

To give you a sense of how we are approaching these Sunday Night Gathering teaching times: First we began with key definitions. This is important to ground our terminology and categories in the Bible so that our church backgrounds and culture don't confuse what we're working towards. Then Craig talked about the Biblical basis for elders and last week Rich spoke to the Biblical basis for congregationalism again grounding it all in Scripture.

Once the Biblical foundation has been laid, we will spend the next 3 weeks looking at the Biblically defined roles of each (the elders, the members (congregation), and the deacons)

On July 1st , We'll see and hear about what this looks like in practice at a local church.

We'll finish up with 3 weeks on some practical steps as we think about what this would look like at Meadow Creek Church. We'll cover the qualifications of elders, deacons and members as well as some ideas on how we would go about selecting (recognizing) elders.

We've laid this out so that there is intentional overlap of topics. In case you want to review what's being presented, you can just click the link on the home page of our website. By the way, the sermon outlines and questions are also on our website on the "messages" tab. You'll see a link on each sermon that says "resources".

As we've discussed, the current Meadow Creek Church deacons are a hybrid of deacons and elders and we're taking time to highlight the Biblical definitions of each role. As we do this, we are acknowledging the biblical roots of the Meadow Creek and this church's deep love for the Bible. That's one of the main reasons we've been a part of Meadow Creek Church for 27 years. We have discussed and we believe that the existing deacon based governance structure grew out of the early members' understanding of the Bible and their experiences. We want to build on that and pursue further our understanding of biblical church leadership and its forms.

To Review our definitions of Elders and Deacons: A reminder: We're using the term elder and pastor interchangeably as well as pastor/shepherd and overseer. Whether they are paid or volunteer it's all the same job. It's kind of like volunteer firemen and full time firemen.

- **Elders:** Christ-minded men, who are not new converts and who are able to teach, chosen by the congregation who give themselves to:
 - praying and ministering the Word (teaching and preaching);
 - shepherding or caring for the members of the body by knowing, feeding, protecting, watching over, and leading them
 - overseeing the life of the church
 - modeling Christ-like maturity with their lives; and
 - raising up men to serve, shepherd, and lead the church

Supportive texts to consider: Acts 20; I Peter 5:2; Hebrews 13:17; I Timothy 3:1-7; Acts 6:4; James 5:14; II Tim. 2:2;

· **Deacons:** Christ-minded men and women chosen by the congregation who manage the church's resources in a way that serves the unity of the church and supports the ministry of the Word.

There are three aspects of the work of the deacons:

1. They care for the physical needs of the Church
 2. They work for the unity of the body
 3. They support the ministry of the Word
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Before we get too far, let's consider the WHY? Why are we considering elder-led congregationalism?

1. God established the church to be His appointed means of spreading the Gospel and making Disciples.
2. We've looked at Ephesians 4:11-16—that tells us how this holy temple/church is to be built? By God's giving of gifts in the form of roles in the church: Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastor-teachers (shepherd/elders) for "equipping the saints (body members) for the work of the ministry, to build up the body of Christ" so that each of the members is like Christ and loves like Christ, caring for the other members of the body.

This is why we're using the term "elder-led congregationalism" As Rich talked about last week, the Biblical model that we're talking about has the members of the congregation doing the work of the ministry and the elders/pastors to equip them. Therefore, the job of pastor/elder should be to teach, explain, shepherd and move their members toward maturity and the ability to make good decisions and therefore use their authority as a church member maturely.

In Acts 6, we see the first deacons that were men full of the Spirit and wisdom to deal with the potential inequality in caring for the needs of those in the church. And the reason given is so that the disciples could, as it says in Acts 6:4 "to devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word".

You can refer to your handout where I've placed this on the top of the handout as the primary roles from which all other roles follow. "In order to speak to men for God, elders must speak to God for men." Dever – Understanding Church Leadership.

If we want to understand Christian elders and their work and roles, I think the best description is found in the Biblical image of a shepherd which is what Craig led us through 2 weeks ago.

ELDERS SHEPHERD

The most comprehensive word for what elders do is "shepherd" (Acts. 20:28, I Pet 5:2) In the New Testament Greek, as in English, there is both a noun form and a verb form of the word shepherd. A shepherd (noun) is someone who shepherds (verb). And in Scripture this refers to

activities like knowing, feeding, leading and protecting. In some ways, every Christian participates in shepherding (Romans 15:14). Yet some men are specifically recognized and set apart for the work of shepherding a congregation. These are the elders.

I like the definition of elders from Derek Tidball in his book "Skillful Shepherds" - "a subtle blend of authority and care", "as much toughness as tenderness, as much courage as comfort" .

In 1 Peter 5:1-2 "Therefore, I exhort the elders among you . . . to shepherd the flock of God, exercising oversight."

We can see the connection between being a shepherd and giving oversight as the elders care for the flock or local church.

As keepers of the sheep, New Testament elders are to 1) protect, 2) feed, 2) lead and 4) care for the flock's many practical needs.

Each one of these roles is found in a Macro or Church-wide Level as well as a Micro or individual Level.

1) **PROTECT THE SHEEP**

For example on the Macro Level

A major part of the New testament elder's work is to protect the local church from false teachers. As Paul was leaving Asia Minor, he summoned the elders of the church in Ephesus for a farewell exhortation: The essence of Paul's charge is to "Guard the Flock - wolves are coming"

Acts 20:17, 28-31

17 Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. 28 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. 29 I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31 Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears.

This requires an awareness of cultural "wolves" that threaten the flock. This would include protecting from false teaching in many forms including materialism, pluralism, relativism, and a watered down or false gospel. This protecting role would also include church discipline that reach a stage where they are brought "to the church" (Matt 18:17)

On a micro level, elders are called upon watch over individuals to keep them from straying from the purity of doctrine or the purity of life. This requires knowing people and being spiritual alert.

This kind of work is not done in a single sermon or in a day. Usually the work of eldering is as repetitive and daily as walking the flock to a fresh field for grazing.

2) FEEDING THE FLOCK

ELDERS PREACH AND TEACH

The other basic activity or role of elders is preaching and teaching the Word of God to the congregation. A qualification of elders is that they must be able to teach because so much of what they do is teaching

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Tim 3:2 **2** Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach”

Elders teach by leading the meetings of the church. They teach by the way they give announcements or read Scripture. They teach by how they pray aloud in public. Certainly they teach when they lead a Sunday school class, whether it is for children or adults.

Elders teach the Word of God by preaching. Elders set aside to do this work full-time are wonderful gifts to the local church. But an elder does not need to be set aside full-time or be the main preaching pastor in order for his basic ministry to be teaching. Elders teach in their one-on-one conversations and in what they write. They teach in small group Bible studies and in evangelistic endeavors.

That is what Paul says in 2 Tim 2:2.

2 and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.

Faithful men who will be able to teach, meaning either they lack the skills or opportunity now but one day they will do what you are doing. So an elder's job is to take men of that character and as they grow out of being new converts help them learn to teach.

This is why elders must be men who devote themselves to knowing the Word of God. Elders should also specifically give themselves to figuring out and understanding important topics in the Bible and in life so that the members of the congregation will be protected, prepared and equipped.

As elders teach, they reflect the manner in which the Good News came to their ears and hearts

from the outside and saved them. Elders pray that God's Spirit would carry it the rest of the way into the hearts of the men and women in their church.

3) LEADING THE FLOCK

According to Acts 20 and I Peter 5 which we just read, elders shepherd the church by, among other things, to lead the church. Give oversight or be an overseer.

ELDERS EXERCISE OVERSIGHT - This is the most common perception of the primary responsibility. Making decision for matters that concern the congregation as a whole is truly an important task.

Paul's words to the Ephesian elders are instructive; "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood (Acts 20:28 ESV)

Elders exercise oversight in all sorts of ways.

On the Macro - church wide level - Like helping set vision, mission, purpose and policies of the church. The good news is that God has given an outline of the broad purposes of the church in his Word for us to examine and live out. The challenge is to determine how these biblical purposes are to be carried out in our particular church at this particular time.

They do it by concerning themselves with the gospel work that the congregation sponsors.

The elders exercise oversight on the micro- individual - level in numerous ways. They meet with missionaries and maybe they even travel to where the missionaries live and work

Elders exercise oversight by meeting with the members of the congregation in their homes and maybe at their places of work.

They look after their member's life and doctrine. They are given an authority by God to exercise for the member's good.

Elders exercise oversight by examining individuals for membership and then recommending them to the congregation. Sometimes this means slowing down someone's application to join the church because they want to help the individual understand something better, resolve question or sort out some areas of his or her life.

One of the most important way to lead is to be "examples to the flock" I Peter 1:3. Failure here sabotages the rest. All but teaching and oversight of the qualifications of an elder relate to godly character.

Titus 1:7-9 7 For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy

for gain, 8 but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.9 He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.”

Because part of oversight is showing the way. They lead the way as disciples. By instructing, they show how to instruct. By being faithful, they show what it looks like to be faithful.

ELDERS WATCH OVER THEMSELVES AND THEIR FAMILIES

Paul instructs the Ephesian elders to “pay careful attention to yourselves” (Acts 20:28)

I Timothy 3:4-5 Being good shepherds of their little flocks at home. It doesn't mean that a man must be a perfect father and husband. Elders must lead by example in family living.

4) KNOWING and CARING FOR THE SHEEP

On the Macro - church level - The fundamental element of knowing who is in your flock and knowing those whom they are accountable.

James 5:14 “call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord”. This text assumes a relationship between the sick person and a group of elders to whom they were to look for care.

Macro-knowing requires that the elders are able to identify the sheep for whom they are accountable to the Lord. The shepherd's responsibility is to identify those who know the Good Shepherd, those who have heard his voice by responding in repentance and faith to the gospel of Jesus Christ. As John Piper says, “We do not become sheep by believing; rather we believe only because we are sheep.”

The elders of a local church are to do all they can to assure the correlation between the visible church and the invisible church.

Macro knowing the flock also includes more subjective matters such as understanding the unique characteristics of your congregation as a whole. Rural or Suburban, mono or multi-cultural, community church or regional church. Etc.

MICRO-KNOWING

Knowing the sheep personally.

Elders lead the way in rejoicing with these members and mourning with them. Elders set a pattern for the members of caring when someone loses a job, or when someone is frustrated in his or her relationships. Elders are discontent when a member misunderstands God or his Word, and they give themselves to tending to such individuals

They counsel each other on difficult pastoral situations in member's lives.

They continually search for whom God is raising up as elders and deacons.

They invite hurting or struggling sheep to meet with them to pray for them in their trial or sickness, to hear about their struggles with sin, or to advise them in their desire to take the gospel overseas.

In all these ways and more, elders seek to fulfill Peter's exhortation "shepherd the flock of God, that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you" (I Peter 5:2)

SUMMARY

All of this is based in prayer. God gives the elders the responsibility for a flock, so they should pray for their flocks individually, collectively, and in the congregation.

Elders must know their sheep and serve them. Godly elders lead their sheep and feed them. They give themselves to ruling well and guarding them carefully. They seek out the lowly and despised. They train those gifted to teach others. In all of this, they follow the example of Christ, the Good Shepherd who loses none of his sheep.

RESOURCES (besides the Bible)

Eldership – Piper, Chapter 6

Biblical Eldership – Strauch, Chapter 1-5

Shepherd Leader – Witmer, Chapter 5-8

Finding Faithful - Chapter 19-28

Understanding Church Leadership – Dever

Understanding the Congregation's Authority – Leeman

Church Elders – Rinne

Elder = Pastor = Shepherd = Overseer

Vocational or Non-vocational

PRAYER				
MINISTRY OF THE WORD (Acts 6:4)				
	Protecting	Feeding	Leading	Knowing
MACRO Public Ministry Church-Wide	Acts 20:17,28-31 • Public instruction and warning from the Scriptures • Awareness of cultural “wolves” • “Tell it to the church” Matt. 18:17	1 Timothy 3:2 • Preaching and Teaching • Multiple ways • Must know God’s Word • To help prepare, protect and equip	1 Peter 5:1-2 • Exercising oversight Acts 20:28 • Decisions for the congregation as a whole • Help set vision, mission & purpose	• Identify those you are accountable for • Accurate membership roles • Unique characteristics of your church – strengths, weakness, traits, opportunities
MICRO Personal Relational Ministry	• Private warning • Keep them from straying in doctrine and life • Repetitive & daily • Matt. 18:15-16 Steps to restore wandering sheep	2 Timothy 2:2 • Train others to teach • Discipleship • Small group •	• Meet with members (& other elders) in their homes • Interviewing people for membership. • Watch over themselves & family Acts 20:28 • Be examples 1 Peter 1:3	James 5:14 • relationships • pray with • “Smell like sheep” • Care, concern, advise • Mourn and rejoice with

Adapted from “The Shepherd Leader” by Timothy Witmer