

# OVERSEERS WITH EXPERIENCE

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## Introduction:

- A. Illustration:** Jehovah's Witnesses come to your house and talk
- They wear name badges which read "Elder \_\_\_\_\_" and "Elder \_\_\_\_\_"
  - Here is an 18-25 year old guy wearing the title of elder – Obviously backwards!
  - If you ask them for their first names, they become offended! It's a position or status!
- B. This morning I would like us to continue our endeavor upon developing men to serve as elders for this congregation by gaining understanding about what they are:**
- Last time we looked at their work from the point of shepherding – They Smell Like Sheep
    - Elders rule by leading, feeding, correcting when necessary, and like a good shepherd would, they would ultimately give their lives for their sheep!
    - They're only effective in their work because they have built strong relationships – The sheep know them personally and they know the sheep personally!
    - They will not "rule" with a style of a CEO, cowboy, sherriff, or a hired hand, because they have the mentality of a shepherd (like Jesus himself!)
  - I began with this aspect of their work because I believe their entire work falls under this category and I also know that too many elders don't smell like sheep!
  - Now let's see their work from another standpoint: Overseers who lead by experience!
- C. We need men who DESIRE the work of an elder! How can you desire the work if you don't know what it is or if you misunderstand it?**

## I. An Elder Leads By Experience:

- A. The very term "elder" itself implies age, maturity, and experience (1 Peter 5:1-2)**
- Just the thought of a young man wearing the name "elder" sounds contradictory!
  - This word "elder" is from the Greek word "Presbuteroi" meaning "older one"
    - W.E. Vines says of this word, "It indicates their maturity of spiritual experience"
    - An elder is a person who's experienced more than others: He's covered more trail!
    - One man said, "It's a person who has walked a long time in the same direction"
  - Elders are older ones who lead because of experience
- B. So when we look for elders we look for men who are experienced Christians!**
- They have experience in living: They're not novices! (1 Tim. 3:6)
    - Novice (neophutos): Literally "newly planted." It was originally used to speak of trees that were recently planted.
    - Elders are men who have walked with God for a long period of time
    - They have wrestled with sin and temptation and have remained faithful! They have battled with discouragement, fear, and doubt and are still serving God!
    - Illustration:** "Been there, done that, got the t-shirt." → They can offer wise advice flowing out of a spring of spiritual maturity and it will be well received!
  - They are experienced with the word of God: They're apt to teach! (1 Tim. 3:2)
    - The question we should be asking is not "Can he wing it with teaching a Bible class if called upon?" but rather "Does he actively teach?"
    - He needs to be feeding the sheep and able detect false doctrine (Titus 1:9)
    - Some look to if they teach Bible classes or preach lessons – Larger than that!
  - They are experienced with good family relationships! (1 Tim. 3:4-5)
    - Why such emphasis on the home? How a man shepherds his own home is evidence for whether or not he can effectively shepherd a local church!
    - Look at his family relationships! The faithfulness of his children! If he is not successful in his family then he is not fit for leading the church!
    - Not fair? That's exactly the point of what the Lord says through Paul!

- C. As experienced Christians, elders help lead and inspire others:**

1. Being experienced Christians, they not only tell people how to live but show the way!
  - a. **Illustration:** Teaching children “The Wise Man Built His House Upon The Rock”
  - b. What if we were to only explain verbally how to perform these actions?
  - c. We show and tell and they follow – why? When we show and not just tell, they understand! Secondly, they gain confidence because they saw us do it first!
2. Jesus sets the perfect example of how to lead and inspire (**John 13:14-15**)
  - a. Effective leadership is modeled leadership! Jesus could have said, “Do this because I said so...” but instead he showed them!
  - b. Jesus did come with powerful authority, but it was in the form of a humble servant!
3. Paul understood this leadership style! (**I Cor. 11:1; Phil. 4:9; 2 Thess. 3:6-7, 9**)
  - a. Effective leadership is modeled leadership!
  - b. Paul welcomed people watching him as well as listening to him!
4. So when it comes to elders, teaching is as much a thing they do as a thing they say:
  - a. “In order to be viable you have to be visible” – True with elders & preachers!
  - b. When encouraging the Ephesians elders on how to lead Paul basically says, “I showed you, now you show them!” (**Acts 20:18, 35**)
  - c. Peter boldly charges elders to “be an EXAMPLE to the flock” (**I Pet. 5:3**)
5. Their experience gives us hope to press on even when we are tempted to give it all up!
  - a. They’ve passed this way before and will have encountered most anything we are now facing! → Either in person or in helping others face their struggles
  - b. **Examples:** A young man faces the challenges of being a good father without having one as a child; a young woman faces being different in school, a young couple facing marriage, an middle age couple with marriage trouble, etc
  - c. They not only show the way but they give us the heart to go on!

## II. An Elder Is One Who Oversees A Congregation:

### **A. Elders are sometimes referred to as “bishops” or “overseers”**

1. Episkopos – Speaks of another aspect of their work (**Acts 20:28; Phil. 1:1**)
  - a. Thayer: “An overseer, a man charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done by others are done rightly, any curator, guardian, or superintendent”
  - b. While “elder” spoke of the spiritual experience and maturity needed, overseer and bishop speaks more to the nature of the work one is undertaking
2. This same word is used to describe how we should “look carefully” for ourselves and one another’s own spiritual wellbeing! (**Heb 12:15**)

### **B. The elder’s work, as an overseer, involves a degree of ruling:**

1. **I Tim. 5:17** → Rule means “To stand before, in rank to preside, to maintain
2. The nature of their rule is like that of father in the home (**I Tim. 3:4-5, 12**)
  - a. He oversees the whole family picture, looks out for their future, and seeks to find out what is best for the family and follows that course
  - b. The family, and the church, is not a democracy; however decisions must be based on the relationship and interaction between the parties!
3. Elders have the duty of directing the church in the will of Jesus Christ (**Matt 28:18**)
  - a. They see to it that Christ’s will is implemented & that sound teaching is maintained
  - b. Their authority is not a legislative authority! Only Christ has this authority!
4. Overseeing entails making decisions on how to expedite God’s will within a congregation:
  - a. There will likely be simple decisions on expediciencies that they will make, sometimes not all will agree, but all should follow!
  - b. Sometimes there will be cause for a collective action of discipline against a member who refuses to correct their lives – Withdrawl is needed
  - c. They will make decisions about the teaching that is done, the order of worship, collective efforts to evangelize, special classes, and even financial decisions
5. As we noted with shepherding, elders rule through leading others! (**Heb. 13:7, 17, 24**)
  - a. Notice how the emphasis is not on POWER but on the GUIDANCE!
  - b. Out of respect for their leadership role given by Christ, their spiritual experience

- and maturity, they are to be obeyed, followed, and honored!
6. Their rule is a limited rule → They are not to rule as “LORDS” (**I Peter 5:3**)
    - a. This word means “To lord against, control, subjugate, a high-handed rule”
    - b. Same word is used in **Acts 19:16** → Overcame them – It’s a power struggle!
    - c. Think about how the rule of an elder is like the rule of a husband in the home:
      - 1) One who “rules the roost” with a hard hand is feared but not respected!
      - 2) People are more willing to follow those who help, feed, and guide them, not those who get them to do what they want through intimidation!
    - d. Jesus drew a bold contrast between aggressive, competitive, controlling, worldly leadership and leadership that is spiritual in nature (**Mt. 20:25-28**)

**Conclusion:** (I Tim. 3:1) → **You are not desiring some elevated position or status within the congregation. The office of an elder is their work. They are servants! They shepherd, give experience, and oversee the local congregation.**