



Lay Shepherding Training Guide

Recommended Books:

These two books give an understanding of what Elders or Church Leaders are and what they do. These are tools to help pastors in their preparation to lead and teach.

Gospel Eldership: Equipping a New Generation of Servant Leaders, Bob Thune, New Growth Press, 2016
This book is a study book about eldership in the local church. It is designed to be a self-study book along with your training.

Biblical Eldership: Abridged, Alexander Strauch, BER, 2024

This is an abridged edition of Strauch's book *Biblical Eldership* (first published in 1995 by Lewis & Roth; it has since been revised and expanded). This book gives a summary and synopsis of the major teaching by Strauch. It includes the scriptures covered in the book. We recommend the unabridged for reading, but the abridged edition is a quicker overview.

An overarching verse on biblical leadership comes from the life of David. In Psalm 78:72, the psalmist says,

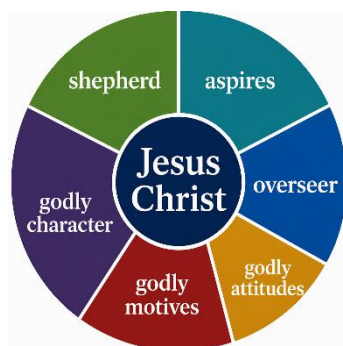
- 70 He also chose David His servant
 And took him from the sheepfolds;
71 From the care of the ewes with suckling lambs He brought him
 To shepherd Jacob His people,
 And Israel His inheritance.
72 **So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart,
 And guided them with his skillful hands. (NASB)**

For this training guide, understanding the role and function of an Elder in the local church is the model for instructing other leaders in the church. Their ministry may differ from Elders, but their function as a leader in the church, at home, or at work requires the same kind of leader.

These are snapshots of the Lay Shepherding Training – *What a Leader Is* and *What a Leader Does*, with Jesus Christ at the center of his life and ministry.

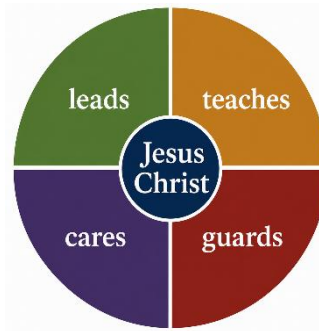
What an Elder/Leader Is

- Overseer
- Shepherd
- One Who Aspires
- One Who Has Godly Character
- One Who Has a Godly Attitude
- One Who Has Godly Motives



What an Elder/Leader Does

- Leads
- Teaches
- Guards
- Cares



Whether you call your Church Leaders Elders, Deacons, or Board Members, the New Testament gives instructions and directions to those who lead the flock of our churches. The title in the New Testament is Elder. Following the instructions given to Elders in the New Testament gives us some guidelines for instructing and training the Leaders in our churches. Of David we read, “So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, / And guided them with his skillful hands.” (Psalm 78:72).

There are two questions that we seem to always be asking. What is an Elder or Leader in the church? What is an Elder or Leader supposed to do in the church? And what we find out is that the Bible has a lot to say to give us guidance for Church Leaders.

If we understand what the Bible says about Church Leaders and what they do, they become the model for all leaders in the church. Whether we are training the leaders of our youth ministry, women’s ministry, missions ministry, Sunday School, or small group leaders, they should all function according to the way Elders, Deacons, or Board members should lead.

For the use of this Lay Training Guide, the depth of your instruction and the study required of your leaders will be determined by the role of the leaders you are training. Greater depth of instruction and study will be true for your Elders, Deacons, or Church Board.

This guide is set up to give an outline of biblical study that can be done with your Church Leaders. Each class or session is set up with a major theme for the study with verses of Scripture that you can study together as Leaders. You have three options of how to use this training guide.

Option #1 – Complete homework before group discussion

Each month have the topic set up in a document with all the Bible verses. Ask your Leaders to read the verses over the next month, write down some observations or thoughts, bring their notes with them to the next Board meeting, read the verses at the Board meeting, and have the Leaders share their observations and thoughts. At the end of your discussion, write down a one-sentence summary of what you have learned from this study. This summary will become part of a document you will create on “What an Elder/Leader Is” and “What an Elder/Leader Does.” This will be a tool to help share with future Leaders you ask to serve and a tool to review each new year with all your Elders/Leaders as a reminder. This option will help develop greater personal convictions about leadership, since it is built upon personal study of God’s Word.

Option #2 – Group study and discussion

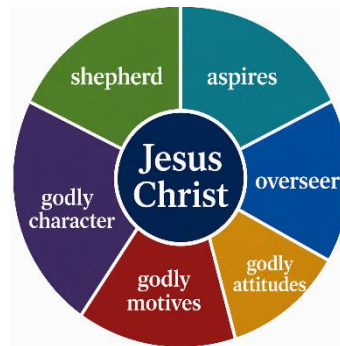
Each month have the topic set up in a document with all the Bible verses. Read the verses at the Board meeting, and have the Leaders share their observations and thoughts. At the end of your discussion, write down a one-sentence summary of what you have learned from this study. This summary will become part of a document you will create on “What an Elder/Leader Is” and “What an Elder/Leader Does.” This will be a tool to help share with future Leaders you ask to serve and a tool to review each new year with all your Elders/Leaders as a reminder.

Option #3 – Training class or event

Conduct a training class or event. In this training model, you will be teaching the material. Your Leaders may not be doing any preparation, but will be taking notes of the principles and of being a shepherding Leader in their church ministry. For a training event, it could be done over a 2-4-hour period of time. For a class, it could be structured as a Sunday School class over 2-4 weeks to teach about leadership in the church, home, and work.

What an Elder/Leader Is

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Overseer

The Ministry of Oversight

- The title **overseer** is used five times in the New Testament:
 - Acts 20:28
 - Philippians 1:1
 - 1 Timothy 3:2
 - Titus 1:7
 - 1 Peter 2:25
- Four references describe Church Leaders
- One reference describes **Jesus Christ**, the **Shepherd and Overseer of our souls** (1 Peter 2:25)

Responsibilities of an Overseer

- An overseer watches over and cares for those entrusted to him
- Acts 20:17,28 demonstrate that **elder** and **overseer** refer to the same office
- 1 Timothy 5:17 indicates there are different functions among Elders:
 - Ruling (Leading) Elders
 - Teaching Elders
- Acts 20:28 teaches that the Holy Spirit appoints overseers to care for God's flock
- Hebrews 13:17 reminds Leaders that they will one day give an account to God for how they watched over His people

Discussion Questions

1. What does the word "**overseer**" communicate that the word "**elder**" does not?
2. Why is spiritual oversight more than simply managing church programs?
3. Hebrews says Leaders will give an account to God. How should that affect the way Elders serve?

Shepherd

Jesus' Role As the Shepherd

- **The Good Shepherd** – John 10:11
- **The Chief Shepherd** – 1 Peter 5:4
- **The Great Shepherd** – Hebrews 13:20

Peter's Instruction to Elders – 1 Peter 5:1–2

- Peter identifies himself as a “fellow elder”
- He commands fellow Elders to “shepherd the flock of God” entrusted to their care

Paul's Instruction to Elders – Acts 20:28

Paul gives Church Leaders two priorities in shepherding:

- **Shepherd Yourself**
 - “Pay careful attention to yourselves . . .”
 - An Elder's first responsibility is to maintain his own spiritual health and walk with Christ
- **Shepherd the Congregation**
 - “. . . and to all the flock . . .”
 - Elders are called to care for, guide, protect, and nurture God's people

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think Peter refers to himself as a “fellow elder” rather than emphasizing his authority?
2. Why does Paul tell Elders to “pay careful attention to yourselves” before caring for others?
3. How does viewing ministry as shepherding change our understanding of leadership?

One Who Aspires

1 Timothy 3:1 – The Desire to Lead

- The Greek word translated **aspire** is used three times in the New Testament:
 - 1 Timothy 3:1
 - 1 Timothy 6:10
 - Hebrews 11:16
- Paul teaches that the church should desire Leaders who **want** to lead.
- The word *aspire* conveys the idea of:
 - Stretching oneself
 - Reaching toward a goal
 - Running after
 - Striving
 - Pursuing diligently
- Paul describes the work of an Elder as “**a noble (fine) work**”
- It is good and appropriate for qualified men to desire the responsibility of spiritual leadership

Discussion Questions

1. Why does Paul call the work of an Elder “a fine work”?
2. Have you ever sensed God stretching or preparing you for greater responsibility? Explain.
3. How can a church encourage qualified men to aspire to serve?

One Who Has Godly Character

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

Biblical leadership requires both competence and character. While skills are important, Scripture places greater emphasis on the character of those who shepherd God's people. The qualifications for Elders in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 reveal that God is more concerned with who a Leader is than simply what a Leader does.

The following qualities provide a framework for evaluating spiritual maturity and readiness for church leadership.

- **Personal Integrity** – above reproach, temperate (self-controlled), prudent (wise and thoughtful), respectable, sensible, just, devout (holy), self-controlled
- **Family Leadership** – husband of one wife, manages his household well, keeps his children under control with dignity, his children demonstrate faithfulness and respect
- **Relational Character** – hospitable, gentle, peaceable, loving what is good, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not pugnacious (bullying or violent)
- **Spiritual Maturity** – holding firmly to God's word, able to teach, able to encourage with sound doctrine, able to refute false teaching, not a new convert
- **Personal Discipline** – not addicted to wine, free from the love of money, demonstrates consistent godly living
- **Public Reputation** – respected by those outside the church, represents Christ well in the community

Discussion Questions

1. Which qualification in 1 Timothy 3 or Titus 1 stands out to you the most? Why?
2. Which area of character is easiest for you to maintain?
3. Why is a good reputation outside the church important?

One Who Has a Godly Attitude

1 Peter 5:2-3 – “Shepherd the flock of God among you . . .”

The Heart of an Elder

Godly leadership begins in the heart. Skills, experience, and knowledge are important, but biblical shepherding flows from Christlike character, proper motives, and a servant's heart. Elders are entrusted with the spiritual care of God's people and will one day give an account to God for their leadership.

Biblical Attitudes

<u>Attitude</u>	<u>Description</u>
Not Under Compulsion	Serve because God has called you, not because of pressure, guilt, obligation, or expectation.
Voluntarily	Lead willingly and joyfully, embracing the privilege of shepherding God's people.
Not for Sordid Gain	Seek God's glory and the good of the church, not personal recognition, influence, or financial benefit.
With Eagerness	Approach ministry with enthusiasm, readiness, and a desire to serve Christ and His church.

<u>Attitude</u>	<u>Description</u>
Not Lording It Over Others	Lead through service, humility, and influence rather than control, power, or intimidation.
Proving to Be Examples	Model a life worthy of imitation through integrity, faithfulness, and spiritual maturity.

Discussion Questions

1. Which attitude in 1 Peter 5:2-3 do you find most challenging? Why?
2. What does humility look like in church leadership?
3. What attitudes tend to weaken healthy leadership?

One Who Has Godly Motives

Hebrews 13:17 – “Keep watch over their souls, as those who will give an account.”

Leading with Joy

Healthy congregations help their Leaders serve with joy rather than grief or discouragement.

Leaders Serve with Joy When:

- There is unity and trust
- Communication is honest and respectful
- Members are teachable and supportive
- Volunteers are engaged and dependable
- Leaders are prayed for and encouraged
- Conflict is handled biblically and lovingly

Leaders Experience Groaning or Grief When:

- There is ongoing conflict and division
- Criticism replaces encouragement
- Gossip undermines trust
- Accountability is resisted
- Expectations are unrealistic
- Communication is unclear or unhealthy

Discussion Questions

1. According to Hebrews 13:17, what motivates faithful shepherding?
2. Which behaviors in a congregation help Leaders serve with joy?
3. How can Elders respond biblically when facing criticism or conflict?

Summary

1. Biblical Elders follow the example of Jesus, the Good, Great, and Chief Shepherd, by leading, caring for, protecting, and nurturing God’s people with humility and love.
2. God calls qualified men to aspire to the noble work of eldership, recognizing that spiritual leadership is both a privilege and a responsibility worthy of diligent pursuit.
3. Elders serve as overseers who watch over the spiritual well-being of God’s flock, knowing they have been appointed by the Holy Spirit and will one day give an account to God for their ministry.
4. The effectiveness of an Elder is rooted more in godly character than ministry skills, demonstrating integrity, spiritual maturity, healthy family leadership, personal discipline, and a Christ-honoring reputation.

5. Biblical leadership is marked by Christlike attitudes – serving willingly, eagerly, humbly, and as an example to others rather than seeking power, recognition, or personal gain.
6. Faithful shepherding is sustained by godly motives as Elders joyfully watch over God’s people while churches encourage, support, and partner with their Leaders in fulfilling Christ’s mission.

Closing Reflection Questions

1. Which of these six topics has challenged your thinking about biblical leadership the most?
 2. What is one area where you believe God is calling you to grow as a Leader?
 3. How can this group encourage one another to become more faithful Shepherds of God’s people?
 4. If every Elder in your church lived out these principles consistently, how would your church be different?
 5. What is one practical action you will take this week because of what you have learned?
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What an Elder/Leader Does

- Leads
- Teaches
- Guards
- Cares



Leads

Lead by the Example of the Good Shepherd – Psalm 23

- Provide rest (vv. 1-3)
- Lead people to spiritual nourishment and refreshment
 - Provide comfort (v. 4)
 - Walk with people through trials and difficulties
 - Provide safety (v. 5)
 - Protect and prepare God’s people in the midst of opposition
 - Provide confidence (v. 6)
 - Give assurance of God’s faithful presence and future hope

Lead with a Christ-Centered Example – Jesus Christ, Hebrews 13:8

- Remain anchored in the unchanging character of Christ
- Provide consistent and faithful leadership

Lead by God’s Word – Hebrews 13:7

- Teach and model the Word of God
 - Live a life worthy of imitation
 - Influence others through godly conduct

Lead through Faithful Oversight – 1 Timothy 3:4–5,12

- Manage personal and family responsibilities well
- Demonstrate leadership through faithful stewardship
- Care for God’s church with wisdom and integrity

Discussion Questions

1. Which aspect of the Good Shepherd’s leadership – providing rest, comfort, safety, or confidence – is most needed in churches today? Why?
2. Hebrews 13:7 calls Leaders to be examples. Why is example often more powerful than instruction?
3. How can Elders balance caring for people with making difficult leadership decisions?

Teaches

Be Able to Teach – 1 Timothy 3:2

- Communicate biblical truth accurately
- Teach with clarity and patience

Hold Firmly to Sound Doctrine – Titus 1:9

- Encourage believers with sound teaching
- Refute false teaching

Instruct and Encourage God’s People – 1 Thessalonians 5:14

- Admonish the idle
- Encourage the discouraged
- Help the weak
- Be patient with everyone

Teach the Sufficiency of Scripture – 2 Timothy 3:16-17

- It is inspired by God
- It teaches, rebukes, corrects, and trains in righteousness
- It equips believers for every good work

Discussion Questions

1. Why is being “able to teach” an essential qualification for an Elder?
2. What are some examples of false teaching that churches face today?
3. According to 1 Thessalonians 5:14, why must teaching be adapted to different people’s needs?

Guards

Guard the Church from False Teaching and Spiritual Danger – Acts 20:28-31

- Keep watch over yourself and the flock
- Shepherd the church entrusted to your care
- Be alert to false teachers from outside and within
- Protect the church through faithful teaching and vigilant leadership

Guard through Biblical Church Discipline – *Matthew 18:15-20*

- Address sin privately and lovingly
- Involve others when necessary
- Seek repentance and restoration
- Preserve the purity and unity of the church

Guard by Restoring Those Caught in Sin – *Galatians 6:1*

- Restore with gentleness
- Watch your own spiritual life while helping others
- Bear one another's burdens

Guard the Unity of the Church – *Philippians 4:2-3*

- Help reconcile believers in conflict
- Encourage peace and cooperation in the gospel
- Protect the fellowship and testimony of the church

Discussion Questions

1. How can Elders guard themselves before guarding the church?
2. What does restoring someone "with gentleness" look like in practice?
3. How can Elders help resolve conflict before it becomes destructive?

Cares

Shepherd the Flock Personally – *Ezekiel 34:12-16*

- Seek the lost
- Bring back the straying
- Bind up the injured
- Strengthen the weak
- Feed and protect the flock

Care for Physical Needs – *Acts 6:1-7*

- Ensure practical needs are met
- Organize ministry so no one is neglected

Care During Times of Crisis – *Acts 11:27-30*

- Respond generously to those in need
- Coordinate the church's care for others

Care through Prayer – *James 5:13-16*

- Pray for those who suffer
- Pray with the sick
- Encourage confession and restoration
- Trust God to work through prayer

Care for the Vulnerable – *James 1:26-27*

- Practice compassionate religion
- Care for widows and orphans
- Live lives marked by holiness and integrity

Discussion Questions

1. How can Elders know the needs of the flock well enough to care for them?
2. What lessons can we learn from the early church's response to practical needs in Acts 6?
3. How can Elders cultivate a culture of prayer within the church?
4. Who are the vulnerable people in your church or community today?

Summary

Biblical Shepherds/Leaders fulfill four primary responsibilities:

- **Lead** by example, God's Word, and faithful oversight
- **Teach** sound doctrine and equip believers through Scripture
- **Guard** the church by protecting sound doctrine, restoring those who stray, practicing biblical discipline, and preserving the unity of Christ's body
- **Care** for the spiritual, emotional, and physical needs of God's people

Closing Reflection Questions

1. Which of the four responsibilities – leading, teaching, guarding, or caring – comes most naturally to you? Which is the greatest challenge?
2. Why is it important that Elders faithfully carry out all four responsibilities rather than focusing on only one or two?
3. How do these responsibilities complement one another in building a healthy church?
4. What practical step can you take this week to grow in one of these areas of shepherding ministry?
5. As you reflect on these responsibilities, which one do you believe your church needs to strengthen most, and why?