

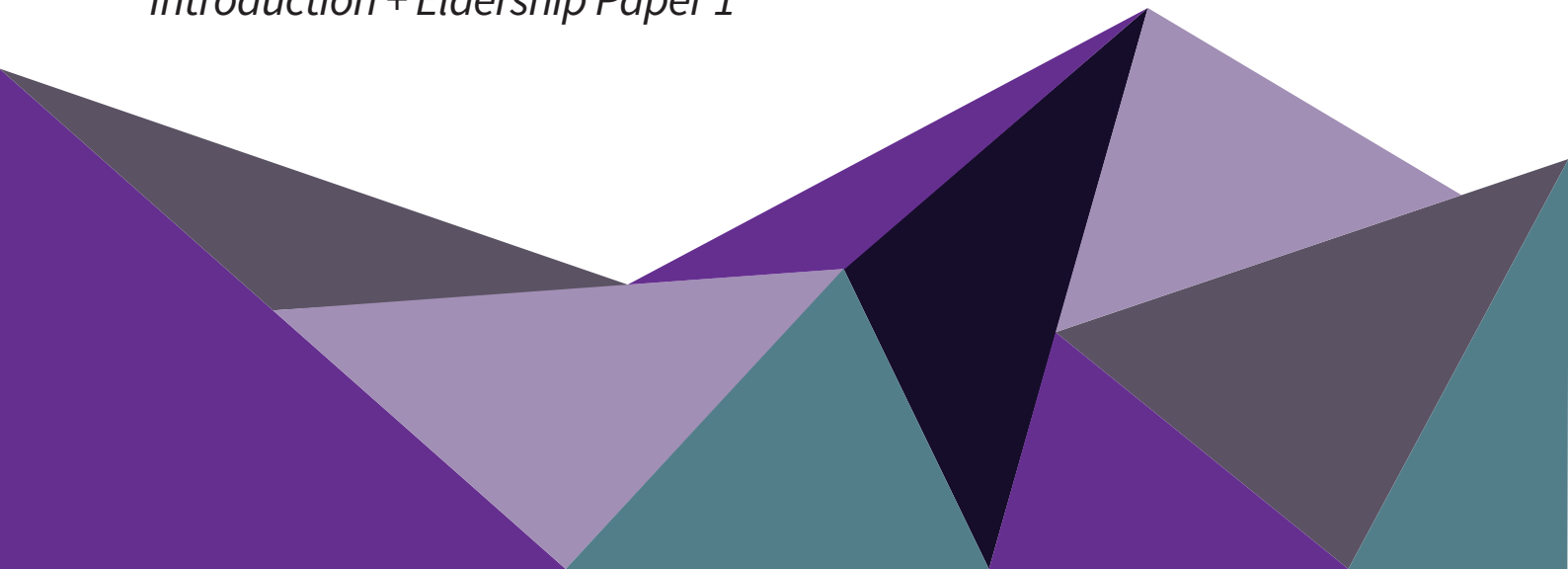


QLD PRESBYTERIAN
ELDER TRAINING

THE ELDERSHIP PAPERS

FOR THE TRAINING OF ELDERS IN THE
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF QUEENSLAND

Introduction + Eldership Paper 1



Extracted from

The Eldership Papers 2023-24

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Introduction to The Eldership Papers

This introduction sets out the principles¹ behind *The Eldership Papers* and introduces guidelines for how they may be used. More broadly these principles encapsulate patterns of Presbyterianism that are affirmed throughout the papers.

I have included a personal assessment of where we are as a denomination as context is important to consider when we are developing a healthy eldership.

Our denomination has fallen on hard times, not only because of the problems associated with Prescare and the resulting receivership, but also because in recent times it has been popular to disparage denominations more generally. Yet, it is my opinion that many of our present problems are a result of a lack of healthy engagement and accountability at all levels of our denomination's life. *The Eldership Papers* are unashamedly built on the principles of Presbyterianism. We need to be interdependently responsible to each other, not only in the local church, but throughout the structures of our denomination. Elders are fundamental to that health as they are representative at every level of our denomination's life and structure.

Principles

Minister-led: For healthy eldership to flourish, elders need to be primarily equipped to do the work of the elder by their own pastors. This is true for several reasons. First, this is a primary responsibility of pastors, who having been theologically trained, are able to train their elders in bible-based eldership. Second, healthy eldership training should be shaped to the different contexts of our many and varied churches: church size, resources and geographic situations etc. Thus,

¹ These principles are based on David Bailey's contribution to the CMR Report on Elders' Training for the 2022 Assembly.



the minister is ideally placed to nuance any eldership training to the needs of their particular church context. Finally, the minister is the ‘leader’ of the Session. He is the ‘first among equals’ and in particular is accountable to the Presbytery for the overall health of the church. As he models humble learning, living and leading this is the primary catalyst for the elders’ humble posture of learning, living and leading as they serve the people of God.

Session-based: According to our shared Presbyterian convictions, Session is the church’s primary leadership team regardless of church size, staffing levels or experiments in models of ministry. Queensland Presbyterians are, quite literally, defined by their commitment to leadership by elders. Eldership training is best conducted and most helpful to a local church when it is undertaken as a whole Session of elders, learning together as Christian men, committed to their Session becoming healthier, for the sake of the church entrusted to their care and God’s mission to reach the lost.

Presbytery-oversight: Our hope is that Eldership Training will be a helpful tool for Presbyteries to oversee, through encouragement and direction of individual Sessions within their regions. Eldership Training will not solve significant problems within a Session. Rather, it might identify them. This may be particularly helpful if prescribed at a timely juncture by an attentive Presbytery. Identification of issues happens naturally as a result of the exploration and discussion around what eldership and Sessions should be. This assists in recognising and more clearly articulating those specific problems and challenges. In other words, we should expect healthy eldership training to be instrumental in exposing problems within the Session as well as giving them some tools to solve them.

How to use The Eldership Papers

Training Objectives

- To understand the God-given role of elders in the life of the local church
- To understand the role of elders in the life of our denomination
- To develop a team (Session) committed to spiritual leadership and caring of the household of God
- To provide tools, and patterns of serving that maintain the unique role of the body of elders



The 'Audience'

- Pastors – thinking through the role of elders and the Session within God's Household
- Existing elders and Sessions reminding themselves of God's call to the noble task of overseer
- Training for potential elders

The Process

Preparation

Each paper is designed to promote discussion and interaction around the ideas of eldership within the Presbyterian denomination in Queensland. Therefore, each paper should be distributed at least a week before the meeting where the paper is to be discussed. The expectation is that the paper will be prayerfully read through, set questions answered, and areas of concern or clarification identified.

Discussion

The discussion of these issues should be warm and searching. These papers deal with God's Word, his Church and the role of the eldership in the life of the church for the sake of God's household. This is a discussion among brothers of Christ for the sake of Christ's Bride.

A significant part of the process of discussion is to develop and be committed to a group identity as elders. This will enable elders to be committed to more than just efficiently covering all items of an agenda at Session meetings but also to care for their life and witness as elders, for the sake of Christ and His church, which they serve.

It is hoped these papers will promote within a local Presbyterian Church a dynamic local leadership that will be used by God to develop other healthy leadership within the local church and a community of God's people who love God and their neighbour.



Our Context: A Personal Reflection

Introduction

Understanding the external factors that shape and form the people of our congregations is important when it comes to nurturing healthy and fruitful churches.

I realise that this hopefully ‘dates’ this introduction but our context, as challenging as it is, surely must be taken into consideration as we think about going forward and especially as we look at the fundamental role of eldership in our churches and our denomination.

Canoeing the Mountains

I am not a prophet nor the son of a prophet, but I am the son of an elder. Having been born in 1958 I am also a late-ish baby boomer.

I remember growing up in the small Epping West branch church of the large Epping Presbyterian Church. West Epping in the early 1960s still retained remnants of its agrarian past: small dairy herds, orchards and bush. As an elder, Dad would go to Session meetings but a particular role he had four times a year was to visit the communicant members of Epping Presbyterian Church in his elder’s district. His job was to see how they were travelling, pray for them and leave them a Communion Token. A reminder and an invitation to the Lord’s Supper that would soon be celebrated by God’s people.

I begin this way not because I consider these were the best times for the church and culture, or because I am motivated by nostalgia in writing these papers. The world of the sixties was a time of rapid change and is a world that we have passed by. Rather, in this paper I want to signal and explore the necessity and significance of the challenge in establishing the biblical role of eldership in the twenty-



first century in the state of Queensland. This task, one of revisioning eldership in the twenty-first century will not only require us to be properly informed by the biblical teaching on eldership in the first century but, as we see the role that God calls us to in the present times, to become convicted that for the vision to become a reality the undertaking both is beyond our ability and therefore cannot be achieved in a single generation, and dare I say, is one that requires repentance. It is a mammoth task if it is to be done well and is best captured by the words of Psalm 127:1 1 'Unless the Lord builds the house the labourers labour in vain.' Christ is calling us through his word to be fellow-workers in building His house or rather His household, we must approach this call with our eyes wide open and with deep humility, prayerful dependence, patience and courage if Christ's call on our lives is to be realised.

In 2017 I read *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory* by Tod Bolsinger. Throughout the book Tod Bolsinger uses the Lewis and Clark expedition of 1804 to find a waterway to the Pacific Ocean as an extended parable for the changing context of church and ministry in the twenty-first century.

The assumption of the expedition was that what was known of the geography of eastern United States - a land of rivers flowing to the Mississippi - would be mirrored west of the Mississippi. Therefore, Lewis and Clark prepared for the expedition by becoming skilled in every aspect of canoeing. There was only one problem. On leaving the source of the Missouri river and moving further west, they were confronted with the Rocky Mountains. Mountains do not lend themselves to canoeing no matter how skilled you are. The Lewis and Clark expedition needed to learn a whole new way of seeing and doing if they were to fulfil the goal of finding a way to the Pacific.

It will be helpful to look at the 'mountainous geography' that confronts us as followers of Christ, would-be elders or elders who are charged with belonging to and caring for the Household of God, the Church, "the pillar and foundation of truth" (1 Tim. 3:15).



In the current context there are four ‘mountain-ranges’ that we need to take into consideration, and they are ordered from the general to the particular:

1. The Present Deforming Culture of the West
2. COVID-19
3. Union
4. The Present Prescare and Receivership Situation

The Present Deforming Culture of the West

While there are many fruits of the present culture of the West that we should celebrate, some of the side-effects have a deforming impact on us as human beings, as a community and especially as a church community. It is easy to point to and bemoan some of the more recent shifts in our culture that indicate a recalibration of the church’s influence and value in our culture and society: same sex marriage and the growing suspicion that Christian beliefs and behaviours are part of the problem in our culture and not part of the solution, and that the Church and Christians are potentially dangerous to the culture.

Behind these ‘canary in the coal mine’ issues lie more significant shifts in Western Culture. Two that are connected and mutually dependent are; consumerism and the rise of the individual. Both are ever present and all-encompassing, and thus are ever present and all-encompassing they are the ‘air we breathe’. And as air we don’t pay attention to it; air is a given. In the last hour, day or week when did you pay attention to air? Yet without it we die.

Consumerism and the Rise of the Individual is built on the principle of individual choice. You choose what you want, and they have manufactured or tailored a product or service to satisfy your wants, suit your situation, and fit your budget. You are then defined by your choices. Your choices form your identity but now you can even choose to change basic aspects of your biological identity. We now live in a culture where biology is no longer a determinative or limiting factor in shaping ‘who you are’. You can choose your gender etc and identify as... whatever you want. We live in a world where you not only can ‘choose your own adventure’, you can ‘choose your own reality’!



'Thin' or 'Thick' Societies

Sociology uses the term 'thin' or 'thick' to refer to two differently structured societies.

Thin societies are highly individualistic, value choice, and emphasise concepts such as rights, liberty and 'justice'.

Thick societies are focussed on a person's social group and value order, tradition and concepts such as duty, respect, reputation, sanctity and purity.

The first society focusses on maximising individual freedom and the second on maximising the robustness of relationships and institutions.

Increasingly, consumerism and the rise of the individual are pushing our society from being a thick to a thin culture. Our society increasingly values tolerance not as it was traditionally defined - the ability to agree to differ - but as an unwillingness to disagree. The unity of our culture is increasingly built on the fragile foundation of non-disagreement with all people's choices (unless the choices have to do with such things as the environment or 'traditional' values). Increasingly, our broader culture therefore has little coherence.

COVID-19

Post COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant, if at times, uneven impact on our churches and ministries. Since COVID-19 there is in the wider community a tendency to 'burnout' that is mirrored in the leadership of our churches. COVID was a time of personal stress for all people and church leaders in particular as they sought to 'pivot' through the changing landscape of lock-downs and changing public health regulations and the varied responses of those making up the church family. The reality is that COVID-19 is not the cause of every subsequent issue but may have functioned more as an accelerant of some and exposed others that were already there.

Church is by its very definition an embodied community, and not meeting as the body of Christ, 'in the body', over a significant period of time meant that some people were slow to return and some did not return at all. Some found another church to attend, while others



Discussion

In what ways have consumerism and the rise of the individual affected or infected modern Church culture?

Why do people come to your church?

Do you have an uncomfortable sense that you are in 'competition' with other churches for people who are already Christians?

Has your church grown primarily by people becoming followers of Jesus or transfer growth from other churches?



realised their commitment to church, or to Christ, was not what they thought it was and no longer felt the need to attend or even believe.

Post COVID churches have either bounced back or are struggling to survive. Some of our churches are the beneficiaries of other churches (often non-Presbyterian churches) which have disintegrated.

Forty-Seven Years Since Union

The rationale for Church Union in Australia was an attempt by the Presbyterian, Congregational and Methodist denominations to shore-up their waning influence in Australian society, and to form a denomination on equal footing and influence with the Anglican and Catholic denominations.

For many in the Presbyterian Church of Australia and in the Presbyterian Church of Queensland, the events leading up to Union in 1977 and consequences post Union, were traumatic. There were many and varied reasons people voted to remain Presbyterian but perhaps the most 'noble' was to become a denomination that stood for the truth revealed in the Scriptures.

Being defined as a denomination built on defending the truth of the Scriptures is part of our long Presbyterian heritage, but it can create blind spots when it is emphasised to the exclusion of other biblical values. An example of this is the interviews of candidates for the ministry. This is especially visible in Presbyteries that have primarily focussed on the would-be-candidate's ability to know and articulate the truth, in the Scriptures or in the Westminster Confession, and their ability to communicate that truth in a sermon.

The biblical and theological truth we believe as Presbyterians is of fundamental importance, but not exclusively so. Of equal fundamental importance is a humble Christ-like character that models progress in maturity of love toward God and neighbours. To focus on the first at the expense of the second is to have an unbalanced leadership.

There was the hope at the time of Union that the resulting continuing Presbyterian Church would be a bastion of truth and we would see God blessing our churches because the true Gospel was proclaimed. The results after nearly fifty years are mixed at best. At Union there were over seven thousand Communicant members of Presbyterian



Discussion

How has your church fared since COVID?

Is your church family more engaged in church or less since COVID and how do you measure that?



Churches in Queensland. I believe that the present situation is largely unchanged or even fewer. No doubt some churches have grown while others have diminished but our hopes have not been realised.

Truth is not sufficient in itself as the Incarnation of Christ demonstrates Truth needs to be embodied and that embodiment in the New Testament is the local church, as it was in Ephesus:

“...if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.” - 1 Tim. 3:15

A true church is not just where the truth is proclaimed or explained, a true church embodies in its relationships the truth of the Gospel. After nearly fifty years it is clear we need more than a knowing of the truth; we need communities of lived truth. In the New Testament the healthy life of the community is very much part of the brief given to elders.

Unfortunately, despite our denomination’s distinctive of rule by elders, little has been done in Queensland, or more broadly, to disciple, train or develop elders in an agreed and systematic way.

The Present Concerns

I have been asked not to include anything about Prescare or the receivership at this point, which I will observe.

Options

It seems to me that there are a number of options that face us at this time in the Presbyterian Church of Queensland.

1. **Ignore our failures and pursue Business As Usual:** I don’t believe this is an option for the majority of leaders in the denomination. The Denominational Consultation, *Presbyterian Church of Queensland 2021 Review and Strategic Priorities*² raised significant issues around vision, aligning the roles of committees with that of the churches, the training of elders, transparency in finances etc. For many of us there can be no business as usual.
2. **Opt for models of church and ministry that are more pragmatic and business-like:** The problem with this approach is that models are never neutral. Church is not a business. It is to be a



Discussion

How would you describe the role of the elders in God’s household where you serve?

What training/discipleship have elders received?

² <https://healthychurches.pcq.church/pcq-review/>



loving community in Christ shaped by his self-giving love and grace. Efficiency is not ultimate in Christian relationships. Love is. And love is both extravagant and 'wasteful'. Being a pastor is not being a 'boss', a CEO or a visionary. Jesus Christ is our Lord and our Saviour and his vision is to be ours, shaped to our local context and opportunities.

3. **Humble Ourselves:** No one would choose to be here! But what if this is just where God wants us to be? What if 'here', this context, right now, is the gift of a loving God in terrible wrapping paper? What if here, right now, with all its threats and frustrations, we receive our Lord's severe mercy and humble ourselves? What if, in acknowledging we don't know what to do, we look foolish in the eyes of the world, but our Lord Jesus, who does know what to do, can use our foolishness to shame the wise? Owing that we are not the glorious denomination we hoped we were and that 'Making the PCQ Great Again', can never be an option, but that our God is both Glorious, great and gracious. Confessing we are weak and powerless, without resources but that the Spirit of Christ is our strength. In Psalm 147:10-11, the Psalmist says of God,

“¹⁰ His pleasure is not in the strength of the horse,
nor his delight in the legs of the warrior;
¹¹ the LORD delights in those who fear him,
who put their hope in his unfailing love.

What will this mean? Confession, repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation. Difficult conversations that seek understanding not victory. Patience and more patience, kindness and love. Asking questions rather than rushing to fast pre-packaged answers.

Above all it will mean shaping all these things in Sessions, Presbyteries, committees and churches in worshipful prayer as we ask God, who does not need us for his kingdom to be gracious again and use us for his glory.



Discussion

What do you agree with most in this paper and what do you disagree with most?



Eldership Paper One

Elders and the Church

Introduction

In Acts we are given an insight into the significance of Eldership in Paul's ministry. On the outward mission journey, Paul and his fellow worker/s would proclaim the gospel and gather a new community of Christ-followers teaching them and encouraging them before moving on to a new town or city to be 'gospelled'. The apostles would then retrace their steps and in each new community of Christ appoint Elders³.

“²¹ They preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, ²² strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. 'We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,' they said. ²³ Paul and Barnabas appointed Elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust." - Acts 14:21-23

This shows us the fundamental importance of a local, stable leadership for the new precious churches. While Paul and other fellow-workers would come and go, the health of the community was put in the hands of proven leaders who knew the gospel, knew the people and were people of character and gifts. I imagine the period between leaving and returning allowed people to see those who had the appropriate character for being a model of Christ-likeness and the ability to care for this new church of Christ.

³ I take the view that 1 Timothy and Titus were written around A.D. 55 when Paul leaves Ephesus and makes the 'painful visit' to Corinth leaving Timothy behind to appoint Elders in the Ephesian churches. Paul charges Titus to church plant in Crete and appoint Elders before meeting up with him at Nicopolis. Paul then returns to Ephesus.



In the following material we will look at:

1. The Character of an Overseer
2. Ability of an Overseer: Able to Teach
3. Ability of an Overseer: Ruling/Managing, Caring for God's Household
4. Eldership and the Shape of the Earliest Church
5. Conversion - the Basis for Leadership and the Church

1. The Character of an Overseer

(1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9)

Paul's instructions to Timothy and Titus regarding the character of an overseer are essentially the same with small variations and can be best seen in the following table:

1 Timothy 3:1-7	Titus 1:5-9
Above reproach (v2)	Blameless (v6, v7), holy (v8)
Faithful to his one wife (v2)	Faithful to his wife (v6)
Temperate (v2)	Disciplined (v8)
Self-controlled (v2)	Self-controlled (v8)
Respectable (v2)	One who loves what is good; and upright (v8)
Hospitable (v2)	Hospitable (v8a)
Able to teach (v2)	Hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it (v9)
Not given to drunkenness (v3)	Not given to drunkenness (v7)
Not violent but gentle (v3)	Not violent (v7)
Not quarrelsome (v3)	Not overbearing v7 not quick-tempered (v7)
Not a lover of money (v3)	Not pursuing dishonest gain (v7)
He must rule/manage his own family (Household ⁴) well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect (v4)	A man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient (v6)
(If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) (v5)	An overseer manages God's household (v7)
He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil (v6)	
He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap (v7)	

⁴ The word is better translated 'household' rather than family firstly because that is how it is translated in 1 Timothy 3:15, God's household and our idea of family is the small by comparison nuclear family.



The Role of Character

The focus of this section is primarily on the character of the overseer. Character not Charisma (personality) or Charismata (gifts) is primary whether we are assessing a Minister/Pastor or an Elder. Having said that giftedness is not completely irrelevant it's just not primary⁵.

The first thing to notice in the list is that if we take out the 'ability to teach' and 'able to rule his household well' the characteristics described in the list are not about an extraordinary Christian but the character of an ordinary mature follower of the Lord Jesus.

This then goes to the heart of the major role of an overseer. The Elder's character is fundamental to their role as they are to be an example and model to the rest of the community.

Having learned to live as a mature (progressing 1 Tim. 4:15) disciple of the Lord Jesus it also means they are equipped to lovingly disciple others. The overseer is not exceptional, there will be other mature followers of Jesus in the community, male and female, who will also be a living witness of Christ-likeness (Titus 2:2-5). Together they will by their character shape the local church to be a Community of Character.

Elders in our church communities should not be invisible or unknown or possibly only seen when the Elders collectively make a decision as the Session, overseers should be vitally involved in the daily life of the community.

The Characteristics of Character

1. Above reproach – there is nothing obvious in a leader's behaviour that others can lay a hold of and defame Christ.
2. Faithful to his wife – 'a one-woman man'. The married leader in ministry actively works on, and at, having a good marriage.
3. Temperate – this is normally associated with alcohol but alcohol is mentioned by itself further down the list so it is probably better understood as sober or clear thinking.
4. Self-controlled – describes a life of choices that is directed by a mind enlightened by God's calling in the gospel of his Son.
5. Respectable – a well-ordered life.
6. Hospitable – this is not just the invitation to a meal now and



Question

Who have been significant models of Christian maturity in your life? Explain why they had such an impact.

⁵ I would make the point that aspects of personality should be taken into consideration such as EQ Emotional Intelligence over IQ but there is a sense in which EQ is factored into aspects of Character in the list.



then, although it will include this. The invitation to a meal is but a symbol of a life shaped by the hospitable God

7. Able to teach – give positive Biblical instruction and able to refute error.
8. Not given to drunkenness – not controlled by alcohol⁶.
9. Not violent but gentle – this probably is about correction, 2 Cor 11:20: “In fact, you even put up with anyone who enslaves you or exploits you or takes advantage of you or puts on airs or slaps you in the face.”
10. Not quarrelsome – not contentious; not someone who enjoys arguing for the sake of arguing and can’t distinguish between the significant and the unimportant.
11. Not a lover of money – not a lover of silver; money doesn’t rule their decision making and choices.
12. He must manage his own household well – rule, care and manage the complex reality of a first century household (slaves, home businesses, extended family members) at a time when there are no hospitals or social welfare).
13. His children should obey him. His children are not crushed by his discipline and instruction but encouraged and follow his lead.
14. He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must be mature: spiritually, emotionally and relationally.
15. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil’s trap. The devil seeks to undermine the truth of the Gospel by bad behaviour that give outsiders a reason to not listen.

2. Ability of an Overseer: Able to Teach

In this section we focus on the first ability that takes us beyond character but is the foundation and the shaping of that character for individuals and the community – the teaching and application of the trustworthy message, the Scriptures.

An overseer must, according to 1 Timothy 3:2, ‘be able to teach’, and according to the expanded version in Titus 1:9, to ‘hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.’



Question

What areas do you see you need to progress in your character?

⁶ This would include other addictions that replace Christ as coping strategies for physical/emotional/relational etc anguish or pain.



In this activity Elders function the way red and white blood cells behave in the body: they both enable the body to be energised (red blood cells) and to be protected (white blood cells). Teaching the Scriptures is the ability to explain how one is saved and made a child of God and what one is saved for. It is a teaching of how the community lives together in love and forgiveness, how together the church is a living witness to the Gospel it lives by. Teaching will mean encouraging or urging others to live according to the truth as well as refuting those who oppose the trustworthy message.

This task of teaching, urging and refuting is most often carried out by the Minister at the public weekly meeting but Elders have a role beyond Sunday and a monthly Session meeting. They are also to feed and protect. This can be done in Growth Groups, one-to-one meeting, or in a discipleship group. Whether an Elder has some formal theological knowledge or not, they are to be committed disciples of Jesus who are able to lead others to Christ and lead others to maturity in Christ.

3. Ability of an Overseer: Ruling/Managing, Caring for God's Household

In both letters describing the role of an overseer there is a direct connection drawn between how he rules/manages or cares for his own household and how he will manage the household of God.

“ *He must rule/manage his own family (household) well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?)*”
- 1 Timothy 3:4-5

“ *Since an overseer manages God's household, he must be blameless – not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain.*” - Titus 1:7

One reason for this is that the household of the first-century was a complex unity of relationships and responsibilities just as the church was. Households included not just the immediate family but some of the extended family as well as slaves and freedmen and may well have been the place of business and commerce. Overseeing



Questions

Do you feel confident to be able to lead others to Christ?

Do you feel confident in being able to teach others in how to mature in Christ?

Identify areas you need more training or practice in.



a household required relational skills, management skills and the provision of health and social support.

In the next paper we will explore in more depth how the church as the household of God shapes the church leaders' role but the following section explores some aspects of it.

In subsequent papers we will give some examples of these sorts of tools e.g. dealing with conflict.

4. Eldership the Pattern of Church Health


There is, I believe, a direct connection between the character of the leaders of the church and the character of the church they lead and this is for good or ill.

In Acts 2:42-47 we see a description of the first New Testament church.

“⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple Courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" - Acts 2:42-47

As you read through the description of this first church, identify characteristics of the church that are also characteristics of overseers in 1 Timothy and Titus.

Elder	Church



Questions

What characteristics of the Jerusalem Church need to be developed in your church?

What maturing needs to be developed in you so as to lead your church in this direction?



5. Conversion - the Basis for Leadership and the Church

(1 Timothy 1:12-17)

Paul's first letter to Timothy, setting out what he is to do in his absence, is set against the background of the danger of false teachers infiltrating the Ephesians ministry. Paul promotes the true gospel by first of all demonstrating what it has done in his own life. Paul is using himself as an example for others who trust in Christ, and this particularly would apply to those who will care for God's Church.

There are two aspects of Paul's testimony that are particularly relevant:

- i) a deep sense of one's need for mercy and forgiveness; and
- ii) the wonderful experience of the grace of God in Christ meeting that need

Read 1 Timothy 1:12-17

Paul looks back on his former life before trusting⁷ in Christ and describes it in the starkest of terms: blasphemer, persecutor and violent man. There is no glossing over the facts; later he describes himself as 'the worst of sinners. But God did what Paul could not do: he sent Christ into the world to save and rescue sinners. Paul describes God's action in Christ as 'grace being poured out abundantly, along with faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.'

An Elder must have a clear conviction of the receiving grace and forgiveness in Christ in being saved, as well as an experience of God's ongoing work in their life. It is out of this experience of love that he loves God and his people in Christ, and it is out of Christ's service to him that he seeks to serve God and his people in Christ. Being saved from sin and death and saved for serving God with their whole life is one's core identity in Christ. This is the foundational unity of all Christians and where we live from through the power of the Spirit.

⁷ This explains the description of himself as 'acting in ignorance and unbelief' he did this before he trusted in Jesus unlike the false teachers who are perverting the Gospel with the law after having believed in Jesus.



Homework

Paul shared his testimony of his conversion as a way of encouraging other believers and witnessing to the power of the Gospel. Your homework this week is to prepare your testimony to share with those with who you are studying *The Eldership Papers*.

Below is a plan for organising your testimony. Your aim is to make it engaging and challenging in under 3 minutes.

Steps in preparing your testimony:

1. *Introduction:* Before you became a Christian, what did you think would make you happy in life? What drove you? What did you think your purpose in life was? Write that into a couple of paragraphs to become the opening part of your story, using concrete examples to back up abstract statements.
2. *Body:* What has made you unhappy? How has your drive been unsatisfied or unsatisfying? Write that into a couple of paragraphs to be the main body of your story; again, using concrete examples to back up abstract statements.
3. *Bridge:* How has the death and resurrection of Jesus challenged your perspective on what will make you happy or achieve your purpose in life? Write a sentence on this for the bridge.
4. *Conclusion:* How has Jesus changed your thinking today? How has Jesus changed your actions today? Write a couple of paragraphs on how Jesus shapes your life today, using concrete examples to back up abstract statements.
5. *Ending:* Write a sentence on how the way God sees you in Jesus makes you feel now.