

Background for evaluating Biblical standards for eldership

Nowhere in Scripture does God call for perfect men to lead his people. That is also true of his church, but the New Testament does give us guidelines to assess the godly character qualities which God expects every man who is appointed to the position of *overseer* to have and maintain. The local body of believers and its elders has the final responsibility to affirm each candidate for the position and office of Elder.

The following is a list of and very brief explanation of the qualities listed in various New Testament passages. The application questions are designed to help understand the qualifications and evaluate potential elders.

If you have any questions about these qualifications or their meaning, please take the time to look up the various passages and to ask any of the elders what they mean.

A. MORAL OR SPIRITUAL CHARACTER

BLAMELESS/ABOVE REPROACH (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6)

Meaning:

None of us is perfect and the pressure to be perfect is not healthy or godly. What God desires is that we are godly and that means that we are consistently being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. An elder's conduct in life is consistently lived in conformity to God's Word. There are no "handholds for blame". No critic has grounds for charges that would cast reproach on the office of elder, the local church, or the name of Christ.

Application:

Does this man have a good reputation and does he deserve it? Is even his (your) private life patterned after the Word of God and the character of God?

EXEMPLARY (1 Peter 5)

Meaning:

Exemplary means that these are men that can be looked up to and a younger believer can pattern their lives after the manner of life of an elder.

Application:

Can this man say as Paul did, "Follow me as I follow Christ"? Is this a man that you would want your children to emulate in his pursuit of Christ, his family, his business, etc? How does he conduct himself when he is confronted with a failure?

ONE WOMAN MAN (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6)

Meaning:

This term forbids involvement in any extra marital affairs. It also means that the inner nature of a man is not driven to sexual addiction, perversion, or sexual activity outside of marriage. His love is isolated and centralized.

Application:

Has this man maintained a sexually pure and moral life? Has this man demonstrated a faithful commitment to one woman? What are his standards for personal

entertainment? Does he have a problem with pornography or any sexual activity outside of marriage?

TEMPERATE-FREE FROM EXCESSES (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:7)

Meaning:

Scripture does not forbid the consumption of alcoholic beverages but it does forbid drunkenness or excess. A man being considered for eldership must not be a man who is controlled by the need or cravings for certain substances. This also includes excesses in other areas.

Application: Is there any material substance, which this man uses in excess or takes into his body because he needs them or has become dependent on its effects? Are there times when drugs, intoxicants, etc. controls his physical, mental, or emotional being? Is this man given to excesses or self-indulgence in any area of his life?

SELF-CONTROLLED (1 Timothy 3)

Meaning:

Is he able to discipline his thoughts and actions, even under difficult circumstances? Is this person a person of extremes or do they demonstrate a stability and balance in their lives?

Application:

Is this person who person who consistently demonstrates self-control in areas of temptation and areas of tension? How do they handle themselves in tough situations? Does this person "go off" easily and regularly?

RESPECTABLE (1 Timothy 3)

Meaning:

This word is translated a number of different ways. It has the meaning of good behavior or respectability.

Application:

Does this man live an ordered, modest life as opposed to garish or ostentatious?

HOSPITABLE (1 Timothy 3)

Meaning:

He enjoys getting to know and help others. He is willing to open his life and home to others.

Application:

How open are this man and his family to people? Are they easy to get to know and are they genuinely interested in others?

SOBER MINDED (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1)

Meaning:

Sensible, prudent, and serious. It does not mean that he does not have a sense of humor, but is he serious about the things of life that should be taken seriously.

Application:

Is this a man who understands life and can laugh at the things that are not that serious, but his life is not just a lark? He knows that there are matters that impact eternity and his life is purposely directed towards that end?

GENTLE (1 Timothy 3)

Meaning:

His attitude, as reflected in his speech and actions, is kind, moderate, yielding. He does not strike out at others like a bully. He is not one that throws his weight around or is consistently rude or harsh.

Application:

Are people afraid of this man (not because he speaks the truth, but he is insensitive or even purposely hurtful)? Is he a bully physically or verbally with his family or others? Does he genuinely care about the feelings and care of people?

NOT QUARRELSOME; NOT OVERBEARING, NOT VIOLENT, NOT HOT HEADED, NOT SELF-WILLED (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1)

Meaning:

His mental composure is not roused to anger or irritation by sudden emotions; he reacts calmly and moderately. He does not have a contentious spirit that enjoys or incites physical or verbal fights. He is not an agitator who loves to stir people to discontent and bickering.

Application:

How much stress does it take to "set this man off"? Do he go around "with a chip on his shoulder"? Does this person like to argue just to argue? Is he quick tempered and violent in his home or elsewhere? Would this man be considered stubborn or reasonable?

NOT MONEY HUNGRY (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1)

Meaning:

This does not mean that an elder cannot be wealthy, but he is not to be greedy for or obsessed with obtaining worldly treasure. Rather, his great priorities and desires are eternal. He does not condone cheating, bribery, deceit, or any other improper means to secure things.

Application:

How does this man handle his finances? Does he have a preoccupation with making or storing up money? Is he a giver to the cause of Christ? Is he consistently tempted by get rich quick schemes? Would this man fudge on biblical principles in order to make money? Would he or has he unfairly used people in the past to make money?

MATURE (1 Timothy 3)

Meaning:

An elder must have a consistent working knowledge of the Word of God and how it applies to daily life. He needs to have the maturity to deal with difficult situations and

difficult people gently but firmly. The concern here is not so much with chronological or even spiritual age as it is with the a man's demonstrated ability to apply the truth of the Word of God consistently over time and testing.

Application:

When did this man commit his life to Christ? What has been his experience within local churches or in the Christian community in the past? Is this a person to whom you would go for godly wisdom and council? What happens in this man's life during times of personal difficulties or crisis?

JUST, HOLY

Meaning:

This person deals rightly with issues and people. He consistently does the right thing regardless of whether it is personally costly. He is non-compromising when it comes to obeying God's Word and principles. He is consistently anxious to be conformed to the image of Christ.

Application:

Is this man sincere in his walk with God and consistent in his application of the Word of God in his life and the lives of others around him? Is he fickle when it is inconvenient or uncomfortable to walk in personal obedience to God's Word? Is he consistent in his pursuit of personal spiritual growth?

HOLDS SOLIDLY TO THE WORD OF GOD

Meaning:

The Word of God is the ultimate authority in this man's life. Obedience is not optional.

Application:

Is this man a consistent student of God's Word? Is he convinced that it is the inspired inerrant word of God and does it dictate his lifestyle, priorities, and practice?

GOOD REPUTATION WITHIN THE COMMUNITY (1 Timothy 3)

Meaning:

His life and attitudes must attract unbelievers to the person of Jesus Christ. The non-Christian world must have no grounds for charges that he violates their standards of conduct (which are in accord with God's Word).

Application:

How does this person relate to his neighbors or coworkers? What do they think of him and his faith? Would they have a negative perspective of Christ because of this man's reputation in the business world, social circles, etc.? Would his being appointed as an Elder exalt their opinion of this local church for its high quality of leadership?

B. ABILITIES

MANAGES HIS FAMILY WELL (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1)

Meaning:

One of the ways that the church is described is "The Family of God". Leadership in the church functions very much like leadership in a home. It is a position of respect and

influence rather than power and authority. Therefore the best testing ground for ability to oversee or manage the church is the family. If he has children, they must manifest sincere respect for him as they submit in obedience to his leading and authority. His children must not have a reputation of living abandoned, dissolute lives that cannot be subjected to control; unrestrained morally and/or wasteful (reckless) in living. He needs to have demonstrated the ability to lead them towards godly living.

Application:

Again, we are not looking for perfect families. They do not exist, but does this man's family demonstrate respect for him and a willingness to follow his life and example? Has he been effective in raising kids that are controllable and have a desire to know and follow Christ?

ABLE TO TEACH THE TRUTH AND REFUTE ERROR (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1)

Meaning:

An elder must first and continually be continually learning and have a desire to understand God's Word more clearly. He needs to be able to explain the significant doctrines of Scripture and their application to every day life. He needs to be able to defend his faith and refute doctrinal error and teach others to do the same. This does not necessarily imply the gift of teaching. It refers more to a clear and mature understanding of God's Word.

Application:

What is this man doing to consistently grow in his understanding of God and His Word? If you had a question about the teaching of some cult or some theological issue, would this be a man who's council you would seek? Is he in any way foggy or unclear in his ability to handle the Bible or to teach it?

LEADERSHIP (Romans 12:8; 1 Peter 5:1-4; Hebrew 13:17, 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1)

Meaning:

One of the jobs of elders is to lead the local congregation. They do so as servants and as examples, but they also have the responsibility to set the spiritual direction and focus for the church. Hebrews teaches that they are held responsible for the spiritual leadership of the church.

Application:

Is this a man who is helping set the pace for the congregation? Is he involved in the lives of people and helping care for their spiritual growth and maturity? Could you willingly follow his direction so that you and your family will be more like Christ and the community will be impacted by the life of the individuals in the church and the reputation of the church as a whole?

C. DESIRE OR CALL

WILLING, DESIROUS, EAGER, SERVANT, SELF SACRIFICING (1 Peter 5; 1 Timothy 3)

Meaning:

Being an elder is not an easy task. It involves extra time and energy because it is very much like parenting. It is never done and it is highly relational. There are tough issues to deal with and tough decisions to make. A man who is an elder must not do so

because “there is no one else to do it”. It is also not a position to be looked at for status or power. It is a position of servanthood.

Application:

Is this man consistently desirous to help others be like Jesus? Is this local church just something else in his life or are the people in this church and their spiritual well being one of the great priorities of his life? Is ministry consistent even when it is costly, or does it happen sporadically only when it is convenient?

RESPONSIBLE (1 Timothy 3; 5:17-20; Ez. 34; Titus 1)

Meaning:

Responsible means being able to accept and complete tasks as well as accepting the added burden to life’s busyness. Biblical eldership is not an easy task. It is sometimes demanding of time and energy.

Application:

Does this man have the time and demonstrated ability to follow through on tasks related to people and this local church body? Is he a person that can be counted on to do what he says and to honor his word? Is he in a position in life with his work and family to dedicate time and energy to the needs of the church and the individuals under his care?