



Elder Process & Preparation Guide

Subject to Ongoing Revision - Fall of 2022

Men of Sacred City,

I wanted to put into words my desire for you to grow in godliness, maturity, and leadership. For years I have prayed for men like you, pleading with the Lord to grace Sacred City Church with men who aspire to eldership. And yet, I know the reality is that even though I long deeply for more elder qualified men, few will devote themselves to the preparation and development required for eldership. Let's be clear: no one stumbles into godliness. Cultivating the character and convictions necessary to shepherd God's flock demands long obedience in the same direction. My hope and prayer is that many of you take up this very task.

As the elders go, so goes the church. Because this proverb is true, Sacred City Church unapologetically holds a high bar for leadership and eldership. This is good for both God's leaders and God's people. The qualifications for eldership are high but by the grace of God they are not unattainable. The purpose of this document is to clearly outline our elder process and provide tracks for you grow toward eldership. The practical encouragements in this document are not a checklist that must be completed in order to become an elder nor a list that guarantees you can become an elder. The Holy Spirit alone calls, qualifies, and commissions men as elders. Sacred City's process of discerning the Spirit's calling includes the six phases listed below:

- Phase 1: Establish an Observable Track Record (1-3 years)
- Phase 2: Self-Nomination
- Phase 3: Qualification and Preparation (6 months to 5 years)
- Phase 4: Candidate Phase (6-12 months)
- Phase 5: Examination Phase (3 months)
- Phase 6: Installation

As you can see, the minimum time frame for a potential elder to move through this process is almost two and a half years. Honesty, patience, and diligence will serve you well in this process. My hope is to serve and equip you in your development as a leader.

For His Kingdom,

Justin Dean
On behalf of the elders of Sacred City

SACRED CITY CHURCH: ELDER PROCESS

PHASE 1: ESTABLISH AN OBSERVABLE TRACK RECORD (1-3 years)

Men who wish to serve as elders should have a known track record serving, leading and giving within Sacred City, with demonstrated teaching skills and observable fruit in ministry, marriage and family life. This is in keeping with the instruction of 1 Peter 5:3 that elders should be “examples to the flock.”

PHASE 2: SELF-NOMINATION

When a Sacred City member senses an internal call from the Holy Spirit to serve as an elder/pastor, he should make his desire known to the current eldership. Those men will confirm the calling and give further direction. This is in keeping with the instruction of 1 Timothy 3 that men must “aspire to the office of elder” (3:1) and “be tested first” (3:10). At this time the current eldership will announce to the congregation that the particular individual has entered into the elder process.

PHASE 3: QUALIFICATION AND PREPARATION (6 months-5 years)

Scripture is clear that no man is to be appointed to eldership unless he is qualified. A man may be rightly called of God to aspire to eldership, yet be years away from meeting the rigorous biblical qualifications. This phase, therefore, may be long and will require great patience and discipline on the part of potential elders

There are three tiers to Phase 3:

Tier 1: Initial Study

All aspiring elders should rigorously study 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 to understand God’s expectations for pastor/elders. All Christians are in the process of sanctification, so qualifications must be read against the backdrop of God’s grace (i.e. the standard is maturity, not perfection). But Scripture is clear that no man is qualified to lead Christ’s church unless he is:

- A mature Christian, not a new/young believer (1 Tim 3:6)
- An exemplary, godly leader in his marriage and family (1 Tim 3:4-5)
- Self-controlled and disciplined in his personal habits (1 Tim 3:2-3)
- An exemplary steward of his financial resources (1 Tim 3:3)
- A man of observable, proven godly character (Titus 1:8)

- Skilled in the study, teaching, and defense of God's Word (Titus 1:9)
- Able to recognize and combat all types of false teaching (Titus 1:9)
- Courageous enough to confront sin and error (Titus 1:10-13)

Men who aspire to eldership but are not yet qualified should submit to the counsel of current elders for assistance in their growth and development (Heb 13:17, 1 Peter 5:5).

Secondly, all aspiring elders should go through a guided study of Biblical Eldership by Alexander Strauch.

The aspiring elder will inform the elders of the completion of their studies. The aspiring elder will have an opportunity to confirm their internal call primarily based upon their agreement to the character demands. It is possible the aspiring elder may recognize they are not qualified and so at this point step out of the process.

Tier 2: Study of Primary Theological Distinctives

The aspiring elder will enter into further study by becoming familiar with the anticipated written essays, major theological paper, written and oral exams. The aspiring elder will read through the documents for Primary Theological Distinctives that identify the theological distinctives of a gospel centered missional church in the historic Protestant Reformed tradition.

The aspiring elder will inform the elders of the completion of their study. They will have an opportunity to confirm their agreement to continue as an elder within the context of the theological distinctives of a gospel centered missional church in the historic Protestant Reformed tradition. It is possible the aspiring elder may recognize that they cannot agree fully with this tradition and thus step out of the process.

Tier 3: Study of Secondary Theological Distinctives

The aspiring elder will enter into further study by becoming familiar with the Secondary Theological Distinctive by reading one book from each category (e.g. Systematic Theology, Ecclesiology/Missiology, etc.) starting on page 7. The aim of these readings is to assist the aspiring elder to start working on and preparing for the written essays, theological paper and written and oral exams.

The aspiring elder will inform the elders of the completion of their study.

PHASE 4: CANDIDATE PHASE (6-12 months)

Once a man has had his calling and qualifications confirmed by the elders, and he has completed the primary and secondary theological distinctive readings, he may enter a phase of study and preparation for the specific work of eldership at Sacred City. This phase involves intentional mentorship by the current elders and careful consideration of the roles, responsibilities, and functions of elders at Sacred City. Features of this phase include:

- Careful reading and study of Sacred City's governing documents, doctrinal statements, and philosophy of ministry
- Invitation into eldership meetings for observation for six month to twelve months
- Multiple conversations and interactions with current elders to assess the candidate's "fit" in the ministry context of Sacred City (**Note: it is possible for a man to *personally* meet all the biblical qualifications, yet not be appropriate *contextually* for eldership. See Appendix 3 for more.)

During Phase 4 the aspiring elder will be working on the written essays, major theological paper and the written exam in anticipation of the Examination Phase.

PHASE 5: EXAMINATION PHASE (3 months)

The process of testing and examining elders should be one of the most rigorous in the life of a church. Since the elders are the primary spiritual leaders in the community, their character, competence, and commitment must be second to none.

- Communal Scrutiny
 - At the beginning of the examination phase, the members of Sacred City will be urged to evaluate the lives and conduct of the potential elders. If a member is aware of any disqualifying sin or character flaw in an elder candidate, he or she will be urged to make the matter known to the existing elders, who will investigate the claim.
- Written Essays (see Appendix 1)
 - Personal Spiritual History
 - Spiritual Disciplines
 - Theological Influences

- Leadership Strengths and Weaknesses
 - Gospel Articulation
- Major Theological Paper
 - Each candidate will contribute to the theological development of Sacred City by researching and writing an academic-style theological position paper on a topic relevant to our ministry. The paper should interact with current scholarship and opposing positions and demonstrate a thorough knowledge of its subject.
- Written Exam – Bible Comprehension
 - Each candidate must pass (70% or better) a comprehensive, multiple-choice and short-answer Bible comprehension test
- Written Exam – Practical and Pastoral Theology (short answer/essay)
 - Each candidate must pass a short-answer exam applying the teaching of Scripture to various real-life pastoral and ministry situations
- Oral Exam
 - Each candidate must pass a one-hour oral exam which will draw from the same areas as the written exams, in greater detail
- Husband/Wife Interview – Live
 - Each candidate and his wife must meet with the current elders for a candid interview related to issues of marriage and family

PHASE 6: INSTALLATION

Following the satisfactory completion of all requirements and the passing of examination, new elders will be installed publicly at a Sacred City Church worship gathering.

SACRED CITY CHURCH: ELDER PREPARATION GUIDE

The work of sanctification and growth is consistently attributed to the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, yet God's Word is clear that you are to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling...for it is God who works in you, both to will and work for his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:12-13). Christ has set you free and given the seal of your adoption, the Holy Spirit, yet "God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap" (Gal. 6:8). The Bible teaches both God's sovereignty over your leadership trajectory and your responsibility for maturity. Therefore, you must be prayerful and sensitive to the work the Holy Spirit within you and also diligent to plan out your growth in competence, character, and compatibility.

Theological formation and biblical conviction are two areas of competence in which I consistently see a lack of preparation in the men who aspire to eldership. Consider the following two lists as you work toward putting together a personal discipleship plan.

THEOLOGICAL STUDY

One of the qualifications of an elder is the "ability to teach" (1 Timothy 3:2). This assumes an elder has a measure of biblical and theological depth upon which to draw his teaching.

A man at Sacred City who wishes to pursue Eldership should begin his theological studies by familiarizing himself with the theological distinctives of a gospel centered missional church in the historic Protestant Reformed tradition.

Primary Theological Distinctives

- Apostles and Nicene Creeds
- Sacred City Church Bylaws
- The Westminster Confession of Faith
- The 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith

Secondary Theological Distinctives

Each elder candidate should read at least one book from each category before leaving the candidate stage (stage 4) of the Eldership process. However, as Elders we are lifelong learners/disciples who strive to consistently and constantly grow in our understanding of the word of God and our ability to teach it to the members in our church. To that end, we recommend all of these books to the man who wishes to be an elder at Sacred City Church.

- Systematic Theology
 - *Systematic Theology*, Louis Berkhof
 - *Systematic Theology*, Wayne Grudem
- Covenantal Theology
 - *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, Pascal Denault
 - *Christ of the Covenant*, O Palmer Robertson
- Ecclesiology/Missiology
 - *When the Church was a Family*, Joseph Hellerman
 - *Saturate*, Jeff Vanderstelt
 - *Center Church*, Tim Keller
 - *The Mission of God*, Christopher Wright
- Biblical Epistemology
 - *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society*, Lesslie Newbigin
 - *Perspectives on the Word of God*, John Frame
- Reformed Theology
 - *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, John Calvin
 - *Chosen by God*, R.C. Sproul
- Apologetics
 - *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis
 - *Presuppositional Apologetics*, Greg Bahnsen
 - *Apologetics and the Glory of God*, John Frame
 - *Reasonable Faith*, William Lane Craig
- Church Leadership
 - *Biblical Eldership*, Alexander Strauch
 - *Brothers We are Not Professionals*, John Piper
 - *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, Richard Lovelace
 - *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, Piper and Grudem
- Spiritual Formation & Pastoral Theology
 - *How People Change*, Timothy Lane and Paul David Tripp
 - *Desiring the Kingdom*, James K.A. Smith
 - *The Christian Ministry*, Charles Bridges
 - *The Gospel*, Ray Ortlund
- Personal Life and Godliness
 - *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, Donald Whitney
 - *Dangerous Calling*, Paul Tripp
 - *Prayer*, Tim Keller
 - *God, Marriage, and Family*, Andreas Kostenberger
- God and Government
 - *The Mission of God*, Joseph Boot
 - *God and Government*, Gary Demar

APPENDIX 1: WRITTEN ESSAYS

Please compose a thoughtful one- to two-page essay on each of the following topics.

1. *Your personal spiritual history.* How did you come to faith in Christ? What have been the significant milestones or influences in your spiritual formation? How did God call you into leadership in his church, and specifically, in Sacred City Church?
2. *Your practice of spiritual disciplines.* How do you walk, hear, and learn from God? What habits of relating to God have you cultivated? How are they practically playing out in your life right now?
3. *Your primary theological influences.* What teachers, books, or movements have been instrumental in shaping your theology? What elements of these influences are visible in your ministry?
4. *Your leadership strengths and weaknesses.* What unique gifts and strengths has God given you? What weaknesses and blind spots have you discovered in your leadership? How are both your strengths and your weaknesses exalting Christ by driving you more deeply into the gospel of grace?
5. *Your understanding of the gospel.* What do you understand the gospel to be? How is it central to the work of the church? How does it find tangible expression in your life and ministry?

APPENDIX 2: SAMPLE ELDER EXAMINATION QUESTIONS

The questions below are intended to be representative, not comprehensive. This is not a "study guide," but rather a sampling of the kinds of doctrinal, personal, and pastoral issues candidates need to have a handle on in order to pass examination for eldership.

Knowledge/Bible Comprehension

1. Where are the two major passages in the New Testament that list qualifications for elders?
2. What two terms are used interchangeably with "elder" in the NT?
3. List some of the duties of an elder according to the NT. Include chapter and verse references if you know them.
4. Which books are referred to as the Pastoral Epistles?
5. What are the Synoptic Gospels?
6. Who were the Judaizers and why were they a threat to the gospel?
7. What was Gnosticism and why was it a threat to the early church?
8. How does Jesus introduce his message in the Gospel of Mark, and why is it significant?
9. How would you justify biblically the statement that "the gospel is the key to both justification and sanctification?"
10. How are the gospel and the kingdom of God related?
11. What does "head" mean in the NT? How does this relate to the concept of covenantal headship in the OT? How is Jesus the head of the church? How is a husband to be the head of the home?
12. Why is the doctrine of the image of God in man important?
13. What is the Biblical view of the origin of sin?
14. How can we prove that sin does not consist exclusively in outward acts?
15. What Bible proof is there for the deity and for the humanity of Christ?
16. What Scripture proof is there for the sinlessness of Christ?
17. Define the following terms: justification, sanctification, election, propitiation, atonement, redemption, consummation.
18. Below is a list of current theological controversies. Briefly summarize the basic viewpoints of each side, and list major bible texts that are important in the controversy.
 - a. Dispensationalism vs. Covenant Theology
 - b. Calvinism vs. Arminianism
 - c. Egalitarianism vs. Complementarianism
 - d. Open theism vs. Classical theism

Elder Process & Preparation Guide

- e. Infant baptism vs. believers' baptism
- f. Transubstantiation vs. consubstantiation
- g. Presbyterian (elder) church government vs. congregational church government
- h. Roman Catholic vs. Protestant view of justification by grace

Character/Lifestyle

1. Name two people you are currently taking spiritual responsibility for. What are you doing to grow them up in the faith?
2. List the people who currently look to you for spiritual leadership and are following your example.
3. Describe your personal Bible study and prayer habits (please be specific).
4. Describe the major sources of conflict in your marriage and how you are attempting to apply the gospel to them and lead your wife in a Christlike way.
5. What are your primary heart idols, and how are you seeking to apply the gospel to them?
6. Within the past 3 years, have you looked at pornography, been drunk, or struggled with addiction to any substance? If so, describe in detail.
7. What evangelistic conversations have you had in the past month?
8. Who are you currently praying for specifically, and what is the content of your prayers for them?
9. How much Scripture have you memorized? What is your discipline for memorizing and meditating on Scripture?

Pastoral Theology

1. How would you respond to a couple at Sacred City that just miscarried 9 weeks into pregnancy? What scriptures would you take them to?
2. You are counseling a couple who claim to be Christians. They are fornicating and believe they are "married in their hearts". They would like to become members of your church. How would you handle this couple?
3. You are praying with folks up front after a Sunday service, and a young man asks you to pray for him in regards to an addiction to pornography. What would you do and how would you on the spot counsel this man?
4. After church one day you are approached by a crying woman that truly has a broken heart after the service. She simply asks you to tell her the gospel so that she may believe like others in your church. How would you explain the gospel to her?

Elder Process & Preparation Guide

5. You are approached by a woman in the church who has a sensitive conscience toward the issue of alcohol. She asks why Sacred City doesn't just teach Christians to abstain entirely from alcohol for the sake of the gospel. What would you tell her, and what Scripture passages would you take her to?

APPENDIX 3: A TRI-PERSPECTIVAL APPROACH TO ELDERSHIP

Being part of a church planting network exposes us to wise counsel from other godly leaders who are planting biblically faithful, contextually relevant churches. David Fairchild, lead pastor of Kaleo Church in San Diego, California, wrote and passed along to us the following article on the process of selecting and training qualified elders. We have found it to be very helpful in applying the biblical teaching on church leadership.

The church is a Cause (normative), Corporation (situational), and Community (existential) in which Gospel Proclamation (prophet), Gospel Renewal (priest), and Gospel Mission (king) are exercised. We've been saying that all three of these are essential for the church to be who she is called to be.

So what leadership qualities are essential for a church to flow in the movement of God's mission, to the praise of His glory, and the joy and renewal of the saints? I believe there are three things for elders and leaders to consider when looking to develop leaders.

1. Competency

It is essential that the leader has the appropriate competency for the task before them. Someone that is leading hospitality will probably not need to be an academic theologian to be suited for the task, however, there will be necessary skills required for them to do this work well. An introvert with little or no interpersonal skills, who is extremely shy, may not be best suited for this task.

As it relates to those who will teach/preach the Gospel it becomes clear that depending upon their particular role (from Missional Community leader to Elder) they will need to possess a greater degree of theological/normative Gospel truth than the average believer. A person who lacks the competency for the task will always feel like they are struggling because they do not yet possess the tools to do the job well. You can see how this works out in each role.

The questions to ask here are "does the person know what to do?" "Do we believe they can do the job?"

2. Character

It is essential that the character of the individual is not significantly less than their competency. A perfect balance is rarely achieved so grace is important as the person is shaped into the image of Christ in both knowledge and character.

Character is the living proof that the gospel has broken in and is working in their life. To place someone in a position of leadership without considering their character is not only harmful others it is also harmful for them. We may find someone has all the

knowledge (normative) necessary for the task but with a suspect character. This will demonstrate to the church that it is perfectly reasonable to think one way and yet live another.

In order for character to be formed and shaped a person must be gospelled by others as well as by themselves. Without the dynamic of gospel renewal at work in their life, they will not be equipped or qualified to lead others in any deep gospel transformation.

The questions to ask here are “is the person living like the goal of the ministry?” or in other words, “do they exhibit what we are praying will be benefit for those involved in the ministry?” “Does their life match the need of the ministry?”

3. Compatibility

When Kaleo first planted 4 years ago we believed that each leader needed to possess the above two. We focused on finding individuals who had the competency and character for the role we were calling them to. This is far more beneficial than not concerning ourselves with competency and character, but we’ve found that the last of the three is as significant as the first two.

Compatibility assures that the person is right for the context in which they will be ministering. Compatibility seeks to place the person in a role in which they can exercise their leadership in such a way that they are not unnecessarily foreigners to the situation in which they’ll be working.

It is important to consider this quality since an individual may possess the necessary knowledge/skill and have a tremendous heart and love for Christ but not be appropriate for a particular context. For instance, we recently assessed someone who was looking to plant a church in the near-east (Greece). This person had the competency theologically, the heart in character, but was simply not a good fit for the context in which they would be moving. He didn’t speak the language, didn’t know the culture, and would be starting at such a disadvantage that we couldn’t in good conscience recommend him to plant a church there. This doesn’t mean he couldn’t some day but at that moment his compatibility would not have fit.

This can also play out in the context of the local church. For instance, if a person agrees to the doctrine of the church, has a heart in line with this doctrine, but finds that they disagree with the philosophy of ministry, the direction of ministry, the vision and values of that particular local church expression, they may not be called to that particular context.

We’ve had individuals come to Kaleo who wanted to eventually get into leadership and even become church planters and their life (existential) and knowledge (normative)

Elder Process & Preparation Guide

were fine but they simply didn't agree with how we were doing (situational) the work of the ministry. They wanted to change it to fit their comfort. In other words, they wanted our ministry to become compatible to them rather than they to it.

You can see how this creates an environment of friction as the person is not "sold" on how the ministry is exercising its mission to the world. A person who believes in church planting but doesn't think the way we are doing it (multi-site, multi-congregational) will find themselves frustrated and in subtle ways fighting against church planting, the very thing they agree should be done. Or, a person might believe that all things should be shaped by the Gospel story yet fight against our desire to engage culture. In principle (normative) they agree, but in practice (situational) they disagree.

There are a number of things to disagree about in the ministry and I believe it is perfectly healthy to do so. What is not being advocated here is a yes-man/woman mentality. However, when it comes to the vision, values and mission of the ministry and the ways in which that local church has chosen to exercise her call, a person who does not believe in your philosophy of ministry will constantly need to be talked into what you're doing in your specific context rather than moving forward together.

The questions to ask here are "is the person right for this context?" "Are they a fit for this specific and particular ministry rather than just ministry in general?"

Lastly, I believe we should seek unity and charity on these matters as much as possible. If the gospel is truly at work in a church there should be a sense of humility and grace. However, the gospel will also bring great courage and confidence that Christ has called this local church love Him, the world, and each other the way He's called them as the One Senior Pastor.

None of us have all three (competency, character, compatibility) in perfect and equal measure. We will be a little heavier on one more so than the others. This means that we need to go back to the gospel continuously to ensure that if it is a competency issue we are not being lazy and unwilling to learn and develop; if it is a character issue we are not being sinful and refusing to repent and believe we are flawed and in need of change; if it is a compatibility issue we are not being unnecessarily stubborn or inflexible.

The gospel shows us that Christ was perfectly competent as our great prophet to teach us about God, He had perfect character as our priest that satisfied God's demands for a perfect righteousness and sacrifice, and He was perfectly compatible as our king to the situation in which He was called. We look to His success not our failures for our security and this should grow in us not only in our desires to change but give us the power to do so.