

The Ministry of Elders

Titus 1:5-9

Elders to be ordained: John, Jim, Carey, and Michael,

Today is a big day in the life of our church. *As the first batch of lay elders, you are charting the course for a healthy leadership model that will outlast ea. of us!*

This church is *affirming you / trusting you / blessing you* in your shepherding ministry among us... that you might pray, serve, teach, and love well God's people. Take a moment and let that soak in.

I'm personally grateful for each of you / for what God is doing in your lives / and *how God will use you to lead us into increasing faithfulness to Jesus Christ.*

As you embrace this calling, you are joining a **fraternity** of men who have willingly given their lives for the Bride of Christ.

The ranks of men like Augustine, Luther, and Zwingli / Smyth & Helwys / Roger Williams and Charles Spurgeon... *but also countless faithful men who have lived quiet lives of service and made a tremendous impact for the kingdom.* Men like Julian Motley, Everett Kier, Zach Decker, and Hunter Bolton.

May the Lord bless you with great joy as you step into this role.

May He give you **wisdom, humility, and courage** as you lead.

May we, **as disciples**, be more like Jesus because of your example and your leadership.

As a formal charge to our new elders, I want to answer 3 questions from this passage; 3 questions that will help us understand the Ministry of Elders.

1. What is an elder? (v 5)
2. What is he like? (v 6-8)
3. What does he do? (v 9)

1. What is an elder? (v.5)

Read v. 5

The word 'elders' in v. 5 is the most common word used by Paul to describe the role of pastor in the NT.

It is used: in **Acts 15**, to describe the pastors of the church in Jerusalem;
 in **1 Tim 3**, to define *what* an elder is / *characteristics* of elders;
 in **1 Peter 5**, we find an emphasis re: humility of an elder... as
 we submit to Jesus X as the chief Shepherd of his flock!

Most evangelical scholars agree that the terms, pastor, elder, and overseer, are used interchangeably; **three words, one office** (pastoral office):

Elder (Gk. *presbuteros*) = pastor (Gk. *poimen*) = overseer (Gk. *episkopos*)

If there are nuances to be made, and I think there are, then:

Elder = maturity, wisdom, experience;
Pastor/Shepherd = care, guidance, and spiritual direction;
Overseer = vision, leadership, and overall direction

So, the pastoral office of the church weaves all three concepts into one calling.

A calling to pastoral ministry / or gospel ministry; this is a ministry that happens in and through the local church.

In our new Constitution, here is how we describe **what an elder is**:

Elders, also called pastors and overseers, are men called of God who **aspire** to serve and whom the church elects. Their ministry of **example** includes personal integrity, family life, and sound doctrine, according to 1 Timothy 3:1 7 and Titus 1:6 9. The church assists prospective elders to **discern** their calling and **affirm** a life that reflects the character and maturity of elders. (emph. added)

Today is the culmination of these words in bold!

Trans

Personally, I think the most important thing about elders is **not** the gift of teaching/preaching or leadership skills but rather, **your ministry of example**. Your character and faithfulness. I think the repeated emphasis on character in **Acts, 1 Tim 3**, and here in **Titus** makes that point.

2. What is he like? (v. 6-8)

Detailed character sketch here in vv 6-8. You may notice the words *Qualifications for Elders* as a heading. When we say qualifications, we don't mean *perfections*. I think that is important to say! These are *characteristics* not *perfections*. There's only one perfect Shepherd, the Lord J.

Paul describes the character of an elder in both positive and negative terms.

Let's start w/ **negative**—a list of **five vices** found in v. 7.

He must not be... *arrogant* (especially challenging tempt. for leaders...)

quick-tempered (vs. patient, charitable, listen well)

a drunkard (not a prohibition against all alcohol but clearly a prohibition against drunkenness)

violent (not a bully; not intimidating; not contentious, or aggressive/argumentative, dominating)

greedy for money (using people as a means to accumulate wealth or fame)

Trans If a man is known for these vices, he's not fit to lead God's people.

Now let's look at the positive characteristics of an elder (found in v. 8).

He is *hospitable*—welcoming others because Christ has welcomed him; opening his home and his table... and his family...

-*a lover of good*—he no longer loves evil/forbidden; he now loves what is true, dignifying, ennobling and beautiful...

-*self-controlled* and *disciplined*—the church needs leaders who are marked by wisdom and prudence, not impulsive and impatient.

Finally, it says he is, *upright* and *holy*... he's a goldy man.

The kind of men you... say to 12 yr old son, '**Watch these men / walk w/...**'

Go on mission trip w/**Carey**/Tom Robinsn to middle of no-where Mexico. Ask **Jim Moore** how to manage your personal finances.

Learn from **John Aldridge** how to love the Bible and let it guide your life.

Spend time with **Michael W** to learn how to serve people on short notice.

Another way to summarize the importance of an elder's personal character is found in **vv. 6-7**. The exact same words are in v 6 / v 7. See if you can find it.

"Above reproach" = again, this does not mean *perfection*; or no past mistakes; it simply means he lives with integrity and faithfulness; no incriminating evidence surrounds him; it would be hard for someone to bring a charge against him because he has a godly way of life.

Illus

If someone calls the church tomorrow, accusing Jim Moore of **shoplifting** at Home Depot, what do you think I'm going to say? There must be a misunderstanding—*because the Jim Moore that I know isn't going down for a set of Milwaukee drill bits.*

Embedded in this character sketch of elders is one of Paul's favorite analogies. In v 7, he compares an elder to a *steward* or a *manager*.

Someone trusted with managing a house far more amazing than Buckingham Palace or the Biltmore. Elders are entrusted w/ managing God's household. God's family estate. An elder is like a steward because he is *not* the owner/*not* the president/*not* the king.

But his role is defined by faithfulness to the owner / to the king.

1 Cor 4:1-2 "This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards they be found faithful."

If a steward cannot be trusted, then its game over. I think that is what Paul is saying about church leaders. The most important quality of any elder, any pastor, is *faithfulness* and *their ministry of example*.

Not the number of people he leads to Christ;
Not his preaching;
Not his organizational leadership skills; but his example / who he really is.

Trans Given the emphasis the Bible puts on character and faithfulness'...the most important ministry of an elder is the way he lives and serves among us. Let's call it 'the ministry of example.' That is the most important work...

3. What does he do? (v. 9) (What is the work of an elder?)

V. 9 has three distinct parts. An elder does at least three things:

A. Hold fast—to the gospel message (word = gospel message)

Before he can teach others, he must be *devoted* to the life-changing *promises of the gospel*. The mercy of X is at work inside of him, thawing his cold heart, reforming his darkened mind, and producing in him the fruit of the Spirit.

He knows: *you can't give away what you don't have.*

So, he clings tightly to the gospel. He keeps the gospel close / alive /active...

John, Jim, Michael, Carey... as you work to balance time/energy in church life, it would be easy to neglect this. And yet, this is the most important work an elder ever does for the good of the whole church. Your ministry of example begins with this—holding fast to the gospel.

B. Teach—sound doctrine (life-giving doctrine)

'**sound**' = *healthy* and full of life; life-giving; think of a healthy vine (Jn 15) or a tree planted by a river that yields its fruit in its season (Psalm 1).

There is something inherently life-giving/healthy about knowing God and his character and his wisdom; '**good doctrine is good for you**'—one pastor said.

Make it your aim to be life-long learner of God's Word and sound doctrine...

Illus Piper book (Russ fav quote so far)

C. Rebuke—with a redemptive goal (see vv 10-16)

Not only does the church need godly leadership; it also needs *protective* leadership. It's *not* the responsibility of new believers to guard the flock; it's the responsibility of pastors/elders to guard the flock.

*I'm not going to say much more about **rebuke** because that doesn't seem like the thing we want to emphasize during your first week of elder ministry!*