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**EDINBURGH**

# The Calling of Eldership

## 1 Peter 5:1-5

Israel's two greatest leaders, Moses and David, are both described as being shepherds of God's people (*Psalms 77:19-20, 78:70-72*) - both received their leadership training by being shepherds of actual sheep first. Ultimately, God Himself was Israel's shepherd, leading them through the wilderness after their escape from Egypt and into the pasture of the Promised Land (*see also Isaiah 40:10-11, Ezekiel 34:1-16 and Psalm 23*) This means that those in authority in God's Kingdom have a responsibility for the flock, but they are also responsible to the flock's owner, God Himself. And Jesus said, "*I am the good shepherd*" (*John 10:11*), He wasn't just using a nice image: He's talking about His care and sacrificial love, and His authority and divinity.

Jesus's first disciples responded to the great commission (*Matthew 28:19-20*) by preaching the good news that Jesus is Lord and Saviour, and establishing local communities of people who believed their message: churches. These churches were led by teams of elders, a practice that can be traced back to *Exodus 3:16* (where elders had a sphere of influence within their own tribe), and the development of synagogues ruled by elders who taught the people, trained others to teach, judged disputes and difficulties, and helped to care for them. In the New Testament we see elders mentioned specifically in the churches in Jerusalem, Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, Ephesus, Crete, Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (references below).

The terms shepherd and elder are interchangeable (*1 Peter 5:1-2, Acts 20:28*), and both these passages add another: overseer (which means watchman). Clearly this is a role that requires more than one word to describe it:

- **Elder:** maturity and responsibility (*Acts 11:30, 15:23, 14:21-23, 20:17; 1 Timothy 5:17; Titus 1:5*).

- **Shepherd:** (Latin word is pastor): protecting and caring (*Acts 20:28-29; Ephesians 4:11; 1 Peter 5:2*).
- **Overseer:** keeping watch (*Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2*).
- **Leader:** giving direction and being an example (*Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13*).
- **Teacher:** feeding the church from God's Word and training others to continue this (*Acts 20:27, 31, Ephesians 4:11; 1 Timothy 3:2, 5:17*).
- **Father:** love and nurture and provision (*1 Corinthians 4:15, 1 Timothy 3:15*).

We believe that eldership is a role for certain men only. Eldership is not a role that any man can do but it is a role that only a man should do. That obviously needs some explaining, which have endeavoured to do in our document "Defining Leadership at King's" (<https://www.dropbox.com/s/2ts0w74pj8r726i/Defining%20Leadership%20at%20King%27s.pdf?dl=0>).

The words used to define eldership can be summarised as protecting the church from harm, guarding. They should stop bad things happening to the church, and make sure that good things are happening. Here are five ways they can do this:

### **1. Display a godly lifestyle (*Hebrews 13:7*).**

You should be able to look at an elder and think, "That is an example of godliness that I can learn from and follow".

### **2. Direction (*1 Timothy 5:17*).**

Elders should be praying and talking about this, listening out for the prophetic and taking counsel from others to keep us moving.

### **3. Definition (*Acts 15*).**

Teaching God's truth as it really is and ensuring it is passed down untarnished to coming generations.

### **4. Discipline (*1 Corinthians 5*).**

Protecting the church and its individual members from sin by warning all, challenging those who are sinning, and – if necessary – barring those who are unrepentant from the benefits of church membership.

### **5. Delegation (*Romans 12:4-8, 1 Corinthians 12:12-27*).**

Every member of the church has something to contribute, has gifts that are required for the church to function as it should. Elders shouldn't be doing everything but ensuring that everything is done.

## How should the church respond to its elders?

- Don't consider eldership to be some sort of ultimate role or highest-level accomplishment. Eldership is just how some of us are called to obey – everyone here is called to obey by telling others about Jesus, by making disciples who follow Jesus, by advancing the Kingdom of God wherever you are, and by using the spiritual gifts given to you by God for the good of others. Doing those things well is to be the ambition of all of us.
- Elders don't compel your obedience, they appeal to your conscience through the Word of God and the testimony of our lives. You decide to accept us as having spiritual authority in your life by agreeing to become a member of this church. (Exploring Membership: Sunday 28th October, 4.30pm; Sunday 18th November, 10.15am.)
- Expect God to speak to you through elders: maybe individually, certainly as a church (through suggestions, sharing faith, and showing you what's in the Word).
- The Bible tells us to honour those in leadership: speak well of them and if you have a problem with them, come and have a conversation.
- Encourage them: a leader's greatest challenge is dealing with discouragement! Tell them about things that are going well, as well as those that aren't going so well.
- Pray for them using the criteria outlined above. When God does them good, the whole church will be blessed! They will answer to God for how they cared for you.

Please remember to send your feedback on Andy Wall, Chris Rawson, and Sandy Deans to [neweldersforkings@gmail.com](mailto:neweldersforkings@gmail.com) (mailto:[neweldersforkings@gmail.com](mailto:neweldersforkings@gmail.com)) by Sunday 19th October.

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## Questions:

- Discuss the various words used to describe church leadership – elder, shepherd, overseer, leader, teacher, father – and what they tell us about church life.
- How can we emphasise the equality of women and men alongside what we believe about the goodness of gender differences?
- Why does the church need elders to do all five of the D's Luke listed: display, direction, definition, discipline, delegate?

- We don't often talk about how to respond to church leadership – what do you think are the key principles for doing this well?
  - How are you getting involved in the life of the church by serving?
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