

# CHAPTER 7

“We engage the experience of those in our fellowship who are qualified to direct our efforts in growth, and who then add the weight of their wise authority on the side of our willing spirit, to help us to do the things we would like to do, and refrain from the things we don’t want to do. They oversee the godly order in our souls.”

– John MacArthur

## 7. THE ELDER'S LEGACY

### “INVESTING IN THE FUTURE”

“**Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men**” said our Lord to the fishermen of Galilee. Instantly they dropped their nets and followed. They were men fraught with problems. These men were head-strong, proud, bullheaded, brash, ambitious, racist, crude, impulsive, inexperienced, hasty, undiscerning, and earthy. Some of them were social outcasts; others were well respected. Some were gregarious and outgoing; others were introverted and virtually unknown. One of the men was a terrorist; another was a sellout; and still another was a traitor. To understate it drastically, this motley crew of misfits was the most unlikely team of people that could ever be assembled to accompany Jesus on His three year mission.

Yet it was not an impressive resume that drew the gaze of our Savior to them. Jesus was not drawn to them because of their academic credentials, charismatic personalities, celebrity status, savvy networking abilities, technological prowess, financial portfolios, or even well-coordinated wardrobes. Jesus was compelled to pursue them and develop them into leaders, because of His ability to transform a life and their potential to be impacted.

In fact, Jesus was so effective in His leadership development that at the end of their training, he said to them in **John 14:12**, “**Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father.**” Jesus is simply saying that it was to their advantage that He ascends to the Father, because as the incarnate Son, He is only one man. And though it is true that with Him the disciples are effective, but *in* them, through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, they are *most* effective, and they will be able to do greater works than even He could on earth. These works were of course not greater in *quality*, because nothing can outdo the atonement of sins on behalf of the world. Instead, these works are greater in *quantity*, because these disciples had now become a multiplied task force, carrying out the work of Christ in the power of the Spirit.

And greater things they did. These were the men who turned the world upside down with their unshakeable convictions about truth, their undeniable character of godliness, and their unashamed commitment to Christ. These were the men who would be raised up and trained to lead the greatest mission on earth – advancing the Kingdom of Christ through spreading the Gospel.

Their pilgrimage from wild immaturity to true greatness all began with two profoundly life-changing words, “**Follow Me.**” Those two words reveal something about God’s priorities and plan for how the legacy of Christianity is spread from one generation to the next. Even His departing words to them reminded them of their need to pass on what they had gained:

**Matthew 28:19-20, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing [and], teaching them to observe all that I commanded you...”**

In short, they were to reproduce themselves in the lives of others. And part of this plan to make disciples includes the priority of developing leaders who will lead and equip others to progress in their faith and fulfill the mission of Christ.

Throughout redemptive history, God has always upheld the priority of entrusting the leadership of His people to the kind of men through whom He could work, whose purpose was not only to fulfill their purpose in their generation (**Acts 13:36**), but to prepare the next generation to take up the same cause and continue the work. You can see examples of this in the following Old Testament verses:

- **Exodus 18:13-23**
  
- **Deuteronomy 1:13-17**
  
- **Deuteronomy 31:6-8 (cf. Joshua 1:2)**
  
- **Ezra 7:10, 25**
  
- **Nehemiah 7:1-2<sup>1</sup>**

The exact same priority appears in the New Testament as well, starting with John the Baptist and his transition to Jesus (**John 3:30**); Jesus and His transition to the Apostles (**John 17:6**); and the Apostles' transition to the Elders of local churches (**Acts 14:23; 20:28**).<sup>2</sup> The Pastors'/Elders' role is likewise an equipping one (**Ephesians 4:11-12**), that the Body of Christ would be built up and that faithful men would be entrusted with leadership responsibility. Notice how the New Testament places an emphasis on this priority for developing leaders in the context of ministry, especially Elders:

- **Acts 15:22**
  
- **Titus 1:5**

Reproducing the next generation of leaders was a top priority for the apostles who recognized their need to give the ministry away to others, for the sake of the church's inward health and outward effectiveness (**Ephesians 4:11-12**). Paul was concerned that the mantle of leadership be carefully passed on from one generation to the next with these wise instructions to Timothy:

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<sup>1</sup> Note the particular reference to family relationships as those who served in leadership roles together, mirrored also in the 12 disciple's, some of whom were related.

<sup>2</sup> Refer to the previous study of this transition in chapter 2, "The Elder's Heritage."

**2 Timothy 2:2, “The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”**

Paul describes a 3-fold relay in the transfer of leadership’s baton: 1) *Paul to Timothy*, 2) *Timothy to faithful men*; 3) *faithful men to others*. The result is that four generations of leaders are exponentially multiplied if Timothy takes the command to invest in others seriously. His pattern of developing leaders follows a simple outline:

- A. Employ the Right Method – **“entrust”**
- B. Impart the Right Content – **“the things which you have heard from me”**
- C. Select the Right Men – **“faithful men who will be able”**
- D. Pursue the Right Goals – **“who will be able to teach others also”**

This standard holds true for all layers of leadership development, but it most certainly applies to the office of Elder, to which a man is appointed.

The New Testament uses the word **“appoint”** to describe how men are to be placed into the office of Elder, by the existing leadership (**Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5**). The word means “to be put in charge of something as a steward,” “to set someone in a position of ruling,” and even “to install or ordain.” In addition, the word usually implies setting something down with a sense of permanence. Therefore, when a man is installed into the office of Elder, he is “ordained” into a role where he is committed to serve as long as he aspires and remains qualified.

A survey of the New Testament’s teaching on Eldership gives us 5 *directives* to follow when it comes to how a man is chosen as a shepherd of God’s flock. Here’s how to appoint an Elder:

1. **RECOGNIZE HIM** – “Recognition” is preferable to *nomination* since it implies that the man of God already possesses the necessary qualities for leading the church, or at least has the potential. His conviction, commitment, and character are already known outside being considered for this position. In some measure, he is already doing the work of an Elder and has already been measured as **“faithful”** and is identified by his provenness (**2 Timothy 2:2**). Consider the example of Paul and Timothy in **Acts 16:1-4**, where the apostle began his investment in someone who possessed certain essential qualities and the potential for significant leadership. What are those qualities in this man who would pastor in Ephesians and eventually carry on the legacy of Paul?

- F \_\_\_\_\_ (v. 2)
- A \_\_\_\_\_ (v. 4)
- T \_\_\_\_\_ (v. 3)

2. **EXAMINE HIM** – “Examination” is clearly implied in the list of character qualifications given in **1 Timothy 3; Titus 1; and 1 Peter 5**, and expressly stated in **Titus 1**, where Paul says “...appoint elders in every city as I directed you, namely *if...*” meaning that he must pass the scrutiny of examination to determine whether he is fit for the role.<sup>3</sup> His examination is not merely a test in theology and Biblical data, but an inventory on his whole life. He should be evaluated in light of three areas, based on **1 Timothy 4:16**, which says, “**Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.**”

- C \_\_\_\_\_ of life: what He \_\_\_\_\_ as a man of God – “**pay close attention to yourself...**”
- C \_\_\_\_\_ about truth: what He \_\_\_\_\_ as a student of Scripture - “**...and your teaching...**”
- C \_\_\_\_\_ to ministry: what He \_\_\_\_\_ as a servant of Christ - “**...persevere in these things...for yourself and for those who hear you.**”

3. **AFFIRM HIM** – “Affirmation” is the witness from others, which confirms that a potential Elder does indeed match the necessary qualifications for the office, and that there is no known Biblical reason to disqualify him from serving (**1 Corinthians 9:27**). According to **Matthew 18:15-20; Galatians 6:1-2; and 1 Timothy 5:19-22**, if a person among the Elders or congregation cannot affirm a candidate for Eldership, he must demonstrate that such a man is not qualified on Biblical grounds, and handle the matter privately and personally. Leadership styles, personalities, and even philosophy of ministry differences (as long as there is no sin or compromise) do not constitute grounds to dismiss a candidate from Eldership. Sin and immaturity are the *only* things keep a man from being affirmed.

Practically, some churches publish the name of the Elder candidate to the church before he is affirmed and instruct the members of the congregation of their responsibility to go to that candidate if there is any Biblical reason as to why he should not pursue Eldership at this time, because of sin or immaturity. If there is Biblical cause to withdraw himself from the appointing process, the Elder candidate should do so. If the Elder candidate does not withdraw himself, that member, believing he still has a valid concern, must then present his case before the church’s Elders who will investigate and make a final determination.

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<sup>3</sup> See the appendix for a sample list of questions you might ask him.

4. **ORDAIN HIM** – “Ordination” has become a professional term in the modern day church for full-time, vocational Pastors, and usually separates the staff Elders from the lay Elders. But as we have already noted in our studies from chapter 2 and 3, such a distinction is unwarranted. Biblically, the final step of affirmation is a *public declaration of endorsement* by the existing church leaders, most visibly seen in the practice of “laying on of hands.”

“**Laying on of hands**” throughout the New Testament is a public affirmation of approval that a person is worthy of support and the role in which he is appointed to serve. The apostles affirmed the prototype deacons in this way (**Acts 6:6**), as did the leaders of the Antioch church to Barnabas and Saul (Paul) before their First Missionary Journey (**Acts 13:3-4**). The practice reflected the human affirmation of divine leading in the life of a servant of God.

Applied to the Elder, this act of installation officially activates his service in the office, and endures as long as he aspires and remains qualified. *Therefore every Elder should be ordained.* Moreover, given the connotation of permanence in the word “appoint,” the Bible never limits the term of service for an Elder nor mandates a sabbatical. Typically an Elder’s ordination lasts throughout his whole lifetime.

- When does **1 Timothy 5:19-22** say that the laying on of hands is appropriate for an Elder?
- What does **1 Timothy 4:14** say about who ordains Elders for ministry?
- How does Paul use Timothy’s ordination to motivate him to persevere in his faithfulness to ministry in **2 Timothy 1:6**?

Practically speaking, some churches choose to have Elder candidates endure an ordination council where they submit doctrinal positions, personal references, and a history of ministry experience, followed by a period of careful testing by other ordained men, who add their affirmation to the church’s.

5. **EMPOWER HIM** – “Delegation” of specific ministry responsibilities is the final responsibility of the existing Elders to his new fellow Elder, so that he helps shoulder the weight of shepherding *all* the flock. In addition to everything pastoring the church requires he assumes specific ministry assignments based on his spiritual gifts and the needs of the church.<sup>4</sup> He is not appointed to an executive “board” on which he sits and makes decisions; he is marked out for an uncommon calling in which he “works.”

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<sup>4</sup> See chapter 3, “The Elder’s Function” p. 10 for a sample job description template for an Elder to clarify his role and responsibilities.

## CONCLUSION

While this series on Eldership has been primarily about understanding the nature and work of an Elder, it has equally brought to light the responsibility of the church to affirm and support their leaders through a variety of responses. Three final priorities remain essential for the members of the local church.

- A. **Appreciate** – In **1 Thessalonians 5:12**, the congregation is commanded to recognize and honor the Elders, because of their work. What are some tangible and non-tangible ways you might do this?
  
- B. **Assist** – According to **Ephesians 4:11-16**, the responsibility of the congregation to partner with the leadership in a cooperative team effort where every member of the church is considered a minister. What are some practical questions that you can ask your Elders to know how you might be more personally involved in their life and leadership?
  
- C. **Aspire** – Based on **1 Timothy 3:1**, certain men who are not yet Elders will long to share and perpetuate the work of the ministry. The Elders are responsible to recognize such men and appoint them to Eldership, *if* they desire it. They are also liable to equip the entire body, out of which will emerge gifted men to serve and lead. The Elders must train, but the candidate must aspire. Therefore, if you desire the work of an Elder, you should make your desires known and enter into the process! The work is hard but the reward is immeasurable for common men with an uncommon calling.