

BIBLICAL ROLE of ELDER

Jesus is the Chief Shepherd and Overseer of our souls (*John 10:11-14; 1Pet 2:25; 5:4*). Christian elders, under the direction of Jesus, have been charged with the same role of shepherd and overseer to that portion of the flock committed to their care (*1Pet 5:1-2*). These two functions have similarities in that they both involve watching over and having concern for the flock. The difference between them is in the primary emphasis.

Shepherding deals primarily with individuals and their spiritual growth and health.

- Read Psalm 23. Make a list of what the shepherd does for the sheep.
- Read Acts 20:28-35. Make a list of what the shepherd does for the sheep.
- Read Eph 4:11-13. What is the shepherd trying to accomplish?
- Read Heb 13:17. To whom are elders accountable? Are they accountable to the local flock?

Oversight deals primarily with the flock and its health.

- Read 1Thes 5:12-13. Who is Paul speaking of and what is he saying they do?
- Read Titus 1:9-11. What are elders instructed to do and why?
- Read 1Pet 5:1-3. How are elders to exercise oversight and what should be their motivation?

Challenges accompany those in Spiritual Leadership

1. Criticism

Inability to handle criticism is a sign of emotional immaturity. Feedback from others can help us better understand ourselves and make appropriate adjustments. The difficulty comes in separating just from unjust criticism. Take it to God for the Holy Spirit to show you your weaknesses and for strength to face unjust criticism. Do not retaliate and stay at your task.

- Read Pro 1:5. What qualities are necessary for a person to listen appropriately to criticism?

“No leader is exempt from criticism, and his humility will nowhere be seen more clearly than in the manner in which he accepts and reacts to it.”

Spiritual Leadership, J. Oswald Sanders, Moody Press, 1977, p. 110.

2. Rejection

Personal rejection may occur. Be motivated by God’s love and love for others. Do not let it lead to discouragement. Leaders are often misunderstood and their value frequently underestimated until after they are gone. Reasons for rejection are often complex and can reflect our own weaknesses and failures. We must learn from our mistakes and the criticism of others and continue to grow in Christ as His servant. It is not our place to give up, but we may be required to sit on the sidelines for a spell while we regroup/reflect and prepare for continued service.

Rejection may also have nothing to do with us but a rejection of God Himself. Consider God’s instruction for Israel to march into the Promised Land that resulted in disobedience and forty years in the desert. Joshua and Caleb were faithful leaders that had to endure the period of corporate discipline before the Promised Land was finally entered.

“The leader who maintains high spiritual standards may sometimes find himself following his Master on the pathway of rejection...”

Spiritual Leadership, J. Oswald Sanders, Moody Press, 1977, p. 110.

- Read 1Kings 19:1-18. Why was Elijah despondent? Was it justified?

3. Conflict

Conflict can occur either from a difference in information, seeing the situation from different perspectives due to past experience, or from differences resulting from differing roles. A working knowledge and practical experience in problem solving and conflict resolution is essential. Ultimately decisions are required for the good of the congregation. The burden is on leaders to make such decisions even though they are sometimes unpleasant. This can be particularly difficult for leaders who don't want to hurt people or who desire approval from those they lead.

4. Change

Improvement in any aspect of ministry means that change must occur. Growth cannot come without change. Unfortunately, change brings the possibility of resistance and conflict. Understanding of the process of change is critical for minimizing the difficulties that may be faced. Knowing what to expect and planning accordingly has the potential to eliminate or significantly reduce any resistance or conflict.

5. Time

There is never enough. Consequently, unless the Holy Spirit directs your efforts and your tasks are prioritized you open yourself up for discouragement, failure and burnout. Managing our time is better termed "managing ourselves." Wasting time is actually wasting life itself. Dealing with issues such as compulsiveness, laziness, disorganization and procrastination are important factors in learning how to better manage ourselves.

6. Personal Issues

Pride, procrastination, fatigue and depression can negatively impact a leader's ministry. We have to learn how to deal with ourselves before we can help others. It is also critically important that we develop close relationships with other elders who can hold us accountable and help us when we struggle.

APPENDIX

Read Psalm 23. Make a list of what the shepherd does for the sheep.

- The Lord makes me the object of His concern and care (vs 1)
- The Lord provides all that I need so that I lack nothing and can be content in His care (vs 1)
- He provides food, water and a place to rest without fear or anxiety (vs 2). Spiritually He provides nourishment that satisfies my souls.
- He renews my soul providing encouragement to fortify my confidence and faith (vs 3)
- He guides me in righteousness for His glory (vs 3)
- He is with me during difficult times and is a source of strength and courage (vs 4)
- He comforts me with His guidance, discipline, and protection (vs 4)
- He provides for me while my enemies watch for an opening to attack (vs 5). Satan is constantly on the prowl seeking to devour ([1Pet 5:8](#)).
- He anoints me with His Spirit (vs 5)
- I can count on His goodness and lovingkindness all my life (vs 6)
- He has made me a permanent part of His household (vs 6)

Read Acts 20:28-35. Make a list of what the shepherd does for the sheep.

- He is on guard for himself (vs 28)
- He guards the sheep (vs 28)
- He oversees the sheep (vs 28)
- He remains alert to identify danger (vs 31)
- He must help the weak (vs 35)

Read Eph 4:11-13. What is the shepherd trying to accomplish?

The Greek that is translated 'pastor' is translated 'shepherd' in every other passage. Along with others the shepherd is working to "equip the saints for works of service" so that the body of Christ may be built up.

Read Heb 13:17. To whom are elders accountable? Are they accountable to the local flock?

Since Jesus is the Chief Shepherd, then elders, as under shepherds, are accountable to Him. If an accusation against an elder is supported by two or three witnesses, and the elder continues in his sin then he is to be rebuked in public ([1Tim 5:19-21](#)). Matthew provides further guidance regarding this accountability ([Matt 18:15-17](#)).

Read 1Thes 5:12-13. Who is Paul speaking of and what is he saying they do?

The description given clearly identifies the elders as the ones that should be appreciated and esteemed. He is saying that elders 'labor among' them and 'have charge' over them. The role involves giving direction and exercising care and diligence as managers that will give an account.

Read Titus 1:9-11. What are elders instructed to do and why?

Elders are required to understand sound doctrine and maintain it through exhortation, refuting those who are leading people astray, because there will be those who must be silenced.

Read 1Pet 5:1-3. How are elders to exercise oversight and what should be their motivation?

The focus of an elder should not be that of exercising authority but that of serving as examples to the flock. Peter made it clear that elders should not be in it for the money nor should they exercise authority in a demanding manner. They should not serve because they are compelled to do so but voluntarily and eagerly as led by the will of God.

Read Pro 1:5. What qualities are necessary for a person to listen appropriately to criticism?

A person who is wise and filled with understanding will most likely listen to criticism and counsel so he can increase his learning. This reflects an attitude of humility rather than pride.

Read 1Kings 19:1-18. Why was Elijah despondent? Was it justified?

Elijah was physically exhausted due to running from Mount Carmel to Jezreel and then fleeing to Beersheba, then into the wilderness. He was afraid of Jezebel and felt that he was the only one left that hadn't forsaken God's covenant. He feared those who wanted to take his life yet he pleaded with God to take his life. His despondency was not justified as God reported to him that 7,000 in Israel hadn't bowed to Baal. Sometimes those who work hard serving the Lord become disillusioned and tired thinking all is in vain. Nothing could be further from the truth. Stepping back and letting God reveal His perspective can revitalize those who feel alone and tired.

GLOSSARY

Various terms are used in scripture to describe the tasks of shepherding and oversight.

1. Shepherd

- 4166 poimén, noun – what a shepherd is (the feeder, protector, and ruler of a flock)
Translated ‘shepherd’ in 16 of 17 occurrences. It is incorrectly translated ‘pastor’ in Ephesians 4:11.

- 4165 poimainó, verb – what a shepherd does
Translated shepherd (5), tends or tending (2), feeding (1), and rule (3 times in Revelation)

“¹Therefore, I urge elders among you...² shepherd [4165] the flock of God among you...” (1Peter 5:1-2)

“...shepherd [4165] the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” (Acts 20:28-31)

2. Manage (4291) proistemi, verb – to stand before, give attention to, direct, maintain (indicating care and diligence); not reign, rule over, or exercising of authority

- Translated manage (3), engage(2), rule (1), leads (1), preside over (1)

“...those who diligently labor among you and preside over [4291] you in the Lord...” (1Thes 5:12)

“⁴ He must be one who manages [4291] his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity ⁵ (but if a man does not know how to manage [4291] his own household, how will he take care of [1959] the church of God?)” (1Tim 3:4-5)

“The elders who lead [4291] well...” (1Tim 5:17)

3. Oversight

- 1985 episkopos, noun - the supervising function exercised by an elder of a church
Translated overseer (4), Guardian (1)

- 1983 episkopeó, verb - exercise oversight, care for,
Translated see to it (1), oversight (1)

“shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight [1983]...” (1Peter 5:2)

4. Steward (3623) oikonomos, noun - a household manager, a steward, guardian

- Translated steward (5), manager (4), city treasurer (1)

“For the overseer must be beyond reproach as God’s steward [3623]...” (Titus 1:7)

5. Give Account (3056) logos, noun - a word, a statement, a speech

- Translated word (236), statement (18), accounting (11), speech (10), message (9), misc. (42)

“Obey your leaders and submit to them—for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account [3056]...” (Heb 13:17)

6. Lead

- 2232 hégemón, noun - a leader, guide
Not applied to elders but to governors and princes
- 2233 hégeomai, verb – to lead or guide
Translated consider (6), regard (6), count (5), led (3), leaders (2), chief (2), thought (2), ruler (1), governor (1), greatest (1), esteem (1),

“Remember those who led [2233] you” (Heb 13:7)

¹⁷Obey your leaders [2233] and submit to them...” (Heb 13:17)

“Greet all of your leaders [2233] and all the saints.” (Heb 13:24)

7. Take care of (1959) epimeleomai, verb - take care of, attend to

- Applied to elders in 1Timothy 3:5 regarding how elders should care for the church

“but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of [1959] the church of God?” (1Tim 3:4-5)

8. Be on guard (4337) prosechó, verb - attend to, pay attention to

- Translated give/pay attention (9), beware (8), be on guard (3), take care (1), respond to (1), addicted to (1), has officiated (1)

“Be on guard [4337] for yourselves and for all the flock...” (Acts 20:28)

9. Keep watch (69) agrupneó, verb – watchful, careful

- Translated keep/be on the alert (3), watch (1)

“...they keep watch [69] over your souls...” (Heb 13:17)

10. Be Alert (1127) grégoreó, verb - to be awake, to watch

- Translated alert (12), watch (6), awake (4), not allowed (1),

Therefore, be on the alert [1127], remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. (Acts 20:31)

11. Admonish (3560) noutheteó, verb - admonish, warn, counsel, exhort

- Translated admonish (7), give instruction (1)
- Often as an example of Paul and sometimes instruction for all believers

“Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who labor among you and preside over you in the Lord and admonish [3560] you” (1Thes 5:12-13 NET)

“Therefore, be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish [3560] each one with tears.” (Acts 20:31)