

The Essential Role Of Elders

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[0 : 00] Last week we looked at Paul's gospel-rich beginning here in his letter to Titus and to the churches in Crete. And after that beginning, he moves directly into the main body of his letter by addressing first the task that he had given to his young colleague.

Titus's purpose in Crete was very practical. He was responsible for setting things in order so that the churches there would move forward, strengthened in gospel doctrine, and faithful in godly living. That's the practical nature of what he's doing. That's the big picture. He is to set things in order that were lacking in the churches in Crete so that moving forward, after he and Paul and the other apostles have moved on, the churches would then, in great strength by the power of God's word and God's spirit, be able to move forward with gospel fidelity and as fruitful Christians that reflect the kingdom of God.

And crucial to this particular task was the establishment of faithful pastors who would shepherd their particular congregation.

Bill Mounts describes it this way, Titus's job was twofold, to complete the organization of the church in Crete and preserve it from doctrinal contamination.

[1 : 30] The former being the first step to the latter. And that's helpful for us. The main objective here that Paul is giving to Titus is make sure the churches are faithful to the gospel, that they're sound in doctrine, that they are refuting heresies that will inevitably begin to creep their way in and turn people away from Christ.

But the first step in being able to do that was the organization of the church, particularly as it related to its leadership. So Titus's task was practical.

It's also necessary for us to know that Titus's task was temporary. It was temporary. Now, contrary to what some Christian traditions have supposed, Titus did not fill a permanent office as a bishop who would be responsible for overseeing groups of churches or cities or regions of churches.

That's not what Titus was doing. In fact, nothing in the New Testament teaches that style of episcopate or that order of church government.

It's just not there. Titus was better understood as an apostolic delegate. That is what the term that scholars would most often use for he and Timothy.

[2 : 56] He was an extension of the apostle Paul. He was acting temporarily on behalf of the apostle Paul in Crete. And his duty to establish elders in the churches there reflects the transitory nature of his role.

It was never meant for him to be the bishop of Crete where he would then fill an office. And then after his death, someone else would then be elevated from one of the churches to then serve as bishop of Crete or bishop of whatever region.

That's not what Titus is doing. That's not what he was meant to do. His role was temporary. The age of the apostles, we have mentioned this many times through our study in Titus already, the age of the apostles was coming to an end.

Paul's going to be martyred very soon. Many of the apostles have already been martyred at this point in church history. Eventually, John would be the last one. And what we would call apostolic succession or what would follow the apostles, the succession did not come in the form of their office, but in their doctrine.

It's important for us to understand as we think about church government, how is the church actually supposed to be structured? This is a significant difference between a Protestant church and a Roman Catholic church.

[4 : 18] is the apostolic succession does not come in the form of an office that someone like a pope would feel. Apostolic succession came in the form of doctrine.

And that doctrine was then passed on to these churches. And those churches had leaders. So that's what Titus is doing.

That's why he's doing it. What eventually led to the development of the papacy or the hierarchical episcopate of the Roman Catholic church, was vastly different than what Paul actually called for in these New Testament letters.

In the centuries that followed the completion of the New Testament, the place of Christ and his word was slowly diminished. And the place of man and man's authority was slowly exalted.

So that the church really historically entered a very dark time, even along with the dark ages, culturally speaking, the church went through a very dark age as well, where human authority was put on the level of, or even supreme to, the authority of the Bible.

[5 : 46] Which is why Alistair Begg says, that is why the responsibility of the church throughout history is to be reformed and reforming. Constantly taking note of who it is, and what it's made up of, and what it's doing, and why it's doing it.

And every local church needs to be careful in this respect as well. Because it didn't take very long for the early church to get this wrong. And as they veered away from what Paul was actually teaching, that introduced all kinds of problems.

Into the churches themselves. And what they needed, ultimately, was a reformation. A reformation that would return the thoughts of the people to the word of God as the supreme authority of their lives.

Well, that's our responsibility as well. That in each age, it's our responsibility as a church to continually come back to the word and say, what does the word actually say?

What is it that God in his authority has actually told us to do? What is the patterns that he has given us? And we need to make sure that whatever human element we bring to that is subservient to what the Bible actually teaches.

[7 : 03] So my aim for this morning is to examine the role of elders. Next week, we'll get into the qualification of elders. But today, we'll look at the necessity of them in the church.

Why was Paul so concerned that Titus fulfilled this task? And what does this task have to do with Lakeside Bible Church? So we'll look at the necessity of elders and pastors today.

Next week, we'll look more practically at what are we supposed to be looking for when it comes to recognizing elders even in our own congregation here?

Even as small as it is, what is it that we're supposed, what's our guide for that? And Paul gives that to us here. And in other places, the New Testament. That's how we're going to spend the next two weeks of our study, okay?

Let me point this first out to you. Point number one, let's see the presence of elders in the church.

The presence of elders in the church. Look back again with me at verse five.

[8 : 04] Paul says in the first phrase, this is why I left you in Crete. This is why, Paul writes. Now, Paul and Titus' visit to Crete probably came between Paul's first imprisonment and his final imprisonment.

No doubt they had had an itinerant preaching ministry on Crete. Certainly, they probably established maybe a few churches, fledgling churches in the process of doing that.

But as I mentioned a few weeks ago in our introduction, Acts chapter two says that there were some Jews from Crete in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. That day that Peter preached that great sermon and the apostles were speaking in tongues and the people were hearing the gospel preached in their own language.

And it wouldn't be out of place for us to assume that some of the Cretans that were there heard that gospel message, were converted to Jesus Christ, probably lingered at least for a time there in Jerusalem, learning at least the basics of gospel doctrine from the apostles as they met together day by day in the temple, and eventually went back to Crete and established churches in their hometowns.

This seems actually very plausible as we understand the history of the church in Crete. So rather than assuming that Paul is giving Titus instructions here about overseeing Paul's church plants, it's very likely that upon visiting Crete, Paul just discovered many struggling churches.

[9 : 44] And they were struggling, not because they did not have the gospel, but because they did not have strong leadership. They didn't have leaders who were disciplined in sound doctrine.

They were beginning to be influenced by the worldly culture of Crete. They were faithful to the truth of Jesus, but they were not very strong churches.

They were struggling. And Paul knew that congregations without faithful shepherds were doomed to fail. So his pattern in the New Testament was to establish elders or pastors to lead the churches that he established and the churches that he had influence over.

And let me show you that in the scripture and other places. Acts chapter 14 is one place. I think this is on the screen for you. Acts chapter 14, verse 21. This is Paul and Barnabas together.

When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith and saying that through many tribulations, we must enter the kingdom.

[10:57] Now, here's the point I want you to see. And when they had appointed elders for them in every church with prayer and fasting, they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

So this is not a singular instance that's unfolding here. This is a pattern that Paul has, not just for Titus, but he's now at least in Acts done it in Lystra, he's done it in Iconium, and he's done it in Antioch and probably in all the other places as well.

He has come in, he's encouraged the Christians there, he's disciplined a few men that could serve as faithful shepherds. And then once through prayer and fasting, he had established those elders, he moved on to his other mission endeavors and the churches were encouraged for it and by it.

And we see in Philippians chapter one, just in the greeting, Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi with the overseers and the deacons. Philippi was one of Paul's church plants. You'll remember when he began that and he and Silas spent the night in the Philippian jail singing praises to the Lord. That was the beginnings of the Philippian church.

[12:08] Paul eventually established his elders in that church. And he writes back to them, emphasizing these overseers. He does the same thing in Colossians. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, Timothy, our brother, to the saints and the faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae.

Now, faithful brothers and saints are not the same thing. Faithful brothers must be a nod toward the leadership that Paul had helped to establish in the church at Colossae.

So we see this as a pattern. But if we're going to understand the presence of elders and the necessity of them to the life and health of the church, we need to understand exactly what they are. What are elders? elders. Well, there's three words the New Testament uses. The first one is presbyteros. That is what is typically translated as elder.

Okay. Sixty-six times in the New Testament, this word is used for church leadership and we translate it as elder or elders in the plural. The second one is episkopos.

[13:18] This is overseer. Overseer. This is used five times in the New Testament referring to pastors in the church. The third word is poimen.

Poimen, this is translated typically as pastor or shepherd or some form or tense of that word. Eleven times this one is used in the New Testament.

Okay. Presbyteros, elder, episkopos, overseer, poimen, pastor, shepherd. Now here's the point that I want to bring to the surface here.

It doesn't matter if you remember those words. Okay. Here's what I want to say about it. These three terms are used interchangeably in the New Testament. They do not refer to three different types of people.

The reason that we're using elders so much even in the language of our own church is because the New Testament uses it so much more than the other words. We use pastor more than anything. Culturally speaking, the New Testament uses elders 66 times.

[14:20] It only uses pastor 11. So there's a huge difference here and it doesn't matter what you call it, but that's the point. That's why we're using this term. But these terms are interchangeable. They don't refer to different offices in the church.

They refer to different functions of the same office. So elder recognizes the spiritual example of the pastor.

Spiritual maturity is the indication there. Overseer recognizes the spiritual authority of the pastor. And shepherd recognizes the spiritual care of the pastor.

Same person, same function, or same office, but three different functions that are fulfilled through that office. Okay?

Spiritual leadership, spiritual care, spiritual example. Now, let me just show you this in a couple of places where these terms are used interchangeably so you don't think I made that up, okay?

[15:22] Because there's some denominations that are gonna separate all those words out. I want you to understand why we don't separate those words out, okay? Titus chapter one, you're right there in your Bible. Verse number five that we just read, Paul says, appoint elders, presbyteros, appoint elders in every town as I directed you.

Now, I want your eye to go down to verse seven. This is where Paul is describing what the elders are to be in character. But he doesn't use presbyteros.

He says, overseer, for an overseer, episkopos, so even right here in Titus, we see an interchanging of these terms. It's not referring to two different people.

It's referring to the same office, different function. Let me show you a better one. First Peter chapter five, you can flip there if you want. I think it's on the screen, actually, if you want to see it there. First Peter chapter five, verse one, Peter says, I exhort the elders, presbyteros, among you as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed.

Shepherd, poimen, okay? Shepherd, the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, episkopos, not under compulsion, but willingly.

[16:41] And so on he goes in Peter's letter. Just another example. Peter understood these three terms interchangeably. Paul understood these three terms interchangeably. So we're not looking for multiple offices in the church.

We're just looking for elders. So let's define it then. What is an elder according to the scriptures? Here it is. An elder is a pastor who is responsible for the spiritual care and oversight of a local church.

An elder is a pastor who is responsible for the spiritual care and oversight of a local church. Two important emphases in that description I just gave you.

First is responsible. There is a burden of responsibility in which those who shepherd God's church are responsible to Jesus Christ for the way that they care for your souls.

This is not a position in which you sit around a boardroom table and you make decisions so that you can kind of manipulate the direction of the organization.

[17:58] That is not what an elder is. It's not the mindset that an elder is to have. An elder carries the responsibility of the souls of the congregation.

That's a weighty responsibility. The second emphasis in my definition is local church. I am a pastor at Lakeside Bible Church, not any other church.

I'm not responsible for people outside of this congregation. And if you belong to this congregation, you're not responsible to any other pastor. There is a working through the local church that is emphasized all throughout the New Testament that we cannot ignore.

I have a responsibility for you. You have a responsibility for me. And it's a mutual soul care that we have for one another. Titus' task for the long-term health of the churches in Crete was to appoint men who would faithfully lead them.

That's what Paul had left them in Crete to do. Before we move on, let me just mention the conspicuous absence of any mention of deacons here.

[19:20] Paul doesn't say anything about establishing deacons. His first and primary concern was for the establishment of pastors. elders. Now, that's not to diminish the role of deacons in the church.

It was to emphasize, rather, the utter necessity of elders in the church from the very beginning. And we must first be concerned with our spiritual needs before we are concerned with our physical needs.

Something that I'm afraid a lot of churches have upside down. How many churches do you know of? How many friends that you have when they're going through a pastoral search are more concerned about who will serve them than who will shepherd them?

Who will teach them? Who will lead them? Okay? A lot of churches get this upside down. We gotta make sure that we get it right side up.

Bill Mounts again says, in the young churches, Paul appointed only elders. Perhaps the assumption was that as the churches grew and the workload increased, deacons would be appointed to help. [20 : 27] A process paralleling the growth of the Jerusalem church in Acts chapter 6. And that makes sense there, doesn't it? A young church can get along for a little while without deacons, but it won't get very far without the presence of faithful pastors.

Paul and Titus understood this to be true, and it was something that we need not overlook as a young church ourselves. Okay? The presence of elders in the church. Okay, I know you've had enough of that.

Let's move on. Number two, the purpose of elders in the church. The purpose of elders. Look back at verse 5. This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order.

Now, Paul doesn't describe what things remained to be put in order, but the letter clarifies it for us as we go through. Clearly, what he had in view was structures to promote gospel fidelity, sound doctrine, and godly living.

But setting those things in order began with appointing elders who would continue that work after Titus leaves Crete because Titus isn't going to stay there.

[21 : 31] We get to the end of chapter 3, and Paul's already telling him, I'm going to send some folks to you, and when they come to you, I want you to come to where I am. And then we get to 2 Timothy, and we see that Paul sends Titus on to Dalmatia.

And who's left behind in Crete? The faithful elders that he appoints in the churches there. That was the purpose. They were to continue this work of setting things in order.

This was as much a succession plan as it was anything else, and the purpose that these men had in the church was the same purpose carried out by the apostles from the very beginning.

But let's take a moment to dig a little deeper. What does a pastor actually do? What is he responsible for under God in the church? Generally speaking, elders are to oversee the church by providing a godly example, teaching sound doctrine, and confronting heresy.

It's an office of the word executed by men who faithfully live according to the word. And we see this right here in Titus chapter 1. Look at verse 6.

[22 : 37] If anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, his children are believers. He's not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. He is above reproach.

He must not be arrogant, quick-tempered, or drunkard, or violent, and so on. It continues on. Look at verse 9. He must hold firm to the trustworthy word. He needs to know his Bible. And he needs to be able to communicate the Bible so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and rebuke those who contradict the sound doctrine.

Generally speaking, a pastor serves as an example to the congregation and he teaches the congregation sound doctrine and he confronts the heresies that may inevitably creep their way into the church as well.

But I want to give you four specific responsibilities that the scriptures give us for biblical elders. Here's what they do. Number one, elders lead the church.

They lead the church. eldership in a local church does not allow for passivity or lethargy.

[23 : 45] It requires that an individual carefully and passionately exercise biblical leadership among God's people.

You shouldn't have to talk somebody into this. That's what I mean. There is a God-ordained passion to not only love the Lord but to love his people and to help them and to edify them and encourage them and to lead them.

And just as God calls a man to actively lead his family, so does God require elders to actively oversee the members and ministries of the church.

It's a stewardship for which each elder gives an account to the Lord Jesus. It's a responsibility that must not be taken lightly by those who are called to fulfill it.

Let me show you this in the scriptures. In Acts chapter 20 and verse 28, this will be on the screen for you so you don't have to turn unless you just want to. Paul tells the elders in Ephesus, pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to care for the church of God which he obtained with his own blood.

[25 : 07] What's he telling the elders? Be faithful to lead because the Spirit of God has called you and has enabled you to this end.

So fulfill it. First, taking careful watch of your own life and then of the lives of the people to which you have been given responsibility. Lead the church.

How about 1 Peter chapter 5? We read it a minute ago. Let's slow down on it this time. Peter says, shepherd the flock. That's among you. Exercising oversight.

There's authority there. Not under compulsion. You shouldn't have to be strong-armed into this but do it willingly as God would have you. Not for shameful gain.

Don't do it for money. Don't do it for prestige. Don't do it for honor. But do it eagerly. Not domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock.

[26 : 10] There is authority here. It is not the kind of authority that domineers over the people of God. It is the kind of authority given by God to serve the word of God to the people of God.

What do elders do? They lead the church. Exercise oversight. Number two, they teach the church. They teach the church. So oversight of the church is not for the sake of a man's preferences or his ego.

The way that elders lead the church is by faithfully teaching the Bible. In fact, the only gifting required for an elder is an ability to teach.

Every other qualification given in Titus and given in 1 Timothy 3 are all character based. It's all about who he is as a believer, not about his gifting except for the fact that he has to be able to teach the word.

Now that doesn't mean that he has to be particularly suited for regularly delivering the main sermon on a Sunday morning. But at the very least, he needs to be able to sit down at a table at a coffee shop or in somebody's kitchen and be able to open up his Bible and help them understand what it says for their life.

[27 : 26] Counsel them according to the word of God. Constantly point them back to the gospel of Jesus. Constantly refute the errors that may be coming in to their life. He has to at least be able to do that.

It's a gifting and an empowerment that comes by God for a man to serve the church. Ephesians chapter 4, we talk about this passage all the time.

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, shepherds and teachers to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, for building up the body of Christ.

How are elders to equip the saints with the word of God? You gotta be able to teach. On some level, they gotta know the Bible.

They gotta be able to communicate biblical truth. 1 Timothy 5, 17, Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.

[28 : 29] 2 Timothy 4, preach the word, Timothy. Be ready in season, out of season. reprove, rebuke, exhort with patience and teaching.

What does an elder do? He leads the church, teaches the church. And through teaching is ultimately the way that he exercises his leadership and oversight. Thirdly, an elder protects the church.

Lead the church, teach the church, protects the church. So just like a father has the responsibility of protecting his family against dangerous people and behaviors, so an elder has the first responsibility of protecting the congregation against dangerous doctrines and practices.

which is precisely why a church must only recognize elders who are clearly knowledgeable of the Bible because they need to be able to spot error that is easily missed by most people.

There's a reason Jesus said that the grieving of wolves look like sheep because they're deceptive. Their doctrines are deceptive.

[29 : 45] And if we're not ready, we'll miss them. And we need to at least make sure that our shepherds are equipped and suited for spotting the wolves to protect the church.

Here in Titus chapter 1, just look at verse 9. He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught so that he may be able to give instruction and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

You say, well, that's not very nice. Well, it doesn't matter if it's very nice. It doesn't matter. Because the elder has a responsibility for your soul.

And if he's going to shortchange his responsibility to confront error, he's shortchanging his responsibility to truly exercise love for the congregation. I know I quote him all the time, but Alistair told his church, he tells him all the time, he says, you'll know that I've stopped loving you when I stopped caring about giving you the truth.

It's a responsibility. What does he continue on with? Verse 10, for there are many who are insubordinate, they're empty talkers, they're deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party, the Jews.

[30 : 59] They must be silenced since they're upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. What does the burden of responsibility fall on?

The shoulders of the elders. Not them alone, but them first. Back to Acts chapter 20, speaking to the Ephesian elders, Paul says, I know after my departure, fierce wolves will come in among you. But then he says, they won't spare the flock, but then he says, even among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things to draw away the disciples after them.

You say, well, what kind of elders do we need? We need elders that can spot error outside the church and elders that can spot error inside the church as well.

Even amongst themselves as elders, they need to be able to spot the error, confront it, protect the church, lead the church, teach the church, protect the church.

[32 : 02] Fourthly, they care for the church. They care for the church. Now, an elder may be a gifted overseer who knows their Bible well, but if they don't display a genuine love and concern for the people of God, they're not fulfilling their responsibility to the church.

I've known pastors that you would think after having lunch with them that the last thing that they want to spend their lives doing is shepherding people in a church, and yet it's their vocation.

That's not right. If a man doesn't seem to love God's people, how's he going to care for them?

There's a reason that I have a unique care for the life that Ashlyn and Harper live because I have a unique love for them.

And in the same way, an elder will have a unique care for the people of God because of a unique love that God puts in his heart for them. When recognizing potential elders in the church, we need to be sure that we don't ignore a lack of care for people.

In fact, when the day comes for us to recognize more elders in our church, we need to be able to spot the people who are already doing eldering work.

[33 : 28] They're already shepherding people. They're already doing these things and it's made evident in their life. And part of that is that they just love the people of God.

They care to serve them. An elder is to be a faithful counselor, a prayer warrior who rejoices with the joyful and weeps with the discouraged.

He must be willing to sacrifice time and energy for the people He's been called to lead. Shepherds smell like sheep. And there may be a man in our church who is gifted in the Word, qualified in His character, but if He doesn't smell like sheep, if He doesn't smell like sheep, you should be concerned.

James 5.14 is a pretty good example of this, isn't it? Is anyone sick among you, James writes?

Let Him call for the elders of the church. Let them pray over Him, anointing Him with oil in the name of the Lord. Why would they call the elders? Why couldn't they just call other people in the church?

[34 : 40] Well, they could. But why would He call the elders first? Because they care for the church. Care for the church. The responsibilities of elders are a serious and weighty matter.

And lest, we'll talk about this more next week, but we shouldn't hold expectations that are, that any human is incapable to actually fulfill either.

We're not looking for perfect men. We're just looking for men who will be faithful. faithful. Church needs to guard against those who desire authority of the office but not the responsibility of it, which is the reason Paul instructed Timothy not to be too quick to recognize elders.

He needs to prove that he has the call of God on his life because ultimately the church doesn't call the elder. God does. The church just recognizes the call through the way that the Lord is using him.

Okay? So we see the presence of elders. We see the purpose of elders. Thirdly, we'll be finished.

We see the plurality of elders in the church. The plurality of elders in the church.

[35 : 52] Verse 5, this is why I left you in Crete. You might put what remain into order and appoint elders in every town as I directed you.

So two things to point out in the language here. The plural use of elders with the singular use of town suggests that Paul's vision was for multiple leaders in each church.

So he's not referring to a group of elders that he's then going to disperse among the churches. He's talking about groups of elders within each church.

Brian Chappell says this about it. The plurality of elders in each place alerts us to the need for multiple persons in our churches who will assume responsibility for the spiritual care of others. And before I go much further it needs to be acknowledged that the Bible doesn't prohibit a singular pastor in a church. It's also true that there's no example of a singular pastor in the New Testament either.

[37 : 00] The New Testament references to church leadership are almost exclusively plural. The fact is that the Bible just doesn't know a form of a church leadership that doesn't exist in some type of plurality multiple leadership.

Now let's address the elephant in the room on that. That doesn't mean our church is in sin. I truly believe that. There are unique settings in church planning where it takes time to recognize the people that God is raising up and training and fashioning into this.

I don't think we're in sin but it does mean that we need to be consciously moving toward multiple leadership. We need to be thinking about it.

I hope you pray about it. That you pray for God to raise up men in our church that will come alongside us and help serve the church and lead it well. Let me give you a few reasons why. Plurality guards against pride and an abuse of power. guards against pride which we are all prone to and the abuse of power which we are all also prone to.

[38 : 17] John Murray said this, Plurality is a safeguard against the arrogance and tyranny to which man has the most characteristic proclivity.

Now let me interpret that with Alistair Begg's words. The New Testament provides all the safeguards necessary to prevent the kind of tyranny that is easily exercised in a local church where one man with a fat head and a big mouth runs the operation.

That was a less special way to say what John Murray said. And it's true, isn't it? We know this. We've experienced these things before where a godly man is rightly exercising leadership in the church but because there aren't the right safeguards that God has provided around him over time through temptation and pride he can get a fat head and a big mouth and think he's responsible to run everybody's life and what he says goes.

And that's not the picture that we see in the New Testament. I'm not saying that our disposition toward leaders should be suspicious.

In fact, I don't think it should be. If you don't trust someone, don't appoint them. So we shouldn't constantly just evaluate to see what is this guy doing wrong and how can we fix him.

[39 : 45] That's not the disposition that we have. But we should care to put the Bible safeguards in place to prevent the church from having to deal with a huge mess down the road. And plurality is the first step in this kind of protection.

Number two, plurality provides consistent, long-term leadership. Let me just ask you a very practical question. What happens to a church that is served by a singular pastor and then loses that pastor? What happens? You've been in churches like this. You know what happens. Unfortunately, the burden of responsibility falls on a group of men who are well-meaning and love the Lord and love their church.

And now the weight of choosing a pastor falls on them and they don't have pastoral responsibilities themselves. But they're supposed to choose the next guy.

So they do it the best way that they can and the best way that they can is with the mindset of the business framework that they're used to. So they have a search committee and they sit around a room and they ask guys to come in and they look at their resumes and they see, does this guy have some skills?

[41 : 00] Like, is he capable of doing things? And let me tell you something, it's pretty easy to convince somebody that you got the skills when you don't have the skills. It's not that hard to do. Every preacher has one good sermon and if you're going to let him preach on one Sunday, he's going to preach that one good sermon, isn't he, Terry?

You know what it's like? And then you're going to invite him to come be your pastor and you're going to realize he only had one good sermon. Well, what happens to the church? They have to go on an extensive church for a new pastor who undoubtedly will come in with his own agenda that may or may not be consistent with the church's mind and mission.

But if a congregation is led by a healthy plurality, it will surely be consistently shepherded for many, many years.

If we have a plurality of faithful pastors in our church and something happens to Jared, who do you turn to? The other pastors in the church. The other men who are already shepherding you. Your spiritual life doesn't rely on me. and if I leave this church to where you're dependent on me instead of the Lord Jesus and the gifts that he gives in multiple leadership, then I have failed in doing what I should do to lead you according to the Bible.

[42 : 28] Something happens to me or if you find me to be in sin, who's going to point it out? Who's going to have that kind of access to my life as a senior pastor?

Well, ultimately, it's going to be my wife and it's going to be the elders of the church. And when something happens to me, you just turn to the other elders who are going to shepherd you faithfully. And it may be that one of them are now suited to take the place of senior pastor. But at the very least, they'll be pastors who can rightly evaluate another potential pastor.

Consistent, long-term leadership. Number three, plurality helps to exercise prudence. We could point out a hundred different things that it does this with just out of basic wisdom that we see all throughout the scripture.

We won't do that this morning, but let me just say it from this perspective. A plurality of elders doesn't mean that every pastor is vocational. It doesn't mean that every pastor relates relies on the church to provide their living.

[43 : 37] In fact, I think it's actually very prudent to have multiple lay elders, what we would call lay elders, whose leadership and judgment isn't potentially clouded by the fact that their living is directly tied to the people that they lead.

Again, that doesn't mean that we are to approach our pastors with suspicion. I hope you're not suspicious of me in the hope I'm accountable to you in a faithful way and in a righteous way. But when there's other men sitting around me and we're making real decisions about the church that maybe have strong opinions on different sides of the aisle in our church, our church will be helped when I'm not the only one making that decision.

Our church will be helped to have men who won't be tempted by the fact that if the good givers in the church don't like what I say, there goes my paycheck for the month or whatever it is.

You know what I mean? There's just some prudence in that. There's a lot of different ways that we could talk about that. That's a helpful way, I think. Fourthly and finally, plurality encourages what we would call parity. Parity.

Alexander Strzok said that healthy elderships involve equality with diversity. Equality with diversity among its leadership. And here's what that means. It doesn't preclude the need or role of a senior pastor or someone that is to be a leader among the leaders and will carry the load of the regular preaching in the church.

[45 : 12] It doesn't preclude that. But a plurality of elders does allow for differing gifts and experiences to be fruitfully used by God for the good of his church.

My gift may have to do with preaching a sermon on a Sunday. But there will be other men in our church who are gifted in ways that I am not. They may have a unique sense of compassion and sympathy and they'll be able to shepherd our church in the role and the function of care in a way that I'm not as good at doing.

Whatever it may be. Parity. Equality. Not hierarchy. Not inferior elders and superior elders. Not that at all. Diversity. Differing gifts all fulfilling the same role.

So a healthy plurality then is not only good for the church. It's good for the elders. It provides camaraderie. Unity of purpose. It will help avoid decision fatigue for a senior pastor.

It protects any one leader from unnecessary or unhelpful accusations. Christians. I believe it's God's plan for his church and that in itself is enough for us to care about it.

[46 : 32] And I think there's hints of it for sure in verse 5. And we could go to a lot of places in the New Testament to see that fleshed out. Let me just bring it to a close this way.

When it comes to the issue of church leadership, remember the structure itself isn't the goal. The structure itself isn't the goal. Remember Titus' primary task is to make sure that the churches are faithful to the gospel, that they're committed to sound doctrine, that they're living godly lives that show the glory of God.

That's the greater end to which the lesser goal of plurality of eldership actually achieves. So that's what we're looking for.

Without faithful elders, our church will eventually fall into dysfunction, it'll fall into error, it'll be subject to it at least. Let me give two specific applications as we finish.

One, the congregation is at least in part responsible for this. In 2 Timothy chapter 4 or chapter 3, Paul tells Timothy that eventually there's going to come, there's going to be congregations with itching ears and they're going to heap to themselves teachers who will tell them whatever it is that they want to hear.

[47 : 55] Meaning that the congregation bears some responsibility in this, at least in part. You're responsible for your leadership. And what we need to do as a church is care deeply about this.

I know for most people, talking about church polity will send you into the deeper stages of sleep for sure in your REM cycle. But it's at least something that you need to care about because you love your church.

So as a congregation we need to care about it and to pray about it, we need to think about it. But let me give you this final application. Paul said that those who desire to shepherd a church desire a noble thing.

and we need men who will desire the work. Who will desire the work. Now understand that the Lord does this, understand that.

But we need men who will desire to love and to lead his church. Doesn't automatically qualify a man to lead, but no man will be willing or able to shepherd a church without a God-given desire to do so.

[49 : 09] And when's the last time that in your time with the Lord you prayed and you said, Lord, if you were to ever want me to serve in this way, I would be willing to do it because I love you and I love your church. Can I also say that we need wives who will encourage this in their husbands?

If not for any other thing, to look at the qualifications of a godly man, Titus 1 and 1 Timothy 3, and say, I want you to be that man in our home. And if the Lord uses it to put you in a place of leadership in our church, I'm not going to stand in the way of that.

And I'm going to encourage you in that. And I'm going to help you in that. A wife won't make your ministry, but a wife can certainly break it. And maybe some of you as wives would pray, you know, if the Lord were to ever do this in my husband's life, I just want to be pliable to the Lord's will.

And I'm going to support it and help. Courage and whatever way I can. And maybe we can all pray for one another to that end. take care for