

# Elder FAQs

## 1. What is an elder?

An elder is a man given by God (Eph. 4:11ff.) to the church to shepherd, oversee, and govern the congregation. This is why we do not vote on elders; we are not electing someone to an office, we are recognizing and affirming the work of God in the life of the man.

The terms for elder, pastor, bishop, and overseer are used interchangeably in the Bible (at Grace, we use the term “pastor” to refer to those elders who are paid staff, while affirming that the council of elders together shepherds the congregation). Except when speaking of the requirements for eldership (e.g., 1 Tim. 3:1), the term for elder is always in the plural, meaning that God gives more than one to a church – wisdom is found in collegiality; no one man is sufficiently gifted to shepherd a church by himself (Acts 11:29-30; 14:21-23; 15:1-6; 20:17, 28; 21:17-19; Phil. 1:1).

The leadership of elders is limited, and spiritual, and pertains only to church matters – to the life and well-being of the body of Christ. Elders lead by example. They must have a shepherd's heart and have genuine care for the spiritual well-being of the people (1 Pt. 5:1-4).

Christ Jesus alone is our High Priest (Heb. 4:14); the church belongs to Him. Elders are assigned by Him to care for His people and will give an account to Christ for how well they handle the care that has been entrusted to them (Heb. 12:17).

There is no hierarchy in the church. While elders have oversight responsibility in the church (1 Pt. 5:2), they also are among or are part of the church (Phil. 1:1), where each member has value as each serves the church according to the abilities God has given (Eph. 4:7).

## 2. How do we know who an elder is?

The first key principle is desire (1 Ti. 3:1). The potential elder must have a willingness to “be spent” in service for this congregation. This involves time and commitment.

Then, if a man has a desire to serve the congregation as an elder, it is our responsibility to see if he is a man of holiness in his personal life and a man of love in his relationships with others.

Specifically, God told us how to recognize an elder by providing qualifications pertaining to character and giftedness in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. These qualifications enable us to determine if the candidate is a spiritually maturing man of substance and reputation, both within and without the church.

Another aspect in identifying an elder is that he is already “eldering.” He does not start shepherding after being affirmed into office, he is already shepherding because he is an elder; that is who God has made him to be.

### 3. How do we prepare an elder for eldership?

We train them. 2 Timothy 2:2 describes the process wherein elders are to reproduce themselves by training men who are qualified and trustworthy, who are already faithful servants in the church.

### 4. How do we as a congregation respond to and treat an elder?

Having recognized the hand of God on his life, we affirm him to serve with the other elders through the symbolic gesture of the laying on of hands; we follow him/them, as directed by God in Hebrews 13:17; and we obey him/them, believing that God has placed them in that role for our well being.