

THE
STUDY GUIDE TO
BIBLICAL ELDERSHIP

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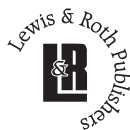
The Hospitality Commands

Men and Women: Equal Yet Different

THE
STUDY GUIDE TO
BIBLICAL ELDERSHIP

TWELVE LESSONS FOR
MENTORING ELDERS

Alexander Strauch



P. O. Box 64260 Colorado Springs, Colorado 80962 U. S. A.

Biblical Eldership Study Guide

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OLD TESTAMENT ELDERS - JOB

Lesson 1 explores Job's life as a model of the Old Testament elder. We will examine the duties and deficiencies of Israel's elders and will note the failure of Job's colleagues to compassionately and tactfully minister to him during his intense suffering. This lesson will help you think and act like a biblical, Christlike elder. The lesson covers pages 121-124, 186-202, 227-238.

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MEN OF SOUND DOCTRINE AND WISDOM - ACTS 15:1-35; 21:18-25

Lesson 2 sets forth the biblical imperative that elders know Bible doctrine so that they will be adequately equipped to judge doctrinal disputes and provide wise, godly counsel and leadership for the congregation. As you will discover throughout the *Guide*, biblical elders must be men of the Word. The biblical standard for pastor elders is that they be able to teach and defend sound Christian doctrine. Elders who are biblically inadequate are actually a curse to the church, not the blessing God would have them be. This lesson is intended to help you evaluate your preparedness as a teacher and defender of Christ's doctrine. It will also touch briefly on the elder-congregation relationship and the need for elders to be men of wisdom who know how to lead the congregation in godly decision making. The pages to be read are 17-22, 125-133, 291-295.

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THE FIRST ELDER APPOINTMENTS - ACTS 14:23 "GUARD YOURSELVES" - ACTS 20:28a

In this lesson we will be confronted by the significance of Acts 14:23 to the New Testament doctrine of eldership and learn to think accurately about the Greek word for "appointed," which is frequently misinterpreted to mean church election or ordination.

Most of the lesson covers Acts 20:28a: "Be on guard for yourselves." Shepherds cannot guard others from Satan's many deceptions if they do not first guard their own souls. This lesson reinforces the Lord's call for us to be men of the Word and of prayer. The pages to be read are 133-147.

LESSON 4 59

PROTECTING THE FLOCK FROM FALSE TEACHERS - ACTS 20:18-35
THE SOURCE OF THE ELDERS' STRENGTH - ACTS 20:32, 36-38
THE PAULINE MODEL FOR ELDERS - ACTS 20:33-35

Lesson 4 deals with the elders' solemn duty to protect their flock from "savage wolves," that is, false teachers. It covers Paul's farewell message to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:18-35. An elder who desires to be a faithful guardian of Christ's Word and flock must become thoroughly familiar with this Scripture passage. It answers the question of who places elders in the local church as overseers and pastor shepherds, and establishes the inestimable worth of the body of Christ, which elders are called to guard from Satanic workers.

The second half of the lesson addresses the elders' need to trust in God and His Word for strength and guidance. It also explores Paul's example of self-employment and generosity to others. The reading covers pages 17-22, 27-29, 31-34, 109-115, 140-159.

LESSON 5 75

HUMBLE SERVANTS AND THE CHIEF SHEPHERD - 1 PETER 5:3b-5
HARD-WORKING MEN - 1 THESSALONIANS 5:12, 13

Lesson 5 covers 1 Peter 5:1a, 3b-5 and 1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13. Peter exhorts elders to shepherd the flock through the power of personal example and encourages them with the promises of the glorious return of the "Chief Shepherd" and the "crown of glory." Finally, he calls elders, as well as the flock, to clothe themselves with humility so that all may live together in peace.

Paul's exhortation to the congregation at Thessalonica reinforces the elders' task of leading and admonishing the congregation. In order to bear this great responsibility, pastor elders must be self-disciplined, highly committed disciples of the Master. Clearly, board elders cannot pastor a local church: only hard-working, self-disciplined, shepherd elders can.

Like Peter, Paul also calls the congregation and its leaders to work for peace and to love one another. Without humility, love, and peace there is little hope of experiencing the joys of Christlike community and effective pastoral leadership. The pages to be read are 161-174, 249-252.

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TEAM LEADERSHIP - PHILIPPIANS 1:1, 1 TIMOTHY 5:17, 18

Lesson 6 examines the plurality of overseers mentioned in Philippians 1:1, the equating of overseers with elders, the significance of church leadership terminology, the importance and practice of team leadership, and the principle of "first among equals."

The major focus of the lesson is on learning how to work with fellow elders in Christian harmony, which is not an easy task. Becoming a good team player takes years of effort and commitment. The key to team leadership is *agapē* love. The lesson covers pages 31-50, 101-117, 174-180.

LESSON 7 99

QUALIFIED LEADERS - 1 TIMOTHY 3:1-15

The major emphasis of lesson 7 is the necessity of church elders being “above reproach.” The lesson also reviews Paul’s purpose in writing 1 Timothy, the Ephesian elders’ failure to protect the church from false teaching, the faithful saying of 1 Timothy 3:1, and the qualifications for overseers. The pages to be read are 67-83, 181-202.

LESSON 8 115

HONORING AND DISCIPLINING ELDERS - 1 TIMOTHY 5:17-25

Lesson 8 surveys 1 Timothy 5:17-25, one of the most significant New Testament passages on the doctrine of Christian eldership. It focuses on elders who deserve double honor because of their capable leadership and diligent labor in the Word and explains the necessity of evaluating each elder’s gifts.

The passage also addresses the difficult issue of disciplining elders who have been proved guilty of sin. The lesson emphasizes the need for leaders to be courageous in exposing sin, to judge justly, and to follow the New Testament precautions in appointing elders. The pages to be read are 206-224.

LESSON 9 135

APPOINT ONLY QUALIFIED MEN - TITUS 1:5-11

Lesson 9 reviews Paul’s instructions to Titus and the underdeveloped churches on the Island of Crete that were facing attack from false teachers. Paul sets forth the qualifications for elders: church elders must control personal anger, be hospitable, be faithful to Christian doctrine, and be able to exhort in sound doctrine and refute false teachers. The lesson also examines the terms “ordination” and “appointment,” and the unbiblical division between clergy and laity. The lesson covers pages 104-106, 111-114, 202-205, 225-238, 284-288.

LESSON 10 149

SHEPHERD GOD’S FLOCK IN GOD’S WAY - 1 PETER 5:1-3

In lesson 10, Peter’s farewell exhortations to the elders of northwestern Asia Minor in 1 Peter 5:1-3 are considered. We examine the urgent apostolic imperative for elders to shepherd God’s flock, that is, to be all that shepherds should be to the flock. This lesson will help you think practically about your time commitment to the shepherding task and your personal contribution to the shepherding team.

Furthermore, this passage is an urgent call for pastor elders to shepherd the flock in a distinctly Christlike way-willingly, eagerly, and as godly models of Christ-not as authoritarian tyrants or hirelings. Christian elders are to be loving, servant leaders. The lesson requires that you read chapter 5, “Servant Leadership,” in *Biblical Eldership*. It covers pages 9-31, 85-98, 114, 149, 239-248.

LESSON 11 159

**CARING FOR THE POOR - ACTS 11:29, 30; 20:35
PRAYING FOR THE SICK - JAMES 5:13-16**

Lesson 11 addresses the elders' attitude toward the poor and needy, and the character qualities necessary in the men who administer the church's charitable funds. The second half of the lesson deals with the elders' responsibility to the sick, as described in James 5:14, 15. To be a Christlike shepherd, the elder must be compassionate toward those who suffer. In ministering to the sick, the pastor elder must be a man of faith, prayer, and wise counsel. The pages to be read are 29-31, 156-159, 253-263; also referenced are pages 188-202, 228-238.

LESSON 12 171

**SPIRITUAL WATCHMEN - HEBREWS 13:17
SUBMISSION TO AUTHORITY - HEBREWS 13:17
MALE LEADERSHIP - 1 TIMOTHY 2:9-3:2a**

The final lesson explores Hebrews 13:17. We discuss the institutional church model versus the community church model, and the joys and heartaches of leading God's people. In addition, the subject of submission to church elders, a matter of great disdain to modern man, is studied.

The lesson also reviews chapter 3 of *Biblical Eldership*, "Male Leadership." This is not only an issue related to God's plan for male-female relationships in the home and church, but is an issue of biblical integrity and authority that is of utmost importance to the Lord's people. The lesson covers pages 51-66, 265-273.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Enthusiastic words of thanks are given to Dick and Anne Swartley who have spent untold hours meticulously pouring over each assignment and question and designing the *Study Guide to Biblical Eldership*. Without them *The Study Guide* would not be the valuable tool it is today. Their work has been a labor of love on behalf of God's people.

Thanks are also due to Todd Leapold for his critique of each lesson as a mentoree; to John Ellis for his analysis of each lesson as an experienced shepherd elder; to the elders of the First Evangelical Free Church in Lakeland, Florida who worked through the *Study Guide to Biblical Eldership* together, resulting in many helpful suggestions; and to Barbara Peek for proofreading the final copy.

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Introduction

How to use *The Study Guide to Biblical Eldership*

Friends of ours who are elders in another church were discussing the need to train more men for eldership. As they sought suitable material for training potential elders, one reminded the others that, “No one ever trained us!” Unfortunately, this assessment could be echoed by 95 percent of all elders and deacons.

WHY TRAIN MEN FOR ELDERSHIP?

The lack of elder and deacon training is an extremely critical problem. We are not training the very men who lead and have oversight of our churches. We erroneously believe that our serving elders and deacons understand spiritual oversight and care, but in fact our churches are filled with elders and deacons who confess that they are unprepared and untrained for their work. Even Bible schools and seminaries, for the most part, do not prepare men to provide spiritual care or leadership for a congregation.

This lack of training is not uncommon among organizations that operate in a familial manner. A leading news magazine reported on the amazing strength of America’s family-owned businesses, estimating that “nearly 50 percent of the nation’s gross national product” was produced by family-owned firms.¹ After enumerating many positive aspects of the family-owned business, however, the article reported that its chief weakness is its failure to train the next generation of family leaders: “On the whole, only a third of family-owned companies survive into the second generation because founders often are too busy to plan ahead or because they lack confidence in their young.”²

The local church is an extended family that does God’s business. Like many family-owned businesses, local churches fail to train the next generation of leaders. Church leaders are frequently too preoccupied with the work of the church or lack vision for training future leaders. They have seriously underestimated both the need and their responsibility. Like flowers in spring, leaders who are ready to bless the flock will not appear without planting or preparation.

Kenneth O. Gangel, a biblically sound expert in church management and training, is right on target when he points out, “The key to reproducing leadership is to clearly plan for it.”³ “Church leaders,” exhorts Gangel, “need to produce leaders who will reproduce leaders precisely as it is done in the family-through experience, instruction, and modeling.”⁴

Training men for future leadership and ministry should not be a novel concept to the Christian who is familiar with what the Bible teaches. Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ spent a significant part of His public ministry preparing for the future. He patiently poured His life into twelve men, training them to be the future leaders of the church. He was a master teacher and mentor. Scottish biblical professor and writer, A. B. Bruce (1831-1899), in his standard-setting work, *The Training of the Twelve*, writes:

“Follow Me,” said Jesus to the fishermen of Bethsaida, “and I will make you fishers of men.” These words . . . show that the great Founder of the faith desired not only to have disciples, but to have about Him men whom he might train to make disciples of others. . . . Both from His words and from His actions we can see that He attached supreme importance to that part of His work which consisted in training the twelve. In the intercessory prayer [John 17:6], e.g., He speaks of the training He had given these men as if it had been the principal part of His own earthly ministry. And such, in one sense, it really was. The careful, painstaking education of the disciples secured that the Teacher’s influence on the world should be permanent; that His kingdom should be founded on the rock of deep and indestructible convictions in the minds of the few, not on the shifting sands of superficial evanescent impressions on the minds of the many.⁵

Like his Lord, Paul was also a discipler of men. He had his Timothy’s, and he expected his Timothy’s to train others: “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). Paul expected that when Timothy departed from Ephesus he would leave in place trained, faithful men who would continue the development of future teachers and leaders.

It should not be assumed that men trained in a seminary are exempt from the need for specialized preparation for the responsibilities of being a pastor elder. Unfortunately, seminaries train a man to be the leader of “his own” congregation rather than an equal participant on an elder council. Seminary graduates who receive significant preparation in the application of scriptural principles to the governance and care of the church are a blessed exception to the rule.

Elder training is essential to the church’s response to the great commission. Our Lord’s command to go, to teach, and to make disciples of all the nations—in other words, the discipleship process—cannot be sustained without elders. In any mission field, whether it be local or at a great distance culturally, the planting of new churches is paced by the availability of elders. The stability of those new churches and their ability to grow will be determined by the maturity of their founding elders.

THE TERM “PASTOR ELDER”

Throughout the *Study Guide*, as in *Biblical Eldership*, elders are referred to as “shepherd elders” or “pastor elders.” This is to counter the considerable amount of unscriptural thinking about elders that exists today. When most Christians hear of church elders, they think of lay church officials, committeemen, executives, policymakers, or advisors to the pastor. They do not expect church elders to teach the Word

or be involved pastorally in the lives of people. We refer to such elders as “board elders.” They are not true biblical elders.

The contemporary, church-board concept of eldership is irreconcilably at odds with the New Testament’s definition of eldership. According to the New Testament concept, elders lead the church, teach and preach the Word, protect the church from false teachers, exhort and admonish the saints in sound doctrine, visit the sick and pray, and judge doctrinal issues. To use biblical terminology, elders shepherd, oversee, lead, and care for the local church. Therefore, to communicate accurately the New Testament concept of eldership, it is necessary to explain that the New Testament term *elder* means “pastor elder,” “shepherd elder,” or “pastor.” Throughout the *Study Guide*, we use these terms interchangeably to distinguish between “board elder,” the unscriptural concept, and “shepherd elder,” the biblical concept. For further explanation of the differences, read pp. 15-17, 31-34 in *Biblical Eldership*.

ELDER QUALIFICATIONS

Since the New Testament so emphatically emphasizes the moral and spiritual qualifications of elders, we underscore them throughout this *Guide*. Most elder leadership problems can be traced directly to the failure on the part of an elder or the body of elders to act according to a specific New Testament character qualification. As there is such a profound depth of wisdom contained in each Spirit-given qualification, elders need to be thoroughly familiar with each. If you need help defining the New Testament elder qualifications, read pp. 188-202 and 228-238, in *Biblical Eldership*. See p. 15 of this introduction for a complete list.

USING THE STUDY GUIDE

The *Study Guide to Biblical Eldership: Twelve Lessons for Mentoring Men for Eldership* is designed primarily as a mentoring tool for training prospective new elders. It consists of twelve lessons based on the revised and expanded edition of Alexander Strauch’s *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* (1995). The *Study Guide to Biblical Eldership* is to be used by the prospective new elder (the mentoree or trainee) under the direction of a mentoring elder. The prospective elder reads *Biblical Eldership* (the revised edition of 1995) and works through the lessons in the *Study Guide to Biblical Eldership*. After completing each lesson, he meets with his mentoring elder to discuss the questions and assignments. A companion volume, *The Mentor’s Guide to Biblical Eldership*, by Alexander Strauch and Richard Swartley, is available to assist the mentoring elder.

If your church does not have a training program for prospective elders, you may seek out one of your church’s elders and ask him to participate in this study program by serving as your mentor. Although the *Study Guide* was prepared to be used in a mentoring relationship, if no elder in your church is available, an aspiring elder can use the *Study Guide* in a self-directed study.

BEFORE STARTING THE STUDY GUIDE

Scripture states most emphatically that a new convert cannot be an elder (1 Tim. 3:7) and that a man is not to be appointed an elder in a hasty manner (1 Tim. 5:22). Thus the *Study Guide* is designed for mature Christian men who are **already actively involved** in local church service, teaching, and leadership. It is for those who know the Scriptures, are knowledgeable in basic Bible doctrines, and agree with the doctrinal positions of the local church. It is for those who desire pastoral eldership (1 Tim. 3:1), and those whom the elders have selected for training for possible eldership. It is assumed that those who use the *Study Guide* are experienced in serving in the church and are well-known by the elders. Moreover, prospective elders should recognize that entering the mentoring process does not guarantee that they will be appointed elders at its conclusion.

Depending on the mentoree's experience, knowledge, skills, personal desire, and needs, the lessons can be accomplished in six months or spread out over a year or two. The lessons should be used in a flexible manner, depending on the mentoree's progress and interest in moving forward. The *Study Guide* is demanding by virtue of the seriousness of the task, and each lesson requires between three to five hours of preparation. In addition, most lessons require about an hour and a half for the mentoring elder and mentoree to review and discuss the mentoree's work.

The *Study Guide* is not designed to be a general leadership training manual. It is a specialized leadership training course intended only for those who aspire to be pastor elders and for the congregation's emerging elders, as surfaced by its current elders. Churches should provide other specific leadership training for all leaders and ministry directors.

THE ROLE OF THE STUDY GUIDE IN PREPARING ELDERS

The *Study Guide to Biblical Eldership* is designed to provide prospective elders with three crucial elements:

1. A thorough study of what the Bible teaches about elders and eldering

An often neglected but critically essential requirement for training new elders is the study of the biblical texts on eldership and Christian leadership. The *Study Guide* directs the trainee through all the New Testament passages on eldership, using *Biblical Eldership* as an in-depth commentary. Lesson 1 begins with Old Testament elders (chapter 7 of *Biblical Eldership*). The *Guide* then moves through Acts (also chapter 7), followed by all the epistles (chapters 8-13). The *Study Guide* also refers to the first six chapters of *Biblical Eldership* as they relate to the eldership texts of Scripture. **Therefore, before starting lesson 1 of the *Study Guide*, the mentoree should read the introduction and the first six chapters of *Biblical Eldership*.**

Only the Spirit of God, using the Word of God, can instill in the hearts and minds of men God's will for what they should be and do as shepherds of God's precious flock. Therefore, an elder trainee needs to saturate his mind with God-breathed words on biblical eldership. Only when he

is “constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine” will he be “a good servant of Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 4:6).

2. Practical ideas for developing prospective elders’ pastoral skills and personal spiritual growth

Elder trainees need much practical instruction in preparing for eldership. Since *Biblical Eldership* is largely a doctrinal, expository book, it offers little practical counsel for prospective elders. The *Study Guide* supplements *Biblical Eldership* by providing probing questions, self-evaluations, warnings, assignments, useful suggestions, and recommended reading material.

Throughout the *Study Guide*, many books are recommended for study or purchase as resource material. Mentorees may not be able to afford such an investment, so we suggest that the church purchase these books for an elders’ resource library. It is important that basic books are at hand for training leaders and elders.

To maximize the trainee’s practical experience, it is essential that he attend elders’ meetings while working on these lessons. *Elders’ meetings are an extraordinarily effective and essential training ground for emerging elders.* They are a virtual school of advanced pastoral training. Observing experienced leaders is fundamental to the mentoring process. While training the Twelve, Jesus was the model. He provided maximum exposure for His disciples to observe His methods of evangelism, the priority of prayer in His life, His compassion for suffering people, His leadership style, and His absolute faithfulness to the will and Word of God. The more exposure the mentoree has to the elders at work, the more effective the mentoring process will be. In addition, trainees should seek opportunities to accompany the elders in their pastoral duties. In-service training is always effective.

3. A guide to facilitate a mentoring relationship between an experienced elder and an elder trainee

If a church is blessed with a well-trained council of elders, the *Study Guide* provides an organized format to be used by elders in mentoring men preparing to share that responsibility in the future. This *Guide* provides the structure for a mentoring elder and mentoree to study all the biblical texts on elders and the book *Biblical Eldership*. It also allows the mentoring elder to share his personal insights into Scripture; his personal spiritual journey and growth; and his experiences, failures, and successes as a shepherd of God’s people.

Please be aware that a number of assignments and questions may require much more effort than the lesson schedule allows. List these items on the inside back cover of the *Guide*. When you complete the *Study Guide*, prioritize the postponed items and schedule time to work on each.

SUGGESTIONS FOR AN EFFECTIVE MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

So that you may derive the greatest benefit from your mentoring relationship, we recommend that both the mentoring elder and the trainee read the book, *Connecting: The Mentoring Relationships You Need To Succeed in Life*, by Paul D. Stanley and J. Robert Clinton. It is available from your local bookstore or from Lewis & Roth (800-477-3239). It is without question the finest book available on spiritual men-

toring. Stanley and Clinton briefly define mentoring as “a relational experience through which one person empowers another by sharing God-given resources.”⁶ Their expanded definition reads:

Mentoring is a relational process between [a] mentor, who knows or has experienced something and transfers that something (resources of wisdom, information, experience, confidence, insight, relationships, status, etc.) to a mentoree, at an appropriate time and manner, so that it facilitates development or empowerment.⁷

Stanley and Clinton dispel false ideas about mentoring and challenge us to seek different kinds of mentoring relationships throughout life for our continued growth.

In a church with several capable elders, one elder does not have to mentor a trainee through all twelve lessons of the *Guide*. As Stanley and Clinton explain, there is no one “ideal,” or “all-encompassing mentor” for each of us for life,⁸ so different elders should be involved with the trainee in specific areas of mentoring.

When seeking a mentor, don’t look for an ideal person who can do the whole range of mentoring functions. Few of these exist, if any. But if the mentoring needs are specified, someone is usually available who can mentor to that need. We believe that mentors are part of God’s development plan for each of His followers. He will provide them as you “ask and seek.”⁹

An elder who is more doctrinally astute should mentor prospective elders in the importance of knowing Bible doctrine (lessons 2, 4, and 8), for example, while an elder who is gifted in counseling and ministering to families should cover lesson 7. An elder who is devoted to prayer should guide the mentoree through lesson 3. This gives trainees the opportunity to learn from several mentoring elders and to draw from their particular strengths, experience, and gifts. However, one elder should be the primary mentoring elder for the trainee in order to provide close accountability for the overall training.

Mentoring should not end when a man becomes a pastor elder. The best learning actually occurs when one is in the process of serving. Furthermore, new elders need the closest mentoring. They need on-the-job training, guidance, counsel, rebuke, correction, love, and encouragement. Since the first few years as a pastor elder are the most strategic for growth in his shepherding ministry, it is imperative that experienced elders seize this opportunity to deliberately pass on their wisdom, knowledge, and skills to their new colleagues. In this way, the eldership is successfully perpetuated, guaranteeing future pastoral care for the local church.

ELDER QUALIFICATIONS**1 Timothy 3:2-7**

1. Above reproach
2. The husband of one wife
3. Temperate [self-controlled, balanced]
4. Prudent [sensible, good judgment]
5. Respectable [well-behaved, virtuous]
6. Hospitable
7. Able to teach
8. Not addicted to wine
9. Not pugnacious [not belligerent]
10. Gentle [forbearing]
11. Peaceable [uncontentious]
12. Free from the love of money
13. Manages his household well
14. Not a new convert
15. A good reputation with those outside the church

Titus 1:6-9

1. Above reproach
2. The husband of one wife
3. Having children who believe
4. Not self-willed
5. Not quick-tempered
6. Not addicted to wine
7. Not pugnacious
8. Not fond of sordid gain
9. Hospitable
10. Lover of what is good [kind, virtuous]
11. Sensible [see prudent]
12. Just [righteous conduct, law-abiding]
13. Devout [holy, pleasing to God, loyal to His Word]
14. Self-controlled
15. Holds fast the faithful [trustworthy NIV] Word, both to exhort and to refute

1 Peter 5:1-3

1. Not shepherding under compulsion, but voluntarily
2. Not shepherding for sordid gain, but with eagerness
3. Not lording it over the flock, but proving to be an example

¹ Steve Huntley, with Jeannye Thornton, "The Silent Strength of Family Businesses," *U. S. News & World Report* (April 25, 1983), p. 47.

² *Ibid.*, p. 50.

³ Kenneth O. Gangel, *Feeding and Leading* (Wheaton: Victor, 1989), p. 313.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 309.

⁵ A. B. Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve* (1871; reprinted Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1988), pp. 12, 13.

Descriptions and dates are provided in this *Guide* only for those authors not previously identified in *Biblical Eldership*.

⁶ Paul D. Stanley and J. Robert Clinton, *Connecting: The Mentoring Relationships You Need To Succeed in Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1992), p. 33.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 45, 46.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

Lesson 1

Old Testament Elders

LESSON OVERVIEW

Every prospective shepherd elder needs good role models to learn from and to follow. God's book, the Bible, provides us with many inspiring examples of godly men and women. In their excellent book on mentoring, Paul Stanley and Robert Clinton call such an example an "Historical Model," meaning "a person now dead whose life or ministry is written in a(n) (auto)biographical form and is used as an example to indirectly impart values, principles, and skills that empower another person."¹

Lesson 1 explores Job's life as a model of the Old Testament elder. We will examine the duties and deficiencies of Israel's elders and will note the failure of Job's colleagues to compassionately and tactfully minister to him during his intense suffering. This lesson will help you think and act like a biblical, Christlike elder.

JOB, A MODEL ELDER

"There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil" (Job 1:1).

Read pages 186-202, 227-238. It is assumed that you have previously read pages 9-117.

1. Using a Bible dictionary, encyclopedia, or other reference tool,² briefly describe who Job is and what the book of Job is about.

2. The verses below describe Job's personal character traits and his actions as a community leader.
- a. As you read each passage, mark with an "E" each reference that substantiates that Job was an elder.
 - b. Where appropriate, summarize what Job did that a shepherd elder should do.
 - c. Consider the New Testament qualifications of an elder on the list below and, using the numbers 1 through 11 that correspond to those qualifications, identify each passage that contains similar qualifications.

- 1 Above reproach (1 Tim. 3:2; pp. 188, 228)
- 2 Hospitable (1 Tim. 3:2; p. 194)
- 3 Respectable [well-behaved, virtuous] (1 Tim. 3:3; p. 193)
- 4 Gentle [forbearing] (1 Tim 3:3; p. 197)
- 5 Free from the love of money (1 Tim. 3:3; p. 198)
- 6 Manages his household well (1 Tim. 3:4; p. 199)
- 7 Lover of what is good [kind, virtuous] (Titus 1:8; p. 233)
- 8 Just [righteous conduct, law-abiding] (Titus 1:8; p. 234)
- 9 Devout [holy, pleasing to God, loyal to His Word] (Titus 1:8; p. 235)
- 10 Faithful to God's Word (Titus 1:9; pp. 235, 236)
- 11 Able to teach and exhort, and to refute false teachers (Titus 1:9; pp. 236, 237)

Job 1:1 There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil.

Example: b. Job was blameless, God-fearing; c. 1, 8, 9

Job 1:4, 5 And his sons used to go and hold a feast in the house of each one on his day, and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. It came about, when the days of feasting had completed their cycle, that Job would send and consecrate them, rising up early in the morning and offering burnt offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said, "Perhaps my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did continually.

Job 4:1-4 Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered, “If one ventures a word with you [Job], will you become impatient? But who can refrain from speaking? Behold you [Job] have admonished [instructed] many, and you have strengthened weak hands. Your words have helped the tottering to stand, and you have strengthened feeble knees.”

Job 23:11, 12 “My foot [Job’s] has held fast to His path; I have kept His way and not turned aside. I have not departed from the command of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food.”

Job 29:7, 8 “When I [Job] went out to the gate of the city, when I took my seat in the square, the young men saw me and hid themselves, and the old men arose and stood.”

Job 29:12-17 “Because I delivered the poor who cried for help, and the orphan who had no helper. The blessing of the one ready to perish came upon me, and I made the widow’s heart sing for joy. I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; my justice was like a robe and a turban. I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. I was a father to the needy, and I investigated the case which I did not know. I broke the jaws of the wicked and snatched the prey from his teeth.”

Job 29:21 “To me they listened and waited, and kept silent for my counsel.”

Job 30:25 “Have I not wept for the one whose life is hard? Was not my soul grieved for the needy?”

Job 31:1 “I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze [look lustfully NIV] at a virgin?”

Job 31:24-34 “If I have put my confidence in gold, and called fine gold my trust, if I have gloated because my wealth was great, and because my hand had secured so much; if I have looked at the sun when it shone or the moon going in splendor, and my heart became secretly enticed, and my hand threw a kiss from my mouth, that too would have been an iniquity calling for judgment, for I would have denied God above. Have I rejoiced at the extinction of my enemy, or exulted when evil befell him? No, I have not allowed my mouth to sin by asking for his life in a curse. Have the men of my tent not said, ‘Who can find one who has not been satisfied with his meat’? The alien has not lodged outside, for I have opened my doors to the traveler. Have I covered my transgressions like Adam, by hiding my iniquity in my bosom, because I feared the great multitude, and the contempt of families terrified me, and kept silent and did not go out of doors?”

3. In summary, what was Job's attitude toward people?

The following observation is from a letter by Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission and one of the greatest missionaries of all time. He wrote about the lack of tact and sensitivity some missionaries displayed toward the Chinese. May his words remind us of the importance of grace and tact in dealing with people:

“Some persons seem really clever in doing the right thing in the worst possible way, or at the most unfortunate time. Really dull, or rude persons will seldom be out of hot water in China; and though earnest and clever and pious will not effect much. *In nothing do we fail more, as a Mission, than in lack of tact and politeness.*”
—Hudson Taylor³

4. Job complained that his five friends, who may also have been elders, were miserable comforters. “**You are all worthless physicians**” (Job 13:4). “**Sorry comforters are you all**” (Job 16:2). Many elders today think and act like Job's friends. So that you will not become a worthless physician of the soul, observe the negative characteristics in Job's friends that shepherds of God's people should avoid. List those that appear in these passages.

Job 6:14, 15 “For the despairing man [Job speaking] there should be kindness from his friend; so that he does not forsake the fear of the Almighty. My brothers [Job's friends] have acted deceitfully like a wadi [a seasonal stream], like the torrents of wadis which vanish.”

Example: lack of compassion, inconsistent, useless

Job 12:5a “He who is at ease holds calamity in contempt.”

Job 13:4 “But you smear with lies; you are all worthless physicians.”

Job 16:1-4 Then Job answered, “I have heard many such things; sorry comforters are you all. Is there no limit to windy words? Or what plagues you that you answer? I too could speak like you, if I were in your place. I could compose words against you and shake my head at you.”

Job 19:1-5 Then Job responded, “How long will you torment me, and crush me with words? These ten times you have insulted me; you are not ashamed to wrong me. . . . If indeed you vaunt yourselves against me, and prove my disgrace to me.”

5. Restate Job 12:5a in your own words. Why is it important for those who provide spiritual care to understand and remember this text?

ISRAEL'S ELDERS

“And they [the elders] shall bear the burden of the people with you” (Numbers 11:17).

Read pages 121-124.

6. Practice pronouncing the following Greek words, and give their meanings (see *Biblical Eldership*):

presbyteros [prez BOO tuh rohs] (p. 124)

presbyteroi [prez BOO tuh roy] (p. 124)

presbyterion [prez boo TEH ree ohn] (pp. 123, 205)

gerousia [geh roo SEE uh] (p. 123)

7. Briefly define the eldership structure of government of the Old Testament (p. 39).

8. The divinely inspired New Testament is built on the divinely inspired Old Testament. A major reason why most Christians do not see or understand church eldership as practiced in the New Testament is that they do not know anything about the Old Testament elders. Robert B. Girdlestone (1836-1923), author of the classic *Synonyms of the Old Testament*, echoes this sentiment: “The importance of a right judgment of the position and functions of these [Old Testament] elders cannot well be overrated when we come to discuss the nature of the analogous office of presbyter in the NT.”⁴

Elders appear throughout the entire Bible, beginning with Genesis 50:7 and ending with Revelation 4:4, which describes the twenty-four elders who surround the throne of God. Since government by a council of elders has been a fundamental institution among the people of God all through biblical history, a study of New Testament church eldership must begin with an examination of what the Old Testament says about elders.

List the responsibilities of the elders of Israel indicated in these Old Testament passages. Be sure to interpret these verses in their context.

Ex. 19:7, 8

Lev. 4:13-15

Num. 11:16, 17

Deut. 19:11, 12

Deut. 21:18-21

Deut. 27:1

Deut. 31:9-12

2 Sam. 5:3

Job 12:20

Ezek. 7:26

9. Although today's elders do not offer sacrifices, protect manslayers, or sit at the city gate, there are important similarities between the responsibilities of the Old and New Testament elders. List some of these similarities.

10. What highly significant lesson for elders do you find in Joshua 24:31?

11. By and large, Israel's elders failed to meet their responsibility to uphold the law of God and protect the people. We also cannot assume that collective leadership will protect us from the consequences of corporate sin.

What were some of the root sins and failures of Israel's elders? Again, be sure to observe the context.

1 Sam. 4:1-11

1 Sam. 8:4-9, 19, 20

1 Sam. 11:1-3

2 Sam. 5:3; 17:1-4

1 Kings 21:5-11

Ezek. 8:7-13

12. In light of your desire to become a godly leader or elder, write brief phrases that summarize the biblical standards for character and conduct for elders that you have gleaned from this study.

I must:

a.

b.

c.

d.

e.

f.

g.

h.

i.

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k.

l.

m.

n.

o.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY ASSIGNMENT:

“There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job; and that man was blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil” (Job 1:1).

¹ Paul D. Stanley and J. Robert Clinton, *Connecting: The Mentoring Relationship You Need to Succeed in Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1992), p. 147.

² We highly recommend that every elder own and use regularly *Talk Thru the Bible*, by Bruce Wilkinson and Kenneth Boa (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers). For a good Bible dictionary, we recommend the *New Bible Dictionary*, by Tyndale House Publishers.

³ A. J. Broomhall, *Refiner's Fire* (Robesonia: The Overseas Missionary Fellowship, 1985), p. 231.

⁴ Robert Baker Girdlestone, *Synonyms of the Old Testament*, 3d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), p. 269.