

Work of Elders: Leading and Healing

Detailed Outline
Part 9 of 9

3. New Testament Roles for Pastor Elders

C. Leading the Church

One thing about shepherding that you learn very quickly is that sheep have no sense of direction. They get lost so easily. So they need to be led. Also there is land and water management. There is so much that goes into shepherding sheep that comes under the title of leading the sheep.

The term *shepherd* itself often means lead or govern. Words like *overseer* or *oversight*, and the Greek word *prohistemi*, all imply leading. First Timothy 5:17 refers to the “elders . . . who direct the affairs of the church well” (*prohistemi*; NIV). Titus 1:7 speaks of the elders as “God’s steward(s).” The elders are God’s household or estate managers of the household of God. All of these are leadership terms.

Sadly, the number one complaint I hear about elders is this: *they are not leading us*. They’re good men, they mean well, they even teach well. But the church is not going anywhere. The same old problems are repeated year after year. We don’t have any fresh vision. There are no new ideas. Old issues and problems are not addressed.

One letter complains: “What are the members of a local church to do when the elders aren’t leading? Planning ahead is a low priority. Utilization of spiritual gifts is not encouraged. And often elders don’t attend elders’ meetings. [That’s a big problem. Absenteeism.] What are the members of the congregation to do, especially those who do have administrative gifts and recognize the problem?” Now there’s a frustrated person because of poor leadership.

1) Poor Leadership Frustrates People

Leaders are called to lead, and they should lead with diligence. As the Scripture says, “The one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; *the one who leads, with zeal*; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness” (Rom. 12:8). In other words, put yourself wholeheartedly into your leadership activities. Don’t be passive.

The eldership is a leadership body (1 Tim. 5:17). But among the elders, some elders will have the gift of *prohistemi* (Rom. 12:8). They will be natural leaders, the kind of people who can motivate people, set vision, address problems, confront issues, and organize. Every elder contributes his own special gifts, interests, talents, or years of experience and knowledge. It’s a wonderful thing to have elders who are gifted in leadership. But remember the whole eldership is a leadership body, a leadership council.

2) Good Leadership is Good Communication

Many elders think they're communicating with the congregation, and they're not. The congregation doesn't have a clue what they're doing or thinking. So think of creative ways you can communicate better.

3) Set World Vision

Jesus Christ gave us the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20). We're globalist, we're internationalist, and we have a message for the world. Are you setting world vision? Do you have a global vision? Are you setting higher horizons for the people? Are you leading them to greener grass? Fresher water?

4) Have Good Elders' Meetings

If you have ineffective, boring, trivial meetings, that is a sign of what the church will be like. If the elders' meetings are well managed and effective, you will see a well-managed church. Good leadership will be shown in good elders' meetings.

5) Hold People Accountable

Hold people accountable for their ministries and train them for those ministries.

Let me remind you that you are not to do everything. It's not your job to do every ministry in the church. According to Ephesians 4:12, all the saints are to be active in the work of ministry, not just the leaders.

The elders who are Spirit-gifted teachers or shepherds are "to equip the saints for the work of ministry" (Eph. 4:12). Thus the elders have an important equipping ministry in the church. They are also to delegate ministry tasks to others in the church, and to hold them accountable for their ministry responsibilities.

6) Do it with Zeal

Do your work as a leader wholeheartedly, put yourself into it. Sacrifice yourself. Don't be a minimalist, don't just do the bare-bones minimum. Do and go beyond the minimum. People are dying for good leadership. They love good leadership. People want to be led. Don't disappoint them. And above all, do not be a passive leader. Neil Glasser once said, "Passivity is the enemy of leadership."

d) Healing and Caring for Practical Needs

This is the practical side of shepherding. Sheep get diseases, they get sick, they get old, they die, they have newborn sheep. All these needs must be cared for.

1) Caring for Sick People

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. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. (James 5:14-15)

People are to call for the elders when they're not getting better and doctors are not helping.

2) Weddings, Pre-Marital and Marital Counseling

There are marriages to perform and families to be helped. Marriages and families are in serious trouble today. They need counsel, encouragement, and comfort during difficult times. The elders are to give wise counsel and comfort to families.

3) Funerals

4) Praying for People

5) Helping the Weak

To the Ephesian elders Paul says, “We must help the weak” (Acts 20:35). Notice he says “*must* help;” it’s a moral imperative. People who cannot provide for themselves must be cared for and provided for by the church and its leaders. The church should be a caring place.

Conclusion

Let me conclude with this charge: “Shepherd the flock of God that is among you” (1 Peter 5:2). The flock needs your leadership. It needs your teaching. It needs your presence. It needs your example.

What a wonderful thing when people say, “Our elders are praying elders. Our elders care for the flock. Our elders are setting out world vision and mission before us.” People need your challenge, they need your heartbeat, they need your passion, your excitement about the gospel. People love good leadership.

Now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. (Acts 20:32)

The Word of God will build you up. As you read and study the Word of God, it will strengthen you to do an impossible job. You’ll be wiped out in the first year of your ministry. But the Holy Spirit can strengthen you. He can enable you to do this job. You can never do it alone. You do it with others. You do it by prayer and by the knowledge of the things of God. So, “I commend you to God” and I entrust you “to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up.”