

What Should I Look For in a Church?: Leadership that Cares for Me

Aaron Brockett | 1 Timothy 3:1-7

Well good morning! Are you guys doing okay? Good, it is good to see you. There was just a real earnest spirit in the room during the worship time. It has been that way every service this weekend. It is just amazing to see that. I just want to thank you for that. That just encourages me and gets me ready to come up here and preach. I want to say this to you and this cannot leave this room. You are my favorite service. If you say it outside this room I will deny it. I opened up that way in all three services. It has gone really well.

If you have a Bible, go ahead and grab it and get to 1 Timothy 3. If you didn't bring a Bible with you, or if you don't own one, feel free to stop by Connection Central. We'd love to give you a Bible as our gift to you. If you have an electronic device, you can download our church app and there is a Bible you can use to follow along. If you didn't bring one and somebody next to you has one, just go ahead and snuggle up next to them. If you don't know them, just introduce yourself.

I want to read a passage and this is not going to be on the screen. I just encourage you to follow along in your Bible. We'll walk back through this passage here in a few minutes and that will be on the screen, but I wanted to give as much clarity to God's voice as I can. I don't want there to be any confusion as to what is my voice and what is God's voice.

1 Timothy 3, starting off in verse 1. *"The saying is trustworthy; If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil."*

That is God's Word and that is our passage this morning. Let me pray. *Lord God we come to you right now and I just pray that in these next few moments together that you would give clarity and wisdom and insight to what I might say. I pray, more than anything, that at some point in the message this morning, that we would hear clearly from your voice; that we would know that you are speaking. God, I know that people have come in here from a variety of backgrounds and, just as John said a minute ago, some of us are maybe struggling, maybe didn't have such a great week. For some of us, our relationship with you may not be exactly what we would call healthy. Maybe we are not there yet in our faith. Others of us are striving to grow. We have reached a plateau in some areas. God I pray that this passage would minister, would encourage, would challenge every single one of us individually and corporately today. I pray that if there are some things I have prayed over and studied, that you would illuminate that and ignite it on fire to make it even better than what I have prepared. If I prepared anything you don't want said, God I pray you edit it so that we could hear clearly from you. We ask this right now, expectant that you will speak, in Jesus' name. The church says, "Amen."*

Well we are in week number eight of a ten part series, so we are coming down the home stretch. This series is called *What Should I Look for in a Church*. What we have basically been doing together is we have been working our way through what are the Biblical marks of a church? So a church isn't just where a couple of people get together and talk about God or read their Bible, but there are identifiable marks that the Bible gives us that says, "That is a church. That is a church that believes God's Word. That is a church that believes that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that the way of salvation comes by grace through faith, and there are these things a church should be striving for."

What we have been doing is that we have been walking through them one by one and we've said if this is your home church, these should be affirmed in us. We should understand what they are so that we can do them better. If you are going to be moving or looking for another church in the future, you will know what to look for beyond just personal preferences and denominational allegiances, if those things exist. Those are not bad things, but they are not the best things. You have to get underneath the soil to the root system to look and see if there is a church that is striving for these Biblical marks.

So last week, if you were here, I attempted this definition of what a church is so that way we could be on the same page. I simply said, "The church is a community of believers who confess Jesus as Savior and Lord, organizing under Biblical qualified leadership (that is what we are going to talk about today), gathering regularly for preaching and worship, observing baptism and communion, unified through the Holy Spirit, pursuing holiness through the disciplines, and scattering to fulfill the Great Commandment and the Great Commission as missionaries throughout the world, as well as where we work, live, and play; all this to the glory of God and our joy.

So we've been working through this and said the church that we belong to should confront us with the Gospel on a weekly basis. We need to be reminded of it. The Gospel isn't just for our justification in God's eyes, but for our sanctification. We grow by way of being reminded of the Gospel. Then a church should invite us into fulfilling the Great Commission in the way we have been gifted, whether naturally or supernaturally, that we should be reminded of the bigness of God and the smallness of self in worship. We looked at the fact that we need to grow as a disciple, that every single week in the teaching of God's Word, that preaching should give voice to God with clarity, and passion, and authority, but all couched in love.

We talked about theology that we should come to have a good understanding of who God is and what He is doing in the world, based upon what He says of Himself, and not what I'd like to be true about Him, or what culture thinks is true about Him. We call that good theology. Last week we looked at membership. We say that if you have given your life to Jesus Christ, upon the day of your conversion you became a member of the church universal. There is only one church that Jesus died for, that teaches His Word, that upholds that Jesus is the Son of God, and salvation comes by grace through faith.

The day you put your faith in Christ you became a member of the universal church. The scripture directs us to then become members of the church local. The two pillar verses that we looked at last week were Romans 12:5 and Hebrews 13:17. Romans 12:5 says, "*Jesus is the head, we are the body and we are members of it and members of one another.*" Then we ended with Hebrews 13:17, "*Obey your leaders because one day they are going to have to stand up and give an account for the flock of God.*"

So now we are talking about this organized leadership thing, and what I want you to understand is that God has organized His church. So if you have been here in this series you know that Jesus first mentions the church in Matthew 16 and then the birth of the church is Acts 2. The growth of the church is Acts 2

through 9 and we just see it exploding. God has seen fit to organize His church in such a way that the Gospel would flourish, that this would be a safe place as John so adequately described that in the worship time, and that spiritual maturity would be the norm, rather than the exception. That doesn't just happen all by itself. The church has to be lead well, it has to be prayed over adequately, it has to be defended from false teaching. So these shepherds that God has raised up to kind of oversee that have a name. They are called Elders.

Now depending upon your background, I know that some of you maybe this is the first church you have been a part of. Maybe all of this is relatively new to you and so you are like, "Elders. What are Elders?" Maybe it sounds like some sort of mysterious Jedi council that meets in a back room somewhere and we break out light sabers. I wouldn't be objecting to that, but that would be pretty cool. Does Yoda show up to those meetings and tell you what to preach? Preach the Gospel of John you shall. That is just about the best Yoda I've got. So is that what an Eldership is? You hear the word Elder and maybe what comes to mind is just a group of old men. Is this just a group of old men that get together and play golf and just talks about the church? What is that? Others of you, unfortunately, and I know this to be true. It is a fact that you have come out of a church, maybe even recently, where this is a period of real discomfort in your life because maybe you were part of a church where the Eldership went bad.

Maybe there was too much power, there was an abusive power, there was maybe a moral issue, a fallout, that greatly damaged not only your faith and your emotions, but also the church. So whenever I talk about Eldership, you maybe get a little uncomfortable with that. Maybe some of you have come out of a church background where the Elders were basically seen as the whipping boys. Anytime you had a problem you vented it on the Elders, they were your voted upon public representatives. Oftentimes we allow American democracy to kind of creep into our thinking here and we think these are the guys we put into office to give voice to the people. While there is an element of truth in that, none of those things are Biblical understandings of what Eldership is.

Here is what I want to do based around these first seven verses in 1 Timothy, that we have already read. I want to just ask, answer, and address three questions. Elders: Who are they? What do they do? How do they do it? To give us an understanding of this, in Acts 6--- I already said that the church was birthed in Acts 2--- by Acts 6, the church is exploding with growth. In Acts 2, 3,000 people responded to the Gospel and then right after that 5,000 people responded. So you've got a very large church right from the beginning and the exponential needs of the ministry were swallowing them up.

So in Acts 6 we see there was a group known as the Hellenists, and the Hellenists complained to the Hebrews that their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. In other words, this was a practical ministry need that needed to be done and because there was so much need, there widows were being overlooked. So the Elders along with the church gathered, got together, and they said, here is what we will do about it. We will find and appoint seven men who are filled with the Spirit and wisdom--- and I find that to be really informative because they are raising them up to go serve food. But it was important they were filled with the Spirit and wisdom. Why? Because this not just filling the stomachs. This is the ministry of the church so the Gospel would multiply.

So let's find seven men who could do this task. So then the Elders say in Acts 6:4, "*But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word.*" Now if you are a cynic, you are going, it sounds like they are getting out of work. Hey you guys go serve food. We are going to stay over here and pray. But here is what happened. The entire gathering got together and they voted on it. It was 100% vote, which is like a miracle in and of itself. They said, no, we see this as very good. You guys go, you serve the food

and the Elders are going to continue in their ministry of prayer and the Word. And then look at the result in verse 7, *“And the Word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem.”* Now I always wonder. Did you ever read those books where you could choose the ending? I always wonder if they hadn’t done that, if we would even be here today; if the church wouldn’t have multiplied; if it wouldn’t have increased; if the disciples (because that is the end goal), these are individuals who swallowed their individual pride and said, “For the good of the Gospel, for the good of the people, for the Glory of God, we are going to service in this function and then the shepherds are going to be about the ministry of prayer and the Word.

So here is a definition. Elders are shepherds who oversee the direction and health of the church by way of the ministry of the Word of God in prayer. That is what an Elder is. We see an example of this in Exodus 18 when Moses rose up Elders to rule and to judge the children of Israel. And then in the book of Acts, as Paul goes out on his missionary journeys, as he was planting churches--- the church in the first century was a church planting movement--- as he was planting churches, he would normally stay in a city anywhere from about 18 months to three years; just long enough to get the church started and just long enough to get an Eldership gathered. There was always a plurality, it was never a one or two man show, because there is collective wisdom in that, there is accountability in that. One man can’t take the church off a cliff. So he would raise up an Eldership and then he would move on to the next city, Acts 14:23.

So by the time Paul writes this letter to Timothy--- and we were in 1 Timothy a couple of weeks ago. If you remember, I said that Paul is writing these letters to a young man who is ministering in the church at Ephesus. And Timothy was a young man. Timothy was more than likely a couple of years younger than I am now. He was probably in his mid-thirties at the time. He has a mess on his hands and the primary mess is coming from false teaching.

Remember what I said a few weeks ago? Satan’s only sermon in his arsenal is, “Did God really say...?” He is preaching the same old tired sermon today and the false teaching was creeping into the church. So Paul is writing to Timothy and he says, Timothy, be on your guard. You need to raise up good shepherds, good overseers who will be able to sniff that out. So they’ve got to be about the ministry of prayer and the Word if they are going to discern and defend false teaching and rightly handle God’s Word.

So this is what prompts Paul to write what he writes to Timothy in our passage today. These seven verses we just looked at are the qualifications of Elders. So what I want to do, in just looking at who are they, let me just walk through this verse by verse. We have already read it, let me just zoom in on it.

Look at verse 1 with me. *“The saying is trustworthy: if anyone aspires to the office of overseer.”* Overseer just basically means shepherd, Elder, pastor. Then *“he desires a noble task.”* So, here is the question. What is noble about it? Well, in Matthew 16:18 Jesus said, I am going to *“build my church and the gates of hell are not going to prevail against it.”* The church is going to be the only thing that will last into eternity. The church will last into eternity. The church is the bride of Christ, the church is the body of Christ. That is what is noble about it. This thing is going to last into eternity. As Jude says, we should all smell a little like smoke, “snatching people from the fire”, loving people where they are, and allowing the name of Jesus to be prominent in this place.

So here is what happens is that an Elder, a shepherd, should be a guy who, number one, has been a member of the church for a while. They have made a covenant promise. They have taken seriously the 59 “one-another’s” in the New Testament that we briefly talked about last week. So they come in, not

desiring any sort of spotlight, any sort of role, any sort of title; just a servant leader, coming in and serving behind the scenes and loving on people; maybe leading a Life group, maybe part of the worship team, maybe teaching children on the weekends. They are just serving. In the process of all that there is this Godly inspiration that begins to bubble up within their heart.

Some of you know exactly what I am talking about. It is this switch that gets switched and all of the sudden you are not coming anymore because your wife is dragging you. You are coming because you want to. You are not serving anymore because, "I should probably do that because that will get me a few extra brownie points with the big guy upstairs." You are understanding that this is Gospel ministry. This is your way to fulfill the great commission. That is not just the church you go to; that is the church you are a part of. You have taken ownership of it and all of the sudden this Godly aspiration starts to well up within you and you begin to operate as a shepherd, even though that has never been formalized. We call that "under-shepherd" where you are just praying with people, you are loving on people, you love God's Word, you love the Gospel, you love the church and what it is trying to do. It just wells up within you.

So he says here that a shepherd should be somebody who has a "Godly aspiration" for it. The word aspiration means stretch for it, reach out for it, man. Here is what it doesn't mean. It does not mean ambition. Ambition and aspiration are not the same thing. This is not a 'hey, I desire to have that', like I am campaigning for it. We don't have any Elders walking around stapling up their pictures on the walls like, "Vote for me in 2015!" This is not a guy who is scheming for it, he is not hinting at it. Why? Because the call to Eldership is the call to come and die. It is a call to lay down your life. Jesus said, "Take up your cross and follow me." This is the call to sacrifice. It is not a call to position, it is not a call to authority, it is not a call to power. It is a call to lay down your life, your pride, and your personal interests for the good of the Gospel, the Glory of God, and the good of others.

I know there is this cynic that exists in all of us. I've got a cynic that lives in me. In fact that actually greatly helps me in preaching, because as I read the passage the cynic in me comes out. Then I just kind of write the sermon around that. I know there is a cynic in all of us. I don't know if I buy that, I mean it has to be about power, it has to be about position. These are just fallen individuals. Yes, there is sin and darkness that exists in every single one of our hearts that makes this a real possibility for anybody in this room. This is why the Word of God says hey, don't put a man over you to be an Elder if he is not first willing to die for you, if he is not first willing to throw himself in front of a bus for the good of the Gospel.

That is what Hebrews 13:7 is all about. God is going to hold them accountable for that. I think this is a big part of the reason Paul lays out these qualifications here in 1 Timothy 3; to wash those guys out in the process. See if I ever walk up to a guy and say, hey man, I've been watching you serve in the church; have you ever thought about serving the church as an Elder, and he looks at me and says, man, it is about time, it is about time. It is about time you noticed that I am God's gift to this church. I've got some ideas, man, I've got some skills with a "z". (I love that.) Get me on there, man. I'll turn this thing around...

Yeah, that is the end of that conversation. And it may not ever be revisited again. That is dangerous. If you walk up to a guy and say, have you ever thought about being an Elder; and they say oh man, that is actually amazing that you would say that. I've never vocalized that to anybody because I don't want my own desires getting in the mix here. I do aspire to that. I've got a lot of questions though. I need to pray about that and fast about it. I need to speak with my wife about that. I need to gather some mentors

around me that know me well and we need to pray about that. I need to really take a season to discern if that is what God is leading me to, rather than my own desires. That is a picture of Godly aspiration.

Paul says, Timothy, don't put anybody in a role who doesn't answer that way. He goes on in verse 2 and he says, *"Therefore an overseer must be above reproach."* That doesn't mean that they are to be sinless or perfect, but it does mean that they are to be blameless in their outward, observable conduct. There shouldn't be any glaring dysfunction. There shouldn't be any scandalous sin in their life.

If you were to present a potential Elder in front of the congregation, the response of the collective congregation shouldn't be, "Oh no. Not that guy!" He gave me some suggestive sign language in the parking lot last week as we were leaving church. That guy punched me in the face at Marsh last week when I took the last carton of eggs. No, actually the collective response of the congregation should be, "Yeah, that makes sense." I don't even like that guy, but it makes sense. He is a man of God. He takes the Word of God seriously. He leads his family well. He is above reproach.

In that same verse it says, *"The husband of one wife."* Now the literal Greek translation of that phrase there, this would be helpful for us to understand this, literally reads, "They are a one woman man." That is what it literally means. They are a one woman man. So this doesn't mean that bachelors are disqualified as serving as Elders. It doesn't mean that widowers would be disqualified from serving as an Elder. It is basically just saying that if that guy is married, number one he should be sexually pure and he should be devoted to his wife. He is only thinking about one woman, and that is his wife. He is not fantasizing about others. He is not known as a public flirt.

Now this is really, really important, obviously for today in our own context, but especially in the first century context because the Greeks and the Romans celebrated and tolerated all kinds of sexual sin. In fact, polygamy was a very common practice, and they were okay with it. Not only that, but it was so dark that a guy named Demosthenes once wrote this about their view of women in this culture. We are speaking about the pagans here, the pagan culture. It says, "The mistresses we keep for the sake of pleasure, concubines for the daily chores, but wives to bear us legitimate children." And they were okay with it. He is basically saying, in the culture in which we live, we have women for pleasure, women for chores, and women to give us kids. Paul says that is the culture that you are operating in, Timothy, and you better make sure that those shepherd leaders don't have that mindset or you are done. So he says they are to be 'one woman' men.

This also means that Elders should be men. And I know that kind of a statement, number one, it will just affirm some of what you already know is true; others will be relieved to hear that is how we interpret that part of Scripture. Others of you might be greatly concerned with what I just said. Part of that is the culture in which we live. That is very counter-cultural. It is very confusing and we have lived in a culture, unfortunately, filled with a lot of chauvinism and the mistreatment of women. So you hear something like that and immediately your antennas go up. This has undoubtedly been the most difficult part of the sermon in all three services.

I want you to hear my pastoral heart here. Our position as a church would be known as the complementarian position. The complementarian position says that God created men and women equal, created in His image and likeness; equal in worth, equal in value, equal in ability, distinct in role and responsibility. God created Adam and Eve and God created Eve. He didn't pull Eve out of Adam's front so that she might lead him. He didn't pull Eve out of Adam's back so that she might follow him. Where did He pull Eve out of--- Adam's side, complementary.

In a complementary role, complementarian; equal in worth, value, and ability; distinct in role and responsibility. I think a good analogy is your hands. Your hands are created equal in worth, value, and ability; distinct in role. If you are right-handed, if you are left-handed, I write with my right hand and there are some things I do better with my left hand. They are not in competition. My right hand is not dominant over the left. It is complementary of the other.

This best reflects the Trinitarian relationship between God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. There is one God existing in three persons. They are all equal in worth, value, and ability; distinct in role and responsibility. God created men and women under that same pattern. You might say distinct, how; what do you mean distinct in responsibility? Distinct in the sense that God is holding men accountable. We get this from Genesis 3. In Genesis 3, when Adam and Eve sinned and God came to find them (they had both sinned), but who did God call for? He called out for Adam. I always wondered where Adam was when Eve was going toe to toe with the serpent. Where was that guy? I'll tell you where he was. He was in his version of a man-cave, or maybe literally a cave, I don't know, probably slipping in and out of a nap watching Sports Center.

The primary sin of a man--- and I can say this because I am one--- the primary, the core sin of a man is abjuration. Left to his own devices, he would abjugate. This is why we have more single moms than single dads. This is why we have more female volunteers in our church than male. This is why we have 30 year old boys living in their parent's basement playing X-box. Because the primary sin of a man is abjuration. Where do you think that came from--- from our first father. When sin entered the world in the garden, God didn't just say well, okay, here is a list of all the things you enjoy but you are not to do now. That is not sin. Sin is it twisted our perceptions. It twisted the roles, and so women are created equal with men in worth, value, and ability, yet there is a distinction in role and responsibility.

In the church, I believe women can serve in leadership responsibilities, they can teach, they can counsel, they can serve in every ministry. I believe the Bible teaches that the one role that God reserves for a man is shepherd Elder. That doesn't mean that women couldn't do it. Of course, women have the ability, they have the wisdom, and they have the intellect to serve in that role. Of course they do. Last night there was a lady that yelled out, "Amen!" Of course they do. God does not want men to abdicate that role. It is a distinction in responsibility.

Some would say, "Well, what about Galatians 3:28?" Galatians 3:28 says, "*Neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, we are all one in Christ Jesus.*" What about that verse? Well, that is a good verse but if we look two verses before that, you will see the whole context of that passage is talking about salvation. In salvation, grace comes to us by faith alone through Jesus Christ, regardless of religious background, your circumstances, or your gender. It is not talking about church leadership.

Some might say, "Well, I just think this is a first century thing. In the first century they were all misogynists and we need to pull the Bible into our modern day." I understand what you are saying. In the first century it was the pagan culture that mistreated women, not the church. The church was the first one to liberate women. The church was the first one to come around women, and support them, and serve them. Women, during that day, were seen just a notch above livestock. Their testimony in court was not valid. And yet, who discovered the empty tomb--- women.

Some would say well, Paul is just a chauvinistic pig. He is a misogynist. But if you look at Romans 16, Paul expresses his deep gratitude for the women he served with in ministry when he commended

“Phoebe, who was faithful to the church, Mary, who worked hard for the church, and the sisters Tryphaena and Tryphosa.”

In Philippians 4:3 Paul says, *“I ask you ... help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the Gospel.”* (That is complementarian), *“with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.”* If you are interested in doing any additional reading on that, there are a lot of big thick books. But there are two small books you can get through in a couple of days. One is by Alexander Strauch called *Equal But Different*, and the other is by Kevin DeYoung called *Freedom and Boundaries*.

Going on in that verse he says, *“Elders should be sober-minded, self-controlled.”* So that means they are to be discerning; they are to be reasonable; and they are able to control their emotions. It means that shepherd Elders should have good judgment. A good analogy is if you are walking through a city late at night, you should be alert, but you shouldn't be paranoid. If you are paranoid, you are probably going to put you and the people that you are watching over in danger. So an Elder shouldn't be paranoid, seeing a ghost around every corner, but he should be very alert and he should be able to keep his emotions under control.

The very first church I served in as a pastor, I was 23 years old. We had an Elder that would lose his temper at every single meeting. He would get angry and upset and he would slam his fist down on the table, and he would stand up and he would leave the room. I remember the first time that it happened I thought, oh, well maybe he is just getting a drink, maybe he is just cooling off. He will come back in. But at the end of the meeting we would go out and his car would be gone. That is a power play. That is a, “I am done with you. I am out of here before you can even say anything else to me,” and the Elders, rightly, came around him and said, Brother, you need to step down.

You see, an Elder should keep his wits about him. An Elder should be very self-aware. He understands his blind spots. He knows what he is good at and he knows what he is weak in. An Elder is not like the contestants on the first couple of episodes of American Idol. You know what I am talking about? They think they've got pipes like Celine Dion, and they really can't carry a tune. An Elder is very self aware.

Paul says they should be respectable and hospitable. They should be reputable and gracious; that is what that means. He is living his life in such a way that he has earned the respect of people, not only inside the church, but outside the church. To be hospitable does not mean that an Elder should invite you over to his house for tea and scones. It means that when an Elder speaks to you, you can tell that they are genuine. You can tell they are authentic.

Have you ever spoken to somebody that when they talk to you they make you feel like the most important person in the world? Isn't that a gift? This is being hospitable. Paul said Elders should be able to teach. This doesn't mean that every single Elder should be able to teach a class or have the ability to preach a sermon, or hold the attention of a crowd. But what it does mean, it that they can rightly explain the Scriptures. A parallel passage to 1 Timothy 3 is Titus 1.

Titus 1:9, helps us to understand this, he says, *“An Elder must hold firm to the trustworthy word that is taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.”* So this is, they are able to wield the sword well. They can rightly handle God's Word and explain it to the Body in such a way that they understand it and it benefits the rest of the Body. It makes sense to them. They can discern and defend against false teaching.

He says in verse 3 that an Elder should not be a drunkard. That means they are not given to addictions. Their bodies, their physicalities, should not be addicted to other substances. That is pretty self-explanatory. They are not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome. One of the marks of mankind is that some of us just thrive on conflict. Some of us just love to argue, don't we? No we don't! Some of you are thinking, "no I don't"! We thrive on conflict, man.

I would say the Eldership goes bad for maybe these two or three reasons. Number one is maybe just a misuse of power. Number two is unnecessary divisive conflict, and number three is moral failure. Those are the big three that just corrupt it.

It says here that Elders are not to be violent, but gentle; they shouldn't be quarrelsome. One of the things that I have noticed as I have kind of counseled with other churches and as I have interacted with other Elderships, is one mistake, and we have to be very careful of, is that a lot of churches will select Elders based upon purely their leadership abilities alone.

They would say well this guy is a Christian businessman. He has done very well in business. He is a Christian. Let's make him an Elder because he will help us get things done. Now he might. I know some really solid Elders that are Christian businessman, but that is not the primary qualification. In fact, nothing in this passage says anything about 'did they run their own business well?'

In fact, the real risk you are running in that is that you get a bunch of chefs in the kitchen. A bunch of Type A strong-willed guys like, 'My way or the highway,' and it ends up in this kind of blowing up thing. So one of the things that our Elders really take seriously is that we'll look at the Biblical qualifications and then we will come over here and say, "Okay, how are they wired?" We put them into three categories: are you wired as a prophet, a priest, or a king? How are you wired up?

A **prophet** is somebody whose supernatural gifting, spiritual gift, is that they speak to people on behalf of God's Word. A **priest** is somebody who speaks to God on behalf of the people, and a **king** is somebody who gets stuff done. I'm primarily gifted, and our Elders have talked about this, my primary gifting is probably number one prophet. I'm wired up to speak from God's Word to people in behalf of God. Number two, I would probably be king and then right after that would be priest. That is just how I am wired up. It is not right, wrong, or indifferent. It is my wiring.

Now here is the thing. In an Eldership, if we get a bunch of kings on an Eldership, it is time to get a few prophets and priests because it is lopsided. It's like a washing machine. Have you ever heard a washing machine get lopsided? It is like wha, wha, wha, wha. That is literally how it sounds too. It just gets all lopsided.

That is what happens in an Eldership when you have a bunch of kings – Type A, or if you just had a bunch of prophets, we would just be going around, "Thus saith the Lord!"... Now what do we do? You have a bunch of priests and priests will marry you and bury you. They are pastoral. Let's go make some hospital calls. Did we hurt anybody's feelings? Let's go tend to the wounds. That is a good gift too; but you need all three of those in equal measure. I'd say this even works its way down through the body.

I just ask you, how are you wired? Are you wired as a prophet, priest, or king? Some of you right now, you are just calling it out. The kings are like, "King. King me! Hey, I want my crown." How are you wired there? So we look at that and we would say okay, we are in a season now where we need another prophet on our Eldership. We need another priest on our Eldership. We need another king. Does that

make sense to everybody? You see Elders should not be looking for conflict, but they don't run from it either. Elders shoot the wolves, they call out the goats, and they protect the sheep.

It says an Elder shouldn't be a lover of money. That just means they handle it well. They see money for what it is. It is not an idol, it is a tool. Our Elders--- it is just a very clear expectation--- they set the example here by managing their personal budgets well for the glory of God. They all tithe here and they all give generously to the needs of others. If they didn't, how do we ask you to do what our shepherds aren't willing to do?

Verse 4, *"He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?"* What that basically means is that an Elder has a well-ordered home. It doesn't mean that his family is perfect. In fact he might even have some kids that have gone wayward, but it means that he has done to the best of his ability to shepherd his home well, because here is the thing. Your home is your primary ministry.

Don't fail at home. You fail at home, you fail completely. The Puritans used to say that the family is a little church. So what that means is that whatever you do during the day, whenever you pull into the driveway, if you work during the day and if you come home, you should pause for a minute in the car, take a deep breath, and think, "The most important meeting of my day is what I go to next." As you walk through the door, as you minister to the needs of your spouse, and to your kids.

It says here in verse 4 and this could maybe be misconstrued by some, it says, "with all dignity, keeping his children submissive." Now that doesn't mean you rule them with an iron fist. This doesn't mean your kids should meet you at the front door with your robe and slippers and a news paper and say, "How was your day, father?"

I don't know what it is, I just always think that submissive kids speak in British accents. They could be total rebels, but if they speak in a British accent, they are an angel. That is not what that means. It just means that as you are parenting, as you are leading your kids, that you discipline consistently, that you don't crush them in that, that if you make a mistake you own it. Sometimes the most powerful conversations for me between me and my kids is when I walk up to them and say, "Daddy blew it. I am sorry."

I want to thank you as a church. I preached this so much more confidently before I was a father. Now that I am in it, with four kids, it has been such a challenge. It is a significant challenge. I'll just bear my heart for you. I've got good kids. My heart goes out for my kids, not only for what they have to grow up with in the culture in which we live, the social media and the accessibility of the internet, which is so easy for them. I didn't even have dial-up when I was their age. I didn't even have any of that stuff, and now it is a touch of a finger for them. Not only that but I signed up for this. I signed up to be here in this church; they didn't. They are in a pressure cooker and I want to thank you for loving my kids well and helping us to raise them.

Here is the thing. I could be your pastor for 35 years and if my kids grow up to resent the church and to resent Jesus Christ, I failed. I just want to ask you to love my kids, don't walk up to them and say, "You should know better. You are the preacher's kids." That crushes their souls. They are already in a pressure cooker. So thank you for that.

In verse 6 he says, *“He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.”* That just means they are to be mature believers who are continuing to mature. So in examining a man for Eldership, we are not just looking to see if he has gray hair. That is what that means. You don’t look just at their biological age; you look at their spiritual age. So you say, *“What is their relationship with Christ like?”* See I’ve known a lot of men who have spent four decades in the church but they are still spiritual infants. I know some guys who have been walking with Christ for five years and are becoming spiritual giants quickly.

So we look at their spiritual age and if they step into a role of leadership and they don’t have both feet firmly fixed on the ground theologically, and their heart is fully surrendered to the Lord--- I tell you, man, you are going to be faced with the weightiness of the role, faced with some pressure situations. I’ve seen Elders give up their faith. I’ve seen Elders walk away from the church because the pressure became too much. They weren’t ready. It is kind of like if you were to plant a soccer field and you leveled it all out, you seeded it, and before the grass could come up and get established, you had a soccer tournament on that field. You would destroy the grass. The same way with the heart of a man who is not spiritually ready for that.

Finally in verse 7, *“Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.”* That just basically means they have a good reputation outside of this place. So in their neighborhoods, in their workplaces, in their extended families, people would say, *“Hey, that dude is legit.”* I don’t even like him, but he is legit. He lives what he believes. In fact, when I see him walk in the store, when I see him walking down the sidewalk, I try to cross the street because I know he is going to come up to me with that goofy smile on his face and tell me about Jesus--- because he loves Him. I don’t believe it, but I believe he believes it because that dude lives what he believes. That is what that means there.

Here is what I want you to see, church. I just walked through 12 things out of those seven verses. Only one had to do with a skill – teaching. Everything else had to do with character. Everything else had to do with their devotion to the Lord, not their aspiration for the spotlight, and those same qualifications should be true for every Christian in this room. You should be aspiring that all those qualification would be true of you. It is connected to the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians. So that is who Elders are.

Now very quickly here, what do they do? In 1 Peter 5, I ended last week with this, we said that Jesus is the chief shepherd and then there are overshepherds, and the church is the flock. He says, *“Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight here.”* And so how do you practically shepherd the church? Let me give you three things.

Number one, they shepherd the church by overseeing it prayerfully. Remember Acts 6 that shepherds devote themselves to the ministry of the Word of God and prayer. Our Elders have two meetings every month and I am considered an Elder here within our church. We meet, I want to tell you this so that way some of you might feel prompted to write down these dates and times so you remember to pray for us when we gather.

We meet on the first Tuesday night of every month at 6:00 right here at the church. Most of the guys are usually coming from work, so we get together, we eat together, and then the next block of time is carved out for prayer. So we may have somebody from the church come in and we pray over them, we will have a staff person come in and pray over them, we’ll just spend a collective amount of time in prayer ourselves.

We take very seriously the directive from James 5, that if there is anybody in the church that needs prayer, then call upon the Elders and they will anoint you with oil and pray over you. That is a part of our ministry. If you are going through a turbulent season with some kind of relationship; things are not going well at work; if you have just been diagnosed with cancer; if you are ill; if there is some issue in your life; you should not be ashamed to call upon the Elders and say, "Will you anoint me with oil and pray over me?" So we will either have you come here or we will go to your house and we will anoint you with oil and pray. That is a big part of the ministry.

The second time we get together is the third Sunday night of every month at I believe 5 p.m. and we usually rotate. We meet in each other's homes. We eat again, because that is part of our spiritual gift mix. We will oftentimes have been reading a book together. We will get together, we'll discuss that book, we'll discuss the condition of the church and how things are going.

Oftentimes they will give me 30 to 45 minutes and say, "Aaron, how are you doing? How is your walk with the Lord? Are you doing okay? How is your marriage? How is your relationship with your kids? Anything keeping you up at night? How can we serve you better?" They shepherd my soul. Then we conclude our time in prayer for this church body, on our knees, sometimes, oftentimes, on our faces, interceding on behalf of this church. They do it prayerfully, they do it doctrinally. As I said we read together, we study together, we discuss my sermon together, we oversee what is being taught throughout the church.

Thirdly, they oversee the church with a servant's heart. All of our Elders serve in this church in a variety of capacities. We have one Elder that plays drums, we have one Elder that works the camera, we have Elders that pass out bulletins, we have Elders that chase your kids around in the children's ministry. You've probably been served by an Elder, and maybe you didn't even know it, because none of them want the spotlight, almost to a fault. All of their pictures and bios are on the website right now. They kind of want me to take it down. They are like, "Ah, we don't need to be in the spotlight." I am like, "I really want you to be there because that way people know who you are, they can find you and ask you for prayer."

None of them desire the spotlight. They do it humbly. I saw a documentary a couple of years ago on Navy Seal Team 6. Some of you are maybe familiar with that, but Seal Team 6 is the elite of the elite of the Navy Seals. They are the guys who took out Osama Bin Laden and they don't like to talk about themselves. They are very covert. They are very behind the scenes. But I was watching a documentary where a former Navy Seal Team 6 guy said, (and this hit me like a ton of bricks) he said, "When Seal Team 6 does its job, danger is averted and the people never knew it." That is a descent aspect of understanding church shepherds and Elders.

When they do their job, danger is averted. Maybe the rest of the congregation didn't even know it. A couple of years ago we had a guy, a young man, come into the church, very prominent, wanted a megaphone, wanted a spotlight, and told a variety of people in different groups that he was the Holy Spirit. Not that he had it, not that he was walking with, but that he was the third member of the Trinity. Nice to meet you, I thought you looked better than this. So our Elders had to confront that. We didn't do it up here, we didn't do it on stage. Most of the church didn't even know it, but we had to address that. So Elders are willing to address the difficult stuff.

How do they do it? How do they do it? Three things: They do it eagerly, they do it humbly, and they do it patiently. We are always open, if you have somebody in the church and hey, they are qualified to be an

Elder, of course give us their names. We have a list of names that could potentially be Elders in the church. There should be many people who are functioning that way who never officially take the role. They take undershepherds seriously, they take the qualifications seriously. We can take those names and if it is time to roll some guys onto the Eldership, there are usually no fewer than eight and usually no more than 12. Jesus had 12 disciples; it is a really good number.

We would say we need a few more guys to role on and so we would look at the list, we would pray over it, and then we might approach however many need to potentially roll on. We would say, "Do you have a Godly aspiration for this?" If they answer with Godly aspiration then we would take the next step to say, "Why don't you come on and apprentice for a year?" So they would come to meetings, they go to retreats, they read books and we have lots of theology and doctrinal discussions.

At the end of that time, if it is still a go, we would bring them, present them to the church and say, "You've got 30 or 60 days. If you know of any reason why they are Biblically unqualified, make that known." Then we would take that into consideration. You could also say, "I just don't like them and here is why. They did punch me at Marsh because I took the last carton of eggs." And we just didn't know it. Maybe we need to find out about that. But I believe that is the Biblical way of handling the Eldership process.

I want to end with this. I've had some of you come up to me in the past and you've said, "What do Elders do anyway? Because I don't know them and how are they supposed to shepherd me if I have never met them?" That is a valid question but I would point you back to Acts 6. The primary ministry of the Elders is the ministry of the Word of God and prayer. So the Elders primary responsibility is to serve the church by building it up so that it would teach God's Word, to make much of the name of Jesus, and to raise up other shepherds. So, listen, you feel their effects even though you might never meet them. You field their effects because they are serving well.

Now that doesn't mean that you can't meet them or you shouldn't meet them. By all means, they want you to meet them. But it just means that if they are doing their job well, Acts 6, the church continues to multiply and increase for the Glory of God, the furtherance of the Gospel, the good of the people, and that lots and lots of undershepherds are stepping in and filling in those tasks for the Glory of God. Our Elders have spent countless hours praying over you and in my six and a half years I can't remember a time when we have prayed over them.

So I want to ask you if you are serving as an Elder here, would you just quickly stand to your feet? I was looking to see how many Elders we had in this service: Earl I saw you over here somewhere bro. Go ahead and stand. Do we have any other Elders? Gene Harker is over here. Do we have any other Elders who might be in this service? So what I want to do right now is I want to ask if you are sitting around these guys, would you just quickly stand to your feet and just surround them? Do it quickly. Lay your hands upon them and, as a church, we are going to pray for these shepherd leaders and I am just going to ask you as a church to join with me in prayer as we complete our time together.

Lord God, we come to you right now and Father we want to have a high view of scripture without being legalists and we don't want to have such a low view of scripture that we read into it things that aren't there because of cultural capitulation. We don't want to worship your Word; we want to worship the God of the Word. We want to be students of it we want to be serious about it, while maintaining our tender hearts. God I know that there is probably somebody here and something that I taught is maybe unsettling to them for a variety of reasons; a perspective, an experience, a different interpretation.

Father I pray that at the end of the day they would sense in their heart, they know, that the desire here is to give you voice as clearly as we can so that the Gospel message might be magnified and multiplied around the globe.

God I thank you for your church. I grieve that oftentimes we mess it up. But I pray that even though we have done that, that you would continue to keep her persistent. You've already promised you'd build her, that she will last into eternity, the gates of hell will not prevail against her. So God I pray that we are not asking for church growth here. I don't want to lead a big church. I want to serve a faithful church. I want to serve a church of people who, wherever they might be in their walk with you, they would know in their hearts this is a safe place for me to be. This is a safe place for me to continue to come and to allow the voice of God to speak into my heart, wherever I might be, so that I might take the next step, just a step, it might be a baby step, it might be a jump, but a step of maturity and growth in Jesus Christ.

God, our main goal is that your name would be known throughout Indianapolis and throughout the world, that the Gospel message would be clarified towards people who are hurting and confused. God I pray that you would help us to be resilient as culture presses on us, not to be angry with culture, that is not where the battle lies, but to be people of joy who are marinating in the Gospel, who love your Word and love the fact that Jesus has already paid the price. God I thank you that you have organized the church beautifully so that all these things could happen and you've placed the primary responsibility of the ministry of prayer and the Word into the hands of shepherds, Elders.

I pray for these three that are here in this particular service. We prayed over the others who were in the other services. God I ask that you protect their hearts, I pray that you would protect their minds, I pray that you would strengthen their marriages, I pray that you would continue to assist them in being fathers to their kids, whether they will be at home or grown and gone. God I ask you to protect them. They are targets just as much as I am. I pray for their unity and their wisdom so that the church would be healthy so that a real difference will be made. God we long to hear the words from you, "Well done good and faithful servants." As our Elders are on their faces daily, weekly, monthly praying for this body, I pray this body will pray for them and lift them up for the Glory of your Name. We ask this and the church says, "Amen."