the congregation for decisions, leaving leaders less exposed to unjust criticism. Such a plurality also makes leadership more rooted and permanent and allows for more mature continuity. It encourages the church to take more responsibility for the spiritual growth of its own members and helps make the church less dependent on its employees.
  - ii. Piper: We need to develop an ongoing leadership team (elders) where the theological distinctives, the philosophy of ministry and the vision of the future can be rooted more durably than in the paid ‘staff.’ The church should not be dependent on a few paid staff as the guardians of the vision.
  - iii. Newton: Another type of polity can be found in some pastor-staff led churches. In these churches, the pastor and staff determine the course of ministry, tap the lay leadership to service their plans, and harness the energies of the church into a well-oiled machine. Some even identify this as their plurality of elders. Certainly, many of these churches accomplish much – as long as there are no changes in the machinery. The machinery may grind to a halt, however, if change does occur (e.g., a staff vacancy).

## **TODAY: WHAT DO ELDERS DO?**

### **I. AT A GLANCE**

- a. Ministry of the Word
  - i. Preach and Teach – 1 Timothy 3:4-5; 5:17; Hebrews 13:7
- b. Pastoral ministry
  - i. Pray for the sick – James 5:14
  - ii. Care for the church – 1 Peter 5:1-2
- c. Oversight/leadership
  - i. Rule – 1 Timothy 5:17; Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24;
  - ii. Ordain other leaders – 1 Timothy 4:14
- d. Set an example – Hebrews 13:7; 1 Peter 5:1-3



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## II. A JOB DESCRIPTION FOR ELDERS (Jeramie Rinne)

### a. Shepherd God's Flock

- i. 1 Peter 5:2 Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly;
- ii. John 21:15-16 When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep."
- iii. Acts 20:28 Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.
- iv. Elders serve the Good Shepherd by providing his local flocks with spiritual oversight. Elders feed, lead, protect, and nurture church members like shepherds do with sheep.

### b. Four Primary Duties

#### i. Teach

1. An elder must be "an able teacher" (1 Timothy 3:2; see 5:17). He must hold "to the faithful message as taught, so that he will be able both to encourage with sound teaching and refute those who contradict it" (Titus 1:9). Jesus' under-shepherds feed Jesus' sheep with Jesus' word.
2. If you're an elder, find venues for teaching the Bible regularly. Teach a Sunday school class, lead a home group, give a lesson to the youth group, or study Scripture with a member over coffee. And if you're offered a chance to preach, take it.
3. Further, tune in to the church's overall teaching ministry. Keep a finger on the pulse of what's being taught through congregational singing or in the Sunday school curriculum. Listen closely when members talk about what they're reading and be alert for rotten food in their spiritual diet.
4. Finally, remember that teaching includes training others to perpetuate the church's teaching ministry. As Paul said to Timothy, "What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2). So bring along an apprentice teacher whenever you can.



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**ii. Lead**

1. Just as shepherds lead their flocks, so elders lead local congregations. The biblical writers also call elders “overseers,” a title that highlights their role as leaders (Acts 20:28; 1 Timothy 3:1; Titus 1:5, 7). Hebrews instructs Christians to “obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account” (Hebrews 13:17).
2. Elders, be brave and lead your church. Don’t hide among the baggage like King Saul. When you see challenges in your church, face them proactively and plot a course forward.
3. Courageous leadership might involve reaching out to a frustrated member who’s stopped attending, or confronting an unrepentant member through church discipline. Or it could mean wrestling through staffing strategies, budget challenges, or important policies that affect the spiritual identity of the congregation.
4. As you lead, don’t lose sight of the destination. The goal isn’t to lead a church to become an efficient organization, as important as that may be. Rather, elders should lead church members toward maturity in Christ. Jesus gave teaching shepherds to the church “to build up the body of Christ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God, growing into a mature man with a stature measured by Christ’s fullness” (Ephesians 4:12-13).
5. Elders bring the flock to green pastures and still waters when they help members know Jesus more and increasingly reflect his glory together.

**iii. Model**

1. Most importantly, elders lead by example. Shepherd the church “not [by] lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:3). Not surprisingly, the New Testament lists of elder qualifications focus predominantly on character (1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-4). An elder’s most basic job is to say “Imitate me as I also imitate Christ.” (1 Corinthians 11:1)
2. The mandate to model maturity carries two critical implications. First, modeling means you must guard your godliness: “Pay close attention to your life and your teaching” (1 Timothy 4:16). Continue to live close to the Lord, nurture your wife and children well, resist sin, and love people. Open your life to the loving accountability of the other elders. Modeling maturity is a team project.
3. That leads to a second implication: modeling requires elders to *be among* the people. It only works if people see you up close. So open your life to church members. Invite them into your home, your hobbies, and your ministry.



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People need a firsthand experience of how you handle stress, relate to your wife, respond to difficult people, and humbly admit when you blow it.

#### **iv. Pray**

1. Finally, elders should take up the apostolic shepherding mantle and say, “we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the preaching ministry” (Acts 6:4). Ultimately, elders are powerless in themselves to mature anyone in Christ; only the Holy Spirit can do that through God’s Word. The sooner an elder realizes this, the sooner he will hit his knees and plead for a continual work of grace among church members, as well as in his own life.
2. So if you’re a lay elder (or a paid elder!), strive to be a man of prayer. Build regular prayer into your daily rhythms. Pray over your church’s membership rolls during the commute or while you’re walking the dog. Carve out time as an elder board for concerted prayer. And when you’re talking to a church member, be sure to stop and pray for her right then and there.

#### **v. Shepherd Like Jesus**

1. Maybe we could sum up an elder’s job description this way: shepherd the church members like Jesus shepherds his disciples.
2. Like Jesus, make teaching central to your ministry, and make Jesus and the gospel the primary content of your teaching. In every decision, lead your people toward knowing and trusting Jesus. Let them see the character of Jesus exemplified in your life. And just as Jesus often turned aside to pray, so you as an elder should join Jesus in interceding for his people.
3. The under-shepherds of Jesus are at their best when they reflect Jesus, the Chief Shepherd.

### **III. PAUL’S CHARGE TO THE ELDERS AT EPHESUS – ACTS 20:28-38**

#### **a. Elders are vigilant shepherds (Acts 20:28, 31)**

##### **i. For their own lives**

1. Robert Murray McCheyne: What my people need most from me is my personal holiness.
2. Baxter – “The Oversight of Ourselves”
  - a. Take heed to ourselves, lest we should be void of that saving grace of God which we are offering to others.
  - b. Take heed to ourselves, lest we live with those actual sins which we may preach against in others. Let us see that we are not guilty of that which we may daily condemn.



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- c. Take heed to ourselves that we may not be unfit for the great tasks that we have undertaken to complete. We must not be babes in knowledge who will teach men all those mysterious things that are to be known in order to be assured of salvation.
- ii. For all the flock
  - 1. "All"
    - a. Baxter - It is you see, all the flock, or every individual member of our charge. To this end it is necessary, that we should know every person that belongs to our charge; for how can we take heed to them, if we do not know them? . . . Doth not a careful shepherd look after every individual sheep? a good schoolmaster after every individual [student]? a good physician after every particular patient? . . . Paul taught his hearers not only "publicly but from house to house": and in another place he tells us, that he "warned every one, and taught every one, in all wisdom, that he might present every one perfect in Christ Jesus." Many other passages of Scripture make it evident that it is our duty to take heed to every individual of our flock. (pp. 90f.)
    - b. Baxter - O happy Church of Christ, where the laborers . . . proportioned in number to the number of the souls; so that the pastors were so many, or the particular churches so small, that we might be able to "take heed to all the flock." (p. 90)
  - 2. "Shepherd (care for)" - Ezekiel 34:4
- b. Elders Provide and Protect
  - i. Provide
    - 1. Ezekiel 34:2, 3, 8, 13, 14, 16, 23
    - 2. John 21:15-17
    - 3. Acts 20:20-21; 26-27; 32
  - ii. Protect
    - 1. Wolves Inside and Outside (Matthew 7:15; Revelation 2:1-7)
    - 2. False Teaching
      - a. Jesus, Paul, John, Peter, and Jude – all warn of false teachers.
      - b. Charles Jefferson - "When Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Habakkuk talk about shepherds, they call them watchmen set to warn and save. Many a minister fails as a pastor because he is not vigilant. He allows his church to be torn to pieces because he is half asleep. He took it for granted that there were no wolves, no birds of prey, no robbers, and while he was drowsing the enemy arrived. False ideas, destructive interpretations,



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demoralizing teachings came into his group and he never knew it. He was interested, perhaps, in literary research; he was absorbed in the discussion contained in the last theological quarterly, and did not know what his young people were reading, or what strange ideas had been lodged in the heads of a group of his leading members. There are errors which are fierce as wolves and pitiless as hyenas; they tear faith and hope and love to pieces and leave churches, once prosperous, mangled and half dead.”

c. Elders Remember

- i. They are Commissioned by the Spirit (20:28)
- ii. That the Church belongs to God (20:28)
  1. An important note here: The eldership doesn't serve as representatives of the congregation. It's not their role or responsibility to represent the people's views or to guarantee that their desires are met. Elders are to serve as representatives of God to the people and to lead the people into obedience to what God says.
- iii. That Purchasing the Church cost Christ His Life and Blood (20:28)
- iv. The Faithfulness of other elders (20:31; 36-38)
  1. Newton: Shepherding is hard work. In Bible times, watching sheep, being constantly on guard for danger, brought on strong mental and emotional strain. Similarly, the work of elders goes on in all conditions and situations. Elders are never off-duty when they leave the church building. An elder must attend to his own spiritual life, guarding his own family from spiritual dangers. He must maintain a godly example for the rest of the church. While others are resting, he will often be toiling on behalf of the church through study, prayer, ministry, counseling, visiting, and watching.

**A Gospel Centered Elder (Colossians 1:24-29) is:**

- **God's man called to God's ministry to proclaim God's message for the maturity of God's people through God's means.**

**I. GOD'S MAN (1:21-23)**

- i. Paul (I became a minister) - Acts 26:9-11; 1 Timothy 1: 13-15

**II. CALLED TO GOD'S MINISTRY**

- i. A Call (Acts 26:12-18; 1 Timothy 1:12)
- ii. A Call to Stewardship (1 Peter 5:2; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Corinthians 9:16-17)
- iii. A Call to Service (2 Corinthians 4:5)





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- iv. A Call to Suffering (Philippians 2:30; Acts 14:19-23; 2 Corinthians 11:24-28; Galatians 6:17)
- v. A Call to Struggling (Galatians 4:19)

### III. TO PROCLAIM GOD'S MESSAGE

- i. Proclaim Christ (2 Corinthians 4:5; 1 Corinthians 18-31; Luke 24:27)
- ii. 2 aspects:
  - A. We Warn Everyone (Acts 20:31)
  - B. We Teach everyone (Colossians 1:9, 2:7, 3:16)
- iii. We make the word of God fully known so that the people of God might be fully mature.

### IV. FOR THE MATURITY OF GOD'S PEOPLE

- i. This is our aim: (Ephesians 4:11-13, 15; Romans 15:14)
- ii. Epaphras' prayers – 4:12 (Is this our aim and prayer?)

### V. THROUGH GOD'S MEANS

- i. All God expects from us He provides for us in Christ Jesus.
- ii. God gets all the Glory.
  - A. God reconciled Paul.
  - B. God gave Paul the ministry.
  - C. God gave Paul the message.
  - D. God gave Paul the motivation.
  - E. God gave Paul the means.

### THE ELDERS' COMMITMENTS

- With the help of the Holy Spirit, the elders commit to the following:
  - We commit ourselves to lovingly care for you and seek your growth in Christ (Hebrews 13:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:12).
  - We commit to provide teaching, preaching, and counsel from the Scriptures that spans the whole counsel of God's Word (Acts 20:27-28; Galatians 6:6; 1 Timothy 5:17-18).
  - We commit to helping you in times of need (Acts 2:42-47, 4:32-35; James 2:14-17).
  - We commit to consistently strive to meet the criteria assigned to us in the Word (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-4).
  - We commit to pray for you regularly, particularly when you are sick (James 5:14).
  - We commit to be on guard against false teachers (Acts 20:28-31).
  - We commit to exercise church discipline when necessary (Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 5; Galatians 6:1).
  - We commit to help you become equipped to serve Christ (Ephesians 4:11-13).



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- We commit to seek God's will for our church family to the best of our ability as we study the Scriptures and follow the Spirit (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-5).
- We commit to set an example and join you in fulfilling the duties of church membership (1 Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 3:17; 1 Timothy 4:12).

**Hebrews 13:17** 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.

**Our prayer:**

- **Please, Father, give us elders whom You have reconciled and whom You have appointed to the ministry and who will proclaim Christ to us until we are all mature and who will do all of this in Your strength for Your glory.**

**WHAT DO DEACONS DO? Acts 6:1-7**

**I. IN EVERY CONGREGATION, MINISTRY NEEDS ARISE. (6:1)**

- a. Their Context:
  - i. Serving, Sacrifice, Suffering and Joy (5:40-42)
  - ii. Growth (2:41, 47; 4:4; 5:14; 9:31; 13:49; 16:5; 19:20)
- b. Their Conflict:
  - i. The Hellenistic widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of supplies.
    - 1. The Hellenists = Greek-speaking Jews
    - 2. Hebrews = spoke Aramaic and some Hebrew
  - ii. Why was taking care of widows a pressing need? (Deuteronomy 14:29; 16:11; 24:19-21; 26:12)

**II. WHILE MANY NEEDS ARE PRESSING, THE PRIMARY NEED IS THE WORD OF GOD. (6:2)**

- a. The Apostles' primary calling was to make disciples through teaching all that Jesus had commanded (Matthew 28:19-20).
- b. The Apostles were already administering support to the needy (4:34-35).
- c. For the Apostles to deal with this problem, it would have pulled away from their primary responsibility of leading out in prayer and the proclamation of God's Word.
- d. If pastoral time devoted to prayer and proclamation is minimized, then an entire congregation suffers.



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**III. THOUGH NOT PRIMARY, PRESSING NEEDS HAVE TO BE ADDRESSED. (6:3-6)**

- a. Both needs had to be addressed:
  - i. To neglect the Word would deny the Church of spiritual sustenance.
  - ii. To neglect the widows would harm the reputation of the Church in the lost community.
- b. The Apostles presented a solution that would address both needs and pleased the whole congregation.
- c. These men are never called deacons and there is no indication they were ever appointed to the office of deacon, but they serve as the prerunners to the office. There were needs and there were men who helped meet those needs.
- d. What does any of this have to do with deacons?
  - i. Like the first church, our focus should not be on a specific gifting as much as their character. (Who they are – not just what they can do)
    - 1. These should be men and women who love Jesus and display Jesus.
  - ii. Deacons are to be the ones who stand in the gap and support the ministry of prayer and proclamation. Their role is to maximize the elders' opportunity to devote time to their primary calling.
  - iii. As the elders and pastoral staff follow God's leadership to "point B" on the church map, then the deacons are the ones who help get us there. They help in whatever needs arise.
  - iv. Deaver: There are 3 aspects of deacon ministry: caring for physical needs, striving for unity of the body, and supporting and encouraging the ministry of the elders.

**IV. WHEN BOTH THE PRIMARY AND PRESSING NEEDS OF A CONGREGATION ARE ADDRESSED, THE WORD OF GOD AND THE NUMBER OF DISCIPLES WILL INCREASE. (6:7)**

- a. In the first church:
  - i. The Word of God continued to increase and spread.
  - ii. The number of disciples multiplied greatly.
  - iii. A great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.
- b. In our church:
  - i. When the church functions as God designed it then it will be blessed.
  - ii. We must have an emphasis on both the primary and pressing needs.
  - iii. We should feel the freedom to call on deacons to serve in whatever capacities will help the Word of God to increase and spread.



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**Anyabwile: Questions and observations for Deacon Candidates**

- Is the prospective deacon a mature and growing Christian?
- Does the prospective deacon show competence in the area of service?
- Is there anything that disqualifies the prospective deacon from serving?
- Is the congregation supportive of the potential deacon entering the office?

**A FUNCTIONAL DEACONATE CAN INCLUDE WHATEVER AREAS OF SERVICE A CHURCH NEEDS INCLUDING:**

- Deacon of Sound and Video
- Deacon of Facility Renovation/Construction
- Deacon of Benevolence
- Deacon of Missions
- Deacon of Finance
- Deacon of Single Adults
- Deacon of Children
- Deacon of Students
- Deacon of Senior Saints
- Deacon of Hospitality
- Deacon of Greeting
- Deacon of Ordinances
- Deacon of Security
- Deacon of Book Stall