

Operations of the Elder Team

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This paper is presented to describe how elders are selected and appointed and to provide practical guidelines for the operation of a pastoral elder team.

*For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd [poimen] and Overseer [episkopos] of your souls.
1 Peter 2:25*

JESUS CHRIST IS THE MODEL OF THE NEW TESTAMENT ELDER. As the Head of the Church, Jesus accomplishes His shepherding and oversight work through a team of mature, gifted, and biblically qualified men which the Bible calls elders. Speaking to the elders of Ephesus, Paul admonished, "Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers [*episkopoi*], to shepherd [*poimaino*] the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28). Under the New Testament plan, every established local assembly is led by a team of elders. Acts 14:23 says, "So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed."

Models of Servant Leadership

According to Acts 20:28, the work of elders can be summarized as shepherding the people of God. The verb *poimaino* means "to tend as a shepherd," which encompasses the complete shepherding task. This includes providing oversight, leadership, feeding, protection, and care. Elders also participate in equipping the believers for their works of ministry (Ephesians 4:11-12). The foundational elements of every elder's ministry is prayer and the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:4).

The shepherding metaphor blends the ideas of leadership and authority with tenderness, genuine care, hard work, self-sacrifice, and constant watchfulness. The noun form of *poimaino* is the ordinary Greek word for a shepherd (*poimen*). Whereas the verb form is used three times in the context of Christian leadership (John 21:16; 1 Peter 5:1-2; and Acts 20:28); the noun form is found only once (Ephesians 4:11), where it is usually translated "pastor." It is interesting to note

that in the New Testament the term *pástor* or *shepherd* is never once used as a title for church leaders. This practice was started by the Reformers. In the Bible, Jesus alone holds the title Shepherd (John 10:11; Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 5:4).

Since the work of shepherding and overseeing cannot be separated, all elder/overseers are pastors, that is, they are participating in the pastoring (or shepherding) of the local flock. In the New Testament, the terms *élder*, "overseer, and *pástor* (or shepherd) can all be used to describe men who are functioning as leaders in a local assembly. This is not to say that everyone doing pastoral work is an elder. Nor is it to say that everyone functioning as an elder is a pastor (e.g. some elders may function as apostles, prophets, or evangelists; ref. Ephesians 4:11).

Another New Testament phrase that refers to those functioning as elder/overseers is those who rule, whom Paul specifically stated are the elders. In 1 Timothy 5:17 he wrote, "Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor." He also stated that those who rule "watch out for your souls," a clear reference to the oversight function of elders (Hebrews 17:13). In Hebrews 13:24 he wrote, "Greet all those who rule over you, and all the saints—not he who rules but those who rule." This phrase clearly points to a plurality of elders in each local assembly.

In our modern way of thinking, the hierarchical system is most often associated with the phrase *ruling over*. But we must understand the biblical concept of ruling by thinking of Jesus. Clearly He is the ultimate Ruler of the Church. Yet He described Himself as *gentle and lowly in heart* (Matthew 11:29). At the last supper He told His disciples, "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example..." (John 13:14-15). And as the Shepherd of the flock, He declares, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep" (John 10:11).

Ruling a local church must always be understood in the context of the spirit of Jesus. It is firm and decisive but not heavy-handed. It is a style of rule based on love, care, gentleness, concern, and compassion. It can be characterized as *gentle strength*.

Qualities of Elders

One of Paul's reasons for writing to Timothy in Ephesus was to review the criteria for selecting men to serve as elder/overseers. Paul's underlying purpose for providing the list that follows was to protect God's people from unqualified and unscrupulous men, of which there has never been a shortage. As he warned the

elders of Ephesus, After my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock (Acts 20:29). Some men hunger for positions of leadership simply to satisfy their own desire for power or prestige. Others are deceived about their character or abilities. In His wisdom and love, God has provided an objective list of qualities by which the subjective desires of men can be measured and evaluated.

1 Timothy 3:1-7

This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. 2 A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; 3 not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; 4 one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence 5 (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); 6 not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. 7 Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

We should note that the phrase "position of a bishop" is not correctly translated here (or in the A.V.). The single Greek word is a noun form of the word meaning "to oversee or watch over" (Strong's #1984). Rather than referring to an office or position within the assembly, it refers to the work of overseeing the assembly. The correct translation is, "If anyone desires oversight...." As *Vine's Dictionary* says of this verse, lit., (if any one seeketh) overseership, there is no word representing office. The *New English Bible* translates this passage, "To aspire to leadership is an honorable ambition. An even better translation would be, 'If a man desires oversight, he desires a noble task.' The idea Paul was expressing was not that it is good if a man desires to hold an office, but that it is good if he desires to do a work.

Paul provided a similar list of criteria to Titus, whom he had left in Crete until mature men with godly character could be appointed as elders to oversee each local assembly.

Titus 1:5-9

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you; 6 if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. 7 For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, 8 but hospitable, a lover

of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, 9 holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.

In this list, Paul used the term steward of God to describe the elder/overseers. A steward is one who cares for and manages the property of another. It is important for elders to remember that the assembly does not belong to them but to the Lord. Paul described the relationship between the elders and the church well when He said, The Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28). Jesus purchased the Church and has appointed the elders to manage it and care for it in His behalf. They are to do so in strict accord with the Word and in the power of His Spirit.

Let Them be Tested

Evaluating men who desire to serve as elders is initially the responsibility of the founding apostolic overseers or their representative. Once an eldership has been established, it becomes the responsibility of the elder team to seek out and evaluate men for future appointments.

Paul told Timothy, Do not lay hands on anyone hastily (1 Timothy 5:22). Evaluating a man takes time and the process must not be rushed. Sufficient time must elapse for a reasonable evaluation of a man's gifts and character, as well as the quality and diligence of his service to the assembly.

Question 1. Desire? Since Paul began his list of elder qualities by saying, If a man desires... , the first question to ask about any potential elder is, Does he desire to serve as an elder? If he has no desire to do the work of overseeing the assembly or no desire to function as part of a collegial team, then he is disqualified regardless of his character, experience, or gifts. Since the job is demanding, a man *must* have the desire to do it.

Question 2. Experience? A second question that should be asked about a potential elder is, Has he served effectively as a home group leader and/or as a deacon? Experience over time is a great revealer of a man's diligence and the quality of his work. If a man has never led a home group or never served as a member of a deacon team, there is little practical experience upon which to base an objective evaluation. This does not mean a man absolutely must have served the assembly in these ways, but it is difficult to imagine how a man could gain the necessary experience and respect of the assembly without serving in these ways.

Question 3. Maturity, Character, and Gifts? A third question that should be asked is, Does he have the maturity, the character, and the gifts to serve effectively as an elder? This is where the lists Paul provided to Timothy and Titus must be used without equivocation.

Structure and Operation

Plurality, Collegiality, and Diversity of the Elder Team: In the New Testament, local assemblies are described as having a plurality of elders; that is, an elder team (Acts 14:23; 20:17; Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:5). There is no indication that any single elder was ever elevated above or exercised authority over the others. Following the pattern of the original apostles, the elder team operates in collegial plurality. This means that each elder is an equal part of the team with an equal voice.

This does not mean that all elders have the same gifts and have been equipped to the same level of skill and competency. Some will be accomplished in areas in which others have little or no ability. This diversity is what gives the elder team strength. It is vitally important that all members of the team recognize and esteem the strengths of the other members. It is also important that they recognize their own weaknesses and limitations. Each elder must accept general responsibility for the operation and effectiveness of the team as a whole.

Meetings of the Elder Team: Whenever the elder team meets for purposes of assessment, planning, evaluation, or accountability, the meeting should not be looked upon as a mere business meeting, but rather as a Spirit-led gathering of mature Christian men. When two or three are gathered together, they should expect Jesus to be in their midst. This means that prayer and worship should be a central feature of every meeting.

The elders may designate any member of the team to a leadership role for purposes of effective and orderly function in a meeting or in a particular area of oversight. Such a designation will always be considered temporary and a matter of function. It must never be looked upon as a separated position of authority.

Specialized work teams may be designated to handle specific areas of oversight. Such groups may be ongoing or temporary and must at all times function under the direction of and be fully accountable to the entire elder team.

Agreement of the Elder Team: Collegiality requires that every member of the team stay engaged and participate fully in all discussions. There must be no passivity. In matters of discussion and general operation, the elder team must strive

diligently to function as a unified group. All actions must be undertaken as the result of a unanimous decision. Unanimity means that all elders are in full and active agreement. There must be no dissent and no grudging agreement or agreeing just to get along. This does not preclude the possibility that in some situations, an elder may agree simply because he has no strong feelings one way or the other about the matter under discussion. In the absence of negative concerns or adverse feelings, agreement for the sake of unity is acceptable.

In instances of disagreement, action must be postponed while the elders remain engaged in discussion, study, and prayer. Waiting for unanimity allows the Lord to confirm decisions in every elder's conscience and helps protect the assembly from impulsive actions and domineering spirits. Such functioning requires a commitment to prayer, mutual submission, accountability, and sensitivity to one another. Once every man comes into agreement, all team members will be able to go forth with confidence that the mind of the Lord has been found and the correct decision made. All decisions should in the end seem good to both the Holy Spirit and all the elders (Acts 15:28).

In situations where agreement has not been reached in an important, time-sensitive matter, the elders must never duck their responsibilities or attempt to pass them off to others. They must commit themselves to staying engaged in prayer and deliberation until a decision is reached over which all elders feel at peace, regardless how long the process may take.

Oversight and Accountability of the Elder Team: The elder team functions under the direct oversight of Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church. Although the team must anticipate, plan, and take the initiative, it must never act independent of prayer and diligent seeking of the Lord. At all times the elders, both individually and as a group, are accountable to one another and to the Lord, and are responsible to the assembly.

In situations of misconduct by an elder, the full elder team is responsible for holding the elder accountable for his actions and determining the appropriate discipline. Paul provided Timothy with the following guidelines concerning misconduct by an elder: Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear. I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality (1 Timothy 5:19-21).

Even after he had moved on, Paul continued to have influence in the assemblies he had founded through letters and personal visits. Both the elder team and the full assembly need to recognize the need for ongoing input from outside. This may

come from the apostolic founders of the assembly or other reliable men with recognized trans-local ministries. The elders, however, retain the responsibility for evaluating all influences from both without and within and protecting the flock from doctrinal error and those who would corrupt their minds or undermine their faith.

All elders and deacons must recognize and be sensitive to the functional differences between these two groups. The elders should want the deacon team to function effectively without having to be micro-managed; yet, they also have a responsibility to oversee their work. The deacons should want to take the initiative, acting expeditiously with boldness and resolve; yet, they have a responsibility to operate under submission and provide regular accounts of their activities to their overseers. Obviously, striking a balance between these concerns may be difficult and may at times produce tension. But this tension need not be harmful if it is met with open communication, love, and a willingness among each group to give the other the benefit of the doubt.

Since neither the elder team nor the deacon team are intended to be static groups, there will always be a learning curve as new members are added. Every new elder and every new deacon will need time to learn the ropes. Mistakes, erroneous assumptions, and impulsive statements *will* be made. Rather than allowing these things to disrupt the flow of ministry from either group, both groups are admonished to be longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:2-3).

Organization of the Elder Team: Since every assembly has different needs and the needs within each assembly vary over time, it is impossible to make definitive statements as to how an elder team should be organized and how often it needs to meet, though it is difficult to imagine how a team could provide effective oversight meeting less often than weekly.

Decisions as to how many elders an assembly needs, how they will be organized, and how often they will meet can be guided by answering the following questions:

1. What are the current needs that the elder team is responsible for meeting?
After listing the needs, divide them between those that are unique or short-term versus those that are ongoing. Prioritize both lists.
2. What resources will the team need to meet these needs? Consider finances, personnel, time, etc.
3. Does the elder team have the necessary personnel within itself or will it need to look for others to work on specific tasks?

4. What men in the assembly have demonstrated the gifts and qualities necessary to serve as an elder? Could any of them be appointed to the team?
5. Does the elder team have the expertise within itself to provide quality service in meeting these needs or do any needs require other assistance, perhaps professional? Examples of this might be building projects or equipment repairs.
6. How often does the team need to meet to effectively serve the assembly in meeting these needs?
7. Do all elders need to be at every meeting or can some meetings be sub-groups within the eldership?
8. When is a good time for the team to meet? The probability that there will be one time slot that is perfect for every member is slight. Therefore, members will need to cooperate with one another on this issue for the sake of the team and its purpose.
9. How will the team determine who will lead meetings and who will head up and participate in particular service projects?
10. How will the team relate to the deacons, home group leaders, and other leaders in the assembly? How will communication be accomplished? What needs to be put in writing and what can be communicated orally? How will the team make requests for resources and provide reports on activities? These questions will need to be worked out with the participation of those involved.
11. Would it be helpful to select one member to act as a general administrator of the team? If so, should this function stay indefinitely with one person or should it be passed around? If passed around, how often? What would be the duties of the person in this role? Suggested duties might include preparing an agenda and circulating it prior to meetings; organizing meetings and keeping them focused; keeping minutes of meetings noting important discussions and decisions; handling written communications between the elder team and deacons, home group leaders, members of the assembly, and those outside the assembly; keeping records of the team's activities for purposes of accountability; and other matters that are administrative in nature.

We should note that anyone handling the administrative matters of a group such as an elder team could potentially gain significant power and begin to dominate the group by controlling meetings and agendas. If the team determines that appointing

one member to this task would be helpful, the other members must be careful not to abdicate their own responsibilities to the team. In most cases, the role of a team administrator should be of limited duration (perhaps one year) and then passed along to another team member.

Elders must remember that the Head of the body makes all final decisions. During times of discussion and deliberation concerning the above questions, each elder needs to clearly state his own thoughts and intentions, owning them first as his own and not prematurely attributing them to the Lord. Only after all members have expressed their own ideas can the consensus of the team be submitted to the Lord. The objective is always to submit the will of man to the will of God.

Whenever the elders are deliberating a matter, they should be open to receiving direction through prophetic utterance. Once the Lord has spoken, the matter is settled. Prophecy, however, is always subject to evaluation and rejection (1 Corinthians 14:29; 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21). In the end, decisions must seem good to both the Holy Spirit and all members of the elder team.

Relationships Between the Elders: Elders should be friends. Their time together should not be limited to handling church matters, but should also include social gatherings with their families. They should genuinely care for one another and be committed to watching over one another's lives. The following verses apply to all believers, but they hold a special significance for those serving on the front-lines of leadership:

A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity (Proverbs 17:17).

Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another (Romans 12:10).

Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way (Romans 14:13).

And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you (Ephesians 4:32).

Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself (Philippians 2:3).

Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

Be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing (1 Peter 3:8-9).

Be hospitable to one another without grumbling (1 Peter 4:9).

The relationships between elders should be marked by kindness, honor, deference, courtesy, loving confrontation, gentle correction, and genuine love.

The Work of the Elder Team

Psalms 78:70-72

He also chose David His servant, and took him from the sheepfolds; from following the ewes that had young He brought him, to shepherd Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance. So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them by the skillfulness of his hands.

The work of an elder team is accomplished through the integrity and leadership skills of each elder. In other words, all elders must have both godly character and well-developed leadership abilities. The ongoing effectiveness of any spiritual gift is dependent on the underlying foundation of Christlike character and skillful functioning. If either are lacking, the effectiveness of the eldership will be diminished and the spiritual well-being of the assembly will be jeopardized.

Within an eldership, each elder is gifted by the Lord to benefit the local body in particular ways. Each should assume specific responsibilities that are in accord with his gifts, level of development, and availability. The assembly depends on the Lord to provide a balance of gifts, abilities, and availability within the plurality of the elder team.

All decisions concerning a man's role and work as an elder are made by the unanimous agreement of the entire elder team, including the one under consideration. No elder should ever be required to do something he is not willing to do. Having said this, however, it must be noted that elders will often have to do things that are difficult or uncomfortable for them. Their commitment to the Lord and to the well-being of the body must be such that they will not shy away from tasks simply because they are not easy.

Focused Direction: While serving in their role as the overseers of the Jerusalem church, the apostles told the assembly, But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the words (Acts 6:4). In this brief statement they summarized the primary focus of the work of elders. No man is qualified to serve

as an elder who is not first a man of prayer and a man of the Word.

Concerning prayer...

James 5:14-15

Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

Since elders work under the direct guidance of the Head and serve as models of the Christian life to the assembly, they must give themselves to prayer. This includes personal devotions, group prayer, intercessory prayer, leading the assembly in prayer, and praying for the sick and those in need. A Christian without prayer is a Christian without Christ. Elders are to give themselves to prayer.

Concerning the Word...

1 Timothy 5:17

Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.

Since the work of elders is primarily based on speaking gifts, they must, as Paul told Timothy, be able to teach (1 Timothy 3:2). This means far more than simply being able to teach a lesson. Paul told Titus that elders must be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict (Titus 1:9). Elders must grasp the Word of God at such a profound level that they are able to accurately explain it, express it, and contend for it. They must be dedicated students of the Word, workers who do not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15). Elders must give themselves to the ministry of the Word.

Concerning shepherding and oversight...

Proverbs 27:23

Be diligent to know the state of your flocks, and attend to your herds.

Elders must at all times exalt and promote the Lord Jesus as the Shepherd of the Church. The only question is: How does Jesus, in a vital and practical way, provide shepherding to His people? According to Acts 20:28, the ongoing work of the elder team is to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His

own blood. Therefore, to understand the work of the elders, we must understand the work of shepherds.

The root meaning of the Hebrew word for shepherd is to see. Shepherds are watchmen, continually observing the sheep in their flock. The elders are, therefore, charged with overseeing or watching over the people in the assembly. They watch out for your souls, as those who must give account (Hebrews 13:17). To do this is a meaningful way, elders must be close to the people. They must be able to connect with and relate to the people. There can be no genuinely effective ministry apart from relationships.

According to Psalms 23, the work of a shepherd includes the following:

1. Leading God's people.

Psalms 23:1-3

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want... He leads me beside the still waters... He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

The following attributes and abilities are necessary for effectively leading God's people.

- ' **Vision:** Elders must be able to see ahead, to anticipate both problems and opportunities. Leading means knowing where the flock needs to go.
- ' **Initiative:** Elders must not be passive or hesitant, but must take the first step and lead the way. They must set the direction of the local body as they receive direction from the Head.
- ' **Management skills:** Elders must be able to plan, organize, implement, direct, evaluate, and correct.
- ' **Discernment:** Elders must be able to evaluate and determine what is of God, what is of man, and what is of the devil.
- ' **Diligence:** Elders must be willing to work hard at fulfilling their responsibilities to the Lord and the assembly.
- ' **Tenacity:** Elders must not be quitters, but must persevere in accomplishing the work of God.

God's people need leadership. But elders must remember that the purpose of leadership is not to control people or bring them into compliance with the latest project or program. It is to lead them into the will of God for their lives. And it is to lead the assembly as a whole into God's specific purposes as His corporate witness to the community.

2. Feeding God's people.

Psalms 23:1, 5

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want... You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

The following attributes and abilities are necessary for feeding God's people.

- ' **Knowledge of the Word:** Elders must be knowledgeable of the teachings of the Bible. Paul declared the whole counsel of God to the Ephesians.
- ' **Understanding of the Word:** Elders must understand the meaning of the Scriptures, which requires an understanding of the meaning of words.
- ' **Communication skills:** Elders must be able to speak the Word in clear and meaningful ways.

Elders may teach the Word of God from any of the following platforms:

1. **Observation:** A teaching may be the result of the elders observing a need in the assembly.
2. **Instruction:** A teaching may be part of a systematic discourse on a particular Bible topic.
3. **Inspiration:** A teaching may be a divinely-inspired message from the Lord.

The purpose of teaching is not merely to convey knowledge; it is rather to convey life. Sheep must eat to live. While it is important for God's people to learn and uphold sound doctrine, this is not the ultimate purpose of teaching. Elders are to teach God's people so they can know Him ("I know My sheep, and am known by My own "—John 10:14) and so they can recognize and yield to His voice ("My sheep hear My voice... and they follow Me " John 10:27). If teaching does not guide people into a deeper relationship with the Lord, it is failing to accomplish its primary purpose.

3. Protecting God s`people.

Psalms 23:1, 4

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want... Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

The following attributes and abilities are necessary for protecting God s`people.

- ' **Watchfulness:** Elders must be alert observers of God s`people and of what is going on in the spiritual realm around them.
- ' **Insight:** Elders must be able to perceive what presents a true threat to the well-being of God s`people and what does not. They must be able to accurately assess a man s`character, to discern wrong motives, and to spot insincerity and hypocrisy.
- ' **Courage:** Elders must be willing to take a stand against doctrinal errors, against contrary and divisive people, and against seducing spirits. They must be willing to confront and refute error and to fearlessly declare the truth.

The New Testament contains many warnings about the dangers of false prophets and false teachers to God s`people (Acts 20:20-31; 2 Peter 2:1; 1 John 4:1). It also warns that belief in a false doctrine will ultimately result in unrighteous living (1 John 2:21-23; 3:7-8) and that close fellowship with those who are not living right will corrupt those who are (1 Corinthians 15:33). For these reasons and more, God s`people need to be diligently protected from false teachers, false doctrines, and false brethren. Elders must cöntend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3).

4. Providing care for God s`people.

Psalms 23:1-5

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want... He makes me to lie down in green pastures... He restores my soul... You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over.

The following attributes and abilities are necessary for providing care for God s` people.

- ' **Compassion:** Elders must genuinely care about the well-being of God s` people.

- ‘ **Gentleness:** Elders must not be harsh with God’s people but must treat them gently.
- ‘ **Forbearance:** Elders must not be impatient with God’s people, but must allow them to fail and give them time to heal and grow.

Caring for God’s people involves providing comfort, healing, and restoration. 1 Thessalonians 5:14 says to “warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all. Galatians 6:1 says, “If a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness.” And James 5:14 says, “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.”

These are all aspects of the work of elders in caring for God’s people. But people also have very practical needs. For example, 1 John 3:17 says, “Whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?” And James 2:15 says, “If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’ but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Elders are not required to personally meet the needs of every person in an assembly, but they are responsible for overseeing a system or methodology by which the needs of the people can be met in appropriate ways.

Concerning equipping for service...

Ephesians 4:11-12

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry.

Since the elders of an assembly are a central part of God’s plan for shepherding and teaching His people, they are also involved in His plan for equipping His people for their individual works of service in the body. This will involve assessing people’s gifts, providing opportunities for gifts to be developed, and releasing people to serve.

As shepherds, elders do not lead by lording over God’s people, but by teaching them to recognize and yield to the voice of the Chief Shepherd. Jesus is the one who equips His people for ministry, but elders and others with the gifts of Ephesians 4:11 are his primary tools through which He does the equipping.

Concerning management of the assembly...

Oversight involves not only watching over people, but in the context of overseeing a local assembly, it includes overseeing the operations, functions, processes, and systems associated with ministry. This will require good skills in planning, organizing, implementing, directing, evaluating, and correcting, .

Killers of eldership effectiveness are:

1. Avoiding problems or situations because they seem to be difficult.
2. Apathetic attitude toward the needs of the assembly.
3. Procrastinating on doing the work of oversight and shepherding.

To provide and sustain effective ministry, an eldership must consist of men who are seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. They must be men who have presented themselves to God a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable. They must be men who love Jesus above all else, who see themselves as slaves of Jesus Christ, and who willingly lay down their lives for the sake of others. They must be men who are compelled by the love of Christ, who are self-controlled, self-denying, and self-sacrificing.

Term and Nature of Service

Since the Scriptures do not indicate how long a man may serve as an elder, each elder may serve as long as he is willing or until such time as he is removed or asked to step down by the elder team. This does not preclude the idea of an elder stepping out of the team for a season due to personal considerations. Since the Bible does teach that human beings need periodic times for rest and renewal, it may be wise for each elder to periodically step off the team just to take a break.

The oversight and service the elders provide to the local assembly should be thought of as a free-will offering unto the Lord. As such, no elder should ever demand to be paid or reimbursed for his services. Like most believers who offer their time and energy to the assembly, elders do their work on a voluntary basis.

This does not, however, preclude the elders from being compensated by the assembly. As particular needs arise, there may indeed be situations in which an elder's service is deemed by the elder team to be of a nature that would prevent him from holding outside employment. In such cases, the assembly may offer to provide financial support. The precise work schedule and responsibilities of any

elder thus freed will be determined by mutual agreement between the elder and the full elder team.

Any elder being compensated by the assembly should understand that his duties may frequently require time other than normal work hours. He must therefore maintain flexibility in his schedule, giving full effort to his duties as an elder while also providing appropriate time for his other responsibilities. While the work of elders is immensely important, it must never be thought of as so important as to warrant neglecting family matters over a protracted period of time.

Since local assemblies rely on free-will offerings and since unforeseen problems can arise, any number of circumstances may necessitate suspending or terminating financial support for an elder. In such cases, every effort will be made to help the elder and his family make it through the transition period until employment can be found. Elders must understand that financial compensation will always be contingent on the assembly having sufficient funds available.

Whether compensated by the assembly or not, all elders are subject to the biblical principles of church discipline as pertaining to their personal lives (Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 5; 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15). In addition, because of the visible nature of their work, Paul instructed Timothy, Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear (1 Timothy 5:19-20). The safeguard in this instruction is that an elder is not to be rebuked on the basis of only one person's account. The severity of the instruction is that the rebuke is to be administered before the entire assembly. As a consequence in any disciplinary action against an elder, he may also be removed from the elder team either temporarily or permanently by the other elders.

As appointed representatives of the assembly, elders must accept that their words and actions will be held to high standards and will be subject to ongoing scrutiny and review by the other elders. As James cautioned, My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment (James 3:1). Since elders lead by both their words and their example, scriptural fidelity is required in their preaching, teaching, and lifestyle. Doctrinal errors, poor quality of work, uncooperative attitudes, and consistent failure to accept required responsibilities may be considered grounds for discipline or removal from the elder team. In such cases, an elder may be removed either temporarily or permanently by the other elders. Any reinstatement at a later time will be determined by the elders after careful consideration of all relevant factors.

A Balanced Life of Service

All elders must be active participants in the ongoing life of the local assembly in which they serve. This is not only necessary for their continued spiritual growth and well-being, but is also a necessary component of their work as elders. As recognized and publically appointed leaders, they are models to the congregation of Christian character and service. In addition, relationship dynamics are a factor in nearly all of their service to the assembly. The entire elder team should see their work as an integral aspect of the body life of the church, not as a function that operates separate and apart from the members.

By being part of a team, each elder should have ample time to fulfill his family, occupational, devotional, and service responsibilities. The work of the elders should be structured so as not to be a detriment to these important areas of life but rather an enhancement. By maintaining a healthy balance between each of these areas, an elder can find fulfillment in life and enjoy fruitfulness in every area of ministry.

*Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor.
1 Timothy 5:17*