

## Church Leadership p4

By Jeff Noblit

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**Bible Text:** 1 Timothy 3:1-7  
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### **Anchored in Truth Ministries**

1915 Avalon Ave.  
Muscle Shoals, AL 35661

**Website:** [www.anchoredintruth.org](http://www.anchoredintruth.org)  
**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/anchoredintruth](http://www.sermonaudio.com/anchoredintruth)

Grab your Bibles and go to 1 Timothy 3 again this morning. 1 Timothy 3 as we conclude these four sessions now on elders or church leadership. I know this is very practical and instructive but it's very very important. And I just marveled this week thinking this thought: what if God had not given us his word? Now think about that. It's so very thorough, so wonderfully balanced. In some ways we have charity in that there are various views and various ways churches can approach things and in some ways God is very specific but what if we were just left to ourselves to figure out, "Okay, how can we run and manage this thing best?" Thank God he has given us his word. It's more than a help, it's absolutely essential.

Paul is writing to Timothy whom he has given the duty of appointing leadership in the church at Ephesus and probably other places too, and he tells Timothy this in 1 Timothy 3:1-7.

1 It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. 2 An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, 3 not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. 4 He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity 5 (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?), 6 and not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. 7 And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

Now, we have exegeted in this text and I apologize that I know you felt at times like you were drinking out of a fire hydrant but I didn't want to take 8 or 12 weeks to do it. This morning though, I'm going to give you conclusions for practical application on elders or church leadership and this will not be derived directly from this text but from a balance of primarily New Testament truth on church leadership. And there is such a thing as progressive revelation. What I mean by that is: as the Bible progresses chronologically, the picture becomes clearer. Certain things would happen in the ministry of Jesus and they progressed further as the Gospel was shared with the Jews and then things

progressed further as the churches were started and the Gospel progressed through the Greek or Gentile regions of the world, and we begin to see how things function in the early church and under the oversight of mainly the Apostle Paul. So drawing from the balance of New Testament Scripture, we draw conclusions for how we are going to function as a modern church today.

I. If we're going to have a man in the office of elder, we would expect that he has had training and discipleship in his life already. Now, there are two parts to this picture. That man would have already been under the influence of other men, it doesn't have to be other elders, but there has been seasons of discipleship in his life that has prepared him for perhaps that office of serving as elder in the church. Now, also when a new man comes on as an elder, there will be years of where he is learning how things function. I mean, we've been at this long time and many things have developed and we have matured and had to adjust and change things so it's a continual discipleship but you would expect he's already been in that discipleship.

Now, to be biblically effective, elders have to be more than just godly men. We've seen that they must be godly men and have good character, they must be men who have gained the approval of the church, but they have to have more than that. They must be godly men who have gained the approval of the church and are adequately trained and disciplined. There are good people and godly men who either God hasn't called them or maybe they're just not ready, it's just not time. We have young men who are very impressive but it's probably just not time for many of them. And of course, you can't have a large body of elders, it becomes cumbersome and ineffective. Now, I don't know how many you're supposed to have, the Bible doesn't spell that out. We know they had 12 apostles for a massive work that God developed on the day of Pentecost and other work. We stay around 8 to 12 elders here at Grace Life. We sort of have a policy of a minimum of eight. I say we sort of have, we do have a written policy of that. But mostly our guys looked around the room and a lot of us were pretty gray-headed, and just to be very practical and honest thought, "You know, we know God is raising up some younger men who need to come on board and carry on and help be those leaders for the next generation."

But as we look for those people, think about Elijah and Elisha, for example. Elijah is looking for a young man to take the leadership prophetic role in Israel and he finds Elisha out there in the field plowing, and he goes and he throws his mantle on him, that means his cloak. It was symbolic of, "You and I are going to be one together from now on and I'm going to equip you." And that's what he did. Elisha was equipped or disciplined by Elijah and then he took over the leadership as the lead prophet, if you will, in the nation of Israel. You have the example, again, of Jesus and his 12 disciples, how Jesus ministered to the masses but actually probably spent more time with the 12 disciples disciplining and equipping them for their later service as apostles and leaders in the first church. Even beyond that we know that he would pull aside Peter, James and John on three separate occasions. The New Testament records that those three were taken out of the 12 and further taught and disciplined like the sickroom of Jairus' daughter or the Mount

of Transfiguration. There are things they needed to see, there were things they needed to experience because they were going to be even leaders among the other 12 leaders.

So this concept of discipleship. When you get to John 13 through 17, you have the Lord pulling away from his public ministry and those three chapters are primarily the Lord discipling his leaders for the future church. We progress chronologically to the church among the Gentiles and we have the Apostle Paul as the primary leader. But what do we see Paul always doing? He always has a Timothy, a Titus, a Barnabas, a Silas, a John Mark and others whom he is equipping. And then what do we see as time goes on? He begins to appoint those men to leadership roles overseeing other churches. As a matter of fact, in 2 Timothy 2:2, the Bible reads, Paul writing to Timothy now, "The things which you have heard from me," that's me discipling you, "among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." So I disciplined you, Timothy, now, Timothy, you make sure you are discipling and equipping other faithful men.

Through the years I have taught a lot of things about discipleship groups or accountability groups or discipling men and I'll never forget being in Africa in the bush of Africa and there were a group of pastors there and I talked about finding faithful men and one of the guys raised his hand and said, "If I pick out some faithful men, other men are going to be jealous and it's going to cause a schism in the church." And I said, "Well, I can fix that. Just say we're going to meet at 5:30 in the morning and any men that want to meet need to meet with me and in about six weeks you'll have your faithful men." It just kind of will take care of itself. Now, that's not absolutely true but that's one way to approach it.

Now, I'm not necessarily even talking about here that there is this formal structured accountability or discipleship group. As a matter of fact, through the years, 36 years now as I have looked at my efforts to disciple men, there are more faithful men today in the church that I have personally influenced informally than those I have had a formal structured discipleship group with. For some reason, a lot of those that I had a very structured discipleship with fell away, but so many of those that we just kind of did things together, hung out together, did some ministry together, I didn't realize that that was probably the most effective discipling I've ever done. But, you know, that's exactly how Jesus did it. He just took the guys along with him. They just went where he went. They were alongside as he taught, as he ministered, as he reproved and rebuked the Pharisees, as he showed forgiveness and compassion to some sinner. They were like recording mechanisms with the record button pushed, just learning what he does in his ministry. So it may not be a formal thing at all but if a man is going to be in the office of elder, you should have noted that, "I see him coming along." It's obvious that he's learning and he's growing under the influence of other men.

Now, let's don't think that just leaders ought to be being disciplined in this more personal way, it's good for all to be disciplined. As a matter of fact, you're doing it in your families every day and every week whether you know it or not. You're either discipling them well or not well but if you're a mom or dad, you're discipling your children by the way you live your life. And it's very rewarding to grow up and know that all the ways you failed and all the shortcomings you had, that's certainly true in my own home, but yet to see that

your children picked up on the fact that you did love Christ and you do love Christ and you are committed to him and his church and they buy into that. Not because of some structured family study time, that's okay and good, but because in your life and from your heart they were disciplined.

So in small groups, you are constantly discipling. So often we think of the discipleship group has to meet on Thursday morning at 6 o'clock. That's wonderful but it can be dangerous. It can get to where you bond with that group on Thursday morning and you forget the brothers and sisters at church. So be careful of how much energy and devotion you put into extra local church ministry. Don't get me wrong, I'm thankful for that, but Satan is very sly and cunning and you only have so much heart you can give and if you joined a local church, you've taken a wife. You've assumed a responsibility for some brothers and sisters so whatever else you do, that's your priority. That's what I'm saying. This is kind of a side point. This is not in my notes. So just be balanced and be wised about how much of your heart and energy you pour into other "Christian ministries" outside of your church because this is the one you'll give an account for at the judgment seat of Christ. The others can be wonderful and good. Don't misunderstand. I especially appreciate you men and ladies who have Bible studies and things in your work environment because you've got to be there anyway. That's wonderful but that is secondary to your work in God's church and where your heart would be.

So we're all discipling in one way or the other. While all should be being disciplined, elders must be disciplined. Let me give you one practical note. I know this will embarrass these ladies but I just thought this was a perfect picture and this has happened a hundredfold more than that across our church body. When I began to talk to Amanda Hollander about being the person who begins to fill in for Ms. Jane Bishop and do all the things of decorating and designing and the things that Ms. Jane did so wonderful at for so many years for us, she said, "Jeff, let me tell you something." No, she didn't say that, she said, "Brother Jeff, let me tell you something." She said, "I was in Linda Pounder's and Jane Bishop's small group and they maybe don't even know it but they taught me by their example, you serve in the church for the glory of God and not for yourself. They taught me you serve selflessly. You serve not wanting a pat on the back or not wanting the glory for yourself." Now, that was in Amanda's heart because she loves the Lord and loves the church but she needed older ladies to disciple her in that. Isn't that neat? I had no idea. But that happens over and over in a healthy church environment. And I know Linda and Jane would tell you, "We had moms and grandmoms who taught us to honor the Lord in his church that way." And thank God for the way we pass on that discipleship principle generation to generation in God's church. And there are so many other good examples we could use and our whole Anchored In Truth Ministries is focused on mentoring and discipling other pastors and God has chosen to bless it in a wonderful way and we are humbled and thankful for that.

Now, I want to make a side note here about the rotation of church leadership and in a lot of Baptist and evangelical churches honestly to deal with knuckleheads, troublemakers, they develop a rotation system among the deacon body. You get nominated as a deacon, you come on and serve as a deacon, you serve three years, you rotate off. That's not

unscriptural. I'm not saying it's evil but as a body matures, it becomes very detrimental. I mean, when you get a guy on and he is quality, in three years he is just beginning to get what he needs to do. He's just beginning to grasp how to lead. He has learned from the older men on the leadership team and the last thing you want is when a guy just begins to learn what to do is to rotate off.

Now, I do understand in a carnal church where you have powerbrokers and people who just want to undermine leadership and get their way, that was an effective way to try to get them out of the way. Am I being too honest this morning? That's what it's for. But there's not one trace of that in the Bible, Old Testament, the nation of Israel or the New Testament church. There is a way to deal with a man if he becomes a problem. The Bible tells you how to deal with that and we have done that. Men have had to step down. Now, we've had good men step down to take other sources of service in the body and it had nothing to do with their character, they were wonderful and faithful, not those men but there have been men who have been asked to step down. You have to do that from time to time but a rotation system I think just robs you of the long-term effective leadership. I mean, where would you be? That's what happens with most churches in the pulpit, they get a guy and he just gets going good and starts maturing and you trade him off and get another guy, and what happens with pastors when they are swapped around that often is, they just keep doing the same thing every four or five years and they never progress further. The best thing you have ever done for me was to keep me around so I could keep growing and that's a good thing for all of us. If your pastor keeps growing, you have a tendency to keep growing. I may have picked this up from somewhere else but I have thought it a long time: if Jesus had had a rotation system for his leadership team, his 12 apostles, those men would have rotated off before the day of Pentecost. Now, think about that. He disciplined, equipped, disciplined, equipped, disciplined, trained. He is ready for the Spirit to come and start the church. Wait a minute, we've got to get a new group. That group rotated off. Postpone Pentecost for three years. Let's get another group ready. So my point being there is a place for that. I understand why churches begin to do that but as a body matures, I would encourage churches to think that through again and keep good men.

Let me give you one other principal here in the area of personnel. We went through a serious season of warfare, it might have been 15 years ago, I don't know how long ago, and things were down around here and that was several years of recuperating and finances were tough. Then we went through the great recession we just had and finances went down again and we had staff members here who literally raised their salaries outside of the tithes and offerings of the church and we had salaries that froze. I don't know if any declined but there were no raises for a long time. Benefits dropped. Convention expenses, things that are just normal and standard were all dropped off. Well, seven or eight years later, we got on our feet financially and being blessed, it took men who watched those last 15 years to know, "Hey, we need to make this up for these brothers. It's only right." If a guy just rotated on, he probably wouldn't get that. There is a lot that is proper and more effective in long-term ministry of men who are disciplined and called of God to do those ministries and that's why in the New Testament that's all you see. You do not see any type of rotation system. I mean, think about it: if an elder is going to do what the Bible

teaches he must do, lead, oversee, rule, teach, preach, ordain others, exhort and refute error, establish doctrine, set policy, pray and prove to be an example to the flock, that requires years. He doesn't just get voted in and shazam, he's ready to do that. All right, long-term discipleship and training.

II. Under conclusions for practical application: the appointment of elders. What do we mean when we appoint? I know the common word is "ordain" but that's not really the Greek word. The Greek word simply means "to appoint," just to affirm someone to that job. What we do here...well, let me point this out, that the word that's used in the New Testament text for "ordain" is properly translated "to appoint." The Authorized Version did use the word "ordain" but there are a lot of things in the old translations where they were trying to, let's say, accommodate the practices of the day and the churches of the day used that process of ordaining where really the idea is more an appointment. As a matter of fact, church history records that in the first and second centuries after Christ was resurrected, the early church fathers never used the word "ordain," they used the word "appoint."

So here's how we function at Grace Life Church trying to be biblically balanced in these areas. 1. A man needs to be called and appointed by God. Secondly, he has to be identified by and nominated by the congregation. Thirdly, he needs to be approved by the present elder body. And lastly, affirmed or appointed into the office by the congregation. To me in the whole balance of New Testament text, that's a thoroughly balanced and biblical approach. Lots of good accountability and lots of broad input into that process. In fact, our policy states that once a person gets through the nomination and interview processes with the present elders, then he and his wife are presented to the church for two weeks to see if anyone in the church thinks there is a concern. And if they have a concern, then we meet privately and work through that. If it's inconsequential, then we proceed on. If it's not inconsequential, we go in a different direction. So it gives a lot of, if you will, authority to the congregation but it doesn't just leave it as a popular vote which I think is completely unbiblical. A church is not a pure democracy. It's just not. It has democratic principles but it is not a pure democracy.

So the New Testament gives us very little detail about how the system should work and, of course, that's also true about the Lord's supper. There is not a point by point spelled out procedure of how you do it or how often you do it. That's also true about believers' baptism, not a point by point procedure, here's how you conduct believers' baptism. We have the principles but we have some flexibility as church to church as how we apply it. So the precise mechanisms and logistics are left to the individual churches. But all that being said, whether you call it an ordination or an appointment, what we're doing is the official recognition and public announcement that we have identified this man as one God has called and led to this office of overseer and we formally on this day will be setting them aside for that work in that office.

Now, in 1 Timothy 4:14, we have an insight into Paul and the early church's practice. In 1 Timothy 4:14, he says to Timothy, "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," other pastors. So there was a point in time when other leaders laid hands on Timothy for the work of full-time vocational ministry. Now, we believe that the idea of having this service and laying on of hands which isn't required, it's not commanded, we have no record that it was consistently practiced but it was practiced for Timothy, but it is the idea that you identify with this one. The other elders are saying, "We lay hands on you to say we are one together now. We stand with you. We support you and we affirm you in this office, in this role as a church leader, specifically a church elder."

III. Plurality of elders. This was something that was a stretch for a lot of us in the early days and that is that when you talk about we are going to have more than just one pastor or one elder at Grace Life Church, we're going to have a plurality of elders and people would say, "Well, that's not Baptist." Well, quite frankly, I don't care. I want to know what's biblical and if you find out what's biblical, you'll find out what's Baptist. That's why I like being a Baptist, but always in that order, if it's biblical, it's Baptist. But we find that every place that the term "elder, presbyteros" in the New Testament is used, every place that Greek word is used, it's used in the plural except when an individual elder is talking about himself. As a matter of fact, there is really no reference in the New Testament to a one pastor church. Now, there may have been one but there is no reference in the New Testament of one. When Paul wrote to the congregation at Philippi, one single church, he says, he addressed this letter to the overseers, plural, in the singular church. Again, elder, overseers is another word for pastor, another word for elder. In Acts 14:23, "When they had appointed elders," plural, "for them in every church," singular. It couldn't be clearer than that: elders, plural, in every singular church. "Having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed." Titus 1:5, Paul left Titus in the renegade, and that's an honest and true description, renegade island of Crete to "set things in order." The Cretan Christians were out of control. They were just making a mess of things and Titus had the wonderful assignment by Paul to go to the island of Crete and get it all fixed. He said, "For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders," plural, "in every city," singular, "as I directed." Now, in the New Testament there is no concept of multiple churches in one town. There was one church in one town and when he says elders, plural, in every city, that's a plurality of elders in one local church.

Now, John Dagg was the first writing theologian among Baptists in America. John Dagg has been long regarded as the foundation stone of theological scholarship among Baptist people and John Dagg very clearly and pointedly in his writings in the middle part of the 19th century taught this very concept, that there is a plurality of pastors taught in the New Testament for singular churches. Dr. Pendleton in 1867, Dr. Pendleton became the standardbearer for his church manual. We use it here at Grace Life Church as a reference. He wrote a manual of how Baptist churches ought to function and in his manual he says this, he said, "Contrary to there being one bishop or pastor for a number of churches," which is true in some denominations, by the way; they'll have a bishop or somebody and he oversees several churches. He said, "Contrary to there being one bishop over several churches taught in the New Testament," he said, "we see a plurality of pastors or bishops in a singular church in the New Testament." Folks, these are our Baptist forefathers, even the foundation stones of Baptist life so please don't tell me just because we have drifted

into this that this is the way Baptists do it. It's not the way Baptists originally did it and there is a reason for that because the New Testament spells it out that way. I think what likely happened was as Americans ventured from the coast and the colonies and began to settle westward, they were very very fortunate to have a pastor. A congregation would start and they'd have to share pastors and there were circuit riding pastors out to these primitive communities and areas and so they were thrilled if they could just get one pastor, much less a plurality of pastors, and probably as time progressed they became satisfied, "If we can just get one elder, we're doing good so we'll take him." That's likely where the change happened through the decades. Well, a plurality of elders. It's something we have practiced here for many years and I'm convinced it's biblical and it's Baptist, but mainly that it's biblical and that's why we want to do that.

IV. A division of responsibility among the elders. That is, that God has ordained that men on this body of believers do different roles and different tasks within the church. Now, in the old concept of there is just one pastor in one church, he typically is viewed upon and looked upon to do everything and if he doesn't do everything, or at least doesn't involve himself in everything, then he's not a good pastor. That is such a terrible trap. That one thing has led to the glaring spiritual deficiency and weaknesses of the churches like nothing else has because pastors are called upon to expend their energies in everything other than study, praying and preaching the word of God which is the key to the church being spiritual and healthy.

But we see in the New Testament a plurality of responsibility. As a matter of fact, a few verses here. Ephesians 4:11, as Paul writes and says, "And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers." Now, he's talking about offices of service in Christendom, you could say in the church in specific, and there are different roles and responsibilities outlined here among these men. Now, all of these might be considered preaching pastors but even among preaching pastors some are more one way and some are more the other way.

1 Timothy 5:16 and 17. Did I get that right? Have you got it right up there? Yes, actually verse 17 is what I'm looking for. "The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor," that's all the elders, especially those who rule well, but then he says, "especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching." The point being with that verse at this point is just this: they had different roles. Some ruled and oversaw, they had to be able to teach but others were more the preaching pastor in the church. Differing responsibilities. It's very clear.

Acts 6:1-4, "Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food." Now, here are widow ladies who are not being fed. That's a serious problem. Well, here's how the early church leaders solved it. "So the twelve," that would be the preaching pastors, "summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, 'It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this



task. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.'" Now, I believe that's the first deacons, these men whom the preaching pastors put in assignment of the this service ministry to the body, particularly feeding these widow ladies who were not getting fed. But the point is among the whole leadership team, there are various duties and responsibilities. They all do not do the same thing.

As a matter of fact, William Bullen Johnson, do you remember William Bullen Johnson? We ought to. He's the first President of the Southern Baptist Convention and William Bullen Johnson in 1844 at the Gilead Meetinghouse in Union, South Carolina, preached a sermon on elders in the church and he suggested, not absolute, but the first President of the Southern Baptist Convention suggested there should be a plurality of pastors in the church. He gave this possible breakdown of duties. He said there could be a presiding bishop. The presiding bishop would be much like our senior associate pastor. He presides over the day to day administration and activities of the church. There are other things but that's primarily what he does. Then he says there can be an exhorting pastor. Now, the concept of exhorter in that day meant personal ministry. He would do what we would call congregational care ministry: counseling, personal benevolence needs, people who are bereaved, sickness ministries, those kinds of things. Then he said there needs to be an organizer of the Sunday school. We'd call that our small group ministries coordinator. Then he says there needs to be a man who labors in the word and the doctrine. That would parallel our senior pastor/teacher. So we see that from the beginning in Baptist life there was a teaching on the division of responsibilities among the whole elder body. All elders do not do the same thing. It's never been that way. It wasn't that way biblically and it hasn't been that way in church history.

Then, of course, size would have something to do with that. If you've got a very small church, you may get by with a couple of elders and them share the responsibilities. As the church gets larger, you know, when I first became your pastor we gave about \$40,000 a year to missions and now if you total up all the missions giving that we are responsible for, even those who help us from outside, we are, what? I guess approaching half a million dollars a year in missions. That takes a full-time person, that's Brother Steve's job. He does other things graciously and committed to other ministries in the church but he takes care of that area and then other elders do other areas. So as a church grows and ministries grow, different elders oversee and take care of different things.

We have a powerful example of this in Exodus 18. Do you remember that story in Exodus 18 where Moses' father-in-law Jethro calls him aside? I think he was concerned about his daughter. Anyway, he calls Moses aside and he said in essence, "God has put you in charge of the congregation of Israel." He said, "But you can't keep ministering to all these people by yourself." He said, "Surely you're going to wear them out because they're going to have to wait hours to see you and days, weeks sometimes, and you're going to wear yourself out." He says, "Moses, here's what you need to do: organize the people into thousands and hundreds and tens and place faithful men over those subdivisions." That's like our small group structure, by the way. "And then let them minister to most of the needs and if there is anything of a real consequential nature, it can be brought to you, but your primary job, Moses, is to get with God before the people and

let them take care of these other ministries." That is a perfect prototype of the way God intends for the local church to function, a division of responsibilities among elders.

I don't think I mentioned the first sub point though I taught on it and that is they are divided up, of course, by their giftedness. It's interesting that some of our elders are never seen in public. They don't really want to be. They do lots of personal counseling. They do conflict resolution things. They are very skilled in administrative things but they are just not a public thing. Then others like me and Brother Matt and others, we are much more public, but we designate responsibilities based on giftedness and then designate responsibilities based on size.

V. A special leader among the elder body. We've already stated that there will be differences in gifting among the elder body and great diversity of roles among the elder body. You know, we have an example though that there is, numerous examples I should say, of those that God raises up a leader among equals. That's John MacArthur's phrase and I think it's an excellent phrase. For example, take the 12 apostles. Jesus' 12 apostles, they were all equal in one sense. As a matter of fact, in Matthew 19 he says, "All of you guys are going to get a throne in the kingdom." All of you will sit on thrones, but in functioning in the church and in functioning in Jesus' ministry, he always organized them in three sets of four apostles and one man is always listed first in each of the sub sets: Peter, Philip and James. And we know how he would bring some of them apart at times for special training more than others. It was based on what he had gifted them to do and gifted them to be responsible for.

As we progress, we find Peter clearly being a leader and a spokesman for the 12. All had equal office, equal honor, equal privileges, equal possibilities. All taught or preached the kingdom. All healed. All had access to Jesus. But while all were equal in terms of office and spiritual qualification, except for Judas Iscariot of course, some stood out as leaders among the others. We go progressively in the New Testament to the church at Jerusalem and James, the pastor of that church, stands out as the leader among the others. In Acts chapters 1 through 12, who do we have? We have lots of apostles but Peter is clearly the spokesman and the leader among that group.

Chronologically coming forward to the ministry to the Greeks and the Gentiles, who do we have? The Apostle Paul. Other men were in authority with Paul but Paul was clearly a leader among equals. As a matter of fact, the Greeks nicknamed Paul Mercury because Mercury in Greek culture meant a great spokesman. So it would be really absurd to think that God is going to give a church five or six strong preaching pastors. He may give several men the gift of that but our position is, like we see in the New Testament, like we see in church history, that typically the senior pastor/teacher is the leader among equals in the elder body.

VI. And we are done: the elder's relationship to the congregation. What things have deteriorated to in so many churches today is that a pastor is hired to manage the religious system of some group. Or if it's a small enough church and everybody is kin to each other, have you ever been in a church like that? And it can be wonderful, by the way, but

it can be bad, by the way. In a small church, a lot of people are kin, the pastor is hired as a family chaplain and so very often they are looking for a family chaplain and a manager of their religious system, they're not looking for a pastor. I'm thankful that Grace Life Church, when you called me you were looking for a pastor and we all benefit because of that.

Now, real quick, I know you can't remember this but just to get the general idea in your mind again of the scriptural outline: the congregation's role toward the elders, the Bible says Hebrews 13, you are to follow their example; Hebrews 13 again, you are to obey and submit to them; 1 Thessalonians 5, you are to appreciate your elders; 1 Thessalonians 5, you are to highly esteem your elders; 1 Thessalonians 5, you are to love your elders; 1 Timothy 5, 1 Corinthians 9, you are to financially support those in full-time vocational ministry; 1 Timothy 5 again, you are to confront an elder if he is in continual or habitual sin; and then you are to protect elders from false or frivolous accusations. That's why the Bible says, "Do not even receive an accusation against an elder except if there are two or three witnesses." The point is if he's preaching and teaching the truth, he's going to have accusers and opposers. You're not even to entertain a fault against an elder unless several credible people say, "We know this is in his life and it needs to be addressed."

Now, the elder's responsibility to the congregation. 1 Peter 5, the lead; Acts 20, they oversee; 1 Thessalonians 5, 1 Timothy 5, they rule; 1 Timothy 5, Ephesians 4, they teach; 2 Timothy 3 and through chapter 4, they establish doctrine; Acts 15, they establish policy; 1 Timothy 4, they ordain others or appoint others, I should say; Titus 1, they correct those in error; James 5, they pray for the flock; and Matthew 20 and 1 Peter 5 says they lead by example; John 21 says they've got to be men who love Jesus.

I had the privilege of spending a day with Dr. Adrian Rogers in Memphis, Tennessee, the pastor of the Bellevue Baptist Church not too long before he passed away and Dr. Rogers and I would disagree on some things but Dr. Rogers I think was a man of God and certainly a powerful influence. I think probably for a couple of decades he was the leading Christian influence possibly in the world other than maybe Billy Graham. And we were in his study, he had a big fireplace in there and we were sitting around there, and I'll never forget, he looked at me and he said, "The man that pastors Bellevue Baptist Church has to love Jesus." I've never gotten over that and I would say when it's all said and done and everything else is considered, the man who pastors any church, the man who has the office of elder at any church, has to have a true Gospel humility. He must love Jesus. And do you know what you find? If that is there, everything else can be learned and everything else will fall in place. I would ask you humbly and genuinely: pray for Jeff Noblit, that in my last third of ministry I would be humbled by the Gospel and a man who loves Jesus and that God would give us as a church men in the office of elder who are Gospel humbled, not full of themselves, not about power and control. By the way, this isn't a representative form of government. "We want somebody from our small group." That's not what this is about. They need to love Christ. And all of God's people said Amen.

Let's pray together.