

Looking for Elders: Developing Men to Serve

I. OUR LORD'S WILL IS FOR EACH LOCAL CONGREGATION TO HAVE ELDERS AND DEACONS:

A. The revealed pattern:

1. **Acts 14:23, Philippians 1:1, Acts 15:4, Acts 20:17, Titus. 1:5.**

2. It is clear - the Lord left us a pattern regarding what He wants for local congregations.

B. We should be moved to action to see our Lord's will accomplished.

1. While there are occasions where a congregation must function without elders, it should trouble us when a church goes decades without qualified shepherds.

2. We make it our aim to do those things pleasing to our Lord, and we know Christ's will regarding local church leadership, therefore there should be an urgency to develop men so that a church does not lack qualified men to serve as elders.

3. Immediate solutions will likely not be found, so we must have the forethought to look 20-40 years down the road, and formulate plans to develop future bishops.

II. STIR UP A DESIRE IN THE YOUNG:

A. When a church starts to look for potential future elders, they often look for a man who has a nice family, good Bible knowledge, and faithfully attends services (usually in his 30's or 40's).

1. Upon finding such a candidate, they may begin to encourage him to start considering the possibility of serving some 10-15 years down the road.

2. The problem is there are so few of these kind of families (so many have already been eliminated because of bad choices).

B. What if we looked for potential future elders when we see a 16 year serving on the Lord's table, or 12 years old singing in the pew, or an 8 year old commenting in Bible class?

1. What if we started encouraging them to consider one day serving as an elder years before we start to see any of the qualities that we typically think of for a potential elder?

2. What if we tried to spark a desire in the young to one day serve as an elder while they still have time enough to develop all the qualifications to do so?

3. The best time to help someone to be qualified for such a work is before they have time to make the choices that would disqualify them.

4. If that first qualification of "***desiring the work***" could be instilled at a young age, then so many of those young adult choices that qualify or disqualify could be guided by that desire (dating/marriage, work/career, hobbies, friends, etc.).

C. For that reason, much effort should be placed on teaching our young children that serving as an elder is a "***good work***" to be desired.

1. Parents and grandparents can encourage their children in this direction.
2. Preachers and Bible class teachers can plant seeds of desire as well.
3. But that teaching must to be backed up by respect for the office.
 - a. If we don't really think it is important if we have qualified elders, our children will get the message that there are a lot more important pursuits in life.
 - b. If we don't truly believe that elders make a difference, change lives, and save souls, it is unlikely our young people will aspire to give themselves to such a work.
 - c. If we are always critical of elders, our children will learn it's a job they don't want.

III. REMEMBER THE LADIES:

- A. Behind every qualified elder is a godly woman.
 1. You cannot have elders without godly women.
 2. If we only produce a desire in our boys, we will still come up short.
 3. We need to train our young women to **"...love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands..." (Tit. 2:4-5).**
 4. This alone would produce more qualified men.
- B. There is no one better suited to encourage a man to be all that he can be than a woman.
 1. She was specially designed to be a **"help meet"**.
 2. A woman who sees the value and need for qualified elders will be the greatest source of encouragement for her husband to desire such a work.
- C. If we can get boys and girls both to see how important it is for local churches to have qualified shepherds and that they could one day help in meeting that need, then what will happen when they grow up and marry?
 1. They both have been taught there is a great need and both have a desire to help meet that need.
 2. They will be much more likely to work together as a team in developing themselves to serve in such capacities.
- D. If we leave ladies out, you have man working by himself and **"it is not good for man to be alone."**
- E. The fact is, elders have to have qualified wives.

1 Timothy 3:11, NKJV "Likewise their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things."

IV. SPECIFIC EFFORTS A CHURCH CAN MAKE:

A. Identify and address problems areas.

1. Read through **1 Timothy 3:1-13** and **Titus 1:6-9**. Which of these qualifications seems to be the hardest for our families to meet?
2. Have focused efforts to address those areas most lacking.
 - a. If it is unqualified spouse, then put more effort in showing the need to value spiritual qualities when dating.
 - b. If it is “**insubordinate children**”, make special effort to address bringing up children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (special classes, sermons, meetings, etc.).
 - c. If it is “**apt to teach**”, create more opportunities for men to develop themselves as teachers.
 - d. If it is a lack of hospitality, teach how to look for those who are in need, how to be of help, how to open up our home, and how to use resources for the Lord’s people.

B. Periodically have leadership classes for Jr. High/High School boys.

1. Focus on what it means to be a spiritual leader (in family, church, and community).
 - b. Work on personal growth skills: self-evaluation, discipline, accountability, humility, knowledge, service, and example.
 - c. Work on developing a genuine love and concern for others: developing an awareness of others (their struggles, needs, growth, etc.), willingness to reach out to others (with encouragement, physical help, admonition, rebuke, etc.).
2. Work on public leadership skills: public reading, teaching, song leading, leading in prayer.
3. Focus on having wisdom in decision making and kingdom first priorities.
 - a. Dating/marriage (what to look for and things to avoid).
 - b. College (preparing to be out on own, choosing a school/church conducive for spiritual growth)
 - c. Work/career (complements serving Lord and family rather than interferes with).
 - d. Hobbies (when does it become an idol, how much is too much)

C. Periodically have special classes for Jr. High/High School girls dealing with topics that help prepare them to be a “**help meet**” well suited for a husband to serve as an elder.

1. Focus on the need for women to grow in knowledge and wisdom.
2. Discuss and develop special skills needed for the management of a well ordered home.
3. As with the boys, focus on having wisdom in decision making and kingdom first priorities (dating/marriage, work/career, etc.)

- D. Have ongoing special classes with the young families specifically for the purpose of stirring up a desire to prepare themselves to meet the future need for qualified elders and deacons.
1. Assist these families in developing the qualities required for service in these roles by:
 - b. Examining the work of elders/deacons and encourage the development of the skills needed to do such work.
 - c. Examine the qualifications/character and encourage the development of those attributes.
 2. Address areas that often derail families from continuing to develop.
 - a. Preoccupation and overcommitment to secular things.
 - b. Neglect of personal spiritual growth
 - c. Neglect of marriage
 - d. Neglect of spiritual training of children
 - e. etc.
 3. Equip with the experience needed for the task of shepherding and serving.
 - a. Provide opportunities for them to get insight into the work of elders.
 - b. Discuss real or hypothetical situation/issues that elders have to deal with.
 - c. Have elders come and talk about their work, challenges they face, lessons they have learned, etc.
 - d. Give younger men the opportunity to see the work of elders:
 - If appropriate, bring them in on elders' meetings
 - Carry them along when visiting
 - Do not let all the work of elders take place behind closed doors.
 4. Create a culture of peer support and encouragement that through years will help them stay on course and overcome the obstacles that may derail one from being able to serve in these roles.

V. CONCLUSION:

There are no “quick fixes” when there is a lack of men qualified to serve as elders and deacons. But there are long range efforts that congregations can make to help our children and young families develop the qualities needed to one day lead and serve the church. Knowing that it is our Lord’s will for each local congregation to have such leadership, let us have the foresight to do what we can to insure that the New Testament pattern for organization and leadership can be followed in the future.