

What does an Elder do?

Elder a Servant Who Feeds God's Flock

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Introduction: I must of hit a nerve last week when I talked about Elders and Deacons. So I thought I would clarify a few items today. First off Elbert Christian Church has had as few as 2 and as many as five elders, so it is not an either John Grisham or Dana Kable decision. If the congregation feels both are called and gifted by God to shepherd this church we should select both as Elders. If the congregation feels neither is called the two Elders we currently have is enough. Also some felt I had put too much emphasis on one candidate or the other. The point I was trying to make is that we should call elders and deacons based on their gifting, not popularity. Or any other criteria other than if God has called them to that position. We make that decision by looking at the gifts God has given the candidates.

The positive was that I had someone say to me they had not thought about what took to be an Elder and would have voted simply on

if they knew them or not. My comments caused them to study a little more and ask more questions. Both responses are what we should do with any sermon or scripture we do not understand. So today we will break from the series Momentum for Life and answer the question what does an Elder do?

First in my Opinion when we are talking about leadership position in the church; we must always first consider the words of Jesus when he said;" *The greatest among you will be your servant. 12For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. Matthew 23:11,12 NIV* Jesus taught his followers, that greatness comes in serving-in giving yourself to help God and others. Service keeps our eyes off self and onto the needs of others. Jesus came as a servant, and calls his leaders to be first and foremost a servant.

The Church often views the Board, Elder and Deacons as positions of power and authority. Jesus Words make clear his will is that we not focus on power and authority but how we can best serve him and others. Some Churches make deacons for a certain period of time and then promote them to Elders. Some Churches try to counteract the perceived power of elders by electing more deacons than Elders so

they can overturn any decision they like. Jesus makes clear that any position in the church is not to be a place of power and authority but a place to serve. Deacons have the delegated authority and power of Jesus the head to meet needs as they see fit. Elders have the delegated authority and power of Jesus to Shepherd the flock. So understand we select church leaders simply to help us all love Jesus and others Better. With that out of the way; let's start answering the question what does an Elder do?

Elderly Advisors

Go, assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—appeared to me and said: I have watched over you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt. Exodus 3:16

Much of what the church does, we have inherited from Judaism. In Judaism those older who grew a reputation as wise became elders who sat at the city gate for advise and to settle disputes. But age alone does not make an elder, we have all met geriatrics who have never learned from their mistakes and at 80 are just as foolish as they wer when they were 20. An elder is a person who has walked a little farther along the road of salvation than you have and on the journey

has practiced Godly wisdom.

The eldership is an elevated ministry that requires godly wisdom

Not elevated in status, but elevated in terms of responsibility and respect. In the New Testament times it was usually the aged who filled the roles that demanded high responsibility and respect. This leader had the duty of commanding, teaching, disciplining, and shepherding the people. Then and today the overseer has a wide range of spiritual responsibility.

- They are responsible for our souls (Heb. 13:17).
- They rule (1 Tim 5:17).
- They preach and teach (1 Tim 5:17).
- They pray (James 5:14).
- They care for the church (1 Pet. 5:1,2).
- They set church policy (Acts 15:22).
- They ordain others (1 Tim. 4:14).

Considering these crucial responsibilities, we can see why for some to grow into the ability to shepherd a church requires a few gray hairs.

Elders are older wise advisors.

Dispute Settlers

Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." 2 This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. Acts 15:1-2

If you are more likely to disturb the peace, rather than making peace - you are not called to be an elder. The church is a place where eternal matters such as salvation are decided, because they are significant there will be sharp disputes. The elders are called upon to discipline and decide between those who have sharp disputes within the church. This requires a high degree of people skills where you can speak the truth, but speak it in a kindly and loving manner. An elder is good at settling disputes.

Equipping Christians to do the Work of Jesus.

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up Ephesians 4:11,12

Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you. I Timothy 4:14

Elders equip Christian to do the works of Jesus. Through one on one time with both the problem people and the possibility people, they help each person find their spiritual gifts and affirm God's calling on their lives. They guide, nudge and encourage each sheep into a specific ministry matching their gifts and passion.

We see this in the life and ministry of Jesus. He equipped others by making a consistent investment of time, energy and love in his disciples. Jesus never varied His investment whether they were running or barely crawling in getting what he was demonstrating. Jesus did this by frequent and long term contact with those he was equipping. An elder is one who is able and willing to make consistent investment into equipping the flock. Jesus also shared with those he was equipping all of his emotions. It was the disciples who were witnesses to the shortest verse in the Bible: Jesus wept! An elder is a man who is genuine with his emotions. Jesus exposed his flock to a variety of life settings, from the wedding in Gallile, to the woman at the well and late night boat

rides. An elder is one who seeks to share more than just Sunday School, but to make time to celebrate, relax and learn from others on the church. Lastly, Jesus lived what he taught. As the old saying goes I would rather see a sermon than hear one any day. An elder is not perfect, but a man who is a person who consistently practices his faith.

Preaching & Teaching

The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. I Timothy 5:17

Today, the church flock is much more likely to have a smattering of teaching from multiple backgrounds. Christians have favorite authors or a favorite TV evangelist. And this dabbling in many teachings often makes for very confused sheep. Who may hold a view because their favorite preacher, but it contradicts every thing else they believe in. So today's elders must be preachers and teacher who can discern sound doctrine from false doctrine.

Who can sniff out legalism a mile away giving the legalist both grace and truth to chew on. Because of the mass doses of available information in our society means an elder must be lifelong learner.

Because of this as long as Elbert Christian church has more than one Elder we should never need a fill in preacher.

One distinction between Elders and deacons is the higher skill of teaching. In 1 Timothy **5:17 KJV** we read, *Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.* The phrase "work hard" means one who works to exhaustion in word and doctrine. Here is a picture of a student who diligently studies God's word and adequately expresses his faith.

Teaching is the overflow of an Elders life.

Prayer Warriors

Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. James 5:14

Elders need the practice of prayer even more than other people do, because they need the Lord's guidance to shepherd the local church.

None of us is wise enough or kind enough to meet our neighbors' deepest needs out of our own resources. An Elder is to Pray for guidance.

An elder is to pray for the people. Intersession is one of the primary

roles of an elder. They are like the Old Testament priests that carried the names of the twelve tribes of Israel before God. An Elder is to pray for the needs of the flock.

We watch in prayer. When elders pray and intercede, they are standing watch over the flock. It is in the place of prayer that God can reveal His plans and purposes for the body. It is also in prayer that God can warn us of the plans and purposes of our enemy. Watching is praying. Elders are to pray the church to fulfill God's purposes.

James leaves us with the last reason Elders are to be prayer Warriors. They are to pray for the healing of their sheep. People in the church must know they are never alone they have God's presence and the prayers of their elders. Members of Christ's Church should be able to count on the Elders for support and prayer when they are hurting.

Bottom Line an Elder is to be a prayer warrior.

Examples of the Faith

To the elders among you, . . . but eager to serve; 3not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. I Peter 5 1,3

This was not just Peter's unique approach, Paul also wrote: Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ. In so many words Paul was saying-I showed you now you show them. Elbert Christian

Church needs men and women to model the life of Christ. More than anything else an elder is one who models what the faith of Jesus looks like lived out. If we do not provide the flock positive examples of Jesus-many sheep by default will flock to negative and destructive shepherds.

It is essential that the church be led by a plurality of godly leaders. It's not optional. it's not advisable. It is essential. Leaders set the pace and set the example for the church. There has never been a strong church without strong leaders. There has never been a prayerful church without prayerful leaders. There has never been a visionary church without visionary leadership. There has never been a bgrowing church without growing leaders. If the leaders are weak, the church will be weak. But if the leaders are sbtrong, the church will be strong.

Overseers

Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.^[a] Be shepherds of the church of God,^[b] which he bought with his own blood. Acts 20:27,28

The word overseer is Episkopos - Term used to refer to a manager or supervisor. Some modern synonyms would be director or superintendent It's another New Testament word that gives the same

sense of meaning as "steward" "One who runs or oversees the master's household". How this works would be the elders would oversee the acts of service Elbert Christian Church does. They would not do the work, or dictate the work but would ensure the motives and methods are pleasing to the head of the Church Jesus. If there is differences of opinion on how to do a ministry it would be the Elders who worked with the group to resolve the differences.

Protectors

I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. 30Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. 31So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears Acts 20:29-31

In guarding his church, God urges us to seek the best men.

Why? Observers will make decisions about the church by the men we ask to guard it. If we appoint men of compromised faith or questionable character, critics will notice and the reputation of the church will suffer. But if blameless men lead, then outsiders will see the value of the church.

Imagine the damage it does if a man of ill-repute in the community is

placed in church leadership. The men in the Lion's Club know he's dishonest. The folks at work know he is a jerk. His golf buddies know he's sleeping around. Yet he's a pastor in the church? The community will draw this conclusion: "That church must not be serious about its mission."

Yet, on the other hand, imagine the good done for the church when those in leadership are respected by the community. Those at work know he is fair. Those in the neighborhood know he is kind. Even his competition respects his skill and judgment. When the community hears that such a man has been appointed as bishop, they will likely think, "That's the kind of church I'd like to be a part of someday."

Both of these reasons, by the way, help us understand why sinning elders are to be rebuked publicly (1 Tim. 5:19). An elder's sin is more than a personal matter; it is a bad example to the entire church and a poor reflection on the entire church.

But it is not only the elders who protect the church, the church

members should protect the Elders. Paul tells the Thessalonians, appreciate those who work hard among you, who lead you in the Lord and teach you. Respect them with a very special love because of the work they do" (1 Thess. 5:13).

This is a good point to pause and ask yourself the questions: Do you respect your elders with a very special love? Do you honor and elevate them? I know of one elder who said he dreads going to church because he feels like he carries a spit bucket. When people see him coming, they work up a wad of their most recent complaint or gripe and spit in his bucket.

Sadly, many potential elders avoid the service, for they have seen how their predecessors have been treated. Elders can't satisfy everyone.

They aren't called to please you; they are called to *lead you*. You didn't elect them, God did.

Shepherd

Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; I Peter 5:2

First and foremost Elders, are shepherds. And what is a Shepherd? A shepherd has a flock. Shepherds in the bible days were not day laborers who showed up in the morning at a stranger's pasture, put in eight hours and then went back home. Rather, shepherds lived with the sheep day and night, year after year. Shepherds helped birth the lambs. They led the sheep to pasture during the day and protected them during the night. The sheep knew their shepherds touch, recognized his voice, and followed no other shepherd. There was a genuine relationship between the shepherd and his sheep. In fact, through a long time and frequent touch, the shepherd smelled like sheep.

Just so in today's church: Elders should not be strangers merely plugged into a job. Instead, elders are people who already have a flock, who are already serving as shepherds. The process of appointing elders is simply the process of acknowledging those who have been shepherding for a long time. It is recognizing those who have attracted flocks through the genius of their lives, the consistency of

their service, and the authenticity of their relationships. A person officially becomes an elder when through one means or another, his flock says to the rest of the congregation, "you too need this man as your shepherd. And the rest of the congregation says; shepherd us also."

Leaders

I Peter 5

A member in pain—an elder draws near. A member confused—an elder draws near. A church moving forward—elders leading the way.

Such is how it should be. Such is God's intent. God never meant for the church to be a hierarchy with one person in charge. He never planned for a select few to perform all the ministry—he never intended for a certain few to do all the teaching or counseling. Ever since the resurrected Lord looked at Peter on the shores of Galilee and said, "Feed my sheep," (Jn. 21:15) there have been shepherds—overseers of the church dedicated to the task of leading, feeding, and the caring of sheep. That is what it means when we say shepherds are to be leaders. It is essential that the church be led by a plurality of

godly leaders. It's not optional. it's not advisable. It is essential. Leaders set the pace and set the example for the church. There has never been a strong church without strong leaders. There has never been a prayerful church without prayerful leaders. There has never been a visionary church without visionary leadership. There has never been a growing church without growing leaders. If the leaders are weak, the church will be weak. But if the leaders are strong, the church will be strong.

There is no higher privilege than to be an elder in the Lord's church. It is a noble position: "What I say is true: Anyone wanting to become an elder desires a good work," wrote Paul (1 Tim. 3:1).

Conclusion:

Elders always start without recognition or even realizing their care for others. We all need elders in our life that feed and care for us spiritually. God simply want's us to recognize at Elbert Christian Church officially those who are already helping others grow spiritually as Elders.

At this time I want each of the current elders to share with us why they want to serve as elders, and then introduce one of the candidates.