



HOMEINHIM.ORG

HELPING ELDERS

Make Relationships More
Effective Ministry Tools



Helping Elders

Make Relationships More Effective Ministry Tools

For Love and Joy (Christ-likeness) in Home, Church, and Community!



First Things First. Equippers of Grace Need Grace!

The work of an elder is as Paul says, “a noble task” (1 Tim. 3:1). Immediately following in verse 2-7, he gives the list of qualifications. This (and Titus 1:6-9 and 1 Peter 5:1-3) is often where the conversation about qualification begins—and ends. And there is a problem with that.

These qualifications are not just entry requirements. We are to grow in our adherence to them. This can be hard to do. The actual work of eldership is also hard.

Elders get into the dirt of people’s lives, helping people with their sin. For example, it is hard to sit down over and over again with a couple falling headlong into divorce pleading with them to alter course—but they don’t. Cases like this are very exhausting and discouraging.

Eldership can also become about pride of our position: doing things “my” way. It can become an escape; a place we get strokes, especially in those dry seasons at work or home.

Just remembering “the list” and praying for strength is not enough. In context, Paul offers something powerful here that is often tragically overlooked.

First, a principle. When scripture gives a command, it provides the means for obeying it. Who God is and what he has done for us in Christ should always be the basis and strength for our walk. Paul prolifically demonstrates this throughout his writings. What has Paul said to Timothy that provides a basis for meeting and remaining faithful to elder qualifications?

In 1 Timothy 1:12-17, Paul shares the source of his strength—his joy—:

- He was been judged faithful,
- He was appointed to service,
- His present struggles nor his former life defined him. Instead, *God’s grace overflowed with the faith and love in Christ Jesus*. He is now defined not by his sinful past but by the mercy he received in Christ. What Jesus did compelled Paul to service (2 Cor. 5:14).

Given Paul’s prior life and the dire challenges he faced in ministry, he had to have something much more powerful motivating him than just the fact he was doing the right thing. Willpower was also insufficient (Col. 2:20-23). Over and over, we see that he always went back to what God had fully and sufficiently done for him in Christ that defined him (and also his audiences) and motivated him with joy.

The Christian life, even eldership, cannot be reduced to mere “obedience.” It is about enjoying God and being in loving relationship with him (John 17:3) out of which true obedience flows (John 14:15).

It is for this reason that Paul refers to himself and his co-workers as workers for the joy of those he ministered to (see 2 Cor. 1:24, Phil. 1:25-26, 1 Thess. 2:19, Heb. 13:17). Paul was motivated and received strength through the joy of who God was and all God had done for him in Jesus Christ. This was Paul’s power source, focus, and message (1 Cor. 1:17-2:5).

Although “joy in Christ Jesus” is not in not on the list, it is an important, assumed qualification that, if absent, will undermine our work. Further, the joy we need to fulfill our calling as elders is the same joy the precious ones need that we seek to lead. Joy is both a means and an end. Imbibing deeply, daily, in that joy will give us strength we need and the message they (and we) need.

Effective Relationships are Essential

Our relationships are the primary program through which the gospel is applied in one another's lives so that ongoing transformation by the Holy Spirit into the image of Jesus Christ can occur.

1. Scripture uses family relationships as a model to help us understand God and our relationships in church. (Matt. 12:49-50, John 1:12-13, Rom. 12:10-13, Eph. 2:19, 1 Tim. 3:1-7)
2. Relationships are the most basic ministry program a church has.
3. Only the Holy Spirit has the power to transform our hearts and lives. Our relationships are tools he plans to use in his transforming work (Eph. 4:16-17, 5:22-6:4; Gal. 6:1-2; Rom. 15:14; Heb. 3:12).
4. Deep relationships feature the trust, commitment, and love required to know each other's desires and struggles so that lasting change can occur (Matt. 18:19; Luke 6:43-45).
5. In relationships, loving accountability that is so important to growth is applied.

Elders Leverage Their Time by Focusing on Heads of Household

Elders are equippers (Eph. 4:12) who have as an implied strategic (not exclusive) focus equipping heads of households (1 Peter 5:5). (By head of household we mean fathers, single mothers, and even unequally yoked mothers. Special consideration is needed when equipping single mothers or mothers who are unequally yoked) to be faithful shepherds in their homes when there is no father present or leading.

1. The role of an elder is a shepherd (John 10:1-16) and is inherently relational (Acts 20:17-38; 1 Tim. 3:1-5; Tit. 1; 1 Peter 5:1-5). Jesus lived an "in-life" shepherding model. In-life application of truth is central to our living for him with wisdom and joy to glorify him in all things.
2. Elders and fathers (including single mothers) are specifically identified by God and vested with authority and accountability to oversee and participate in gospel application in the lives of those under their care (Eph. 4:12; Heb. 13:17; 1 Tim. 3:4-5; Eph. 5:22-6:4).
3. The covenantal nature of God's plan gives elders an implied (not exclusive) equipping focus on heads of household (for example 1 Peter 5:5). This focus provides a way to identify who each elder is directly accountable for.
4. Except for scope, the work of the elder and of the head of household is *basically* the same—teaching children and adults how to know God's love and to walk with Jesus Christ.
5. The elder's focus on discipling men is rewarded! Men who are faithful leaders at home are qualified for consideration as elders in the church.

Practical Suggestions That Make Relationships More Effective

Elders do well to make relationships an intentional focus in the church and home. Intentionality is a process that has implications for church and home life. Effective relationships (ones where real growth occurs through the gospel) will overflow (2 Cor. 5:14) into effective worship, evangelism, missions, and discipleship. The effort is therefore worth it. Following are some helpful suggestions.

Elders Commit To Know And Be Known.

1. It is helpful to periodically evaluate our work as elders. (An evaluation tool is provided on page 6 of with this handout.) Make a plan for how you can be more intentional in weak areas.
2. Focus shepherding efforts on heads of household; helping them with their individual growth and shepherding their spouse and children.
3. Be clear with heads of household about their responsibility to lead spiritually.
4. Appropriately share your own struggles, failures and successes.
5. Pursue growth on a heart-level which includes helping people identify idolatry (sin) and how to apply the gospel to defeat it. Helpful resource: *Instruments in the Hands of the Redeemer* by Paul Tripp,
6. Designate time at the beginning of each elders meeting for each elder to give a quick update on how one or more people under their care are doing spiritually.

Equip People To Minister To One Another In Their Relationships

7. Ephesians 4 says that the equipping the elders do should result in the *“building up of the body of Christ... speaking the truth in love... growing up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so the body that it builds itself up in love.”* The relational process matches a relational outcome.
8. Everything people do is an overflow of the heart (Pro. 4:23; Luke 6:43-45). Ongoing heart transformation is needed so that joyful overflow comes from Christ. Training in how to apply the gospel in relationships is needed.
9. Revive ministry through relationships with Home In Him's *Gospel Life Together Seminar!*
 - Getting the whole church on board with making relationships the primary ministry program
 - Helping the whole church understand their role in God's covenantal structure for relationships
 - Equipping people to know how to build deeper relationships
 - Equipping the whole church to know how to minister on a heart-level by discerning idolatrous desires that are behind their daily battles with the flesh
 - Equipping the whole church to rediscover the gospel indicative (who we are in Christ) and how to apply it to defeat idolatrous desires which results in our growth in Christ.

Small Group Ministry Ideas That Help Elders

10. If you have small groups, it is helpful to ensure that each church member is part of a small group. (Care is needed in communicating this. I do not think small group participation should be forced. People will value small groups more if they see them not as a mere Bible Studies, but as a place where they find safety, love, trust, equipping, accountability; indeed the help they need to grow in Christ. Even if people don't participate in small group, having a small group they belong to serves as a point of contact.)
11. Organize each small group to be led by an elder. This has practical benefits. First, it ensures that each member is connected to the leadership for care. Second, it makes it clear who each elder is accountable for. Third, it provides an organic connection with people, particularly fathers, where deeper relationship, teaching and accountability can take place.

Final Comment:

Carefully consider how dependence on other good—even necessary—ministry activities can make it easy to drift from an intentional pursuit of what God has already clearly and sufficiently told us in his word about his revealed will for applying the gospel in our lives: *relationships*.

What should be *normal* can seem foreign, unnecessary, or even impossible. In such cases, doubt creeps in regarding the sufficiency of God's Word where it speaks to ministry methodology. And worse, people can doubt the very power of the gospel to change their lives. In both cases, a tragic loss of confidence on the part of the elders, and the people to be ministers in our homes, churches, and neighborhoods can result.

Each church has to wrestle with what this looks like for them. There is freedom. These discussions require wisdom, grace and the Holy Spirit's guidance as we begin with what God has already sufficiently provided in his word.

God's basic plan is simple to understand but requires intentional focus in order to work effectively.



For Personal Evaluation

*Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls,
as those who will have to give an account. - Hebrews 13:17*

● Are you prepared to give a good account of the people under your care? This evaluation is intended for all elders—not just pastors— as it is the role of all elders to “equip the saints for the work of service” (Eph. 4:12). Eldership is a significant commitment. This evaluation is designed from the perspective of a very deep personal commitment to knowing and discipling people. It is simply a tool. Thankfully, our responsibility is not perfection but faithfulness within our unique context. Our goal is to grow in greater faithfulness. This evaluation will help identify areas where more focus could be helpful.

1. What is the name of each person under your direct care?
2. What are the names of each person's family members?
3. About how much time have you spent in focused conversation about personal spiritual things with each person under your direct care over the past month or two?
4. Name at least one area of spiritual struggle in the life of each person under your direct care.
5. How have you tried to help the person with this struggle?
6. What is your plan to regularly help these people?
7. What specific encouragement have you given each of these people over the past month or two?
8. Is discipleship regularly taking place in their homes? If so, what spiritual fruit has become visible in the lives of their family members?
9. What have you shared with these people over the past month that has highlighted how the gospel has worked/is working in your own heart?
10. How much time have you spent in prayer for those under your care?
11. How much time is spent during elder meetings discussing what's going on (struggles/victories) in the lives of the people versus business decisions or handling other administrative matters?

[For articles to help strengthen you as an elder, please visit, www.HomeInHim.org](http://www.HomeInHim.org)

