

Discussion Questions

Lesson 1: People Skills

1. Write out your own expanded paraphrase of [Psalm 78:70-72](#) and [2 Corinthians 10:1](#). Be creative in your paraphrase.
2. Why is it absolutely critical that an elder desires to continually improve his people skills? List as many reasons as you can.
3. It is inevitable that church leaders will be criticized or misunderstood. In what ways does Paul's response to the difficult Corinthians serve as a model for these difficult situations?
4. In our hyper-busy society, why is it critical for an elder to be available and visible to those he is serving (spend time with the sheep)?
5. Why do you think that no amount of good works, wisdom, hatred of sin, or disciplined doctrine can ever make up for lack of love? (See the quote from D. A. Carson.)

Lesson 2: People Skills (continued)

1. Why do you think church work is slow work?
2. Paul includes being gentle/patient in the list of requirements for eldership. Give an expanded definition of the Greek word *epieikēs* for gentle/patient (see page 197 in *Biblical Eldership*, pages 62-63 in *Spiritual Maturity*). Why is it imperative that an elder be gentle/patient?
3. It's important that you understand the difference between being passive and being patient. They are not the same thing. Explain the difference between a leader who is *passive* toward people and problems, and a leader who is *patient* with people and problems.
4. Why is it vital for elders to set the tone for encouragement in the local church?
5. Why do we find the ministry of encouraging others so difficult? Answer this question in light of encouraging your spouse, your children, fellow workers, and congregants?
6. Why is hospitality required of a pastoral elder? List as many reasons as you can.
7. Write a creative paraphrase of the following texts on prayer: [Colossians 4:12](#), [Acts 6:4](#), [1 Samuel 12:23](#).

Lesson 3: A Shepherd's Heart

1. When confronting someone about his or her sin, how do you respond the objection, "Who are you to judge me and try to restore me? You are not perfect."
2. How would you describe your shepherd's heart? What can you do to develop this aspect of your leadership?

3. Whom in your circle of influence do you need to have a shepherd's heart toward that you are not currently reaching out to?
4. What (in your opinion) is the difference between shepherding and the gift of mercies?
5. How important is humility to an effective pastoral ministry?

Lesson 4: Hospitality

1. What are some ways you can structure a plan to make sure that everyone in the church has had some hospitable contact from the elders or their representatives?
2. What are the biggest hindrances for you in showing hospitality to others?
3. List as many ways as you can for showing "love of strangers" to the newcomers of your church.

Lesson 5: Handling Conflict

1. Why do you think that, in many conflicts, Christians forget to act in the Spirit ([Gal. 5:22-23](#), [25-26](#)) and instead act in the flesh ([Gal. 5:20-21](#))? Why is it so hard to implement biblical principles when we are dealing with conflict?
2. Describe "the wisdom from above," mentioned in [James 3:13, 17-18](#). Describe "the wisdom from below," [James 3:14-16](#). Why is it essential that an elder know [James 3:13-18](#) when facing conflict with fellow elders?
3. Read about the leadership conflict between Paul and Barnabas in [Acts 15:36-41](#). Summarize the issue. What do you think Paul could have done differently to solve the conflict that led to the separation between him and Barnabas? What do you think Barnabas could have done differently to solve the conflict that led to the separation between him and Paul?
4. Read [Acts 6:1-7](#). What did the apostles do right that avoided a division between two different ethnic groups (the Hellenistic Jews and the Aramaic-speaking Jews) in the first Christian church?
5. The context of [1 Corinthians 13](#) was a church in conflict. It was written to a group of believers in conflict. Read through [1 Corinthians 13:4-7](#) and discuss how exercising the fifteen descriptions of love (both negative and positive) would prepare you to constructively handle conflict with your fellow elders. Talk through all fifteen descriptions of love so that you understand how they will help you handle conflict well.
6. The antidote for pride is humility. [Philippians 2:3-5](#) tells us, "In humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus." When conflict arises among the elders, explain how humility of mind helps the elders handle conflict in a Christlike way.

Lesson 6: Handling Conflict (continued)

1. Read [Ephesians 4:26-27](#). What does the apostle mean when he says, "Be angry and do not sin"? What does he mean when he says, "Do not let the sun go down on your anger"? What does the apostle mean by "give no opportunity to the devil"?

2. Discuss a situation when you defused an inflamed conversation by applying the principle of [Proverbs 15:1](#), “A soft answer turns away wrath.”
3. The speaker says to eliminate cutting words and inflammatory speech from your vocabulary. What are some words or ways of communicating that you need to change (e.g., “You’re a liberal,” when the person is not)? What words could you use to replace those cutting words?
4. Elders need to be skillful when working with people. As Charles Spurgeon said, “Blame comes best on the back of praise.” Discuss how you as an elder would handle correcting the church musician who shows up late many Sunday mornings. An elder who habitually shows up 5 minutes late for the elders’ meetings. Think of some of the points given in this lesson.
5. Francis Schaeffer makes this insightful comment regarding the power of cutting words: “I have observed one thing *among true Christians* in their differences in many countries: what divides and severs true Christian groups and Christians—what leaves a bitterness that can last for twenty, thirty, or forty years. . . . Invariably it is lack of love—and the bitter things that are said by true Christians in the midst of differences. These stick in the mind like glue.” How have you seen this or experienced this personally?

Lesson 7: The Diotrephes Syndrome

1. Explain in your own words what the Diotrephes Syndrome is and why it is bad for the church.
2. This lesson has presented five marks of the Diotrephes of the first century ([3 John 9-10](#)). In your experience, what are some of the modern marks of the Diotrephes Syndrome? How does an autocratic leader today control or manipulate the congregation?
3. What is the difference between an effective, Spirit-gifted church leader and a sinful, autocratic leader? For example, Moses was a great leader, but at times the people accused him of being a controlling despot. Their criticisms were unjust and unfounded.
4. Diotrephes seems to be the only example we have in the New Testament for a solo leader in a church. Explain how a biblical plurality of qualified elders might have mitigated against a problematic leader like Diotrephes.
5. Sometimes an elder needs to make quick, on-the-spot leadership or pastoral decisions. Not every leadership decision or piece of counseling advice can wait until the next elders’ meeting. At other times, an elder should wait to consult the other elders before a decision is made or counsel is given. Discuss the areas in your church leadership context where elders can make independent decisions without running the risk of being called a Diotrephes, and when mutual accountability needs to be sought among the other elders.
6. Reflect on [1 Peter 5:1-4](#). Compare and contrast this passage with the account of Diotrephes in [3 John 9,10](#).
7. This lesson has taught us the dangers of gossip. As an elder, you will be in the people business and in the talking business. You will often be talking about people’s problems, quirks, and sins, especially with other elders as you think through how best to disciple them. You *must* have these conversations with fellow elders. When does *the legitimate* discussion of people’s problems in an

elder meeting cross the line into *gossip* about them, even if you never speak about them outside an elders' meeting?

Lesson 8: Meetings

1. When you think of an unproductive elders' or leaders' meeting, what comes to your mind?
2. What are some of the key reasons the speaker gave for having effective elders' meetings? Can you think of any other reasons?
3. Explain how working with others in a leadership meeting setting can build personal character. Give some examples.
4. How can effective elders' meetings impact the congregation?
5. How do elders' meetings provide a training ground for future pastor elders?
6. Describe how elders' meetings would be more productive and enjoyable if each participant adopted Christ's attitudes of humility and servanthood.

Lesson 9: Meetings (continued)

1. Why are meetings more effective when each participant takes personal responsibility for the decisions made by the group?
2. List the negative consequences when team members are inactive or passive.
3. What are some suggestions the speaker gave to make participants more active and responsible during meetings?
4. List the negative consequences of elder absenteeism (when an elder or elders miss meetings regularly).
5. List some specific ways an elder can manipulate his colleagues in decision making.
6. List the positive benefits of having Spirit-controlled participants in the elders' meetings.