Elders 8-9-2020

The Apostle Paul believed that local churches needed local leadership. It wasn’t enough for him to stop by from time to time and encourage them. And it wasn’t enough for them to simply depend on his letters and other correspondence. In the book of Acts it is written:

“*Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.*” (Acts 14:23, NIV84)

Every local body benefits from a group of leaders who work together for the people they know and love. Every two years, at our church, we open nominations for the position of elder. Beginning in September the leadership team will consider your nominations and complete a process for installing new elders. I will outline the process at the end of the sermon today.

So what does the Bible say about elders? Who are they? And what are they supposed to do? Today we will take a quick look at who elders are and some of the things they generally do? As you have been nominating overseers and as you continue to think about who you would like to see in leadership, I thought it would be good to talk a little bit about what the Bible says about those who oversee the church.

1 Timothy 3:1-7 says:

“*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.*” (1 Timothy 3:1–7, ESV)

#1 Aspiration/Desire for office

Call of the Holy Spirit

Those who would serve as elders should have received and recognize the call of God to this ministry. In Acts 13, Luke writes:

“*While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”*” (Acts 13:2, ESV)

One author wrote:

Unless a man believes he is called of God, he will find it difficult to survive the stresses of the ministry.

And a desire to see others be helped and served (Elders care about others) not a desire to be in charge. Leadership should not be self-seeking, as Jeremiah writes the words of God:

“*And do you seek great things for yourself? Seek them not, for behold, I am bringing disaster upon all flesh,”*” (Jeremiah 45:5, ESV)

And as Oswald Sanders once wrote in a book on Spiritual Leadership:

 “The true spiritual leader is concerned infinitely more with the service he can render God and his fellowmen than with the benefits and pleasures he can extract from life. He aims to put more into life than he takes out of it.”[**1**](https://bible.org/article/qualifications-evaluation-elders-and-deacons#P50_8303)

Like Jesus said to His disciples:

“*…Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*” (Matthew 20:25–28, ESV)

The desire to be an elder is a desire to serve and give your life as a ransom for many, because Jesus served and gave His life for you.

Serving as an elder means being spent for the people under your care. As Paul said in his preparation of Timothy:

“*But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry. For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.*” (2 Timothy 4:5–7, NIV84)

#2 Above Reproach

It doesn’t mean he is without sin

And it can’t mean that everyone likes him and thinks the best of him, remember what was said about Jesus…

He was accused of being a glutton and a drunkard ([Luke 7:34](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke%207.34)),

a false prophet ([Luke 7:39](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke%207.39)),

a Sabbath breaker ([Luke 6:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke%206.2), [7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke%206.7)),

a friend of sinners ([Luke 7:34](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke%207.34)),

insane ([Mark 3:21](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark%203.21)),

demon-possessed ([John 10:19-20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%2010.19-20), [31-33](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%2010.31-33)),

and a blasphemer ([Matt. 26:57-67](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt.%2026.57-67)).

Being above reproach means that the character and integrity of his life is not easily refuted by those **who truly know him**.

As Kevin DeYoung wrote:

the elder-pastor-overseer must live a life of Christlike character and virtue that is not easily refuted by those who know him best.

#3 The Husband of one wife—literally (a one woman man)

The Baker New Testament Commentary records:

This cannot mean that an overseer or elder must be a married man. Rather, it is assumed that he is married — as was generally the case —, and it is stipulated that in this marital relationship he must be an example to others of faithfulness to his one and only marriage-partner. Infidelity in this relationship is a sin against which Scripture warns repeatedly. That this sin and those related to it (sexual immorality in any form) were of frequent occurrence among the Jews and certainly among the Gentiles, is clear from ever so many passages…Accordingly, the meaning of our present passage (I Tim. 3:2) is simply this, that an overseer or elder must be a man of unquestioned morality, one who is entirely true and faithful to his one and only wife; one who, being married, does not in pagan fashion enter into an immoral relationship with another woman.

Being the “husband of one wife” does not necessarily mean that an overseer has never been divorced. It is meant to address the man’s faithfulness to the woman he is married to. The question is “Is he a man who is faithful to his wife?”

If he is faithful to his wife, then he is likely to be faithful to the people he serves in his local church. Let’s take that as an example, how many people jump around from church to church? This is a sign that you don’t want to work through difficulties and you are ready to jump ship when things get hard, but sometimes even those who are faithful have legitimate reasons to leave a church. The same is true of those who have been divorced.

#4 Sober-minded

Not hasty

Thinks through things rationally.

As Treebeard from the Two Towers says:

You must understand young hobbit, takes a long time to say anything in Old Entish. And we never say anything unless it is worth taking a long time to say.

#5 Self-Controlled—Cool and collected

“*A man of quick temper acts foolishly...*” (Proverbs 14:17, ESV)

Again Treebeard says:

“…I have become too hot. I must cool myself and think; for it is easier to shout stop! than to do it.”

#6 Worthy of respect—Someone you could look up to. An elder doesn’t have to be all things to all people, but he should have some qualities that lead others to respect him.

#7 Hospitable—Welcoming, treats you as important

#8 Able to teach—Preparation, Rightly dividing the Word of God, helps to illustrate the truth

#9 Not a drunkard—Not necessarily one who abstains from alcohol but one who isn’t prone to getting drunk. If you get a call that someone needs help at 2am, you want to be sober.

#10 Gentle—Not pushy, being an elder or an under shepherd is not like being a cattle driver. God is not about forcing people to do things and neither should His representatives be. Isaiah 40:11 says:

He will feed his flock like a shepherd. He will carry the lambs in his arms, holding them close to his heart. He will gently lead the mother sheep with their young. Isaiah 40:11 NLT

#11 Not quarrelsome—Not always looking to have to win and prove you wrong. Some people are contrarians, Overseers in Christ’s Church should be trying to establish and keep peace whenever possible.

#12 Not a lover of money—Money is necessary and it can be a tool for good but a leader in God’s church will either love money or people he can’t love both. To a certain degree one has to be sacrificed at the expense of the other.

#13 Good manager of his home—His children generally respect Him. Some people try to take this to extreme levels, but ultimately it means that his kids have enough of his love that they won’t be bitter with God or with Him because of the time he spends on the affairs of the church.

#14 Not a recent convert—It seems easy to lead when walking on the clouds of ignorance and unawareness. However, people who are new to the faith tend to think things are cut and dry and/or like a fairy tale. As an elder you will have to help people negotiate their way through the seriously messiness of life. I remember once telling someone that they weren’t going to surprise me. Then they told me that their daughter had just gotten pregnant from her first cousin…I was wrong, they definitely surprised me!

#15 Well thought of by outsiders—An elder should be someone who you think is a good liason between the church and the world. In fact, he should have some friends that are unbelievers. This is why I like to ask elder candidates to have one of their references be a non-believer.

I want to re-read 1 Timothy 3:1-7 from The Message Bible:

“*If anyone wants to provide leadership in the church, good! But there are preconditions: A leader must be well-thought-of, committed to his wife, cool and collected, accessible, and hospitable. He must know what he’s talking about, not be overfond of wine, not pushy but gentle, not thin-skinned, not money-hungry. He must handle his own affairs well, attentive to his own children and having their respect. For if someone is unable to handle his own affairs, how can he take care of God’s church? He must not be a new believer, lest the position go to his head and the Devil trip him up. Outsiders must think well of him, or else the Devil will figure out a way to lure him into his trap.*” (1 Timothy 3:1–7, The Message)

Men who are elders generally fit this description. Men who are elders have a desire to serve others because of the way Jesus has served them. And if you have the desire…that is a very good thing!

That brings us to the service side of things, just what is it that elders do?

First off, I will say that the job could entail anything from doing a baptism, to officiating a wedding, to getting called at midnight because a husband and wife are having a knock down drag out. I have done all these things as your pastor here, and these weren’t the hardest things I have done in my role here at BLCC.

**Generally speaking the duties of an elder include**:

Getting to know the people of the church and being hospitable (1 Tim 3:2)

Praying for the congregation (James 5:14; Acts 6:4)

Ministering the Word in various ways (1 Tim 5:7; Titus 1:9)

Being an example of Christian maturity (1 Peter 5:3)

Providing guidance for individuals in the church (Acts 20:28)

Protecting the church from false teaching (Acts 20:28-31; Titus 1:9)

Those seeking to be an elder for power, prestige or honor will probably be disappointed. But if God has given you a desire to serve His people, for their benefit and for His glory, then you will find it to be a difficult and rewarding task.

As a congregation I would ask you to pray for those who are going to be nominated and involved in the interview process. Also, once we announce who the nominees are I would ask you to find ways to spend time with them and get to know them. Lord willing, you will be asked to affirm them as those who will be part of your spiritual growth and encouragement.

As 1 Thessalonians 2:12-13 records:

“*…respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work...*” (1 Thessalonians 5:12–13, NIV84)

God’s plan for the leadership of the church is to…

“*…appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Since an overseer is entrusted with God’s work, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.*” (Titus 1:5–9, NIV84)

This is why we will be interviewing men to serve in the position of elder, because we believe it is God’s plan for His church to have leaders who serve His people in every local church body. Please continue to be in prayerful consideration for those who will be part of the leadership team here at BLCC.