

# What Grace Life Church Has Learned So Far About Elders

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*“...At the outset it must be said that the form of church government is not a major doctrine like the Trinity, the deity of Christ, substitutionary atonement, or the authority of Scripture...And church history attests that several different forms of government have worked fairly well for several centuries...It seems to me, then, that there ought to be room for evangelical Christians to differ amicably over this question, in the hope that further understanding may be gained.” Wayne Grudem*

## I. THE DANGERS OF SINGLE-ELDER LEADERSHIP

- Lack of Accountability
  - Excessive power
  - Excessive demands
- Benevolent Dictator

## II. BIBLICAL EVIDENCES

- In the New Testament churches, leaders were appointed to the offices of elder and deacon. The New Testament model for church leadership and ministry was a shared endeavor.

📖 *When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. Acts 14:23*

- “It is of note that the appointees were not ministerial apprentices or even seasoned pastors. Rather, Paul and Barnabas chose men in plurality from within each of the churches to serve as elders in their own congregations. We have no evidence that the office of elder evolved into a function comparable to modern full-time ministry service. Accordingly, we may conclude that godly men from within the church—men that demonstrated Christian character and leadership qualities—were set apart to serve their churches while continuing with their normal occupations.” Elders in Congregational Life, Phil Newton

📖 *For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, Titus 1:5*

📖 *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. Acts 20:28*

📖 *Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith Hebrews 13:7*

📖 *Shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. 1 Peter 5:2-3*

- “The framework may be fleshed out in different ways—depending on cultural influences, personalities, pressing needs, and gifts within the church. Nevertheless, several elements are essential to every local church. Even during the days of the apostles and prophets, the New Testament church had developed a structure that included the offices of elder and deacon. This pattern has been affirmed in the evangelical confessions, with elders primarily addressing the spiritual needs and deacons addressing the temporal needs of their congregations.” Elders in Congregational Life, Phil Newton

### III. GRACE LIFE TRANSITION TO ELDER LEADERSHIP

- Teach the Qualifications
  - ① Qualifications today would be more stringent and comprehensive (i.e. Conflict Resolution, Church Discipline, Conversion Counseling)
  - ② There is a sense in which the qualifications are relative to the maturity of the church.
- Initially used the term “Pastor’s Council” (eight years to “Elders”)
- Nominations by the Church Body
- Screening by the Pastor
- Affirmation by the Church Body

### IV. THE PRACTICAL BENEFITS

- Our primary goal is to function biblically. We have found that as we strive to function biblically, the practical benefits take care of themselves. We believe that the Scriptures are sufficient for every need.
  - ① Interdependence and Diversity of Gifts (1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12:4-6)
    - Each believer has differing gifts.
    - Each elder is specially gifted by God for the good of the entire church. The entire church body benefits from this diversity and sharing of leadership.
    - Likewise, each man is human with *feet of clay*, possessing blind spots that can be compensated for by other brothers.
    - God can miraculously blend these different personalities to function as one unified group through the work of the Spirit.
  - ② Shared Responsibility and Accountability
    - Our view is that the Senior Pastor is a “leader among equals” within the elder body.
    - The Old Testament offers many examples of God using one man to influence many. Within the group of disciples that Christ chose, He set aside Peter for a special role.
    - The Trinity, the Church, and the home all have a central *head*. The Senior Pastor, although equal in leadership, is still the primary spiritual leader and visionary for the entire church body because of his unique giftedness.
  - ③ Provides a model of spiritual unity to the body in how its members are to function

## V. HOW GRACE LIFE ELDERS FUNCTION

- Weekly Prayer
- Monthly Meeting
  - ①Ministry Reports
  - ②Financial Statement
- Committees
  - ①Personnel
  - ②Finance
- Divisional Shepherding
  - ①Discipline Issues
  - ②Teaching
  - ③Ministry
  - ④Lord's Supper
  - ⑤Church Membership

## VI. WHERE TO START

- Preaching the Word is the Pastor's first priority. Whatever else you do, you must be prepared to preach the Word. You may have to practice purposeful neglect. There may come a time in the week when everything else must be let go so that you can be ready to preach.
- Disciple the leadership team. Not all of the initial leadership team will eventually become elders.
- Minister to the body alongside individuals from the leadership team. This will allow you to discern if they should continue in a leadership role, plus it helps in shepherding and ministering to the body. Furthermore, this allows you to witness their interaction with the body in a shepherding role.

## RESOURCES

### Anchored In Truth

- *Authority and Order in the Church* by Jeff Noblit

### Miscellaneous Resources

- *Biblical Eldership* by Alexander Strauch
- *Elders in Congregational Life* by Phil Newton
- *Answering Key Questions Concerning Elders* by John MacArthur