

● Leading

* 1Tim 5:17,20

Elders should lead the church as a father leads a household (1Tim 3:4-5)

* 1 Peter 5:1-6

Be shepherds of God's flock that is in your care:

- not under compulsion, but willingly as God would have you do
- not for shameful gain, but eagerly
- not domineering, but being examples to the flock

The humility of Jesus should be the hallmark of the service of elders (Matt 20:25-28, John 13:12-17).

Leading involves: leading by example, managing the flock, giving clear direction to the church, bringing judgment where necessary (Act 15:19), exercising discipline (1 Thess 5:12-13), and giving security and stability to the church.

● How many elders?

No number is specified but eldership was plural in the New Testament. The elders, however, are not a management committee but a group of leaders submitted to God and to each other. There will usually be a recognised leader e.g. James at Jerusalem (Act 15:13,19). A very large eldership becomes unwieldy.

● Appointment of elders

Elders in the New Testament were appointed by apostles or their messengers (Act 14:23, Titus 1:5), there were not voted for by the church. There are no obvious examples of women elders in the New Testament. In the light of this study you can see that those appointing elders will be looking for the following:

- A mature Christian
- A proven godly character
- An ability to manage his family
- An ability to teach, shepherd and lead
- A calling from God for the task
- A commitment to the local church
- The guidance of God and the witness of the Holy Spirit
- The confidence of members of the church

Elders

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This Bible study material is about Elders. You can read it on your own or in a group. You will understand it a lot better if you can find time to look up the Bible references.

● “Elder” (Greek word - presbuteros)

The word means an older experienced man involved in leading the people. Elders are frequently mentioned in the **Old Testament**. On a national scale, there were the **70 elders** (Ex 24, Num 11), and locally there were the **city elders** (Deut 21:1-4). In New Testament times the **elders of the people** are often grouped with the scribes and priests and these formed the Sanhedrin which took a prominent part in the arrest and trial of Jesus (Matt 26:3,47 27:1,3,12,20,41). There were also **elders of synagogues**.

In the church, elders first emerge in **Jerusalem** (Acts 11:30) where with the apostles they were involved with **decision making** (Act 15). James, the brother of Jesus appears to have been the leading elder in Jerusalem. Paul **appointed elders** in the churches which he founded (Acts 14:23) and sent Titus to do the same (Titus 1:5).

There are twenty four elders in the book of Revelation around the throne of God.

● Overseer (Greek word - episkopos)

This word is used interchangeably with “elder” (Acts 20:17,28 Titus 1:5, 7 1 Peter 5:1-2) and is a description of the same person. The greek word means an overseer. Paul writes to the Philippian church as saints, overseers, and deacons. (The development of a bishop as special leader arose in the second century and eventually led to the papal system.)

The qualifications and functions of elder-overseer are outlined in Paul's “pastoral epistles” (1 Tim 3:1-7, 1 Tim 5:17-22, Titus 1:5-11), in the epistles of James and Peter (James 5:14, 1 Peter 5:1-5) and in the Acts of the apostles (Acts 20:28-31).

● Character qualifications

In **1 Tim 3:1-7** and **Titus 1:5-9**, Paul describes the character of an elder. Clearly these qualities should be the aim of every mature Christian but very high standards are set for those who lead the flock. Read the passages and note the qualities:

Above reproach	•	Good reputation outside	•
Husband of one wife	• •	Blameless	•
Sober-minded	•	Children believe	•
Self-controlled	• •	Children well behaved	•
Respectable	•	Not overbearing or arrogant	•
Hospitable	• •	Not quick-tempered	•
Able to teach	•	Not pursue dishonest gain	•
Not given to drunkenness	• •	Loves what is good	•
Not Violent	• •	Upright	•
Gentle	•	Holy	•
Not quarrelsome	•	Disciplined	•
Not a lover of money	•	Hold firmly to the word	•
Manage his family well	•	Encourage by sound doctrine	•
Children obey and respect	•	Refute error	•
Not a recent convert	•		

Obviously no leader will be perfect but they should have a good reputation in the church and before the world - like Daniel (Dan 6:5)

Those who aspire to eldership must search their hearts in all these areas, it is a **“noble task”** (1 Tim 3:1).

Notes:

● Gifting

An elder must be able to **teach, shepherd** and **lead**.

● Teach

He should be able to teach clearly from the word of God and be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and refute error (Titus 1:9-16, 1 Tim 3:2). He must be a man of the Bible.

● Shepherd (Pastor)

Elders are responsible for the pastoral care of the flock in their charge. They must help the weak (Act 20:35), pray with the sick (James 5:17) and lay hands of those commissioned by the church (1 Tim 4:14). They need to be able to see when sheep are straying or when a wolf is coming - and take action where required. They need to be involved in the entry into the fellowship and should guard the door to the sheepfold.

Paul’s advice to the Ephesian Elders in Acts 20:

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. 29 I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31 Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears. 32 And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

● Elders have pastoral accountability

Although each man is accountable before God for his own sin, the elders are chosen and anointed by God and accountable before him for the souls in their care (Heb 13:17, Ezekiel 33:7-9, 34:1-10). They must be very committed to their flock and must seek the will of God with a clear mind and godly motives. They must be open to reason but not swayed by every opinion, disturbance or wind of doctrine which passes by.

Eldership is not to be taken lightly. It is a calling from God and must figure highly in priorities of life. This does not mean that every elder needs to be “full-time” but it may be difficult to be an elder and to sustain an extremely demanding and time consuming career. It is good for a church to support its elders generously (1 Tim 5:17-18).