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# BIBLICAL ELDERSHIP

**S t u d y   G u i d e**

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Restoring the Eldership  
to its Rightful Place  
in the Local Church

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BIBLICAL ELDERSHIP  
R E S O U R C E S

Biblical Eldership: Study Guide

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## How to Use the *Biblical Eldership Study Guide*

The *Biblical Eldership Study Guide* is updated for the revised edition of *Biblical Eldership: Restoring the Eldership to its Rightful Place in the Local Church* (2023).

This guide is designed for group study with facilitation by an experienced teaching or mentoring elder. A companion volume, the *Teacher's Manual to the Biblical Eldership Study Guide*, is available to assist the group facilitator and to ensure that the questions are answered consistent with the book. Please use this valuable tool for ensuring biblical accuracy. Most of the questions require the student to grapple with the texts of Scripture. The *Teacher's Manual* is free online at [www.biblicaleldership.com](http://www.biblicaleldership.com).

The *Study Guide* can be used by an individual for self-directed training in preparation for future pastoral leadership. This may be necessary if an experienced teacher is not available.

There are several ways to use this guide.

**Level 1:** A person interested in a brief survey of biblical eldership can read and answer the study questions from the Introduction and chapters 1 and 2, with only 32 pages of reading. This provides a simple overview of the subject. This can be done individually or in a group directed by a knowledgeable facilitator.

### **Introduction (pages 11–19)**

**Chapter 1**    **New Principles for Leadership (pages 21–30)**

**Chapter 2**    **Pastoral Leadership (pages 31–42)**

**Level 2:** A person who wants to know more about biblical eldership, and specifically about the qualifications and responsibilities of biblical elders, can read and answer the study questions from the Introduction and chapters 1–5, with 67 pages of reading. This can easily be done in six weeks, covering one lesson a week.

### **Introduction (pages 11–19)**

**Chapter 1**    **New Principles for Leadership (pages 21–30)**

**Chapter 2**    **Pastoral Leadership (pages 31–42)**

**Chapter 3**    **Shared Leadership (pages 43–59)**

**Chapter 4**    **Qualified Leadership (pages 61–68)**

**Chapter 5**    **Male Leadership (pages 69–77)**

**Level 3:** A person seeking more in-depth study of the biblical doctrine of eldership can read and answer the study questions from the Introduction, chapters 1–5, and chapters 16, 17, 20, 23, 24. This provides the student with a sampling of key chapters of the book. This includes 112 pages of reading, and would be a good eleven-week study.

### **Introduction (pages 11–19)**

**Chapter 1**    **New Principles for Leadership (pages 21–30)**

**Chapter 2**    **Pastoral Leadership (pages 31–42)**

**Chapter 3**    **Shared Leadership (pages 43–59)**

**Chapter 4**    **Qualified Leadership (pages 61–68)**

**Chapter 5**    **Male Leadership (pages 69–77)**

**Chapter 16**   **Worthy of Double Honor: Elders Who Lead Well (pages 167–175)**

- Chapter 17** Worthy of Double Honor: Elders Who Labor in Preaching and Teaching
- Chapter 20** Appoint Elders as I Directed (pages 207–214)
- Chapter 23** Able to Exhort in Sound Doctrine and Rebuke False Teachers (pages 233–239)
- Chapter 24** Peter’s Exhortation and Encouragement to the Elders (pages 241–253)
- Chapter 30** Summary Points (optional reading pages 317–322)

**Level 4:** A man actively pursuing pastoral leadership should complete the entire *Study Guide*. This is a good starting point for training a candidate for assuming the solemn responsibility of shepherding God’s precious flock, guarding the church from false teachers, and of teaching and modeling New Testament Christianity.

Further explanation and discussion of the material presented in the book *Biblical Eldership* and the *Study Guide* is available on a podcast conversation with Alexander Strauch and David Anderson for all chapters of *Biblical Eldership*. For auditory learners, an audio version of *Biblical Eldership* is available through Amazon. You can also find our online School of the Shepherds program and many more resources at [www.biblicaleldership.com](http://www.biblicaleldership.com).

**For sources of quotations in this guide, please refer to the full volume of *Biblical Eldership*.**

# Scriptural List of Qualifications

## 1 Timothy 3:1-7

1. Above reproach
2. Husband of one wife
3. Sober-minded
4. Self-controlled
5. Respectable
6. Hospitable
7. Able to teach
8. Not a drunkard
9. Not violent
10. Gentle
11. Not quarrelsome
12. Not a lover of money
13. Manages his own household well . . . children submissive
14. Not a recent convert
15. Well thought of by outsiders

## Titus 1:6-9

1. Above reproach
2. Husband of one wife
3. Children are believers [faithful]
4. Not arrogant
5. Not quick-tempered
6. Not a drunkard
7. Not violent
8. Not greedy for gain
9. Hospitable
10. A lover of good
11. Self-controlled
12. Upright
13. Holy
14. Disciplined
15. Holds firm to the trustworthy word as taught
  - Able to give instruction in sound doctrine
  - Able to rebuke those who contradict sound doctrine

## 1 Peter 5:1-5

1. Not under compulsion
2. Willingly
3. Not for shameful gain
4. Eagerly
5. Not domineering
6. Example to the flock

# *Getting Started: Introduction*

*“When most Christians hear of church elders, they think of an official board of directors, lay officials, or influential people within the local church. They think of elders as policymakers, fund raisers, decision-makers, or advisors to the pastor. I call them ‘board elders.’ ”*

...

*“Since the two most prominent apostles charged the elders—and no other person or group—to shepherd God’s flock, we can conclude that, in biblical terms, the elders are responsible for the pastoral oversight of the individual flock God has assigned to them (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:3).”*

## Read the Introduction to the book

1. What is the point of the opening story of the author attending a music concert at a church?

2. According to the author, what is the purpose of this book?

3. Briefly explain what the author means by the following statement:

Be prepared to discover teachings and principles that may be unfamiliar to you and that you might consider to be radical. You may learn new terminology and at the same time find familiar church vocabulary and common church traditions missing. This is intentional because my goal is, by God’s grace, to accurately represent the words and teaching of Jesus, Paul, Peter, James, and Luke as recorded in the New Testament.

4. Why do you think that some Christians think that pastoral eldership is “a new and subversive concept that threatens the very life of the church,” or a heresy to be avoided.

5. Explain the difference between board elders and pastoral elders. Give one illustration of each concept.

6. In short, how would you demonstrate to someone that pastoral leadership by a plurality of scripturally qualified elders is a thoroughly biblical doctrine?

Author's Notes

The New Testament offers more instruction regarding elders than other important church subjects such as the Lord's Supper, the Lord's Day, baptism, or spiritual gifts.

7. What are the three distinguishing features of a biblically defined eldership?



Which one of the three do you know the most about? Explain your answer.

Which one of the three do you know the least about? Explain your answer.

If you were to list the three in order of importance, how would you do that? Explain your answer.

Author's Notes

Timothy Witmer, author of *The Shepherd Leader*, is right on target when he states: "you will see that 'shepherding' is at the very heart of the biblical picture of leadership."

**8.** Because there is a crying need for more pastoral leaders, it is tempting to allow unqualified, unprepared men to assume leadership in the church. But this is a time-proven formula for failure and long-term problems. Specifically, what kind of problems would be created by appointing unqualified and unequipped men to "the office of overseer" (1 Tim. 3:1)?

**9.** From the Scriptural List of Qualifications on page iii, list five qualifications that you did not know were required of church elders.

Which five were you most familiar with?

Was there one qualification that especially stood out to you as significant? Explain.

**10.** A very important concept in this book is equality among the elders (= parity) and functional diversity within eldership. Do your best to explain what this means or what it would look like.

**11.** From the book *Perspectives on Church Government: Five Views of Church Polity*, edited by Chad O. Brand and R. Stanton Norman, which view are you most familiar with? Explain.

Which view are you most unfamiliar with? Explain.

**12.** From what you have read so far in this chapter, what one piece of evidence is most compelling to convince you that “The Plural-Elder-Led Church” view is most scriptural?

**13.** What is the fundamental principle of hermeneutics the author claims the seminary teachers and students violated regarding the subject of eldership.

**14.** In your own words, explain the experience the author had in a seminary class on church polity. What did you learn from this illustration?

## *Jesus's New Principles for Leadership*

*"In the most unforgettable way, Jesus dramatically illustrated everything he had been teaching his disciples about humility, love, sacrificial service, and greatness by washing the feet of his disciples."*

...

*"The symbol of an authentic Christian leadership is not the purple robe of an emperor, but the coarse apron of a slave; not a throne of ivory and gold, but a basin of water for the washing of feet." (John Stott)*

### Read chapter 1

1. After reading the first two pages of chapter 1, list in bullet point form what you learned about Jesus Christ the Teacher.

2. After reading A. B. Bruce's quotation from *The Training of the Twelve*, what did you learn about Jesus Christ and the twelve apostles?

#### Author's Notes

In Christ's kingdom, leadership positions and the exercise of authority entail humility, servanthood, brotherhood, and Christlike love. This new, countercultural teaching provides the foundational principles for our study of New Testament elders and Christian leadership in general.

3. Explain the traditional leadership pyramid (whether secular or religious).

Explain how Jesus reversed the traditional leadership pyramid.

4. Explain what created continuous conflict among the twelve disciples.

5. Explain the meaning of the paradox, “if anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.” (See endnote 4 in the full book for help.)

6. What was Jesus’s response to James and John seeking for themselves the chief thrones in the kingdom next to Jesus?

In what ways do we, like James and John, seek higher status and positions for ourselves?

7. Using bullet points, list what Jesus did that shocked the disciples regarding greatness in the kingdom.

8. Read Luke 22:24–27. This is a significant passage for understanding our Lord's radical new teachings. What did Jesus say to correct the disciples' thinking and sinful attitudes?

Author's Notes

A loveliness of spirit and a tenderness of heart radiated from the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so should his character radiate from us as well.

9. Read Matthew 23:1–12. What lessons can you draw from this insightful passage of Scripture to help you lead the Lord's people in truly authentic, biblical ways? Be specific.

In what ways do we imitate the religious leaders Jesus condemned by our own attempts to appear impressive to others?

**10.** Define the New Commandment (John 13:34-35) Jesus gives his disciples.

List two reasons why it is essential for an elder team to practice the New Commandment.

Author's Notes "[The ten other disciples] were outraged because they wanted purple robes, ivory thrones, and golden crowns for themselves. They were all 'card-carrying members of the 'self-seekers' club'" (Lewis B. Smedes).
--

**11.** Make a list of five characteristics of the strongman leader. Make a second list of five characteristics of the Christlike, servant leader.

Strongman Leader	Servant Leader

**12.** Read 3 John 9-10. List several ways in which Diotrephes's style of leadership contrasted with Christ's.

13. As you consider all that you learned about Christlike leadership, what changes do you need to make to your own leadership style?



## *Pastoral Leadership*

*“If a body of elders lacks certain gifts or dynamic personalities, the elders’ Christlike love for the people can compensate for such deficiencies. But there is no substitute for a lack of personal love or warmth on the part of the elders for the people. Without a loving, caring relationship with the people, the elders are an empty shell.”*

...

*“Spiritual laziness, as well as a lack of self-discipline, is a major reason why most churches never establish a biblical eldership. Too many men are more than willing to let someone else fulfill their spiritual responsibilities, whether it be their wives or the ‘trained’ professionals.”*

### Read chapter 2

1. When you hear of the shepherd-sheep metaphor applied to the elders, how does this metaphor affect your understanding about biblical church elders?

2. The biblical imagery of a shepherd and his flock has many dimensions to it. List what you think are the four most important characteristics of a good shepherd. Explain your answers.

#### Author’s Notes

Shepherd leaders are not “a board of directors,” sitting in a meeting once a month making decisions and letting others do the work shepherding. They are to be shepherds who are out among the people feeding, guiding, and lovingly caring for the people’s needs.

3. In what Scripture passages do Paul and Peter use the verb shepherd to describe the elders' work?

What one important fact did you learn from each of the above passages that was most enlightening to you regarding the subject of biblical elders?

4. Some church leaders say that the shepherd-sheep motif is out of style for today. Hence, we should use the business CEO model and terminology. How would you answer someone who wants to replace the shepherd-sheep imagery for a more modern image?

5. The author emphasizes the elder's visible presence among the people. He warns about being an invisible elder. What did you learn that will make you more visible and present among the people?

Author's Notes Shepherd imagery beautifully blends the concepts of authority and leadership with self-sacrifice, loving care, and intimate relationships.
--

6. Why should the teaching ministry (or feeding ministry) be of "first importance" to the elders?

7. List several specific dangers that your local church needs protection from at this very time.

8. Why is Paul so deeply concerned that elders be mentally and spiritually “alert” (Acts 20:28-31)?

How would you practically prepare yourself to be mentally and spiritually “alert” in order to protect the church from the inevitability of “fierce wolves” attacking the church body?

Author's Notes  
"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hos. 4:6). "I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding" (Jer. 3:15).

9. In general terms, what does practical care for the people entail?

When it comes to the practical care of people, where are you, as an individual, strongest?

**10.** How would you answer someone who says, “You can’t expect a man to work all day, raise a family, and help shepherd a local church.”

**11.** R. Paul Stevens wrote:

For tentmakers to survive three full-time jobs (work, family and ministry), they must also adopt a sacrificial lifestyle. Tentmakers must live a pruned life and literally find leisure and rest in the rhythm of serving Christ (Matt. 11:28). They must be willing to forego a measure of career achievement and private leisure for the privilege of gaining the prize (Phil. 3:14). Many would like to be tentmakers if they could be wealthy and live a leisurely and cultured lifestyle. But the truth is that a significant ministry in the church and the community can only come by sacrifice.

What is a “tentmaking elder.”

What specific contributions can you, as a tentmaking elder, make to shepherding a church body.

**12.** Biblically speaking, what does a busy elder need to remember in order to protect himself from pastoral burnout due to overwork?

Author’s Notes A healthy, growing flock of sheep doesn’t just happen accidentally. It is the result of good leadership and skillful management of the entire flock.
--

13. Using the list of the biblical qualifications for an elder, which five qualifications would be most needed in order to feed God's flock? Explain your answers. (See page iii for list of qualifications.)



An Invaluable Online Training Program for  
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“One of the most important factors in shaping an effective pastoral eldership is training, training, training! Educating, mentoring, and developing future leaders and teachers must be a priority. Yet, many times elders have lamented to me, ‘No one ever trained me!’ That is tragic because biblical Christianity clearly emphasizes the roles of teaching, modeling, imitation, and discipleship. Training needs to be in the DNA of every local congregation.”

Alexander Strauch

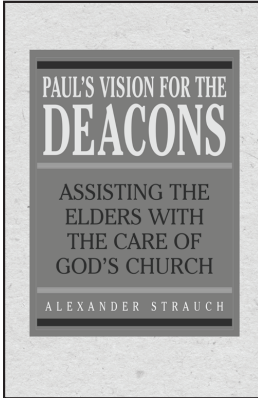
Working with a team of shepherd elders, Alexander Strauch has been instrumental in launching an online tool for training and equipping elders within local churches. Biblical Eldership Resources offers systematic training in order to develop present and future generations of local church elders.

All the instructional material on the website is rooted in Bible exposition. This unique website, combined with the publishing ministry already has a widespread influence throughout the world and can have a long-term, lasting impact on leaders and churches in the future.

The website offers a structured curriculum called *School of the Shepherds*. The videos and other curriculum available on this website are designed to be used by individuals or by small groups. Visit the website and choose the resources that best fit the needs in your church or your personal ministry.



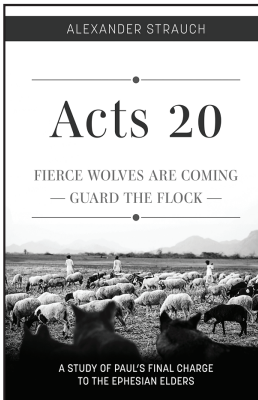
# *Resources for Church Leaders*



## **Paul's Vision for the Deacons** by Alexander Strauch

Views on the roles of deacons vary widely among evangelical Christians. What does the Scripture actually teach about deacons and their role the church?

A separate study guide is also available, making these resources an excellent training program for deacons, as well as the elders who lead them.



## **Acts 20: Fierce Wolves are Coming; Guard the Flock** by Alexander Strauch

God has given us a special gift in Paul's farewell message to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20. There is nothing else in the New Testament comparable to this passage and it's message is urgently needed today. Indeed, every new generation of church leaders needs to discover afresh Paul's instructions to the Ephesian elders.