



PROFILE OF CHURCH ELDERS

Biblical Traits Expected of Church Elders

/// WELCOME

Elders functionally must protect, feed, care, and lead the congregation. But they must do so with the biblical qualifications related to their character and competency. We read in Scripture, “they appointed elders in every church” (Acts 14:20-23). We are also warned, “do not be hasty in the laying on of hands” to designate the wrong kinds of leaders (1 Tim 5:22). We do well to heed this sober warning, because many local churches have been harmed by installing those who are unfit to be elders. How can you avoid the mistakes of many and instead move forward to install qualified elders for this critical role?

God has provided clear biblical traits required for local church elders in Scripture (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Pet 5:1-4). However, church planters and existing elder teams often struggle to multiply qualified elders. Why? It’s because they fail to capture a clear profile of church elders and they don’t have an actionable plan to intentionally develop and multiply biblically qualified elders. That doesn’t need to be you and your church. Cooperate with the Holy Spirit and use this Profile of Church Elders, along with a closely related document called Multiplying Church Elders Pathway. Here are the traits that characterize the biblical Profile of Church Elders.

PROFILE OF CHURCH ELDERS

Biblical Traits Expected of Church Elders

/// HEAD (Understanding & Imagination)

PG 3: Gospel-Centered, Bible-Based, & Theologically-Sound

PG 4: Understands God's Church & Biblical Eldership

/// HEART (Character & Motivation)

PG 6: Walks By The Spirit & Above Reproach

PG 7: Walks With Humility & Passion

/// HANDS (Practices & Skills)

PG 10: Makes Disciples Who Make Disciples

PG 10: Shepherds God's Flock

PG 11: Teaches & Equips Christ's Body

PG 12: Manages Through Serving & Teamwork

PROFILE OF CHURCH ELDERS

Biblical Traits Expected of Church Elders

/// TRAITS FOR CHURCH ELDERS

Here is a description of biblical traits that church elders should exemplify. Before examining these various biblical traits, it's critical to remember that all that church elders do is to be done under the grace and supremacy of King Jesus, the head of God's church.

UNDER THE GRACE AND SUPREMACY OF KING JESUS, A CHURCH'S ELDER TEAM...

(Acts 2:29-36; Eph 1:20-23; Col 1:13-14; 1 Pet 2:24-25; 5:1-4)

/// SECTION 1: HEAD (Understanding & Imagination)

GOSPEL-CENTERED, BIBLE-BASED, & THEOLOGICALLY-SOUND

Church elders need to hold to gospel centrality, biblical fidelity, and sound theology. Paul wrote Titus, who was on a temporary assignment to help with appointing elders in the church plants in different towns throughout Crete. Paul instructed that for someone to become an elder,

"He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it." – Titus 1:9

It's not enough to know the Bible in general; elders need to hold firm to the gospel revealed in scripture and keep it central.

Someone can confess to believe the Bible but miss or minimize its central message, which is Jesus and the gospel. Jesus taught Jesus from Scripture (Jn 5:38-40; Lk 24:25-27, 32; 44-49; 2 Tim 3:14-17). Church elders are to be committed to being bible-based, meaning they hold to biblical fidelity - handling biblical texts accurately in order to live under their authority and teach them faithfully. It also means submitting their life to be shaped by scripture, not using poor interpretation to shape scripture to fit their lives.

PROFILE OF CHURCH ELDERS

Biblical Traits Expected of Church Elders

Interpreting Scripture accurately can be aided by the use of three lenses: Context, Content, and Christ. Elders need to interpret biblical texts by knowing the historical and literary context of a biblical passage.

They must also learn biblical content, which includes the meaning of words, phrases, metaphors, and figures of speech, as intended by the author, given the genre. As mentioned earlier, a Scriptural passage must be considered in light of how it points to Jesus and the gospel within the larger narrative throughout all Scripture. Considering Context, Content, and Christ by church elders is important, and humbly asking God for insight and relying on the Holy Spirit to illuminate God's intended meaning in his written word is equally important.

Church elders are to be theologically-sound. Just like a building that is no longer structurally sound should be condemned, elders must hold fast to sound theology so they will be fortresses for truth in the body of Christ. This includes biblical theology, systematic theology, and practical theology. All of which must be sound and centered on the Lord Jesus Christ. Holding firm to sound theology that's Christ-centered also requires that church elders rely on the Holy Spirit's help. Paul wrote Timothy,

"Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you."

- 2 Timothy 1:13-14

Being Gospel-Centered, Bible-Based, and Theologically-Sound is critical for church elders because this will undergird their disciple making, shepherding, teaching, and equipping of God's church (Mt 28:18-20; Mk 1:14-17; Lk 10:38-42; Jn 15:7-8; Eph 1:13-14; 4:11-12, 15, 21; Col 3:16; 4:2-6; 1 Tim 3:2; 5:17; 2 Tim 2:1-2; 3:14-17).

UNDERSTANDS GOD'S CHURCH & BIBLICAL ELDERSHIP

Church elders need to grasp the nature of God's church and the biblical concept of eldership. Even those who aren't elders, but have leadership roles in God's church, are required to "hold to the

PROFILE OF CHURCH ELDERS

Biblical Traits Expected of Church Elders

mystery of the faith with a clear conscience” (1 Tim 3:9). All the more for elders because they must be “able to teach” (1 Tim 3:3). This “mystery of the faith” referred primarily to the gospel of Christ (Eph 6:19; Col 2:2), but in other passages we read that when Paul referred to the mystery now revealed, he also included the nature of God’s church (Eph 3:4-6, 8-10; 5:32; Col 1:24-29). Therefore, all church leaders and elders must grasp the nature of God’s church and hold firmly to the gospel. Many biblical metaphors can help church elders grasp the nature of the church. For example, Scripture teaches that the church is Christ’s body, his bride, God’s household, the community of disciples, the temple of the Holy Spirit, God’s flock, and ambassadors of reconciliation, among other descriptions.

When church elders grasp and value the nature of God’s church, it helps them better grasp the biblical functions of elders in keeping with the nature of the church. This will encourage them to discharge their responsibilities as elders who serve under the head of the church, King Jesus, for the church he promised to build (Mt 16:18; Mk 10:45; Acts 9:31; Eph 1:22; 3:20-21; 1 Tim 3:14-15). Those elder responsibilities include being examples of godly character as they practice disciple making, shepherding God’s flock, teaching and equipping Christ’s body, and managing God’s household by serving and building strong teamwork so that God’s glory shines brighter and spreads further (Mt 28:18-20; Acts 14:21-23; 20:17, 28-32; Eph 3:20-21; 4:11-16; Phil 1:1, 27; 2:1-11; 1 Tim 3:1-7; 5:17-22; Titus 1:5-9; Ja 5:13-18; Heb 13:17; 1 Pet 5:1-5).

PROFILE OF CHURCH ELDERS

Biblical Traits Expected of Church Elders

/// SECTION 2: HEART (Character & Motivation)

WALKS BY THE SPIRIT & ABOVE REPROACH

Church elders need to walk by the Spirit and above reproach. Character matters! In scripture, we read that when new leaders were needed for the church, character took precedence over abilities. When the Jerusalem church had a pressing need for leadership, the twelve apostles whom Jesus had trained, told this community of disciples to look for those known to be “full of the Spirit and wisdom whom we will appoint to this duty” (Acts 6:3). One can only identify whether or not someone is full of the Spirit and wisdom by observing their daily life and speech to see whether or not they exhibit the fruit of the Spirit and characteristics of God-given wisdom (Gal 5:16-26; Ja 3:13-18). Peter was one of the twelve who insisted on Spirit-filled character when appointing the seven. He later addressed church elders in 1 Peter 5. In that section of his letter, he underscored the importance of good character in elders, warning them about their motives and practices so they wouldn’t work under compulsion, for shameful gain, nor be domineering over those in their charge. Rather, these elders were to serve willingly, eagerly, and humbly, setting an example for those they shepherd and oversee (1 Pet 5:1-4).

Paul echoed this need for godly character when he wrote to Timothy and Titus about what to require in aspiring and existing church elders (1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). Here again, we read that godly character took precedence over abilities on the list. Paul provided a substantial list of character qualities expected of church elders. These character qualities were summarized as a respectable life that is “above reproach” in character in the home, church, and among outsiders (1 Tim 3:2, 4-5, 7; Titus 1:6-7).

Believers can only bear the fruit of the Spirit and live a life that is above reproach with the help of the Holy Spirit. Scripture instructs us to “walk by the Spirit” and “keep in step with the Spirit” (Gal 5:16, 25). That means daily and continuously yielding to the Holy Spirit and letting him lead us. Moment by moment we are to be filled with the Spirit who helps us focus on Christ and walk more like him (Lk 9:23-27; Eph 3:14-19; 5:18; Col 3:16). Jesus was led by the Spirit, saturated with the scriptures and submitted to them,

PROFILE OF CHURCH ELDERS

Biblical Traits Expected of Church Elders

focused on the gospel, and maintained intimacy with the Father through prayer (Lk 4:1-14; Mk 1:14-15, 35). We can follow the way of Jesus with the help of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit spotlights on Jesus and the gospel (Jn 15:26; 16:14; 2 Tim 1:13-14). God, by the Holy Spirit, made us spiritually alive in Christ through the gospel (Jn 3:1-8; 1 Pet 1:3-5, 23-25; Titus 3:4-7). The Spirit continues to refresh and strengthen us as believers by making the gospel of grace and the love of Christ experientially real in our hearts (Jn 4:13-14; 7:37-39; Rom 16:25-27; Eph 3:14-19; 2 Tim 2:1). The Holy Spirit not only regenerated us and now strengthens us, but he also makes us more like God's Son. The Spirit points us to Jesus, and progressively transforms and matures us, so we walk more and more like Jesus, to the glory of God (2 Cor 3:18; Rom 8:26-30; 13:14; Col 1:28-29; Eph 4:13-15; 1 Jn 2:6; 3:2-3; 4:13-17). When believers walk by the Spirit, the results will be the fruit of the Spirit, which are those Jesus-like character qualities, and a life that is above reproach (Acts 6:3, 5; 2 Cor 3:18; Gal 5:16-26; 1 Tim 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-8; 1 Jn 2:6). This is why it's so important to walk by the Spirit.

Church elders are imperfect people who sin, but they can still walk by the Spirit and above reproach. The fruit of the Spirit is attractive in any follower of Christ, but church elders are to set an example of walking by the Spirit and above reproach in their families, the church, and among outsiders as well (Gal 5:16-26; 1 Tim 3:4-5, 7, 12; 4:12; Titus 1:5-8; 1 Pet 5:3).

WALKS WITH HUMILITY & PASSION

Church elders need to walk with a gospel driven humility and passion. Paul wrote to all the believers in the church in Philippi, including church leadership, "overseers and deacons" (Phil 1:1). He urged them to walk with gospel-driven humility that served the interests of others. He called them to a cross-shaped walk patterned after Jesus when he wrote,

"Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others."

PROFILE OF CHURCH ELDERS

Biblical Traits Expected of Church Elders

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” - Philippians 2:3-11

Church elders must humbly submit to the exalted Lord Jesus, head of his church (Eph 1:20-23; Col 1:13-14; 3:1-4). This means that elders are constantly seeking to align with the agenda of King Jesus and walk humbly, as he did, to serve others and lead his church with passion.

The Bible talks about having passion, or zeal. Why zeal by church elders? When Paul described the wide variety of gifts God gives his church body, he wrote, “the one who leads, with zeal” (Rom 12:8). That includes elders who are to lead God’s church with zeal. A few verses later, we read, “Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord” (Rom 12:11). There is no place for half-hearted indifference, apathy, or slothfulness in church elders. Instead, they are to lead with eagerness, fervency, and diligence. There should be a passion connected to the way we lead because of the mission we are on and who we are fighting for! But this zeal must never be motivated by selfish ambition or for the applause of people. Elders “serve the Lord” with zeal (Rom 12:11). It may be helpful to remember that passion can be expressed differently from person to person. Some show passion with verbal enthusiasm, while others demonstrate it with quieter intensity. In Titus 2, Paul returned to the theme of zeal, explaining that Jesus “gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works” (Titus 2:13-14; c.f., Rom 12:8). Zeal for good works is to be a result of the cross of Christ.

PROFILE OF CHURCH ELDERS

Biblical Traits Expected of Church Elders

This includes the good work of leading God's church. Jesus expects humble obedience and passion, but he cares deeply about what motivates us (Lk 6:46; Mt 6:1, 5, 16). Church elders are to be motivated by the gospel of grace and God's self-giving love. As believers, we are to love God back because of how much he has loved us in Christ. Elders are to model eager service, which issues from a heart of gratitude to our heavenly Father, who has lavished his love and grace on us in Christ. Submission to King Jesus, cross bearing, self-giving love for others, leading with passion, and faithfulness to Jesus in every aspect of life, are all to be fueled by the gospel of grace (Mt 5:19-20; Mk 8:34-38; 10:45; Rom 12:1-2, 8, 11; Titus 2:11-14; 2 Tim 2:1; Ja 3:13-18; 1 Jn 4:10-11). Church elders who exemplify humility and passion, because they treasure Jesus and God's grace, provide a powerful example to God's church.

PROFILE OF CHURCH ELDERS

Biblical Traits Expected of Church Elders

/// SECTION 3: HANDS (Practices & Skills)

MAKES DISCIPLES WHO MAKE DISCIPLES

Church elders need to be people who make disciples, but those disciples need to be the kind of disciples that go make more disciples of Jesus. We call this practicing relational disciple-making. Why is this necessary? Disciple-making takes precedence over leadership. Making disciples is a command for all disciples of King Jesus, and it's the core mission of the church. Disciple-making encompasses not only making new disciples of Jesus but also growing faithful ones (Mt 28:18-20; Lk 6:46). Each elder on the elder team must set an example of disciple-making so that those in the church will learn to value and practice it as well. The term "relational disciple making" is used to convey that it doesn't require a large platform to speak from to make disciples, but rather engaging people relationally. Every disciple of Jesus can make disciples relationally without special gifting to do so. All disciples, especially church elders, must actively practice relational disciple-making, which includes: Following Jesus, being Formed by Jesus, and Fishing with Jesus.

The early church was a Spirit-empowered movement that multiplied gospel-centered disciples and churches because it made disciples who, in turn, made disciples, just as Jesus had modeled for them. These disciples of Jesus were disciple makers first, church leaders second. If we want the DNA of disciple-making to permeate all we do so that we can remain faithful to mission God gave us, our elders must make disciples who make disciples. Church elders in our day must practice relational disciple-making and not allow leadership demands to crowd out obedience to Jesus who first modeled it, then commanded us to make disciples (Mt 28:18-20; Mk 1:14-17; Lk 24: Acts 6:7; 9:31; 11:19-20 (c.f., 8:1); 12:24; 14:20-23; 2 Cor 5:17-21; Eph 4:15; Col 4:2-6; 1 Thes 1:8).

SHEPHERDS GOD'S FLOCK

Church elders need to shepherd God's flock. They are to ensure that those sheep they oversee in the church are cared for, fed God's word, prayed for, strengthened, and protected from wolves and false

PROFILE OF CHURCH ELDERS

Biblical Traits Expected of Church Elders

teachers (Jn 21:15-19; Acts 20:28-35; Ja 5:13-18; 1 Pet 5:1-4). As elders shepherd God's flock, they are to help the sheep center their lives on God's kingdom, like Jesus did. Jesus said to his disciples,

"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's pleasure to give you the kingdom" – Luke 12:32

There was a temptation to worry and be anxious about physical provision, but Jesus reassured the flock that they could trust their heavenly Father and set their heart first on his kingdom (Mt 6:33). Church elders are to shepherd in such a way that the God's flock is helped to prioritize the reign of King Jesus and listen to his voice because he is the ultimate Shepherd and Overseer of their souls (Jn 10:14-16, 27-29; Heb 13:20-21; 1 Pet 2:24-25; 5:4). One pastor among the elders should not be expected to do all the shepherding of the flock. Shepherds need to equip more shepherds who can care for God's flock (Eph 4:11-12). Shepherding and care can be shared among elders, designated care teams, and the body needs to be equipped to serve one another within group environments where relationships are fostered and care happens (Acts 6:1-6; Gal 5:13; 1 Thes 5:11). Elders not only care about sheep that are found, they also pursue lost sheep in a way that reflects the Good Shepherd's heart, who laid down his life for his sheep, so that the lost will be brought into his one flock (Mk 6:34; Lk 15:1-7; Jn 10:14-18, 26-30; 1 Pet 2:24-25).

TEACHES & EQUIPS CHRIST'S BODY

Church elders need to teach and equip the body of Christ. Not all teachers are elders, but all elders are teachers. Paul wrote to Timothy, making it clear that those who serve as elders must be "able to teach" (1 Tim 3:2). This teaching role is why it's so important for elders to hold firmly to Gospel-Centered, Bible-Based, Theologically-Sound. When Paul wrote to Titus, he reinforced and expanded on the requirement that elders be able to teach. He wrote that an elder "must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it" (Titus 1:9). Elders proactively provide sound teaching but they also correct false teaching so that God's people are not deceived, unstable, or draw away by a distortion of Jesus and the gospel (Acts 20:29-32; 2

PROFILE OF CHURCH ELDERS

Biblical Traits Expected of Church Elders

Cor 11:1-4; Eph 4:14; Titus 1:10-11). Elders not only teach. They are to teach in such a way that the church community of disciples faithfully follow Jesus and obey his commands (Mt 28:18-20). They teach in a way that enables the body of Christ to do the work of the ministry actively, not just remain passive learners (Eph 4:11-16). This includes teaching the body so they are equipped to speak the truth of the gospel to one another so the whole body grows up (Eph 1:13-14; 4:11-12, 15-16, 21; Col 3:16). Teaching the body to speak the gospel to one another also prepares them to share the gospel to make new disciples from the harvest who will come to trust and follow Jesus (Mt 28:18-20; Mk 1:14-17; Lk 24:44-49; Jn 4:34-38; 2 Cor 5:17-21; Col 4:4-7; 1 Thes 1:8). Teaching by elders may include preaching a sermon on Sundays, but is not limited to this context. Teaching and equipping by elders can be done in a variety of contexts, like large church gatherings, smaller groups, instructing ministry teams, mentoring, active training with a few, or teaching during training courses. However it's done, church elders need to teach and equip Christ's body.

MANAGES THROUGH SERVING & TEAMWORK

Church elders need to manage God's household by serving and working together as a team. The household metaphor for God's church is used when traits for elders are described in 1 Timothy 3:4-5, and in other passages as well (Eph 2:18-19; 1 Tim 3:14-15; 1 Pet 2:5; 4:16-17). Paul uses the responsibility for "managing" God's household in several passages and carries the idea of leading, presiding over, having charge of, ruling well, managing well (Rom 12:8; 1 Thes 5:12; 1 Tim 3:4-5; 5:17). Peter exhorts elders about their responsibility to "exercise oversight" (1 Pet 5:2), but they were to do so under the authority of Jesus, the ultimate "Overseer of your souls," (1 Pet 2:24) that he wrote about earlier in his letter. Elders are to lead and manage God's church well. The household metaphor reminds us that the responsibility is to be done so that God's family members experience care as they would in a healthy family that is led or managed well (1 Tim 3:4-5). Think family, not corporate manager. Granted, some church families are larger and require elders and staff to manage differently, so things are done well; however, caring for brothers and sisters in God's household remains the primary aim of overseers. Elders in all churches should embody and foster a healthy culture of serving and teamwork, regardless of church size. Jesus was

PROFILE OF CHURCH ELDERS

Biblical Traits Expected of Church Elders

clear that serving others humbly, like he did, is what he expects of all disciples - especially those who will lead his church (Mk 10:35-45; Jn 13:1-17).

Church elders not only serve as individuals, but they must build teamwork in God's family. Elders build healthy teamwork among themselves, with church staff, and others in the church family, to accomplish vision and so that God's household is well led and flourishes, and to ensure that members of the church family uses their gifts to serve others in love (Lk 6:12-13; Acts 6:1-7; Rom 12:3-8; Phil 1:1, 27; 2:1-11; 4:2-3; Eph 4:1-16). It's important to realize that God has called our specific church to a specific role in the kingdom here and now. By pursuing that mission and vision, the elders must lead with unity to avoid sinful division or mission drift. Elders are to serve humbly and build teamwork so that God's household is managed well, cared for, and so the gospel of God's beloved Son is proclaimed so more outsiders will be welcomed into the Father's family (Mk 10:35-45; Jn 13:1-17; Lk 15:1,11-31; Acts 6:1-7; Rom 12:3-8; Phil 1:27; 2:1-11).

Now that you've read through these biblical traits for church elders, commit to clarifying and developing these traits in your church elders. That includes new elder candidates and existing elders where some traits may still need to be strengthened. Men considered elders/overseers/pastors should be required to align with the biblical traits for all elders.

Above all, be diligent, pray humbly, and rely on God's empowering presence as you multiply more church elders who are centered on King Jesus and serve for God's glory.

"Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen." - Ephesians 3:20-21

PROFILE OF CHURCH ELDERS

Biblical Traits Expected of Church Elders

COPYRIGHT

© 2026 TIMES12, Inc. Westmark Evangelical Free Church produced this document by adapting a TIMES12 document with permission for use under a current TIMES12 Partnership Agreement and Copyright License Agreement. For questions by TIMES12 Partners about using or adapting a resource or document, visit at times12.org/copyright-use. If you are not a current TIMES12 Partner and have questions about use or copyright permission, visit times12.org/copyrightpermission.

PROFILE OF CHURCH ELDERS

Biblical Traits Expected of Church Elders