Biblical Eldership Training Plan

Welcome

The following plan is designed to lay a foundation for equipping men to be elders in the local church. Whether your church is beginning with elders for the first time, or considering adding new elders to an existing group, you will find this material spiritually challenging for men contemplating spiritual leadership among God’s people, the church. Optimally, this should be completed over twelve months.

Selecting Men

If the potential elders have not already been identified, the following are suggestions for how to recognize men who are ready and capable of being elders.

A. Pray: Pray the Lord would show to you those who already have a shepherd’s heart or a desire to shepherd people. Elders must be men of God’s choosing.

B. Observe: You are looking for evidence of God’s work in men’s lives in relation to shepherding God’s people. Key things that you should look for in men are those who:

• Desire the work of an elder.
  “It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do” (1 Tim. 3:1 NASB).

• Have an aptitude for teaching the Word.
  The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also (2 Tim 2:2).
  An overseer, then, must … able to teach, (1 Tim 3:2)

• Show concern for people’s spiritual lives.
  Therefore, I exhort the elders among you … shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness (1 Peter 5:1-2)

• Live an exemplary Christian life – morally and doctrinally.
  ... in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified ... (Titus 2:7)

• Meet up in good measure to the elder qualifications as listed in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.
  Watch on Sunday mornings as people interact with others. Take note during small group times and social times. Which men are starting spiritual conversations, directing people’s thoughts to spiritual things. Who is greeting visitors on Sunday mornings, showing hospitality to others? Ask your wife and others you know to be spiritually minded, who they observe shepherding others.

C. Invite: From your observations, invite a select group of men as potential elders to begin participating in the formal training program.

Study the BE Workbook

A. The text and workbook, “Biblical Eldership” (BE) and “Biblical Eldership Study Guide,” by Alexander Strauch will provide the primary guide into the study of God’s Word. Each participant should have their own copies. While the workbook is geared toward one-on-one mentoring, you will be adapting it to group study.
B. This is an intensive study and should not be rushed, so we suggest covering this material over a period of twelve months, at a pace of one workbook chapter per month (the twelve chapters are keyed to specific readings in the textbook). Plan to meet as a group once per month to discuss answers and to interact with the material.

C. The designated facilitator (one of the existing elders) will lead the discussion, selecting which questions and issues to focus the discussion on. We suggest the facilitator use the companion, “Biblical Eldership Mentor’s Guide,” which provides answers to all the questions and helpful ideas for discussion.

D. Each participant should have his own textbook and workbook.

E. Meeting format –
   1. Ninety minutes in length.
   2. Fifteen minutes of prayer— We suggest praying on your knees. This teaches the men the importance of humble prayer. The length of time depends on the number of men involved. Pray for each other, God’s work in each other’s individual lives, personal needs, and concerns of the church. In order to use this time effectively, we recommend not spending time requesting prayer (or at least keep requests to a minimum)—simply start praying. The burdens for prayer will surface as the men pray.
   3. Five minutes of memory verse review- Memorizing scripture is not only beneficial for “shepherds” who need to be “apt” to teach, but also sets a good pattern of life and an example for the congregation.
   4. Sixty-five minutes of review/interaction.
      a. Each meeting will involve discussing one chapter in the BE workbook. The facilitator’s role is to guide the group through the questions and encourage interaction as the group members share their answers, insights and clarifications.
      b. The group will probably not have time to discuss every question in the workbook, so the facilitator needs to be selective—giving attention to those issues for which the group of men requires extra time for discussion.
      c. Five minutes promo of the next chapter in the workbook.
      d. Closing prayer.
      e. Refreshments: You may want to include snacks at the end, to encourage ongoing camaraderie, spiritual fellowship and discussion.

F. Homework:
   2. The assigned reading should be done first. This can be found at the beginning of each chapter in the study guide. (The arrangement of the textbook is different than that of the study guide, so your selected readings will at times be scattered throughout the textbook).
   3. The questions in the study guide chapter should be completed, in writing, before the next session. This has the following benefits:
      a) By working on the material ahead of time, the individuals in the group will have had adequate time to ponder the questions deeply.
      b) A pen or pencil is marvelous “mental crowbar” that forces people to think! It is an antidote to lazy study habits.
      c) The discipline of writing down the answers will encourage men to summarize and crystallize their thoughts concretely. Elders need to be able to think things through and then to
communicate their findings concretely. So this homework is an exercise in developing clear thinking.

d) Time will not be wasted during the monthly meetings while men try to “figure out” or remember their answers. They will already have wrestled with the issues, and the written answers will refresh their memories.

e) Observing (even at a distance) their workbooks during the discussion times will help you determine who is taking this training seriously, by whether they have done the work.

f) Seeing other men’s answers written out will encourage a camaraderie and sense of accountability for each of the men.

4. We cannot stress enough the importance of the homework—this is core to the learning process. The meetings serve as accountability and framework for progressing through the material, and give opportunity to learn from one another and from the wisdom and experience of the facilitators. But, the bulk of the learning comes from the individual’s personal wrestling with the material. This part of the shepherd training is mostly cognitive. God can use this material as a spiritual tool to bring about not only much self-inspection, but also a challenge to godly manhood to which spiritually-minded men will aspire. We have seen time and time again, men being stimulated to greater spiritual leadership through this course.

Practice the Shepherding

Elder training needs to involve instruction and practicums in the practical hands-on work. There is no better education than “on the job” training. Universities have long recognized the value of work-study programs where students intersperse academic study with practical hands-on job training. The time invested in both of these for potential elders will pay off in the long run. Medical schools usually give med students two years of class room and lab studies, and then traditionally follow with a third and fourth year of doing “rotations.” The rotations are designed to put the med students into supervised clinical situations to gain experience and education in the various aspects of applying their medical learning to real life cases.

Potential elders, likewise, need to develop experience in basic shepherding skills, like visiting the sick and encouraging the downtrodden. They need opportunities to be part of baptisms, funerals and marriage ceremonies. They need to develop skills in small group leading. Likewise, potential elders should experience firsthand the interactions in elders’ meetings dealing with real issues. So, as part of elder training, rotating for a time through the various aspects of elder’s work and ministry should be standard procedure in preparing for spiritual leadership.

What follows is a rudimentary guideline for elder training “rotations.”

**Mentor**

First, each potential elder should be assigned to an experienced spiritual leader, who will help him set out a plan and monitor his progress. The mentor will not provide all the “on the job” training, but will make sure the best ministry mentors are employed for the various aspects of the rotation.

We recommend the rotations address the six main effectiveness areas outlined on our Biblical Eldership website (see Effectiveness menu). We have also prepared a worksheet to help you develop a customized plan for each participant. Obviously, the worksheet is simply a template for you to use and modify as needed.

**Devising a plan**

1. The potential elder and the mentor should meet to discuss the plan. We recommend including experiences in all six “effectiveness” areas. For a variety of reasons, you may wish to emphasize some areas more than others, but there should be at least some exposure to all areas.
2. For each area the mentor should guide the potential elder in selecting 2 or 3 specific tasks to work on. The specifics, such as supervision, observation and accountability need to be agreed upon at the beginning. But, here are some examples:

- **Caring effectiveness area.** The potential elder should read/listen to the Effectiveness material online, and then accompany an experienced elder in visiting someone in the hospital or who is a shut in. Multiple visits would be recommended. During this time, the two should interact on the material read and also debrief after each visit.

- **Leading effectiveness area.** The potential elder should be given an opportunity to lead a small group discussion. Again, he should read the material online dealing with small group leading.

- **Leading/communication.** The potential elder may be given opportunity to give announcements on a Sunday morning.

- **Etc.**

Obviously, some men will already have experience and be competent in some areas. The idea is to stretch them into new areas of ministry, to better improve their abilities for functioning as an elder.

These mentoring relationships should meet on a regular basis to help the mentor assess how the potential elder is doing, including both the strong areas and the weak areas.

**Duration & quality of rotations**

The duration of the “rotation” exercise depends on a variety of things: availability of mentors, personal constraints, needs of the church, etc. The quality of this training depends upon the experience of the mentors.

At the very least, a mentor shares his own experience. In essence, mentoring goes like this:

1) Read or watch this resource.

2) I’ll (mentor) do it and you (mentee) watch, then we will discuss.

3) You (mentee) do it and I’ll (mentor) watch, then we will discuss.

In the end, the mentor determines when the rotations are complete, when the on-the-job training is finished. We suggest that it be contained in a twelve month period of time, coinciding with group study of the BE study guide.

**Conclusion**

Every effort to provide mentoring in a systematic, meaningful way will help men become better prepared for the ministry of being elders of God’s people.

However, there is a clear recognition that learning is never finished, for the growing, maturing elder continues his own learning and development. Wise elders continually challenge one another on to developing further their effectiveness as elders.