

Introduction

On May 22, 2011, an EF-5 tornado with winds over 200 miles per hour went through Joplin, Missouri. It was the deadliest tornado in America, killing 161 people. The path of the tornado was $\frac{3}{4}$ mile wide and it destroyed everything in its path for thirteen miles. When this storm went through, there was not much remaining. It was also the costliest tornado, and did over \$2.8 billion in damages. After the storm, local, state, and federal teams helped to set in order what remained. There was a lot of work to be done to set things in order.

In the book of Titus, after Paul was released from prison in Rome, he and Titus went to the island of Crete. Apparently, they had heard that a spiritual storm had gone through and that it was devastated. Paul did not spend much time there. He surveyed the situation, and he went on to Nicopolis to spend the winter. Paul left Titus there to set in order what remains. Paul's instructions to Titus were prioritized. The first order of business was to set in elders in every city. Establishing the government is critical to setting things in order. This is true in society, in churches, and in families. The government of God's church is the elders. Paul has left Titus in Crete to set up the government by appointing elders in each church on the island.

This morning, I want to look at the office of elder. I will define a few terms that will help us understand that office. Second, we will look at the calling of an elder. Titus had an amazing job to do. He had to go to the various churches on the island of Crete and identify the men who were called to pastor the congregations, and then ordain them as elders. We will look at some things that he had to consider. I call them the fingers that point to the calling of a man.

Calling of Elders

1. Defining The Office Of Elder
2. Identifying The Call Of An Elder

1. Defining The Office Of Elder

The church is not run by kings. I am not an advocate of "king pastors" and there are a lot of churches today run by king pastors. I believe that the church is run by the plurality of elders with a lead elder presiding over the presbytery. Paul told Titus to appoint elders in every city. There was a plurality of elders in churches. In Acts 20 Paul met with the elders of the church at Ephesus, and it was not one, but a plurality of elders in the same church.

In Acts 11, Barnabas was sent to Antioch by the apostles in Jerusalem. They had heard that the gospel had spread to Antioch, and so they sent Barnabas to check things out. After observing the abundant grace of God there, the first thing that he did was to go find Paul and bring him there to help him. They taught the church and considerable numbers were added to the church. They started the church with a plurality of elders: Barnabas and Paul. That elder team grew and in Acts 13, we find that there were five elders at the church in Antioch. I see the plurality of elders all through the New Testament.

In 1 Timothy 3, Paul gave the qualifications for overseers. There are some that teach that you have an overseer in each church and that the elders serve the overseer. That is very common today. That false teaching began at the end of the first century by a man named Ignatius. He had concerns about false teachers, false apostles, and false prophets and so he developed a tier of leadership. Gene Getz describes how this took place in his book, *Elders and Leaders*.

Facing the results of what he considered a deteriorating situation, Ignatius moved the church toward a three-tier system of leadership. The primary leader of the elders/overseers in various churches in the early years of Christianity became “the bishop.” Using the freedom we see in the New Testament story to use different terminology to identify spiritual leaders, Ignatius redefined the term episkopos to refer only to the primary leader of “the elders.” In other words, the presbytery or body of elders reported directly to a single bishop, and the deacons in local churches basically reported to the elders and assisted them as well as the bishop with their ministries. As this change took place, the “bishop” in a believing community began to take on more and more authority, particularly because of Ignatius’ teachings...Unfortunately, this system set the stage for some of the serious leadership abuses that have haunted Christianity for centuries.”¹

Elders and overseers are one and the same. I want to go to Acts 20:17-18 for just a few minutes to talk about Paul’s meetings with the Ephesian elders. Paul was on his way to Jerusalem and stopped at Miletus, and he sent a message to the Ephesian elders to come and see him. In verse 18, we find that they came to him, so Paul is meeting with the elders of the church in Ephesus.

(Acts 20:17-18) “From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church. {18} And when they had come to him, he said to them, ‘You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time,’”

I am going to skip down to verses 28-31 where Paul exhorts them to be on guard for themselves and for all the flock. Shepherds watch over flocks, and we see that these elders are supposed to shepherd the church of God. The word for shepherd is poimano, which means shepherd or pastor. Elders are pastors. Elders pastor or shepherd the flock. You don’t have a pastor and then elders under that pastor. Elders pastor the flock; they are one and the same.

(Acts 20:28-30) “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. {29} I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; {30} and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.”

Notice what else Paul said in verse 28. He said “the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to shepherd the church.” Are these elders, shepherds, or overseers? They are all three. An overseer is just one of three terms to describe a pastor or elder. Paul has told Titus to appoint elders in every city, and he gave him a list of qualifications for elders. He gave Timothy the qualifications for overseers. They are the same office and the same requirements. This group of Ephesian elders were overseers and they were to pastor the flock. There was not a hierarchy of overseers over the elders; they were one and the same office. And, there was a plurality of elders at Ephesus and at all the churches.

One note about overseers and how that word is translated. In the KJV, the word episkopos is translated as overseer in Acts 20:28. But, in 1 Timothy 3:1, episkopos is translated as bishop. A bishop is an overseer or pastor. A bishop is not someone over the elders, or over a group of churches. It is just another word for overseer. This has caused some confusion in the church.

¹ **Error! Main Document Only.**Elders and Leaders by Gene Getz, pages 224-225.

I want to go to 1 Peter 5 for a few minutes. Peter gave three charges to elders. He wants them to pastor the flock with the right motives, right mindset, and right methods. But, what I want you to see is the tie between elders, overseers and shepherds. He is talking to elders. He tells the elders in verse two to shepherd the flock and to exercise oversight. The Greek word for elder is presbuteros, and it comes from presbus, which means an older man. This speaks of a man's maturity, and in the case of an elder, it refers to his spiritual maturity. Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 3:6 that overseers were not to be new converts. They have to be mature men.

(1 Pet 5:1-3) "Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, {2} 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; {3} nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock."

The second word I want to look at is the word shepherd. It is poimano, which means to shepherd or pastor. Poimano is a verb describing the action of shepherding, which is to lead, feed, and protect the flock. That is what pastors do. The elders, the spiritually mature men that have been made overseers by the Holy Spirit, are to lead, feed, and protect the flock. Peter tells these elders that they are to exercise oversight. The word for oversight is episkopeo. Epi means over and skopeo means to see. The word for overseer is episkopos, which is a noun. An overseer gives oversight to the flock. The term elder refers to the maturity and character of the office. The terms overseer and shepherd refer to the function of the office. Elders are to oversee or manage the affairs of the church and they are to lead, feed, and protect the flock. But, all three terms refer to the same office. There is not a hierarchy with an overseer having a team of elders serving them.

So, when Paul tells Titus to ordain elders in every city, he is telling him to identify those men who are spiritually mature and can oversee and manage the affairs of the church, and who can feed the flock sound doctrine.

2. Identifying The Call Of An Elder (Titus 1:5)

(Titus 1:5) "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."

Appointing elders is not something that is done quickly or without a large investment. Jesus gathered disciples and trained them. They were with Him for three years, watching, being taught, and then being coached to do the same works. They were His disciples. We see in Luke 6:12-13 that after Jesus had trained them, He prayed all night to see who the Father wanted Him to ordain. Then, He hands on them and made twelve of them His apostles. This was a model for us to follow.

(Luke 6:12-13) "It was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God. {13} And when day came, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles."

We saw that Barnabas and Paul were initially leading the church at Antioch, but by Acts 13, there were five men leading the church. They had trained and ordained three more to join their elders team. When they were sent out, they went into each city, preached the gospel, and then poured themselves into the lives of faithful men. After training them, they would pray and fast

and get guidance from the Lord. Then, they would lay hands on them and set them into the office of overseer, and commending them to the Lord. Luke records this in Acts 14:23. Notice that they prayed and fasted before ordaining them, just as Jesus had done.

(Acts 14:23) “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.

I want to look at Paul’s departure from the Ephesian elders at Miletus. In Acts 20:36-38, Luke records this scene. Paul has just exhorted them to watch over the flock, and then told them that they would not see him again. They began to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him. Why? Because Paul had poured into their lives. He had made a significant investment into their lives. There was a strong bond that had developed between Paul and these elders, and it is evident in how they showed their affections in this final meeting.

(Acts 20:36-38) “When he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. {37} And they *began* to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him, {38} grieving especially over the word which he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they were accompanying him to the ship.”

Paul told Timothy in 1 Timothy 5:22 not to lay hands on anyone too hastily and thereby share responsibility for the sins of others. The ordination of elders in every city was not to be done hastily; it was a process. That process involved training, mentoring and coaching, praying and fasting, and seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit before laying hands on someone. There are a number of fingers that point to the calling of a person as an overseer. Our text today is just one of five fingers. These are the things that Titus had to consider as he was setting things in order and ordaining elders in every city.

(1 Tim 5:22) “Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily and thereby share responsibility for the sins of others; keep yourself free from sin.”

A. God’s Calling

The first and most important finger that points to someone being an elder is God’s calling. A couple of years ago at a national church convention, the leaders of that group of churches encouraged their leaders to ordain women, and in particular, black women, so that their churches would be more balanced. I think that the church leadership should reflect its congregation, but you never ordain people because of sex or color. You ordain people that are called by God as pastors. If you put people into office that are not called to be pastors, the church will suffer. Large numbers of pastors resign every year, and one of the factors is they were never called in the first place. In John 10, John calls them hirelings. If someone is pastoring for the money, position or anything else, he is a hireling. A true shepherd is going to shepherd the flock because he is a shepherd. He will not leave when the going gets rough. He will not leave when there are attacks. A man who is called will lay his life down for the sheep.

(John 10:12-13) “He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. {13} He flees because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep.”

How does God call men? What does it look like? We looked at Acts 20:28 a little earlier. Paul exhorted the Ephesian elders to be on guard for themselves and the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers..." It was the Holy Spirit that made them overseers. The Holy Spirit is God. The Holy Spirit very often speaks to us through prophetic words.

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

Last week we looked at Acts 13:1-4, where the leaders of the church at Antioch were ministering to the Lord, and the Holy Spirit said to set apart Barnabas and Paul for the work He had called them to do. They were then sent out as apostles. The Holy Spirit gave a prophetic word about their calling. I believe we should seek prophetic words about the calling of people.

I was called as a pastor before I was even formed in my mother's womb. When I was about four, the Lord spoke to my mother in Houston, Texas and told her that I was going to be a pastor. In 1986, I was ordained as a pastor. Other men recognized the call of God on my life and ordained me. On August 11, 1996, ten years later, Karen and I were at Robert and Sharon Materna's house in Atlanta, Georgia to hear a prophet from Oklahoma named Lattie McDonough. I was in my final days as a professional golfer. In 1995 the Lord told me that 1996 was going to be my last year in golf and that he wanted me to plant a church. Listen to this prophetic word about my calling by a prophet that had never met me, seen me, or heard of me before.

Father, I bless this man whose field is the world. You have used (him) much more than he realizes. And I offer thanks, God, for Bill and for his family, Lord. Now I ask You that Your hand continue upon him. I ask You, God, to bless him in his vocation. Open new vistas of opportunity. Make him visible as a man of God in just every area that he goes in, Lord.

I ask You, my God, touch this family that weariness not take hold of them in all their travels that they must do. I ask You, God, for that in the name of Jesus. And may there be no weariness of heart, but to know that I have called you to the world and I have used a unique thing to put you out there amongst a certain segment. So know that it is my calling. I want to tell you, I believe God is confirming your call again tonight, Bill, that it is out there. I know you didn't have any doubts but I want to tell the world. I want to tell the world that God has called this man. Hallelujah! And He's confirming the call tonight to touch a unique portion of the population.

Seeds that you have sown and seeds that you will continue to sow will surely bear fruit and much of it. Much of it you'll never know about until eternity. But there will be enough fruit that you will see so that you'll know that it's good fruit. I see it full ripe, and you just taking a bite and juice running down your chin. Hallelujah! Good fruit. Good fruit says the Lord. Good fruit says the Lord. Thank You, God. Thank You, God. Thank You, God.

B. Man's Aspiration

The second finger that points to the calling of a man is a man's aspiration. In 1 Timothy 3:1, Paul wrote, "It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires *to do*." The Greek word that is used for aspire is *oregomai*, which means to

stretch oneself, or to reach out after, or to desire. A man should have a desire to pastor. If he does not have a desire or aspire to the office, there is probably not a call on his life.

G3713. oregomai, or-eg'-om-ahee; mid. of appar. a prol. form of an obsol. prim. [comp. G3735]; to stretch oneself, i.e. reach out after (long for):--covet after, desire.

A few years ago, I gave the leadership team at the church that I was pastoring a survey to fill out. In that survey, I asked a very direct question about whether they felt called to be a pastor. I wanted to work with those that felt called and help them fulfill the calling on their life. Unfortunately, many of the people did not fill out the survey because they did not feel called. Your worth is not in what you do or in a title. Our worth comes from being a child of God. Christ laid down his life for us with something more precious than silver or gold, His own precious blood. He considers us very valuable. But, some of the people did not want to admit that they really did not feel called to be a pastor. We need all the members of the body, and if God has not called you to be a pastor, that is okay. We just need to find out what God has called you to do and help you begin to do the things He has called you to do.

When I was in high school, I spent my week-ends hitting golf balls. In the winter time, when it was freezing cold outside, I would practice until I could not feel my hands. I would go inside and warm up and then go back outside again. I wrestled in the winter to get stronger. In the summers, when I would go back to Iran to be with my family, I would get up and practice at 4:30 in the morning, because it was too hot to practice later in the day. I share this because no one made me do these things. I aspired to be a professional golfer. When someone aspires to do something, there will be outward evidence of this inward desire. Here are some other things that point to a person aspiring to the office of overseer.

1. An aspiring man will try and learn everything he can about pastoring and shepherding. He will read books. He will ask questions. He will seek to be disciplined and mentored by shepherds. A pastor will pastor people without the title, because he is called to pastor.
2. An aspiring man will study Scripture. He will have a desire to teach and feed other people. This man will be reading, studying, and meditating on Scripture. The word of God will always be on his heart and in his words. He will study to show himself approved to God as a workman, who handles accurately the word of God.

(2 Timothy 2:15) "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

3. An aspiring man will be working on his weaknesses. If he lacks patience, he will memorize verses on patience, like I did, and ask God for more patience. An aspiring man will be trying to nail down these qualifications in his life. He will be asking the Lord to change and grow him in these areas. He will be open to correction and input from others.
4. An aspiring man will have a zeal for the household of God. Isaiah 9:6-7 tells us that those who have a governmental call will have a zeal to help accomplish the work. In John 2, when Jesus drives out the money changers, the disciples remembered that "zeal for thy house will consume me." There is a passion, zeal, and enthusiasm about the local church.

(Isaiah 9:6-7) "For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. {7} There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this."

(John 2:17) "His disciples remembered that it was written, "ZEAL FOR THY HOUSE WILL CONSUME ME.""

C. Presbytery's Confirmation

The third finger that points to a man's calling to be an elder is the confirmation of the presbytery. Presbytery means a group of elders; it is the plural of presbuteros, an elder. Once a church has been established, when elders are added to the team of elders, the elders should be in agreement with bringing on the man. When a person is brought on as an elder, he needs to have the same vision and there should be unity of doctrine. The team cannot be divided. I have pastored a church where our leaders were not unified, and that house did not stand. I have been in other churches where the leaders were not unified, and those that were not in agreement had to leave so that the church could move forward. So, bringing on additional elders is a team decision.

In the early church, the elders would lay hands on the person and ordain him. This would not be just for elders; it was true for sending people out. We saw in Acts 13 that the elders laid hands on Barnabas and Paul and sent them out for the work God called them to do. In 1 Timothy 4:14, the elders or presbytery laid hands on Timothy. The elders are confirming the call on this person to the work, whether it be as an elder, deacon, apostle, whatever.

(Acts 13:2-3) "While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." {3} Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away."

(1 Tim 4:14) "Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery."

In new works where elders have not been set in, it is the work of apostles to set in elders. Or, in churches where a storm has gone through and they are without elders, as it appears to be the case in Crete, it was an apostle like Titus who was going to set things in order by appointing elders in all the churches. Paul gave Titus the things to look for in a man to help him identify those who were called and capable of leading those churches. Apostles flow in all of the giftings. They can teach, prophesy, evangelize, pastor, and train and release leaders. In new works, the leader needs to be able to move in all these areas.

D. Flock's Confirmation

The fourth finger that points to a man's calling to be an elder is the flock's confirmation. Some churches have congregational rule. They bring in the pastor and they make all the major decisions. The elders or pastors simply feed the flock, but have no other authority. I do not see this Scripturally. I see that Paul, Barnabas, Titus and other apostles set in the pastors. When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that there were believers in Antioch, they sent Barnabas there to see

what was going on. The apostles set in someone to lead that work, not the new congregation. Having said that, I do believe that one of the fingers that points to the calling of a man is the sheep. Jesus said in John 10:3-4 that the sheep hear the shepherd's voice and follow him. He said that they will not follow a stranger. Why would you ordain a shepherd that the sheep won't listen to or follow? I think it is wise to get the input from the congregation. Any presbytery that does not listen to the congregation about things is unwise.

(John 10:2-5) "But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep. {3} To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. {4} When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. {5} A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers."

On a practical basis, it is better to raise up people within the congregation than bring in an outsider. Sometimes, there is not someone within the body so an outsider is brought in. In those cases, it is wise to have input from the congregation about the people being considered. Get feedback on the sermon that a potential candidate gives. Get feedback on the personality and relational skills from the congregation. If they cannot connect with him, they will not follow him.

When I have brought on other pastors, I have always tried to get the feedback of the congregation. When questions or concerns were voiced, I listened and tried to get those resolved. I believe that Titus would have spoken to people in the different flocks and got their input about the possible elders. I also think that he would have observed the flocks to see who they were willing to listen to and follow.

E. Man's Qualifications

The fifth and final finger that points to a man's calling to the office of overseer is his ability to meet the requirements given in Titus 1:5-9, 1 Tim 3:1-8. Paul gave these qualifications to Titus and Timothy for a reason. If any man did not meet these qualifications, he was not to be put into office. We will be looking at these requirements next week.

Conclusion and Applications

This morning we have defined the office of elder or overseer, and then looked at how to identify those who are called to be elders in the church. At the Connection Church, we have been holding leadership meetings on Wednesday mornings. One of my most important jobs is to pour into the faithful men that God brings us. I am to train and raise up leaders in the church. It is a joy and a priority to do this. The goal is to set in elders in this church, just as Titus was being charged with doing in the churches at Crete. The criteria that Titus was given by Paul, will be the same criteria that we use in establishing elders. We will be looking at these criteria in more depth next week as we continue our study of Titus.

Introduction

- 1. Defining The Office Of Elder** (Acts 11, 13, 20, 1 Tim 3:1-7, Acts 20:17-18, 28-30, 1 Pet 5:1-3)
Presbuteros – elder
Poimano – shepherd, pastor
Episkopos – overseer, bishop

- 2. Identifying The Call Of An Elder** (Titus 1:5, Luke 6:12-13, Acts 14:23, 20:36-38, 1 Tim 5:22)
 - A. God’s Calling** (John 10:12-13, Acts 20:28, Acts 13:1-4)
 - B. Man’s Aspiration** (1 Tim 3:1, 2 Tim 2:15, Is 9:6-7, Jn 2:17, 1 Pet 5:1-3)
 - C. Presbytery’s Confirmation** (1 Tim 4:14, Acts 13:2-3)
 - D. Flock’s Confirmation** (John 10:2-5)
 - E. Man’s Qualifications** (Tit 1:5-9, 1 Tim 3:1-8)

Conclusion and Applications