



# **Biblical Eldership**

**The Study and Application of God's Word**

## Proposed Schedule

Date	Lesson #	Topic	Text
Sept 11	1	The "Call" of an overseer	1 Tim 3:1a
Sept 18	2	The "Office" of an overseer	1 Tim 3:1a
Sept 25	3	The "Work" of an overseer- Part 1	1 Tim 3:1b
Oct 2	4	The "Work" of an overseer- Part 2	1 Tim 3:1b
Oct 9	5	The "Qualifications" of an overseer - Part 1	1 Tim 3:2a
Oct 16	6	The "Qualifications" of an overseer - Part 2	1 Tim 3:2b
Oct 23	7	The "Qualifications" of an overseer - Part 3	1 Tim 3:3
Oct 30		<b>NO STUDY</b>	
Nov 6	8	The "Qualifications" of an overseer - Part 4	1 Tim 3:4
Nov 13	9	The "Qualifications" of an overseer - Part 5	1 Tim 3:5
Nov 20	10	The "Qualifications" of an overseer - Part 6	1 Tim 3:6
Nov 27	11	The "Qualifications" of an overseer - Part 7	1 Tim 3:7
Dec 4	12	The "Qualifications" of an overseer - Part 8	1 Tim 3:8
Dec 11	13	The "Qualifications" of an overseer - Part 9	Titus 1
Dec 18	14	The "Qualifications" of an overseer - Part 10	1 Peter 5
Dec 25		<b>NO STUDY</b>	
Jan 1		<b>NO STUDY</b>	
Jan 8	15	The "Honour" toward an overseer	1 Tim 5:17-21
Jan 15	16	The "Appointment" of an overseer	1 Tim 5:22-25
Jan 22	17	TBA	
Jan 29	18	TBA	

# Purpose

- Consideration for pursuing eldership
- Men growing in Godly character
- Understanding of biblical eldership

Every Christian should take a sober assessment of their gifts and calling (Rom 12:3) to serve Christ and His church, this includes men giving consideration as to whether God may be calling them to eldership.

Not every and even most Christian men aren't called to the office of overseer, but all should consider it and all should strive toward the godly characteristics set forth as qualifications for pastors.

This assessment should consider the negative and positive aspects of this role:

- Positively: The work of a pastor is called a "noble task," "good work," and "fine work" (1 Tim 3:1) and therefore is a good role to pursue and practice
- Negatively: Those who teach will be judged with greater strictness (James 3:1) and therefore great care must be taken to evaluate one's calling to such an office

# Method

## Iron Men:

“Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another” (Prov 27:17)

- Teaching
- Discussion
- Prayer
- Application Questions/Steps
- Support/Accountability
- Sharing with others

It's easy to sit and listen to someone speak... are you prepared to be engaged and do the hard work of application?

There will be time for small group prayer and discussion, including application questions. I'd also encourage small groups to support and keep each other accountable in growing (Please let me know after this week if you plan on continuing with this study and want to be part of a small group. These groups will meet during our time together).

The topics we discuss would be great material to share with your wife and children, so they're learning alongside us and you're learning as you teach them. This will also increase the level of accountability.

# **Introductory Matters**

## Introductory Matters

### ► Why is church leadership important?

- 1) The NT mentions church leadership over and over again, both by example and exhortation.
- 2) From personal experience and biblical examples, we can also testify that leadership is important, whether it's the results of missing or poor leadership OR good, strong, and effective leadership.
- 3) The significance and purpose of the church demands us to pay attention to those designed and called to lead **Christ's church**.

- In fact, more is said about leadership in the church than the Lord's Supper, baptism, the Lord's Day, and spiritual gifts.

- As a poor illustration, as the NFL season started last week, can you imagine a team not being concerned or focused on identifying, recruiting, and using their coaches and captains?

Therefore, the greater and eternal value and significance of the church of the living God, compared to an NFL team, requires us to consider the biblical design for leadership.

In summary, the church is (which demonstrates its importance):

1. Christ's, owned by Him and under His Headship
2. Promised by Christ to grow, to be built
3. Promised by God to be victorious and permanent
4. the revealer of God's wisdom to the angels
5. the application of God's eternal plan
6. the chosen vehicle in which God will be glorified, through all generations.
7. saved by Christ

8. being cared for and nourished by Christ
  9. one with Christ, like husband and wife are one flesh
  10. the family of the living God
  11. the pillar of the truth
  12. the support or foundation of the truth
  13. the prescribed source of encouragement, exhortation, and edification
  14. the church meeting together is necessary and essential.
- This summary taken from the membership class #1.

## Introductory Matters

### ► Why is church leadership important?

► “It is a trustworthy saying” (1 Tim 3:1a)

- It's like Paul's saying “please pay attention to this next statement” or “listen up to what I'm going to say”
- This phrase likely points to a recognized and popular statement already known to the audience.
- Paul's highlighting the reliability of the phrase saying it's trustworthy and important
- The important or trustworthy saying is what follows in v. 1
- This phrase is only used 5x in the NT (all in the Pastoral Epistles) and introduces an important truth Paul wants to highlight.



## Introductory Matters

### ► Male Leadership

➤ “*if any man...* (1 Tim 3:1)

Women are prohibited from this office based on the immediately preceding passage (1 Tim 2:11-15)

Paul says, “any man” and by this it suggests any man is welcomed to aspire to the office of overseer, and even to pursue such a role; although not all who aspire to the office will be called to serve in such a capacity, because of the qualifications that follow in this text, and other related passages.

- Male leadership is the model for the church throughout the NT e.g. the 12 disciples/apostles, and the 7 men in Acts 6.
- Male leadership is the biblical structure in the home (e.g. Eph 5:22-33; Col 3:18-19).
- Male leadership is implied from the context (e.g. women aren’t to teach or exercise authority (1 Tim 2:11-12) and an elder is to be the **husband** of one wife and manage his family well)

The restriction of women in this leadership role doesn’t diminish their value and worth **at all**.

Women are gifted and called to serve in many many ways! There’s areas women can exercise teaching and leadership gifts within the church e.g. women’s ministry, administration, children’s ministry.

## Introductory Matters

### ▶ Summary

- ▶ Paul's teaching on the office of overseer is **important**,
- ▶ The office of overseer is **not available or open to women**, and
- ▶ The office of overseer is **available and open for all men**, although this is later qualified by Paul.

## Introductory Matters

### ▶ Application Questions

- ▶ What's your purpose and commitment to this study? Ask God to grow you (and others) through this study and to be faithful in consideration and application of God's Word.
- ▶ Why is understanding the Biblical model for church leadership important and necessary?
- ▶ What biblical reasons teach eldership is for men only?
- ▶ Does the limitation on women from serving in this office decrease their value and worth in the church?
  - ▶ How can we encourage them to serve and in their service?

## What is the Biblical Model for Church Government or Leadership?

- ▶ **The Office of Overseer**
  - ▶ **The Call of an Overseer**
  - ▶ The Titles for Overseers
  - ▶ The Number of Overseers
  - ▶ The Authority of Overseers

## Eldership is a “Calling” from God

### ► The Call of an Overseer: Aspiration

► if any man aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a good work (v. 1).

► Word meaning: The Greek word (ὀρέγεται) means literally to **stretch or reach out (BDAG)**, like someone might stretch out their hand for food.

Figuratively it refers to a desire for something, that includes **trying to accomplish that goal**.

**Aspiration is an active, deliberate, and focused pursuit of this “office”**

- The word “aspires” here is an interesting word (and important word) to understand, because before we get to the qualifications listed in 2-7, this is an important qualification for anyone who would become an overseer or elder.

It’s used 2x in the NT to describe people who actively chase after **sinful** desires,

1. First in Rom 1:27, Paul uses the noun to describe men who “*burned with the desire*” for other men

2. Second, in 1 Tim 6:10, Paul uses the verb to describe people who love money so much that their aspiration for money has led them astray from the faith.

The only other time the word is used in the NT, is in Heb 11:16, where this time it’s used in a positive sense when the author writes,

*But now, **they aspire to a better country**, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He prepared a city for them.*

In the context of our passage Paul is describing not just an internal desire and interest in becoming an elder, but an **active** and **ongoing** (the verb is in the present tense pointing toward a continued and sustained aspiration) pursuit to

reach this position or office.

My example... going to seminary, serving in the church, meeting with pastors to learn from them. Seeking pastoral positions to serve.

I don't think this has to be the same path or proactive approach for every man who desires to be an elder or pastor, but there must be some level of seeking after the position.

1. First, the aspiration (active pursuit of the office) comes from the God-given desire (v. 1b) He places in a man He's called to shepherd His church, so a man should commit it to the Lord in prayer.
2. Second, possible aspiration should involve a man letting his wife, pastors, and a few other mature believers know they aspire to this office,
3. Third, it requires the diligence and effort to prepare themselves for the work of the ministry (e.g. willingness to study, to read, to practice)
- 4 Fourth, there should be a commitment to serve the local church in a variety of capacities, and be growing and learning from others.

## Eldership is a “Calling” from God

### ► The Call of an Overseer: Desire

► *if any man aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a good work.*

► Word meaning: The Greek word (ἐπιθυμεῖ) means “to have a **strong desire** to do or secure something, *desire, long for*” (BDAG)

*“The word ‘desire’ refers to a **strong inner compulsion** that releases itself in outward desire. It is not a title that is desired but the work of ministry. The pastorate is a calling to men who have a **passionate desire to minister**. I never compel anyone to go into the ministry. **A man must sense the calling of God as a consuming desire in his heart.** He is not fit for ministry if he hasn’t sensed the call or if sin in his life is muffling that call.” —John MacArthur*

The verb “desire” is in the present tense pointing toward a continued and sustained desire. It’s not weak, not intermittent, and not infrequent. In a negative sense the word means to lust after.

A man aspiring to the office of overseer, is to have a passionate or driving inner compulsion for the task of an overseer, like an irresistible urge to do something. Albert Martin suggests it’s a “strong, continual desire that may grow into a kind of holy obsession” (Martin, *Pastoral Theology*, Vol 1, p. 57)

This desire doesn’t remove or exclude God calling a man to pastoral ministry, but, actually helps demonstrate that God has planted this desire within the man and is calling him to serve.

## Eldership is a “Calling” from God

### ► The Call of an Overseer: From God

- Acts 20:28 – Overseers are appointed **by the Holy Spirit**
- Eph 4:11 – Pastors are a gift **from God**
- 1 Pet 5:2 – Elders are to Shepherd God’s flock **according to God’s will**

“The **only men** we should want as overseers of our local churches are those in **whom the Spirit of God has placed the desire, motivation, love, strength, and gifting** to do the work. Since this is God’s work, only those whom he appointed to do his work are qualified.” Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 2023. p. 107.

Acts 20:28 “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which **the Holy Spirit has made you overseers**, to shepherd the church **of God** which He purchased with His own blood.”

- It’s the work of the Holy Spirit that calls, equips, qualifies, and preserves an overseer.
- The word translated “made” means, **1. to put or place in a particular location, lay, put... 2. act. to lay aside/deposit (money), put aside, store up, deposit ... 3. to assign to some task or function, appoint, assign ... 4. to bring about an arrangement ... 5. to cause to undergo a change in experience/condition, make, consign (BDAG)** BDAG suggests Acts 20:28 is an example of this 5<sup>th</sup> definition, as is 1 Cor 12:28; 1 Thess 5:9.

Eph 4:11 “And **He Himself gave** some [as] apostles, and some [as] prophets, and some [as] evangelists, and some [as] **pastors and teachers,**”

- God (Jesus) gave the offices of the church to the church. “He Himself” is emphatic, highlighting these offices are Jesus’ gift to the church.

1 Pet 5:2 also carries the idea of aspiration and desire, “shepherd the flock of



God among you, overseeing not under compulsion, but **willingly**, according to God; and not for dishonest gain, but with **eagerness**”

- The elders are charged to shepherd God’s flock, not their own and to do so “willingly” and with “eagerness.”
- They’re charged to do so in accordance with God’s will, as He wants them to...
  - “as God wants you to be” (NIV)
  - “as God would have you” (ESV)
  - “according to the will of God” (NASB1995)
  - “according to God’s will” (HCSB)
  - “under God's direction” (NET)

We can’t base someone’s call to the ministry on (much of the following points are from Albert Martin):

1. An uninstructed or ignorant zeal and desire
  1. Paul refers to the Jew’s “zeal for God” but this was misdirected and misunderstood because they lacked knowledge (Rom 10:2)
2. A mystical or providential “call”
  1. God gives the “desire” and He’s recorded the qualifications for elders and appointed the church to recognize such in a man, this must be the basis for someone being called.
  2. Examples (stories from Albert Martin): a young farmer seeing three clouds in the sky that looked like the letters G, P, C and he interpreted that to be God saying “Go Preach Christ.” Later, an older man with a bit more discernment said, “Son, could it be that God was telling you to “Go Pick Corn”?” OR people who interpret tragedy and challenges in life as God’s punishment on them because like Jonah they’ve run away from God’s call.
3. An individual and private decision only
  1. God expects the church to be involved in the decision process to encourage, affirm, and recognize a man’s calling e.g. evaluate his ability to teach, consider his ability to manage his home, and ask unbelievers of his character. Elders are also responsible to appoint other elders and men are expected to be part of the church as they pursue (and before they pursue) the office of elder)
4. Pragmatic or emotional thinking
  1. Forcing a man into the office because he’s charismatic, a good manager, because there’s a “need” etc are unbiblical reasons to appoint a man as a pastor.
  2. Pressuring or encouraging a man to the office of overseer because that’s what his parents want when “he grows up” or because the church recognizes potential and ability, isn’t grounds for appointing

him as an elder, if he doesn't have the God-given desire and call.

1. Example: I remember talking with a man who almost went to Bible college to become a pastor, simply because he thought everyone expected him to.

## Eldership is a “Calling” from God

### ▶ **The Call of an Overseer:** How do you know if you’re called?

#### ▶ Internal:

- ▶ A **strong and lasting** (increasing) desire **for the work** (not a position, fame, fortune etc)
- ▶ A **sober self-assessment**
- ▶ A **submission to the Lord**

\*\*Some men may have the character qualities and ability to teach and lead (these are qualities every man can and should strive for), as set forth in Scripture, but have no aspiration for the office or desire for the work.

#### Internal:

- A sober self-assessment should include an evaluation of motives, character (not just those listed in 1 Tim 3 and Titus 1, but include work ethic, courage, perseverance etc.), ability, knowledge.
- Submission to the Lord is trusting the process and the outcome into the Lord’s hands, seeking to glorify Him and be used by Him in anyway He chooses.

## Eldership is a “Calling” from God

### ► **The Call of an Overseer:** How do you know if you’re called?

#### ► External:

- An **active** pursuit of the office
- A **proven commitment** to serve the church with your gifts
- A willingness to be **examined by others** (e.g. other elders, the church, wife, unbelievers)
- A **lifestyle** characterized by **godliness** (“above reproach”)
- A recognized **ability to teach and lead**
- An **encouragement and affirmation** by one’s wife, elders, church, and other mature Christians

\*\*Some men may have the character qualities and ability to teach and lead (these are qualities every man can and should strive for), as set forth in Scripture, but have no aspiration for the office or desire for the work.

#### External:

- The active pursuit includes proactive, focused, and intentional training/preparation for the work
- The office is a work of service so one must demonstrate their willingness and commitment to serve before recognized in an office of service.
- The recognition of an overseer is the responsibility of the church who affirms God has called a man to serve in such a role (thus we see elders appoint elders in the NT). The qualifications also imply a willingness to be examined by his wife, the church, and even unbelievers (1 Tim 3:7).
- A man God has set apart for the office of oversee will meet the character qualifications set forth in Scripture, because God will protect and sanctify Him in such a way.
- A man who aspires and desires eldership and has the character qualities of an elder, will also be gifted by God to teach and lead.

- The final step(s) in recognizing a man is called by God to the office of overseer is encouragement and affirmation from others (although this must also be happening along the way)

# Summary

- **Eldership is a Calling from God**
  - Aspiration (External pursuit)
  - Desire (Internal passion)

*God gives the desire,  
God motivates the aspiration,  
God gifts the ability,  
God sanctifies one's character,  
God leads the church in affirmation,  
God preserves His man*

A good question on this topic may be whether God truly calls a man to eldership who later sins and is disqualified. This is a hard question to answer, because we don't know the mind of God or have anything specific recorded in Scripture to answer the question. However, there are examples in the OT of men called by God who exhibited disqualifying character (e.g. Samson, Gideon, David). Judas Iscariot was also "called" by Jesus to be one of the 12 disciples and we know his character. Paul also warned that from among eldership some would be proven as wolves (Acts 20). Therefore, I'd tentatively suggest God may "call" men into eldership who will disqualify themselves or prove to be wolves.

## Application Questions

1. What is the second requirement for an elder candidate in v. 1a (the first being he is to be male)?
  - ▶ What might motivate an individual to “aspire” to this office? Are all such motivations pure?
  - ▶ How might a potential elder demonstrate a true aspiration (remember “aspire” is not just a desire, but pursuit of this desire) to the office of overseer?
2. Is your understanding of the nature of eldership/pastoral ministry formed by Scripture? Or is it formed primarily by tradition and culture?
3. Do you think of eldership as an opportunity to sacrifice for the glory of God, the good of His church, and the sake of an eternal reward? Or is it an opportunity for worldly gain?
4. Are you drawn to the office of overseer because of its glorious connection to Jesus Christ, the Great Shepherd? Or are you more attracted to a different occupation?

### 1. “Aspiration”

1. Someone might be motivated by the idea of power, fame, fortune. Someone might be motivated by the expectations of others or because there’s a “need” in the church. These aren’t biblical motivations.
2. Service in the church, humility to learn from others, willingness to undergo training as part of preparation, discussion with others (e.g. wife, pastors, mature believers).

## Application Questions cont.

5. Are you pursuing eldership out of personal desire and the inner prompting of the Spirit? Or is there some external compulsion (tradition, family, mentor, money, fame, etc.) motivating you?
6. Do you experience your greatest joy and satisfaction when occupied with pastoral tasks (teaching, preaching, discipleship, evangelism, counseling)? Or do these things always feel like a burden?
7. Is your aspiration to be involved in the work of the ministry more resolute today than a year ago? Or do you talk more and more of burnout and resignation?
8. Is there sin (e.g. selfishness, fear, pride) that is preventing you from answering “yes” to the first half of each of questions 3-8?
9. The harvest is ripe, but the workers are few, are you praying for God to raise up workers for the harvest (Matt 9:37-38)?



# PRAY

- Pray for each other as we begin this study (pray in pairs/small groups)
- Pray for God to raise up men as elders of His church
- Pray for spiritual growth in our lives as we study eldership
- Pray for the church to grow through our example as we're sanctified