

## “Good leadership” (22)

In a world where people are looking for some kind of direction and some sort of role model. In a world where people are looking for some kind of guidance and some kind of leadership. It’s good to know that God gives us all four and much, much more. It’s good to know that God provides wise godly people we can talk too especially when life gets a bit much for us.

I heard a story about a Christian councillor who knew he'd made a huge mistake one day by agreeing to counsel a certain woman when she opened their first session by saying, "I want to thank you for seeing me, especially because my husband said he'd kill anybody that I talked to about our problems."

We all need someone to talk to sometimes about our problems, we all need good guidance and direction sometimes and we all need some sort of leadership. And God knows this and that’s why as Christians we all need to see clearly which direction our lives are going in both individually and collectively as a congregation. That’s why all Christians need a good role model to follow within our congregations. That’s why Christians always need good leadership within our congregations, especially when the congregation is facing difficult times.

When Jesus came to earth, He looked around at the people He met and was deeply moved. Matthew records in **Matthew 9:36** “When Jesus saw the crowds; he had compassion on them because they were bewildered and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” He didn’t want people to be bewildered anymore; He didn’t want people to be helpless anymore. He didn’t want people to be like sheep without a shepherd.

And so God in His infinite wisdom calls for all local congregations to be overseen by qualified men known as elders. Men whose responsibility it is to shepherd the flock of God, and that’s what Peter is going to talk about today. But before we get into the text of **1 Peter 5:1-4**, let me share with you some important truths regarding elders. In the New Testament church, the appointment of elders was **priority for local congregations**.

When the apostle Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch, they were encouraging the local congregations and the Bible says in **Acts 14:23** “When they had appointed elders for them in the various churches, with prayer and fasting they entrusted them to the protection of the Lord in whom they had believed.”

I believe some people don’t see the importance of appointing elders as soon as possible in many of our congregations today because many have become reliant on the preacher being the **Jack of all trades**. And there are many congregations who just don’t have the men who are qualified to be elders or if they are qualified they don’t desire to be an elder. But nothing has changed loved ones, if it was important for the early church to appoint elders as soon as possible this should still be the priority in all of God’s local congregations today.

The **second point** I want to make is this, in every example we have in the New Testament, there was a **plurality of elders in each congregation**, never just one elder. In **Acts 20** when Paul was travelling through Macedonia and Greece, we find Paul urgently wanting to talk to the saints in Ephesus and Luke records in **Acts 20:17** “From Miletus he sent a message to Ephesus, telling the elders of the church to come to him.”

In **Acts 21** when Paul and Luke arrived safely in Jerusalem, the brothers welcomed them gladly and in **Acts 21:18** Luke records “The next day Paul went in with us to see James, and all the elders were there.” And so not only was it a priority to appoint elders in each local congregation, there also had to be a plurality of elders, there was never just one elder appointed to lead a congregation.

Now like I said earlier God wants godly men in leadership roles for a reason within every congregation. And the reasons are clearly seen in the Bible in the different names which are given to those in these leadership roles. For example in **Acts 20:17+28** the elders are called **overseers** and they are charged to **shepherd** the church. In **Titus 1:5-7** the words **elder** and **overseer** are used together. In **1 Peter 5:1+2** we are going to see that the **elders** are told to **shepherd** the flock of God, serving as **overseers**.

The point I’m trying to make here is that as **older men**, they have the responsibility to watch over the flock, and tend the sheep. In other words God wants a plurality of elders appointed in every congregation as soon as possible to lead His people in God’s ways. And with such an awesome responsibility to watch over and tend the flock of God, we need to be extra careful who gets these positions of responsibility.

We can't have just anyone coming forward to be an elder, and to make sure we don't have that happening God has blessed us with enough information to help us choose wisely. Some people call them the qualifications of an elder but I like to call them qualities of an elder.

Now we're not going to study these in depth but the first list of qualities are found in **1 Timothy 3:1-7** "This is a faithful saying: if a man seeks the office of an overseer, he desires a good work. The overseer therefore must be without reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, sensible, modest, hospitable, good at teaching; not a drinker, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well, having children in subjection with all reverence; (but if a man doesn't know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the assembly of God?) not a new convert, lest being puffed up he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. Moreover he must have good testimony from those who are outside, to avoid falling into reproach and the snare of the devil".

The second list of qualities are found in **Titus 1:5-9** "I left you in Crete for this reason, that you would set in order the things that were lacking, and appoint elders in every city, as I directed you; if anyone is blameless, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, who are not accused of loose or unruly behaviour. For the overseer must be blameless, as God's steward; not self-pleasing, not easily angered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for dishonest gain; but given to hospitality, a lover of good, sober minded, fair, holy, self-controlled; holding to the faithful word which is according to the teaching, that he may be able to exhort in the sound doctrine, and to convict those who contradict him."

Now like I said we're not going to look at these qualities in depth but I do hope that you understand that not just anyone can take on this role. That's why I find it sad when you get these missionary teenagers coming to your door informing you that they are elder so and so from the Mormon Church, when they are clearly not old enough to be an elder. That's why I find it sad when you read about some churches having women elders, when the Bible clearly commands that elders are to be male.

And the last important truth I want to mention before we get into our next is that when congregations appoint elders, **the congregation then has a responsibility to those elders**. Paul says that when a congregation has appointed elders, the congregation must recognise them and respect them. Paul says in **1 Thessalonians 5:12+13** "Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who labour among you and preside over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them most highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves."

Paul also says in **1 Timothy 5:17-20** "Elders who provide effective leadership must be counted worthy of double honour, especially those who work hard in speaking and teaching. For the scripture says, "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain," and, "The worker deserves his pay." Do not accept an accusation against an elder unless it can be confirmed by two or three witnesses. Those guilty of sin must be rebuked before all, as a warning to the rest."

The **Hebrew** writer reminds congregations who have appointed elders to obey and be submissive when they lead scripturally. **Hebrews 13:17** "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls and will give an account for their work. Let them do this with joy and not with complaints, for this would be no advantage for you."

And so loved ones we need to think of elders as our **spiritual advisors**, as **shepherds** who are to be mature, experienced Christian men charged by God to **watch out for our souls**. And so with those important truths fresh in our minds I now want to get into the text.

Turns you Bibles to **1 Peter 5:1** "So as your fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings and as one who shares in the glory that will be revealed." Now notice that Peter could have commanded them using his apostolic authority but he didn't, he simply says as your fellow elder. As one who has all the qualities of an elder, as one who is qualified as an apostle of Jesus Christ and as one who will share in the glory when Jesus returns.

He goes on to say in **1 Peter 5:2** "Give a shepherd's care to God's flock among you." He wants the elders to tend to the people of God and for an elder to do that; he must have the quality of being able to teach, like **1 Timothy 3:2** tells us. "He must hold firmly to the faithful message as it has been taught, so that he will be able to give exhortation in such healthy teaching and correct those who speak against it" like **Titus 1:9** tells us.

And because Peter says in **1 Peter 5:2** “Give a shepherd’s care to God’s flock among you, exercising oversight not merely as a duty but willingly under God’s direction, not for shameful profit but eagerly.” This tells us that their responsibility is for the sheep in the congregation where they serve and their job is to willingly oversee the flock of God.

I heard a story about an elder who lived up to all the people's expectations and was willing to live on a very low salary. He loved to work around the church building and keep both his house and grounds in repair. But when they appointed a new elder, he wasn't like that. He hired someone to do a lot of these chores, including the mowing of the house and church lawns. Naturally, this cost more money. This change of pattern was of concern to some of the other elders of the church. One day one of them approached the new elder and tried to bring up the matter tactfully. He said to the new elder, "You know, our previous elder mowed the lawn himself. Have you considered this approach?" The elder responded, "Yes, I'm aware of this. And I asked him. But he doesn't want to do it anymore."

You see loved ones; some people have got the wrong idea about the role of an elder but we need to remember that no man should be forced into the position of elder; no man should desire to become an elder if he isn't willing to serve. Now like I said the position of an elder is a desired position but sadly there are some who desire the position for all the wrong reasons. **1 Peter 5:2** “Give a shepherd’s care to God’s flock among you, exercising oversight not merely as a duty but willingly under God’s direction, not for shameful profit but eagerly”.

Now this may come as a surprise to some people but it's not just the preacher who may be financially supported for his work. When Paul writes to his young friend Timothy, he says in **1 Timothy 5:17+18** “Elders who provide effective leadership must be counted worthy of double honour, especially those who work hard in speaking and teaching. For the scripture says, “Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain,” and, “The worker deserves his pay.”

Paul says an elder may also be financially supported for all his hard work. Now like I said a moment ago some people may desire the role of an elder for all the wrong reasons and sometimes it's for financial reasons. But Peter says the real motive for service is not to be money, but an eagerness to save souls. And sadly money is not the only wrong motive for some men wanting to become an elder, some men like the power trip.

Peter says in **1 Peter 5:3** “And do not lord it over those entrusted to you, but be examples to the flock.” Peter says the oversight is a position of service, which is not to be abused by assuming a dictatorial role. Elders are supposed to set an example for the rest of the flock to follow.

**Have you ever seen a shepherd leading his sheep?** He doesn't stand at the back of them driving them forward with a stick, no, he leads them from the front and the sheep willingly follow. And what Peter is saying loved ones is that just as sheep are best led, and not driven, so it is with the people of God.

And qualified elders will have less of a problem getting people to follow them and submitting to their care if they lead by example and not by lording it over people. So some men may desire the office of an elder for all the wrong reasons and that's why congregations need to be so careful about who they choose to lead and guide them.

And these men if they shepherd the flock correctly, like all of us will be greatly rewarded for their efforts. **1 Peter 5:4** “Then when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that never fades away.” I pray that one day the congregation here will be in a position to appoint elders.

And when we obey them and submit to them, then they in turn can watch out for our souls with joy and not with grief. **Hebrews 13:17** “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls and will give an account for their work. Let them do this with joy and not with complaints, for this would be no advantage for you.”

And so loved ones let that be our goal for the years ahead, it's God's will that we have a spiritual leadership within our congregation, may the Lord's will be done. Now I know up to now this has been more like a study rather than a sermon but I want to spend the remainder of our time looking at the position we're in at the moment.

**We haven't got any elders, so what do we do until we do have them?** You see churches are given responsibility for accomplishing various tasks for the Lord. We've all got the responsibility of taking the gospel to the lost. We've all got the responsibility of edifying our membership, and helping saints in need. And these duties exist whether we have elders or not, **don't they?**

You know if we didn't have a full-time preacher here **would that mean that there would be no preaching when we get together each Lord's Day?** You see in the same way and for the same reason, elders are leaders within a congregation, but a lack of elders doesn't mean the work goes undone.

We may have no elders here but we all still need to welcome visitors and follow up with them to see if an opportunity exists to teach the gospel. We all need to be aware when someone becomes erratic in their attendance because it might be the first signs of personal struggles with sin. We all need to make sure that our fellow members are being looked after when they are ill. These and other tasks are not dependent on the presence of elders in a congregation.

Throughout the New Testament before congregations actually had elders in place we know that several individuals were appointed to carry out different tasks on behalf of the church. And so long as the tasks are authorized by the church, individual members can be given responsibility to carry out those tasks on behalf of the church.

So all these tasks need to be done and are being done by individuals within the congregation but a congregation still needs some sort of leadership **doesn't it? So do we have Men's Meetings where all the men make all the decisions on behalf of the church?** Most congregations settle on having the men holding regular meetings to make decisions on behalf of the church. But there's a problem with this, **Men's Meetings** are not even hinted at in the New Testament.

So let me share with you what is found in the New Testament, what is found is that decisions were made by the whole church. For example notice in **Acts 6** that the apostles did not select the men for serving the widows. **Acts 6:3** **"Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty."**

The apostles asked the brothers to choose seven men from amongst themselves; the apostles didn't make the decision. It may even surprise some people to know that decisions were made by the whole church even when elders were present. Notice in **Acts 15** that the apostles and elders did not on their own select men to carry and testify to the decision concerning a question about sacrifices to idols, blood, animals which have been strangled and sexual immorality. **Acts 15:22** **"Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas."**

The point I'm trying to make loved ones is that decisions of the church were made by the whole church in the first century. Now let me tell you what's concerning some of you, what some of you are concerned about is **1 Timothy 2:11+12** where Paul writes **"Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet."**

What's concerning some of you are Paul's words in **1 Corinthians 14:34+35** where Paul writes, **"The women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church."**

Now please don't misunderstand me here, I'm not suggesting for one minute that we have our ladies leading in some manner each Lord's day. What I am saying is that from those two passages we've just looked at, it's very clear that women can and are present in the worship service. It's also very clear that when the whole church gathered to consider a matter, women were present as well, though they did not participate in the debates that accompanied the decisions.

However, liked we looked at a moment ago, since the whole church gave its approval in certain matters, it means that the women were able to indicate their agreement or disagreement with the decision. In other words just as a woman singing does not violate the command to be silent in the churches, indicating agreement or disagreement does not violate the command either.

We've seen that though the elders and apostles ruled over the church, the church still gave their approval. Even though the apostles ordained men, the church still selected men to serve widows. And the point I'm trying to make is this loved ones, we don't have any elders and even if we did have elders the whole congregation still needs to be involved in decision making. **Psalm 133:1** says **"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"**

And so decision making is important loved ones but good scriptural leadership should always be on our minds.

[And how do we go about getting that?](#) Well we don't have any elders at the moment but we can grow them. We can encourage the men of the congregation to think about becoming elders and inspire them to become elders at some point in their lives if they are willing. But in the meantime we should carry on doing what we're doing until we're in a position to appoint elders.

We have no elders but we do have scripturally mature men amongst us who are leaders. We already have a good leadership otherwise our worship wouldn't flow so well each Lord's Day. We already have a good leadership otherwise we would never be able to host any special events so efficiently. We already have a good leadership otherwise we wouldn't be able to deal with any disciplinary matters within the congregation. We already have a good leadership otherwise we couldn't meet each others needs so effectively. We already have a good leadership in place otherwise we wouldn't be able to manage the church finances so effectively.

And so loved ones, God desires that we have godly men who can lead the flock, feed the flock, guide the flock and protect the flock. It's my prayer that we never lose sight of God's desire for our congregation.