

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP @ SEASIDE

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 How We Got Here

Since Seaside was planted, only men have been allowed to serve as Elders, Pastors, or Preachers. This was based on a biblical understanding that while men and women are equal in dignity and worth, they are also created with distinct, complementary roles and responsibilities in the church; specifically, that men are to be the ones in authority.

That said, Seaside has a wide variety of Christians from many different church backgrounds, and over the years at Seaside (particularly since 2015), many Seasideers have expressed concerns about this understanding and practice. We estimate that about a third of our church leaders strongly support the position that we've maintained, about a third are open to allowing women to serve in all roles in the church, and the other third are somewhere in between.

In light of this, the elders, after prayer, study, and conversation, decided in early 2024 to form and launch our Women in Leadership Committee. Based on the Elders' belief that there are compelling Biblical cases on both sides of this argument, the Elders felt that a committee

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composed of trusted men and women at Seaside with diverse perspectives, backgrounds, and stages of life was the best way to determine a path forward for Seaside. In August 2024, we announced this process and our committee to the church and set out together to reach consensus on whether women can serve as Elders, Pastors, and/ or Preachers at Seaside.

The road for our committee has been long and complex. The journey has been both extremely difficult as well as rich and rewarding. At last count, we have met 26 times, praying intently for God to lead, learning to listen to each other, discussing all of the debated passages, reading multiple books and articles, listening to podcasts, and holding many meetings with other Seaside members. Each committee member has given countless hours to prayer and study, to listening and speaking, and staying at the table together, even when our disagreements made it seem impossible.

After these meetings and discussions, it was clear that, while we understood each other's positions better, there remained a wide range of personal beliefs and convictions on this topic. For most of us, while our own positions had matured through the conversation, we still held to the same core viewpoints we started with. And yet, somehow, we still had to reach consensus on a way forward.

So, in the fall of 2025, our committee gathered for an entire day away to seek God's direction, inviting all of our church leaders to fast and pray with us. We began the day with prayer, then summarized the points where we all agree (this is summarized in the "BIBLICAL FOUNDATION FOR MEN, WOMEN, & THE CHURCH" section we will cover shortly). After this, we outlined five options for moving forward as a church regarding women serving as Elders, Pastors, and/ or Preachers. Importantly, we were intentionally considering what we believe is best for Seaside, not necessarily the position we hold most strongly ourselves. After further prayer, each person shared their first choice along with the other options they could support. In this, we reached a general consensus, meaning most of us could at least support the option we are now moving forward with, though there were still some disagreements and concerns. We left this meeting tired but hopeful that we had found a way forward, though we recognized that the elders still had to develop the practical applications of this general consensus.

Since then, the elders have met and prayerfully decided on the best way forward. To be clear, this is a decision that Seaside's elders ultimately made, based on the committee's general consensus. It does not reflect the personal beliefs and convictions of every committee member.

We continue to maintain that there are several essential Biblical truths related to Men, Women, and the Church that we can all agree on, even if we hold different views on whether women should serve in particular roles in the church.

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1.2 Biblical Foundations for Men, Women, & the Church

- We affirm that God created humanity in his image. We are created male or female and affirm that our sexuality is good. We reject the premise that gender is subjective, negative, a social construct, or a matter of personal preference. (Genesis 1:26, 27, 31, 2:18, 23, 25; Psalm 8, Matt. 19:4)
- We affirm that women and men have equal access to God through faith in Christ Jesus. (John 3:16-17, Romans 4:5, 10:10, Galatians 3:28-29, Ephesians 2:8-9, 4:7-13)
- We affirm that the Holy Spirit resides in men and women who are made new in Christ. The Holy Spirit empowers, leads, and gifts both men and women to build up and strengthen the church and bear witness to the Lordship of Christ in this world. (Numbers 11:29, Joel 2:28-29, Mark 16:16-18, Luke 24:1-12, 46-49, John 4:8-29, Acts 2:17-18, Romans 12:3-8, 1 Corinthians 12:7-13)
- We affirm that men and women are equal in dignity and yet significantly different and not interchangeable. We were created this way for the purpose of interdependent flourishing. Accordingly, we affirm the Biblical mandate that the church be a place where women and men are welcomed, respected, disciplined, and celebrated. Both men and women are essential to the body of Christ and the advancement of the gospel. (Genesis 1:28, 2:18-25, Matt. 19:5-6, 28:19-20, Romans 16:1-23, 1 Cor. 11:11-12, 14:1-5, Ephesians 5:22-33, Philippians 4:2-3, 1 Timothy 5:1-2)
- Additional Comments:
 - ◆ Treatment of Women in Church History/ Culture: We grieve that, for much of the church's history, women have been devalued and seen as inferior to men and treated accordingly. We also grieve that women have often been treated with suspicion. We reject the belief that women are more irrational, sensual, easily deceived, or prone to sin compared to men. We also reject the premise of male superiority being in alignment with biblical teaching.
 - ◆ Sexual Abuse and Exploitation: We grieve that in our contemporary culture, around the world, and over the centuries, both in and outside of the church, women and men, boys and girls have been sexually abused and exploited. We are dedicated to preventing all types of abuse and neglect—including physical, mental, sexual, and emotional—by increasing awareness, following established safety protocols in our youth and kids programs, preventing coercive or manipulative language or behaviors, being aware of and addressing power dynamics, and promptly reporting any suspected abuse to the proper authority

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channels in and outside of the church structure. We also affirm our call as the church to bring hope, healing, a new start, and a new family to those who have suffered sexual abuse, exploitation, or violence.

2. INTERPRETING & APPLYING THE BIBLE

2.1 Principles For Interpretation & Application

→ Principle 1: Approach the Bible on its own terms

- ◆ Recognize the way your own experiences, learning, and desires shape the way you read, interpret, and apply the Bible. Acknowledge this by humbly bringing your fears, frustrations, pride, anxieties, disagreements, and perspectives to God in prayer.
- ◆ Pay attention to the questions the Bible is asking/ answering. Be careful not to force the Bible to answer questions it isn't answering.
- ◆ Remember the Bible is written for us, but not to us. This should lead us to a posture of humility and curiosity when we come across something that doesn't make sense to us or something that Christians disagree on.

→ Principle 2: Context is key (to approaching the Bible on its own terms)

- ◆ Literary Context: Passages before and after (within the same book or by the same author)
- ◆ Biblical Context: Allusions or connections to other parts of the Bible or to broadly accepted Biblical theology
- ◆ Historical/ Cultural Context: Circumstances of the author or audience.

→ Principle 3: Use what's clear to interpret what's unclear

- ◆ Use the clear biblical principles, concepts, or ideas to interpret unclear or confusing verses.
- ◆ Importance of good biblical theology Example: "And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven." (James 5:15, ESV) This passage raises many questions: Does this mean that healing is dependent on our level of faith? Does this mean that our prayers bring forgiveness? Does this mean that the Lord will always heal the one who is sick? Does this mean that sickness is a result of specific sin? These

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questions are answered by good biblical theology, allowing us to get at the heart of what James is saying: “seek God in prayer, prayer works.”

→ Principle 4: Distinguish between Normative/ Specific Instructions

- ◆ Normative: An instruction that applies to all Christians in all times and all circumstances.
 - Example: Do not speak evil against one another...” James 4:11
 - Application: Don’t slander your brother or sister in Christ.
- ◆ Specific: An instruction given for a particular culture, context, or situation (often demonstrating a normative principle).
 - Example: “Greet one another with a holy kiss” 1 Cor. 16:20
 - Application: In our culture, don’t kiss each other, but do (principle) show familial kindness to your brother or sister in Christ.
- ◆ How do we tell what is normative vs. what is specific? Most often, we can tell this intuitively. When we can’t, context and using what is clear is key.

2.2 Values that Guide Us When We Disagree

→ What we believe

- ◆ The Bible: We affirm the truthfulness and authority of both Old and New Testament Scriptures in their entirety as the only written word of God, without error in all that it affirms, and the only infallible rule of faith and practice. We also recognize the many challenges of interpretation and application.
- ◆ Our Doctrinal Statement: Through the Apostles Creed and our Statement of Faith¹, we affirm the core (non-negotiable) essentials to our faith. These form the guardrails for disagreement. Calling them into question risks moving outside of orthodox Christianity.

→ How we are called to act

- ◆ Love (1 Corinthians 13): Sacrificially laying down our lives for God and one another. Asking what is best for another and then doing that.

¹ <https://seasidechurch.com/what-we-believe>

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- ◆ Our posture: eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit, mutual submission, peace, humility, respect, curiosity, & listen first/ well.

→ Gospel witness

- ◆ How do we best point a hurting and skeptical world to Jesus?
- ◆ How do we best minister to those in our particular context/ culture?

2.3 What Do We Do When We Disagree?

→ Locate the weight a Biblical interpretation, application, or theological question should carry.²

- ◆ Die for: The core essentials of our faith (pale of orthodoxy).
- ◆ Divide for: Not essential, but still important enough to divide over. "Division over these issues is regrettable but ultimately acceptable."³
- ◆ Debate for: Important to Christian theology and worthy of debate, but not enough to justify separation or division among Christians.
- ◆ Decide for: Theological beliefs that aren't worth debating and are unimportant to our gospel witness and ministry collaboration.
- ◆ Note: A significant challenge is discerning which important issues are worth dividing over and which are "debate for." As a non-denominational church with people from many different church backgrounds, Seaside generally chooses "debate for" rather than "divide for" related to many controversial issues.

3. THE DEBATE OVER WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

3.1 A Brief Biblical Theology Related to Men & Women

The Bible records God's redemptive work of rescuing humanity from sin and death and into a connected life of trusting and walking with God in this life and for eternity. The redemption promised by God in the Fall is initiated by God through calling out Abraham to become a

² The "Die for, Divide for, Debate for, and Decide for" framework comes from Gerry Breshears and is explained further in his "Gospel Unity" article. <https://www.westernseminary.edu/stories/gospel-unity/>

³ This quote comes from Gavin Ortlund's book "[Finding the Right Hills to Die On](#)" as he argues that division of secondary issues is both regrettable (because we should be able to work it out) and acceptable (because some things aren't clear).

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set-apart nation of worshippers of the One, True God, and as the vehicle through which redemption is made available to the entire world through Jesus the Messiah. Amidst this story of God's generous love, mercy, and grace for a sinful and rebellious humanity which unfolds over centuries in the Ancient Near East, there are key passages which speak specifically to who we are as men and women.

CREATION:

In Genesis 1, we read that humankind is created in God's image, male and female, set apart from the rest of creation, with a call to rule over it. In Genesis 2, we read how the man Adam was not complete on his own. Needing a "suitable helper," God took a rib from Adam and created Eve. Bible scholars are divided on the meaning of "suitable helper," with some concluding this describes a position under the authority of Adam, while others conclude that it describes a co-laboring responsibility shared by man and woman. In Genesis 3, the man and woman's connection and closeness to God are severed when they ate the fruit from the one tree that was forbidden. The consequence of this disobedience was not only a separation from God, but also a damaged relationship between man and woman from that time forward.

LEADERSHIP IN THE OLD TESTAMENT:

In the context of the patriarchal Ancient Near East of the Old Testament, men held the governing responsibility and authority for the care and provision of their people. This first took place within the extended family, which was connected to a wider clan, with several related clans comprising a tribe. While men held these positions of authority, many women are included in the Old Testament and contributed prominently during the period of the Patriarchs, the exodus from Egypt, the period of the Judges, the reign of the Kings, and the exile into Babylon.

THE PROMISE OF THE PROPHETS:

The Old Testament also includes the witness of the prophets who were given the responsibility of calling Israel back to worshipping the One True God when, they frequently pursued the false gods of the neighboring nations. The prophets also pointed to a day when God would do a new work in the hearts of his people and invite those same foreign nations to live under the reign and rule of the Living God.

THE PROMISE FULFILLED IN JESUS:

The promised rescue of humanity by the prophets was fulfilled in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ. The New Testament begins with the genealogy of Jesus recorded in Matthew's gospel, which includes four women. Their inclusion would not have been lost on the first readers and makes an explicit statement about the value and importance of

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women. As Jesus began his ministry, he called twelve Jewish men to be his closest companions and followers. At the same time, Jesus welcomed and received a wider circle of people, which included women who supported his ministry financially, two sisters and their brother Lazarus, a woman who had been physically ill for twelve years, a woman caught in the act of adultery, and a Samaritan woman whose life was marked by numerous failed marriages.

THE BIRTH OF THE CHURCH:

When Jesus rose from the dead, he appeared to women and to men before he ascended to heaven. His followers who waited and prayed in the upper room in Acts 1 included the remaining eleven disciples and the women listed by name. When the Holy Spirit fell upon them in Acts 2, the group went into the city and, empowered by the Spirit, began to speak to the Jewish pilgrims in their native languages. The Apostle Peter explained this as the fulfillment of what was spoken by the prophet Joel: "In the last days, God says I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy." The book of Acts then tells the story of how the Church, born in Jerusalem, became local churches scattered across the Mediterranean with Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free, men and women fully included and contributing to the life and growth of the New Testament church.

INSTRUCTIONS TO THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCHES AND LEADERS:

The Epistles of the New Testament provided the churches with a deeper, clearer understanding of salvation in Jesus and of their new identity in him. Included are instructions on how to live a life of love and obedience to Jesus as members of his body, along with passages that address expectations for leaders and the correction of false teachings that harm young churches. Additionally, these letters frequently included greetings to specific men and women who were contributing significantly to the life of that given church.

PIVOTAL PASSAGES:

In Ephesians 4:7, the Apostle Paul states that to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. He then describes in vv. 11-13 how Christ gave to the church the leaders it needed, "...the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." [NIV]

Similarly, Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12:4, "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them." [NIV] and vs. 7-11 "Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is

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given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines." [NIV]

In 1 Corinthians 14:33-35, Paul instructs women to remain silent during the church gathering and to wait to ask their questions until they get home. While some read this as a universal restriction on women speaking, at least in some settings, others interpret the passage as addressing a particular issue in which some women are being disruptive during the worship gathering. That 1 Corinthians 11:5 provides instruction on how women are to present themselves when prophesying or praying when gathered with other believers lends weight to the argument that Paul was providing a specific response to a particular situation.

In the first pastoral epistle written to Timothy, Paul provides a strong response to the false teaching that has disrupted and is causing great harm to the church in Ephesus. In chapter 2, he instructs the men to dedicate themselves to prayer without anger or disputing, followed by instruction to women starting in v. 9. They are instructed to dress modestly and not lavishly, and in v. 12, Paul states that he does not permit a woman to teach or assume authority over a man. Some scholars interpret this as a universal directive, while others interpret it as a specific corrective for the women who were promoting this heresy, both in their appearance and in the content of their false teaching.

In the chapter that follows, 1 Timothy 3, Paul provides the qualifications for those who would serve as elders, also called "overseers" within the church. In addition to a list reflecting high moral character and not being a recent convert, the only gender specific requirement in the original language is of being the "husband of one wife" (Literally, "a one-woman man"). Theologians rigorously debate what this means (only men, a married man, a never-divorce man, a man in a monogamous marriage, faithfulness to the biblical sexual ethic, etc.). A very similar list of qualifications is included in Titus 1 as well as the qualifications for deacons. Seaside Church was founded in a tradition that interprets this passage prescriptively and has required that the elders of the church be men.

3.2 Commonly Held Positions

We recognize the following three views (and the many iterations each contains) as legitimate Biblical positions related to women in church leadership. Each is plausible and supported by a faithful reading of the Bible.

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- **Hard Complementarian (Male Leader):** Men and women are equal in worth, and yet created with distinct, complementary roles and responsibilities in the church. Women are encouraged to minister in multiple ministries, but they should not exercise any ministry that includes public teaching to the corporate body, teaching the Bible to men, or exercising authority over men in the church.
 - ◆ Among hard complementarians, there are a variety of views on women's roles in church gatherings. Generally, most do not permit women to lead worship, corporate prayer, be pastors, and/or be deacons.
 - ◆ Proponents of this position: Tom Schreiner, Bruce Ware, John Piper, Mary Kassian, John MacArthur, many at Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood

- **Soft Complementarian (Male Elder):** Men and women are equal in worth, and yet created with distinct, complementary roles and responsibilities in the church. Women are encouraged to minister in any office or ministry open to other non-elders, provided their qualifications and appropriate gifting are met. The office of elder is reserved for men.
 - ◆ Among soft complementarians, there are a variety of views related to women as preachers and/or teachers: some hold that women can teach but not preach; others hold that women can teach or preach alongside a man; still others hold that women can teach and preach under the authority of the male elders.
 - ◆ Among soft complementarians, there are a variety of views related to women as pastors, some holding that elders and pastors are synonyms for the same office, others that women can be pastors in a limited sense (i.e.- of women and children), and still others that women can be pastors in the church, under the authority of the male elders.
 - ◆ Proponents of this position: Tim Keller, Craig Blomberg, Beth Moore, Jen Wilken, Dan Jarrell, Debbie Dodd, Gerry Breshears

- **Egalitarian (Mutualist):** Men and women are partners in every aspect of life. All ministries and offices of the church are equally open to all qualified men and women. Gender is not a relevant distinction for excluding a person from any office.
 - ◆ These hold that men and women are complementary (different in ways that enable them to complete one another), but not in terms of specific leadership roles in the church or home.
 - ◆ Proponents of this position: Millard Erickson, Cynthia Westfall, Gordon Fee, Walt Kaiser, Craig Keener, Mimi Haddad, Christians for Biblical Equality

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- Denominations: Many denominations are fully committed to the authority of the Bible yet reach different conclusions on this topic. Some of these lean strongly in one direction or the other, while others take a more moderate or neutral position, allowing their member churches some freedom in choosing how to move forward in their own church.
- A Note About Extremes: There are versions of the above views that go beyond the orthodox Christian beliefs related to men and women, and biblical sexual ethics. Some see women as inferior, devaluing them and treating them as less than men or as more irrational, sensual, easily deceived, or prone to sin compared to men (this, unfortunately, has been prevalent in church history). Some have gone on to blur gender distinction entirely and/ or redefine what has been the historical and biblical sexual ethic of one man and one woman in the context of marriage (this, unfortunately, is prevalent in our culture today). These extremes on both sides are patently false and dangerous for the holiness, health, and witness of the church.

3.3 Commonly Debated Passages Related to Women in Leadership

- Genesis 1-3: Creation accounts and fall. Do the creation accounts clearly establish a principle of male headship and authority or not?
- OT: What bearing does the male priesthood have on this conversation? Is the tribe-based, and generally patriarchal culture common throughout the OT descriptive of how God's people functioned in that time or prescriptive (God's ideal for all humans)? What do we do with the women who are celebrated for their leadership, initiative, and or courage (Deborah, Ruth, Esther, Rahab, and others)
- Jesus (Gospels): Does Jesus being a man and choosing 12 disciples contribute to a principle of God-designed male leadership? What bearing do Jesus' praise and support for women, and the gospel writers' inclusion of women in their accounts, have on this conversation (especially in a culture where men were commonly front and center in public)? What bearing does the fact that Jesus never teaches about male headship/ male authority have on this conversation?
- Acts:
 - ◆ While the Spirit is poured out on all, we see men as apostles and leaders in the early church. Is this based on the culture and context they came from/ were in, or is this the normative pattern for all future churches?
 - ◆ What do we make of the many women included, disciplined, and taught (in counter-cultural ways for that time) in the life of the early church? (Acts 9:36-42, 12:13-16, 16:11-19, 16:40, 17:34, 18:2-26).

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- Romans 16:7: Is Junia an “Apostle” or well-regarded by the Apostles?
- 1 Corinthians 7:3-5: How does Paul’s charge that a husband and wife submit to one another in sexual relations impact the debate around male headship and/ or authority and submission?
- 1 Corinthians 11:2-16:
 - ◆ Does this passage establish a universal principle of male headship in the church and/or family, or is this about mutual submission, using freedom in Christ properly, and not being contentious?
 - ◆ What does Paul mean in saying, “man is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man” (1 Cor. 11:7b)? How does this square with our reading of Genesis 1-3?
- 1 Corinthians 14:33-35:
 - ◆ Is Paul’s ban on women from speaking in church a universal command, or is he specifically banning disruptive speech/ disorderly conduct by immature leaders?
 - ◆ How does Paul’s command here align with other places where Paul encourages women to pray and prophesy in the public gathering of the church (i.e., 1 Cor. 11:5)?
- Galatians 3:28: All are one in Christ. What does this mean for gender distinction and roles in the church?
- Ephesians 4:11-12: Are these spiritual gifts and/or leadership offices in the church?
- 1 Timothy 2:11-15:
 - ◆ Is Paul correcting a specific problem in Ephesus (immature female leaders) or establishing a universal norm (male eldership w/wo teaching)?
 - ◆ Is “teaching” and “exercising authority” one combined concept or two separate ideas? What bearing does this have on the examples of women who seemed to teach others? (Priscilla, Phoebe, Euodia, and Syntyche)
 - ◆ By writing, “I do not permit a woman to... exercise authority (authenteo),” what does Paul mean? The word “authenteo” is a hapax legomenon, meaning it occurs only once in the Bible. Is he banning a particular kind of domineering authority (how the word seems to be used in other writings) in the church, or is he banning all women from exercising authority over men?

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→ 1 Timothy 3:1-13/ Titus 1:5-9:

- ◆ Is Paul establishing a universal norm that Elders and Deacons must be men or not?
- ◆ Why does Paul say, “If anyone aspires to the office of overseer...” if he means to exclude women?
- ◆ In the original language, the elder and deacon qualification “husband of one wife (one-woman-man)” is the only point where a male pronoun is used in the list; all other pronouns aren’t gender specific. What bearing does this have on the debate?
- ◆ In saying that, both elders/ deacons must be “husband of one wife,” what does Paul mean? Faithful in marriage, not polygamists, only men, only married men, and/or never divorced? Then, how do we apply this today?

3.4 Biblical Arguments For/ Against Women Serving as Elders, Pastors, & Preachers

It is important to acknowledge that the specific questions we’re asking (can women serve as elders, pastors, or preach a sermon on Sunday morning?) do not seem to be ones the authors of the Bible were concerned to answer directly. It’s hard to overstate how much our current understanding of these words comes from our own culture, traditions, and church history. As will be demonstrated below, our modern understandings of preaching, pastoring, and even eldering are much more specific, well-developed, and nuanced than those in the biblical text. As we proceed, we must pay special attention to the main ideas the author is communicating to their original audience in their respective culture, before using the text to inform our own unique questions. We must also be aware of how our upbringing, traditions, culture, and church experience inform our beliefs and convictions on this topic (for better or worse).

CAN A WOMAN BE AN ELDER IN THE CHURCH?

→ Yes, a woman can be an elder:

- ◆ These point to Gen. 1-3 as foundational for understanding the nature and relationship of men and women, noting that together they are made in the image of God and that Eve is created as a corresponding partner, joining Adam in co-ruling over creation with the Lord (in unity they are complete). These point out that only in the consequences of their sinful rebellion does “headship” show up (see below), as the woman’s desire “will be for her husband/ her husband will rule over her.” Gen. 3:16.

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- ◆ In light of Gen. 1-3, these would say that the ideal relationships between men and women are not the man in charge and the woman in submission, but one that more closely resembles Genesis 1-2 (where unity, interdependence, and co-laboring together for God's glory and others' good is the goal). Therefore, by keeping women out of leadership in the church, we are limiting the differentiated unity that God intended for the flourishing of all creation.
- ◆ These point to the gender-neutrality of Paul's lists of qualifications for elders and deacons in 1 Tim. 3 and Titus as noteworthy (the only "gendered" Greek word in the entire list of qualifications is "a one-woman man," the "he's" that we read in our English translations are gender neutral in the Greek). These argue that if Paul meant to exclude women from eldering, why wouldn't he say "If any man aspires to the office of overseer..." or something more obvious?
- ◆ These argue that the normative principle from Paul's statement in 1 Tim. 3 that an elder be "a one-woman man" is a requirement for marital faithfulness. In other words, it doesn't matter if the leader is married or not, male or female; what matters is that they are submitted to a biblical sexual ethic between one man and one woman in the context of marriage.
- ◆ These interpret Paul's words, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority (1 Tim. 2:12) as specific instructions from Paul, helping Timothy deal with the problem of powerful women abusing authority and teaching false doctrine in the church in Ephesus. The basic normative principle from this text is not to allow anyone (male or female) who is abusing authority or teaching false doctrine to continue to do so.
- ◆ In defending the specific application of 1 Tim. 2, these point to head coverings in 1 Cor. 11 as another example of something we hold as specific to that time, even though Paul also appeals to creation for his argument.
- ◆ Most of these note that in Eph. 5:21-30, Paul tells everyone to submit to one another, going on to apply the way of Jesus (sacrificial love, service, submission) to the particular patriarchal context of the 1st century AD. Accordingly, Paul isn't establishing a headship theology but rather reorienting those in that culture to Jesus' radically different way of living, in which a husband sacrificially loves his wife rather than domineering over her.
- ◆ These point to the fact that Jesus and the gospels don't say anything to substantiate headship theology or exclude women from church leadership.

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- ◆ These point to the presence of key female leaders in the OT (Miriam, Deborah, Esther, Hilda, etc.), in Jesus' ministry (the Samaritan Woman, the Marys, Martha, etc.) and the female leadership present in the early church (Junia, Phoebe, Chloe, Nympha, Apphia, Priscilla, etc.) as evidence that God celebrates female leaders alongside male leaders in the church and world.
 - ◆ Some have argued that if the Bible isn't definitively clear in forbidding women from eldership, then why not side with freedom (Gal. 5:1) and the plain reading of Genesis 1-2, by allowing women to join with men in leading the church? These point to an absence of teaching on male headship and authority in Jesus' ministry and Acts.
- No, a woman cannot be an elder:
- ◆ These say that when Paul says elders should be a "one-woman man" (1 Tim. 3:2), this universally means that elders should be men only. Many would also argue that they should be married; some even argue that they should never have been divorced.
 - ◆ These interpret Paul's words "I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority (1 Tim. 2:12) as normative based on Paul's appeal to creation/ Genesis 1-2 in the verses following. Generally, these combine the exclusion of teaching and exercising authority, equating "teaching" with our modern understanding of preaching and "exercising authority" with being an elder (i.e., Paul is saying women are not allowed to teach/preach to men authoritatively).
 - ◆ These point to male headship and female submission as described in Eph. 5:22-32, Col. 3:18-19, 1 Peter 3:1-6, and Titus 2:4-5, and conclude broadly that God created men to have unilateral authority over women (headship theology). These point to 1 Cor. 11:2, 1 Timothy 2, to argue that this headship extends beyond the home.
 - ◆ These use Genesis 1-3 (based on Paul's comments in 1 Cor. and 1 Tim.) to argue for headship theology in creation, interpreting Eve's actions in the garden as usurping Adam's God-given authority and Adam's actions as abdicating his authority to Eve. Accordingly, these suggest that neglecting headship theology is at the core of original sin (this can elevate this issue to a matter of orthodoxy, even salvation).

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- ◆ These point to the testimony of scripture, in which all priests and the 12 apostles were men, suggest that God intends for men to be the spiritual leaders of his people.
- ◆ Those who believe in a headship theology defend the presence of women leaders in the Bible (such as Miriam, Deborah, Esther, Mary, Mary Magdalene, Phoebe, Junia, and others) as either allowed because they were under the authority of a man or because no men were leading.

CAN A WOMAN PREACH IN THE SUNDAY GATHERING?

→ Yes, a woman is allowed to preach:

- ◆ If preaching is understood in the Biblical sense (proclaiming the arrival of Jesus' kingdom), then all Christians are to preach. This is what Jesus tells his followers to go and do in Mark 16:15, and something we see men (the disciples/ apostles, etc.) and women (woman at the well, those at the empty tomb, etc.) doing throughout Jesus' ministry and the early church.
- ◆ There is no clear indication that the only preachers/ teachers in the NT were elders. No verse or scripture reference explicitly connects preaching with the requirement to be an elder/ overseer or says that only men can "preach/ proclaim" the gospel.
- ◆ These point to specific examples of women in Jesus' ministry who told others about Jesus in public (e.g., the Samaritan woman and the women at the empty tomb).
- ◆ These must explain why Paul prohibits women from teaching or speaking in the church in Corinth and Ephesus (1 Cor. 14:34-35 and 1 Tim. 2:11-15) and typically point to the in-congruency of these verses with everything else that Paul (and Jesus) says/ does with women (use the clear things in the Bible to interpret the unclear). Accordingly, these often go on to suggest that these commands were specific to that context related to practices that were disruptive and/ or false teaching, which conflicted with the Apostles' teaching.
- ◆ These point to the inconsistency in many modern churches of allowing "non-elder" men to sometimes preach (under the authority of the elders) but not allowing non-elder women to preach under the same authority. It seems like it should be either only elders or men and women, under the authority of the elders.

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→ No, a woman is not allowed to preach:

- ◆ These apply Paul's prohibition on women teaching in the churches in Corinth and Ephesus (1 Cor. 14:34-35 and 1 Tim. 2:11-15) universally to our modern understanding of preaching (expositing God's word on Sunday morning in a local church). To get around the apparent contradiction of these verses with actual women who were allowed to pray and prophesy in the church (1 Cor. 11) and women teachers/ leaders in the NT, like Phoebe, these may also argue that there is a difference between authoritative/ commissioned preaching and general praying, prophesying, teaching in the church, the former of which should only be done by elders/ overseers who are men.
- ◆ Some would argue this based on their understanding of male headship, others on their basic understanding that elders, charged with overseeing the church, should be men (1 Tim. 3, Titus 1:5-9).

CAN A WOMAN BE A PASTOR IN THE CHURCH?

→ Yes, a woman can be called a Pastor.

- ◆ The office of "pastor," as we understand it today, isn't found in the Bible.
- ◆ These interpret "shepherd/ pastor" Ephesians 4:11-12 as a spiritual gift and/or a specific kind of leader that God gives to the church.
- ◆ These interpret Acts 20:28 and 1 Peter 5:1-2 as describing the way an elder should lead God's people. These may then be applied more generally to all leaders in the church (men and women), who act as under-shepherds to the chief shepherd (feeding, protecting, nurturing, and directing the church under their care).

→ No, a woman cannot be called a Pastor:

- ◆ These interpret Acts 20:28, Ephesians 4:11-12, and 1 Peter 5:1-2 as connecting "pastoring/ shepherding" exclusively to the office of "elder/ overseer" in the early church. Then, believing that women can't be elders, they accordingly conclude that "pastors" also can't be women.

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4. LEADERSHIP IN THE CHURCH

4.1 Leadership in the NT Church

When it comes to leadership and offices in the church, the NT provides an essential foundation that churches have built on over the past 2000 years. Although we might prefer it, the NT is not an instruction manual nor does it provide an org chart with clearly defined job descriptions, exact qualifications, and essential duties for how church leadership should be structured. Instead, each church/denomination gets to work this out, building on the foundation the NT demonstrates.

There were several different types of leaders in the early church, including:

- **Apostles:** Traditionally understood as those who personally met with and were commissioned by the risen Lord. This includes the 11 disciples, plus the late addition of Matthias, as well as Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14:4, 14), James (Gal. 1:19), and possibly a wider circle that may have included Junia and Andronicus (Romans 16:7, 1 Cor. 15:7).
- **Elders (presbyteros) & overseers/ watchers (episkopos):** Likely synonyms for the same leader/ office/ kind of service in the early church. Elders/overseers were often appointed for each church (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5-9). The early church community seems to have adopted governance that the members of that society would have already had some familiarity with, specifically for the Jews, the familiar concept of Elders was adopted in the church, and for the Gentiles, the familiar concept of Overseers.
- **Servant/ deacon/ minister (diákonos):** This word, which means “one who waits at the table” or “servant,” is sometimes used in the NT to speak of another kind of office/ leader in the early church (besides elder/ overseer). These had similar requirements for character and spiritual maturity as elders, but seemed to serve differently, in more specific or tangible service (like the seven who were chosen to ensure that the widows were being taken care of in Acts 6, although they aren’t called deacons specifically).
- **Leadership Roles and/or giftings:** Prophets, evangelists, shepherds/pastors, teachers; although it is hard to tell whether this refers to some kind of office or leader, or to a gifting. (Eph. 4:11-13)

While many specifics of how the above was worked out are unclear, the NT does emphasize the following foundations for leadership in the church:

- **Hierarchy in the church:** While all humans possess the same dignity and value, and all Christians are made one in Christ (Gal. 3:28), some Christians are gifted and called to particular leadership roles within the church (Eph. 4:11-13). Jesus is the head of the

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church, and these leaders serve under Jesus (Eph. 1:22, Col. 1:18, 1 Cor. 12). Church leaders are responsible (to a certain degree) for those in their care and those in their care should honor and submit to/ obey their church leaders (1 Thess. 5:12-13, 1 Tim. 5:17, Hebrews 13:7, 17-19). Seaside's elders believe that churches are responsible for building an organizational structure within their own context that rests on the foundations for leadership that are presented in the NT.

- Different leaders are necessary: One consistent theme we see in the early church is a variety of leaders (Acts 6:1-7, Eph. 4:11-13, 1 Tim. 3). We are unsure if Paul's charge to appoint elders in every church is speaking of appointing a singular elder or multiple elders, regardless, a plurality of leaders, different leaders serving in different ways, seemed essential. Additionally, there is no one-size-fits-all leader approach in the NT. Instead, God gives a variety of individuals as gifts to the church (apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, teachers), to build up the church. In this, each individual's unique gifting benefits the whole (the whole is greater than its parts).
- Leaders in the church are servants first and foremost: Jesus said, "The greatest among you shall be your servant" (Matthew 23:11). All Christians are servants (even slaves!) to God and others (Mark 10:44, 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, Philippians 1:1), some of these servants serve in official leadership capacities, others don't. Importantly, the NT never tells leaders in the church to "rule over" or "take charge"; instead, it points leaders to service, to modeling Christ-like character, to caring, protecting, and feeding the church like a shepherd does his flock (Matt. 20:25-28, 1 Timothy 4:12, 1 Peter 5:1-5).
- Character comes before competency: The base level qualifications for a leader in the church are primarily character-based (above reproach, faithful in marriage, self-controlled, not a drunkard, not violent, respected, hospitable, mature, able to manage a household well, etc.). Competency is also mentioned (able to teach) and seems to align with the giftings God gives leaders (1 Timothy 3:1-13, Titus 1:5-9). Church leaders in the NT were, generally speaking, mature and experienced followers of Jesus. In Paul's instructions to Timothy, age alone is not a determining factor; spiritual maturity and experience are.
- Peer affirmation: Leaders seem to be appointed in the church based on the recommendation and/ or affirmation of other church planters, leaders, and elders (Acts 6:3-6, 14:23, Titus 1:5, 1 Timothy 5:22).
- Who's in charge? Jesus! Instead of prescribing a leadership structure or organizational chart, the Bible offers analogies for the church (body of Christ, bride of Christ, temple, shepherd/ sheep, vine and branches, etc.). These all have one thing in common: Jesus is

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in charge (the head, the groom, the cornerstone, the shepherd, the vine, etc.). Human leaders in the church are to submit to Jesus as they lead the church, serving alongside all Christians under the authority of Jesus.

4.2 Forms of Church Government:

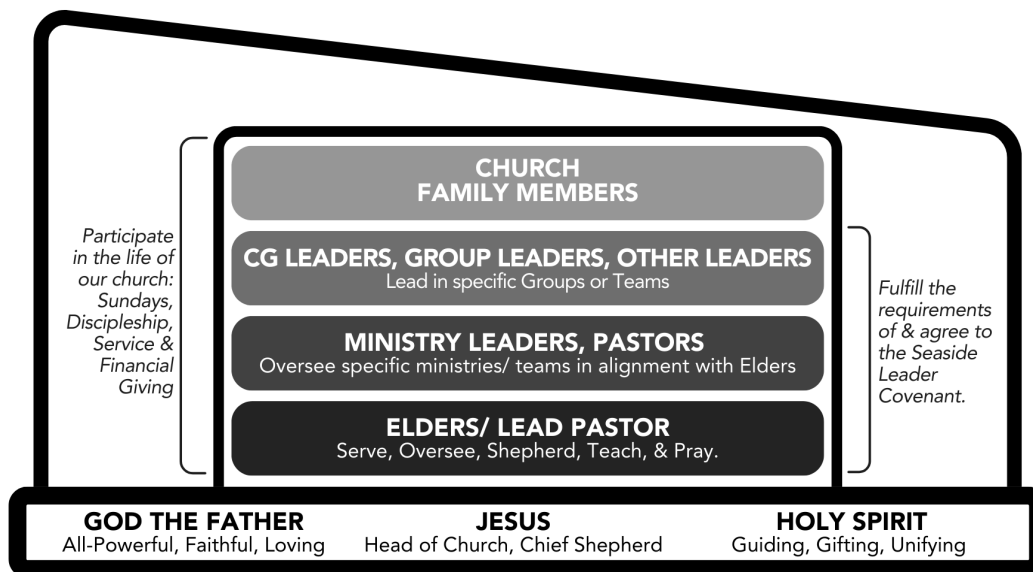
Throughout history, churches have developed various structures that were functional, culturally appropriate, and still consistent with biblical principles. These structures have sought to define how church authority was vested, both in relationships between churches and in each local church. Generally speaking, these fall into three camps:

- Episcopal (local church under control of higher authorities (bishop), generally one elder/ priest/ rector in each local church)
- Presbyterian (local church vests some authority in higher authorities, plurality of elders)
- Congregational (autonomy of local church, plurality of elders, who serve primarily under the authority of voting church members).

As a non-denominational, elder-led church, Seaside falls somewhere between the Presbyterian and Congregational models.

4.3 Leadership Positions @ Seaside

Leadership Titles/Positions: Seaside's elders recognize that titles for those who lead are important; they convey trust, clarify what leaders do, and honor leaders. In our church, where so many come from different church backgrounds or no-church background, it is hard to choose titles that appropriately communicate to all in our church what a specific leader does. With that, we try to keep titles as simple and straightforward as possible, while also drawing on the Bible where possible.



LEADERSHIP RESPONSIBILITY @ SEASIDE CHURCH

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Elders: At Seaside, the elders are a group of men who equally share the oversight responsibilities of Seaside Church, under the authority and direction of Jesus.

- Why “Elders?” While this term communicates something different in our culture today than it did in the early church, we have intentionally adopted it to refer to those who oversee our church. Other titles may be more easily understood by those outside the church (board of directors, leadership council, etc.); however, regarding elders, it is important to us that we use one of the names for church leaders that we see in the New Testament. A major reason for this is to demonstrate the core spiritual leadership function of our elders.
- Our Elder team is primarily composed of volunteers, but also includes staff elders (like the Lead Pastor)
- Our elders serve as the registered Non-Profit Board of Governors with the state of WA.
- Responsibilities:
 - ◆ Service: Our elders model their leadership after Jesus, seeking to lead as sacrificial, servant-shepherds in the church.
 - ◆ Authority/ Oversight: Our elders, submitted to Jesus, provide spiritual oversight, direction, and correction to our entire church. They are responsible for hiring, calling, and affirming our staff pastors; providing strategic and mission-related oversight; and overseeing all legal, financial, and governance matters.
 - ◆ Shepherding/Pastoring: Oversee feeding, leading, caring for, and guarding those who belong to the Seaside Church family.
 - ◆ Teaching: Responsible for overseeing all teaching and doctrine at Seaside, ensuring and encouraging sound doctrine while correcting false doctrine. The elders also serve on the preaching team (see below) and review every sermon manuscript before it is preached.
 - ◆ Prayer: Pray for the church and lead it to be centered on prayer.
- Qualifications
 - ◆ Meets the Biblical character and competency qualifications for elders as outlined in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9, 1 Peter 1-4.
 - ◆ Fulfills the requirements of and agrees to the Seaside Leader Covenant.

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- ◆ Must have experience leading in a ministry at Seaside (CG/ small group leader, youth leader, preaching team, director, or pastor).
- ◆ Must have completed one year as an “Elder-in-Training,” meeting regularly with the elders, learning the specifics of what we believe and how we work as a church and elder team. At the end of this year, elder candidates must continue to desire to be an elder, be affirmed as a qualified elder by Seaside’s members, and receive approval from the current elders.

→ How do we find potential elders?

- ◆ If a man is in a leadership role at Seaside and is interested in serving as an elder, they can notify the Lead Pastor.
- ◆ Anyone in Seaside can recommend a male leader for eldership by notifying the Lead Pastor.
- ◆ Current elders will consider potential elder candidates every quarter, based on those who serve and lead at Seaside, as well as recommendations from Seaside members.

Pastors: Staff members (FT or PT) who oversee a ministry/ ministries, under the authority and direction of the elders, shepherding (feeding, leading, caring for, and guarding) those in their ministry and our church as a whole, through their leadership and service.

→ Why “Pastors?” For the most part, churches today use the title “Pastor” to refer to a paid (vocational) ministry or church leader. In many denominations, this title is given after a formal ordination process, while in other denominations, as well as in non-denominational churches, it is given when someone is hired for that position. It also seems that most people outside the church understand that a “Pastor” is a staff leader in a church. In light of this, Seaside uses this term for staff leaders who have completed a process with our elders to become a “pastor” at Seaside.

→ Responsibilities

- ◆ Service: Our pastors model their leadership after Jesus, seeking to lead as servants in the church.
- ◆ Pastoring (shepherding): Our pastors feed, lead, care for, and guard those in the specific ministries they lead.
- ◆ Learning: Must be willing to continue learning through applicable educational programs, workshops, or training.

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→ Prerequisites

- ◆ Have been assessed, affirmed, and installed as “Pastors” by our elders.
- ◆ Must be a disciple of Jesus and a committed part of Seaside, evidenced by regular attendance on Sundays, involvement in a Community Group, serving on a serve team, and regular financial giving.
- ◆ Fulfills the requirements of and agrees to the Seaside Leader Covenant.
- ◆ Completed a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral level degree in a related theological/ ministry program and/or is committed to continuing theological/ ministry education and training.
- ◆ Must have 3 years of leadership experience in a related ministry.
- ◆ Must be affirmed as a qualified Pastor and receive approval from the current elders.

Ministry Leaders: Staff or volunteer leaders who lead specific ministries or teams at Seaside.

→ Why don't we call our leaders “Deacons?” While the New Testament church used the word “Deacon/ Servant (diákonos)” to refer to at least some of those who led/served in specific, tangible ways in the local church, the way churches and denominations use the title “Deacon” today varies widely. Furthermore, most people outside the church have little to no understanding of the term “deacon.” In light of this, we simply refer to all those who lead in some capacity as leaders (we may also use the term “director” for staff leaders). Our qualifications for all leadership positions at Seaside include the qualifications for deacons found in Acts 6:3 & 1 Timothy 3:8-13. Additionally, as the name deacon suggests, all of our leaders are called to be servants first and foremost.

→ Responsibilities

- ◆ Service: They model their leadership after Jesus, seeking to lead as servants in the church.
- ◆ Coordinating: Develop, plan, and lead specific ministries at Seaside
- ◆ Learning: Must be willing to continue learning through applicable workshops and conferences.

→ Prerequisites

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- ◆ Must be a disciple of Jesus and a committed part of Seaside, evidenced by regular attendance on Sundays, involvement in a Community Group, serving on a serve team, and regular financial giving.
- ◆ Fulfills the requirements of and agrees to the Seaside Leader Covenant.
- ◆ Must have appropriate experience serving and leading a similar ministry.
- ◆ Must be affirmed as a leader and receive approval from the current elders.

Leaders: Volunteer leaders in specific ministries at Seaside, including: SeasideKids leaders, SeasideYouth Leaders, Worship Leaders, Outreach and Care Ministry Leader(s), Meals Ministry, CG Leaders, Adult Ministry Leaders, etc.

→ Responsibilities

- ◆ Service: All Seaside leaders model their leadership after Jesus, seeking to lead as servants in the church.
- ◆ Responsibility: Responsible for leading professionally and thoughtfully, under the direction of the elders, pastors, or coordinators they report to.
- ◆ Recruiting: Responsible for recruiting and developing future leaders at Seaside.
- ◆ Learning: Must be willing to continue learning and growing as a leader.

→ Prerequisites

- ◆ Must be a disciple of Jesus and a committed part of Seaside, evidenced by regular attendance on Sundays, involvement in a Community Group, serving on a serve team, and regular financial giving.
- ◆ Fulfills the requirements of and agrees to the Seaside Leader Covenant.

New Leadership Teams:

- Advisory Council (to the Elders): A council of representatives, made up primarily of male and female ministry leaders at Seaside (though it may also include other representatives, where appropriate). Given that our elder team is all men, we want this team to include a significant number of women.

- ◆ Responsibilities

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- Participate in Quarterly Leadership Council meetings with the elders, providing ministry updates, insights into church health, and feedback on the church's vision and direction.
 - Provide counsel and support to elders as they discern any significant shifts in ministry, programs, or direction at Seaside.
- Preaching Team: A group of Seaside leaders (elders and non-elder men and women) who preach on Sunday mornings and provide input on the sermons.

◆ Responsibilities

- Development: Committed to continuing to develop competency as a teacher/ preacher.
- Sermon Planning and Review: Provides input on sermon series direction as well as individual sermon worksheets, manuscripts, and overall review process.
- Preaching: Preach the sermon on Sunday mornings.

◆ Roles on Preaching Team

- Preaching Team Lead: The Lead Pastor who preaches at least 30 times a year, and provides direction, training, and leadership to the entire team.
- Preaching Team: Members who preach 1-6 times a year, participate in quarterly training, development, and planning meetings, and contribute to the sermon planning and review processes.

◆ How do we find members for the Preaching Team?

- If someone is in a leadership role at Seaside and interested in serving on the Preaching Team, they can email the Lead Pastor.
- Any Seaside member can recommend a leader for the Preaching Team by emailing the Lead Pastor.
- Current Preaching Team members will consider potential team members annually, based on those who serve, teach, and lead at Seaside, those who have expressed interest in the team, and recommendations from Seaside's church members.

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5. RECOMMENDED BOOKS, ARTICLES, & PODCASTS

This is not an exhaustive list, and there are countless resources related to this debate. Here are a few resources we recommend.

→ Books:

- ◆ Allison, Gregg. Complementarity: Dignity, Difference, and Interdependence. B&H Academic, 2025.
- ◆ Belleville, Linda L, and James R Beck. Two Views on Women in Ministry. Grand Rapids, Mich. Zondervan, 2005.
- ◆ Lee-Barnewall, Michelle. Neither Complementarian nor Egalitarian. Baker Academic, 15 Mar. 2016.
- ◆ Ortlund, Gavin. Finding the Right Hills to Die On. Crossway Books, 2020.

→ Articles:

- ◆ [Gender: Complementarian Vs Egalitarian Spectrum- By Adrian Warnock](#)
- ◆ [Gospel Unity and Levels of Certainty- By Dr. Gerry Breshears](#)
- ◆ [Women Preachers: A Response to John Piper- By Andrew Wilson](#)

→ Podcasts/ Videos:

- ◆ [A Complementarian Reading Of The New Testament: Dr. Tom Schreiner #948](#)
- ◆ [A Theology of Disagreement: Dr. Christopher Landau by Theology in the Raw](#)
- ◆ [An Egalitarian View Of Women In Ministry In Light Of The Greco-Roman Context: Dr. Lynn Cohick #1018](#)
- ◆ [From Complementarian To Egalitarian: A Conversation About Women In Leadership With Dr. Nijay Gupta #1006](#)

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- ◆ [God & Us: The Story of the Bible Seaside Church Sermon Series \(particularly sermons 1 & 2, based on Genesis 1-3\)](#)
- ◆ [Neither Complementarian Nor Egalitarian: Dr. Michelle Lee-Barnewell #1043](#)
- ◆ [The Beauty of Complementarity: Dr. Gregg Allison by Theology in the Raw](#)
- ◆ [Women in Ministry \(the Biblical Case\) with Sandra Richter](#)