

What Does Scripture Say About Church Leadership?

Five Biblical Principles About Pastors/Elders

1. The words “pastor”, “elder”, and “overseer” (sometimes translated “bishop”) all refer to the same person and role.

Key passage: Acts 20:17-28

- “Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the **elders** [Greek word: presbuteros] of the church to come to him.” (20:17)
- “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers** [Greek word: episkopos], to shepherd the church of God.” (20:28)

Conclusion: the words “elder”, “overseer”, and “shepherd/pastor” all refer to the same leadership office. So, for example, Danny being a “pastor” means he is also an “elder” and “overseer”.

2. A local church should have multiple pastors/elders.

The most common word for this office is actually “elder”, and the least common is “pastor.” The Scriptures consistently show that churches in the New Testament had *multiple* elders:

- “When they had appointed **elders** [plural] in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed” (Acts 14:23)
- “This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint **elders** [plural] in every town as I directed you” (Titus 1:5)
- See also Philippians 1:1, Acts 20

3. A church’s pastors/elders must preach and teach the Word to the flock.

The first deacons in Acts 6:1-5 were appointed to free up the apostles to devote themselves to the ministry of the Word and to prayer. In the pastoral epistles (1, 2 Timothy and Titus), the primary task of the pastor is to teach God’s people:

- *“An overseer....must be able to teach.”* (1 Timothy 3:2)
- *“Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort with complete patience and teaching.”* (2 Timothy 4:2)

4. A church’s pastors/elders must exercise oversight and leadership.

Pastors have God-given authority to lead and oversee God’s people, the church. The church in turn is called to submit to its leaders.

- *“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account.”* (Hebrews 13:17)
- *“Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.”* (1 Timothy 5:17)
- *“So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd [pastor] the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.”* (1 Peter 5:1-3)

5. A church’s pastors/elders must be men of godly character.

In 1 Timothy 3:1-7, and Titus 1, the most space is not about what pastors do, but who pastors are — men of godly character. They must be:

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| • Above reproach | • Not a drunkard |
| • Husband of one wife | • Not a lover of money |
| • Sober-minded | • Manage own household |
| • Self-controlled | • Not a recent convert |
| • Respectable | • Good reputation |
| • Hospitable | |

Five Practical Benefits of Transitioning to Multiple Pastors/Elders

1. The congregation receives better pastoral care.

One pastor, like Pastor Danny, is only able to do so much. Having multiple pastors moves the church from relying on a one-man band, to having a pastoral team. This means the church would receive better pastoral care from a variety of pastors/elders.

2. It provides complementary strengths and pastoral accountability.

1. Every person has different strengths and weaknesses. Having multiple pastors/elders means that no one person's strengths or weaknesses affect the congregation in an imbalanced or unhealthy way. Just like a sports team has a variety of players who are better at some things than others, so too God has provided a way for church leadership to have complementary strengths and make up for each other's weaknesses.
2. Having multiple pastors/elders provides a way to truly keep all the leaders accountable. This is crucial for fostering holiness and healthy leadership.

3. It positions the congregation and leadership for growth

1. Sociologists have discovered that most people are able to maintain networks of about 150 relationships. This means, that if one man is pastoring a church, that church will likely not be able to grow larger than 150 people. Or, if it does grow, that many people in the church will not receive the pastoral care they need.
2. It enables the church's pastoral leadership to grow without having to hire staff for every pastoral need. As the church grows, God can and will raise up qualified men to be pastors/elders, including and especially those men who are not paid.

4. It enables pastoral leadership to be developed from within the congregation

1. Most of the best companies in the marketplace promote people from within their organizations. These people already know the people and

the “culture” of the organization. This is a huge benefit to the company, and even bigger benefit to the church, as pastors/elders are raised up who already know the people. This, again, means that the pastoral care in the church is more effective, because the pastors/elders already know the people in the congregation.

5. Helps to dissolve the notion that only “professionals” can do ministry

1. Ephesians 4:11-12 says that pastors are called to equip the saints for the work of ministry. If only the “professionals” do ministry, very little gets done. But if various leaders from all spheres of life are called into the ministry of pastor/elder, it shows the congregation that everyone is called to do ministry.
2. Our church is so blessed and grateful for those in our church who do so much ministry. We have leaders all across the board who serve faithfully and effectively. And this is a way to see us “excel still more” in this area, to continue to get even better!

Five Questions and Answers About Pastors/Elders

1. How many pastors/elders would there be? Is there an age requirement?

1. *Quality is more important than quantity.*
More important than number is the issue of qualification. The quantity is less important than the quality of the character of the leaders.
2. *Maturity rather than age is the key factor.*
As far as age, the Scripture points to spiritual maturity and calling more than age. Elder doesn’t necessarily mean “older”. Timothy was a young man. Jesus was young himself. Age itself is not the issue. “Elder” is used in part to refer to a man’s maturity, but not necessarily chronological age. God might be raising up future elders in our church in their 70s and in their 20s, and at any point in between.
3. *A church our size, church expected to have 3-5 pastors/elders, some “staff” some “non-staff” or unpaid “lay” elders.*

2. Would this give too few people too much power?

No. Currently, a relatively small group of people on important committees along with Danny make or recommend to the church almost all important decisions. Most people's input and roles would not be significantly affected by such a change in leadership structure. We have wonderful, godly people serving on our committees, who serve as somewhat of a *de facto* elder board. However, since there are not biblical parameters for who should or should not serve on a committee, it would be better to have our primary leadership structure be a group of pastors/elders who are qualified according to biblical standards.

3. But Baptists don't have elders, do they?

All Baptist churches recognize the office, because all Baptist churches have or recognize the need for at least one Pastor. However, some Baptist churches have not recognized that in the New Testament "pastor", "elder", and "overseer" all refer to the same office, what they typically call "Pastor." Although many Baptist churches only have one Pastor (like ours does now), many have multiple, whether staff or volunteers.

Likewise, both in history and today, Baptists have recognized the fact that the New Testament indicates that churches should be led by multiple pastors, instead of just a single pastor. Here are a few examples:

- The 1689 Second London Baptist Confession says, "The officers appointed by Christ....are Bishops s [overseers] or Elders and Deacons."
- The 1925 Baptist Faith and Message (BF&M) says the church's "Scriptural officers are bishops or elders s and deacons." The 1963 and 2000 version of the Baptist Faith and Message says "pastors" instead of "bishops or elders", but Herschel Hobbs, who was chairman of the 1963 committee for the BF&M said, "Pastor is one of three titles referring to the same office. The other two are 'bishop' [overseer] and 'elder.'"
- The first president of the Southern Baptist Convention, W.B. Johnson of South Carolina said that in the New Testament, "each church had a plurality of elders."

- John Hammett, Professor of Theology at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, NC says, “the consistency of a plurality of elders in New Testament churches and the practical benefits that result from such a strong plurality constitute a strong recommendation for the advisability of adopting a plurality of elders in local churches.”
- Many SBC churches across the country, such as First Baptist Church Durham, NC, Capitol Hill Baptist Church (Washington, DC), and Southwoods Baptist Church (Memphis, TN) have elders. And nearby us, SBC churches such as FBC Boynton, West Pines Community Church, and Hollywood Community Church (Hollywood) are led by a plurality of elders.

4. Would elders/pastors each represent a specific group in the church?

No, eldership would not be a “representative government” with certain elders representing certain constituencies. Each pastors/elder would represent the whole body, like Danny works to shepherd entire congregation.

5. Why do we need pastors/elders? Isn't that why we have deacons?

As we've seen pastors/elders and deacons have very distinct and different biblical roles. These roles are defined in the Bible, and we should not adjust these. The biggest difference is that pastors/elders have a responsibility to shepherd (literally, “pastor”) the church through teaching and leadership. In 1 Timothy 3, pastors/elders are required to be “able to teach”, but deacons are not. Deacons serve the church in more “hands on” ways of practical and tangible service. I'm so excited about next week. Jody and Cobb will be ordained as deacons, and they're showing this. Cobb has worked to coordinate service days on our campus. Jody's been coming every week early and staying late to set up and clean up refreshments. These men (and all our deacons) are such blessings to the church!

Conclusion:

Pembroke Road would be well served by asking God to raise up multiple fellow elders/pastors alongside Pastor Danny to lead and shepherd the flock of God.

Therefore, we should prayerfully examine and develop a structure of a council of biblically qualified pastors/elders to be the primary leadership group in our church.

Action Steps:

Form a LEAD (Leadership Evaluation And Development) Task Force to:

- study the topic
- bring a recommendation to the church for next steps to take

So important

Jesus is our Senior Pastor. We are looking at qualified under-pastors, who shepherd the flock under Jesus' authority. He is our hope, not Pastor Danny, not this proposal just laid out, not any qualified men whom God is raising up in our congregation.

Jesus. He is the shepherd who has given his life for the sheep. The hope is that this whole process points us toward Jesus, and throws us more deeply into his love and grace.