

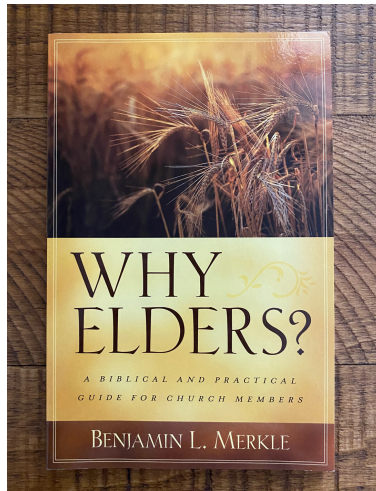
# PASTORAL EPISTLES

## GOAL

## WHY STUDY THIS?

**Y**ou may be asking yourself the question "Why study about elders?". There are three main reasons to read and study the concept of elders. The first reason is: it is in the Bible and we know that all of Scripture is God's Word and is profitable for all Christians to learn and grow in (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The second reason is: it allows us to take a look at our own church polity (operational leadership structure) to ensure that we as a church are functioning in a healthy way that is in harmony with Scripture. And the third reason for us to study is: it helps us engage, not only the Church body, but the world around us so that we can clearly articulate what the Bible says about church leadership as a result of study and trusting the Holy Spirit.

We study so that we can be faithful and obedient Christians. When studying the Word of God, we seek to gain understanding, we seek clarity of the Scriptures, we seek wisdom, and we seek to be humble, learning as the Spirit teaches us. I have prayed for you and your group to have a fruitful and enlightening time as you study "*Why Elders*" and the Scriptures.



## REQ. READING

**O**ver the next four weeks, our Life Groups will be reading and discussing the book "*Why Elders? A Biblical and Practical Guide for Church Members*" by Benjamin L. Merkle. Each family in the church will be provided one copy. Please make sure to read the chapter ahead of time and be ready to discuss during group; bringing your copy to Life Group could prove to be invaluable. Pastor Kevin and the Leadership Team will be setting up small gatherings for church members to dialogue over the next few months regarding elders.



## OPENING

- When was the last time you read something in Scripture and thought to yourself "Should I be including this in my life? My family? My church?" What was that thing and what did you do about it?
- Why is it a good sign for God's people to be faithful and committed to God's Word?
- When you hear the term "Church Polity" what comes to mind? Is this even a term that you have heard before? (Church Polity refers to the operational leadership structure of a given congregation.)
- What is your experience with church elders (or an elder board)? How does that impact your view of elders?
- Can you describe how Legacy Church is led?

# PASTORAL EPISTLES

## BOOK DISCUSSION

# CHAPTER 1 - IT IS THE PATTERN OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

INTRODUCTION  
ELDERS & TERMINOLOGY  
ELDERS & PLURALITY  
ELDERS & AUTHORITY  
CONCLUSION  
READING TOTAL - 32 PAGES

1 TIMOTHY 3:1-7  
TITUS 1:5-9  
ACTS 20:17, 28  
1 PETER 5:1-2

*As a group, utilize the following set of questions to discuss your reading and understanding of Chapter 1 of "Why Elders". Please remember this is a book discussion that is coupled with Scripture. If you do not have all of the answers, that is okay. You can utilize resources such as Blue Letter Bible, Bible Gateway, or Bible.org, among many others.*

*Because of the differing dynamics of our groups, some groups may have only a short time to discuss the book, whereas other groups will have a copious amount of discussion time.*

*With that in mind, I want to suggest that you adjust your format/pattern for the next four weeks so that you can cover the entire content. Use your group time for discussion, and praying for wisdom and understanding of this book. Consider utilizing text or email for personal prayer requests if time is short so that your group can focus on this discussion.*

- What are some of the terms you have heard church leaders called? According to Merkle, what are the leaders of a church called? Is it a title or a function? Why do you say that?

- Merkle asserts that there are three Scriptural texts that demonstrate an interchangeability for the terms Elder and Overseer. Can anyone name those texts (Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5, 7; 1 Peter 5:1-2)? Why is it important to know those terms are interchangeable?

- Let us read the three passages. (Assign a person or persons to read the aforementioned verses.). What do we see in these sections?

- On **page 20**, Merkle draws the reader's attention to the qualifications of eldership in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. As a group, read those passages.

- As a group, list out the qualifications of what God says qualifies a person to be an elder, making note of how those qualifications can be observed in individuals that you know.

- What qualifications stand out to you? Why do you believe these to be important qualifications for a person to have?

- From **pages 24 through 28**, Merkle discusses the use of titles for church leadership. He claims that titles are not essential but they are important. What reasons does he give to support that statement? Is language important in church leadership? Why or why not?

- **Pages 28 through 32** discusses the plurality principle of elders. (i.e. leadership should be shared among more than one person.) Should there be more than one person leading a church? Why or why not? How does plurality benefit the church? What is your experience with plurality in leadership (whether in the church or at your job)?

# PASTORAL EPISTLES

## BOOK DISCUSSION

- Merkle addresses the elder and staff distinction on **pages 32 through 35**. The four main components of this section are -

*Not all staff members are elders*

*Not all elders are staff members*

*Some staff members should be elders*

*Don't distinguish between staff and non-staff elders*

How do those four main components challenge your understanding of church leadership?

- In the final section of Chapter 1, Merkle discusses "Elders and Authority" within the local congregation. This teaching is found on **pages 35 through 40**.

- What comes to mind when you hear the word "authority"? Have you had a positive or negative experience in life with authority? What are some of your experiences when it comes to church authority?

*Nota Bene: The topic of authority within the church, and the abuse thereof, can be a sensitive and difficult topic. As Christians, we need to be aware of two things. The first is that when a person expresses hurt because of authority, the most detrimental thing we can do is be dismissive of what was just expressed. Lovingly and graciously acknowledge what was said by offering your sincerest condolences for their experience. Do not make excuses for those in authority nor defend them. Offer prayer for the hurt that the group member has experienced. The second thing we need to be aware of is not allowing the conversation to take a negative turn where the entire group then begins to complain about authority in the Church. One way to handle this is to offer a sentence similar to "I am so sorry to hear of the many negative experiences with Church authority. I would like to discuss this in further detail, maybe even having one of the pastors listen to your story as well. Let us pray together now for healing and for healthy authority in the Church*

*before we get back to our discussion." The group can then pray and return to the discussion at hand. Anytime someone shares something vulnerable, we want to properly acknowledge it and then move forward.*

- Why is it important to remember that obedience in accordance to God's Word is the calling of the Christian?

- Merkle contends on **page 37** that elders are representatives for a congregation and that they speak and act on behalf of that church. How do you respond to that statement? Why do you respond in that way?

## CLOSING

As the group closes, spend time praying for

- Understanding

- Clarity

- Humility

- Wisdom

as you continue this book study.

As mentioned, Pastor Kevin and the Leadership Team will provide opportunities for discussing elders in more detail. Be on the lookout for those dates.