

# What Must I Do To Be An Elder?

**Introduction.** It is God's plan for elders to be in the local church. I appreciate every man who serves as an elder because of the responsibility they accept, because of the time they give to the Lord's work, because they work with the least encouragement of any people I know, and because of the sacrifices they and their families make so they can serve. It's such an awesome task, and we should be teaching and supporting young men to step up and develop themselves to be elders. We need to be teaching and supporting young women to become the worthy and helpful wives of elders.

This lesson will explore six different steps for men who want to serve the Lord in this special and unique way.

## ***I. Be Sure Your Motive Is Pure***

- A. One must "desire" the position of a bishop (1 Timothy 3:1; "coveted after," 1 Timothy 6:10).
- B. Why do you desire the position? There are several motives.
  - 1. Right motives:
    - a) It is a good work (1 Timothy 3:1).
    - b) It equips the saints (Ephesians 4:11-12).
    - c) It saves souls (Hebrews 13:17).
  - 2. Wrong motives:
    - a) Personal glory (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; cp. Matthew 23:2, 5-7).
      - (1) Do you want your church to grow because you really want to reach people or because it will look good on you?
      - (2) This is an awkward question, but it will push you to brutal self-honesty. Even more than that, it will be a question between you and God.
    - b) "Under compulsion" (1 Peter 5:2).
      - (1) He is not forced by a wife who wants control.
      - (2) He is not guilted by brethren who desperately want elders.
    - c) "Filthy lucre" (1 Peter 5:2).
    - d) Control over everyone (3 John 9-10).

## ***II. Begin Preparation Early In Adulthood***

- A. Frequent approaches:
  - 1. "I've got other matters to tend to now; I'll focus on that when I'm a little older."
  - 2. "I'll think about it when I'm asked to serve."
  - 3. "I'll worry about that when I retire and have time to serve."
- B. Reality:
  - 1. An elder is one who is older in age (Acts 20:28; 1 Timothy 5:1, 17).
  - 2. He has shown faithful leadership of his family (1 Timothy 3:4-5; Titus 1:6).
  - 3. He cannot be a novice (1 Timothy 3:6).
  - 4. Other qualifications require years to come to maturity and demonstrate, since he must "first be proved" (1 Timothy 3:10).
- C. Begin preparation while you are young so you are ready when asked to serve. This is a good reason to remember God in your youth (Ecclesiastes 12:1).

- D. Are we planting seeds in the hearts of our young men to serve as faithful elders when they are old and mature enough? It needs to come from the pulpit, but maybe the greatest influence is from the members.

### **III. Develop Godly Character And Guard Your Reputation**

- A. A good elder is a balance of character (what you are before God) and reputation (what you are before men).
  - 1. With the exception of marriage and family qualifications, the qualifications for an elder are traits required of every Christian.
  - 2. Elders come from men who are married, with godly families, and spiritually mature. They are men who are what the Bible says we ought to be anyway.
- B. The elements of godly character include temperate, sober-minded, not given to wine, not greedy for money, gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous, steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, lover of what is good, just, and holy (1 Timothy 3:2-3; Titus 1:7-8).
- C. The elements of reputation include blameless, of good behavior, hospitable, and good testimony from those who are outside (1 Timothy 3:2, 7).
  - 1. An elder has to make the gap between public and private as thin as possible. This happens in two ways.
    - a) Be honest in your public talk. Don't pretend to be someone you're not (Luke 12:1-3, 56; 13:15).
    - b) Show more integrity in your private walk. Make every effort you put into looking good in public into the private moments when no one's around.
  - 2. The leaders people respect the most are the people with whom you get no surprises. Their public talk is honest. Their private conduct is sometimes even better than their public talk. In an age where authenticity is a non-negotiable, gaps between who are you publicly and who you are privately are deadly.
- D. Godly character is developed and one's reputation can be guarded by "holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught" (Titus 1:9).

### **IV. Focus On Your Family**

- A. Date and marry wisely.
  - 1. Since an elder has to be a husband, this requires a man who is married (1 Timothy 3:2).
  - 2. Since wives must meet qualifications too, he must marry wisely (1 Timothy 3:11). This implies dating wisely. What a man ultimately becomes lies largely in what kind of woman he marries.
- B. Be a godly husband.
  - 1. Don't be afraid to exercise proper headship (Ephesians 5:23), but realize that it is not a dictatorship or tyrannical rule.
  - 2. Headship includes authority (1 Corinthians 11:3), but it manifests itself in appropriate attitudes and service: "love," "gave Himself," "sanctify," "be holy and without blemish," "love wife as own body," "nourishes," and "cherishes" (Ephesians 5:25-29).
- C. Be a godly father.
  - 1. A faithful family is proof of his ability to lead the flock (1 Timothy 3:4-5).

2. Abraham is a good example of a faithful father (Genesis 18:19).
  - a) He had a relationship with God — “For I know him.”
  - b) He instructs — “he will command his children and his household.”
  - c) He has exemplary conduct — “after him.”
  - d) His emphasis is on obedience — “they shall keep the way of the Lord.”
  - e) He encourages right treatment — “to do justice and judgment.”
- D. Raise godly children.
  1. Submissive and reverent (1 Timothy 3:4).
  2. Faithful (Titus 1:6).
  3. Not rebellious and wicked (Titus 1:6).

## ***V. Understand Shepherding***

- A. The nature of the work is oversight and shepherding (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2).
  1. A “shepherd” sees his spiritual work as caring for souls of people. They do this work with godly respect and fear as a “steward of God” (Titus 1:7).
  2. A mere “leader” sees himself as holding the “office” of a shepherd in the local church. He sees his “leadership position” as authority to “run the church” with human wisdom, like an office manager runs a business.
- B. We normally understand oversight. We need insight into shepherding.
  1. Ezekiel condemned the unfaithful shepherds of his day (34:1-6):
    - a) They focused on themselves (vv. 2-3).
    - b) They didn’t help the sick or gather the straying or lost (v. 4).
    - c) The flock doesn’t always come to the shepherd; he must have the foresight to look for opportunities to do what should be done (“and none did search or seek after them,” v. 6).
    - d) The results of their failure was that the flock was scattered and they wandered (vv. 5-6).
  2. You can readily see the positive provisions of God as He took on the role of shepherd in Psalm 23:1-6.
- C. “The flock of God which is among you” (1 Peter 5:2):
  1. This limits the scope of the elder to the membership of the local church.
  2. Being an elder is motivated by genuine love and concern for people’s spiritual condition (Hebrews 13:17).
    - a) Maintaining the flock’s spiritual condition means that an elder must know how to teach (1 Timothy 3:2). This is more than he’s put in some time teaching a Bible class.
    - b) Keeping the church pure means that an elder must be “able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers” (Titus 1:9).

## ***VI. Don’t Be A Hireling***

- A. Being an elder or a bishop is more than a position; it is a “work” (1 Timothy 3:1).
- B. An elder has to be more than a hireling (John 10:12-13).
  1. A hireling is a hired hand who has no genuine interest in the flock. We would call him a “clock puncher” today. It was a temporary position in the Old Testament (Job 7:1; Isaiah 16:14).

2. Jesus was the perfect example of a shepherd. Note what He does and how the sheep respond (John 10:3-5, 11, 14). A legitimate, loving shepherd:
  - a) Has an intimate relationship with sheep: “hear his voice,” “calls sheep by name,” “for they know his voice,” “will by no means follow a stranger,” “know My sheep,” and “am known by My own.”
  - b) Leads the sheep, and the sheep follow (vv. 3-4).
  - c) Is sacrificial in his service (v. 11).
  - d) Does not leave when “wolves” (in whatever forms danger and difficulty may take) come because he cares about the sheep (vv. 12-13).
- C. An elder who is pleasing to God will do the work and be committed.

**Conclusion.** The question, “What must I do to be an elder?” is really thought-provoking. Being an elder is an honorable pursuit, and we want to encourage men and their wives to realize this noble dream. So as you look out among the congregation, think of the men who have put in the time to grow as they should.