

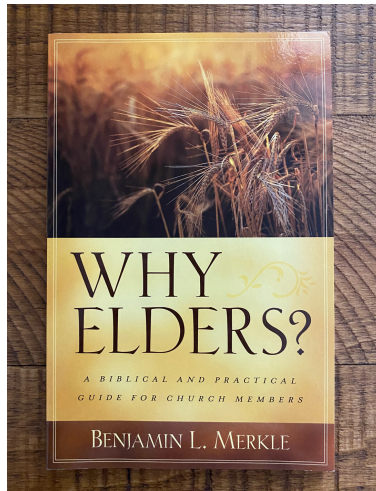
PASTORAL EPISTLES

GOAL

WHY STUDY THIS?

You 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

All Christians need help and accountability. Pastors are no different. In the second chapter of "*Why Elders?*" we see just how a plurality of elders provide a senior pastor with help and accountability. The work of guiding and guarding the doctrine and direction of the Church is spiritually, emotionally, and (oftentimes) physically taxing. When a group of elders share the responsibility of such a task, the help is positively immeasurable. In addition to this, mutual accountability among the elders will ensure that lives and ministry are above reproach.



OPENING

- Consider a time in your life where you needed help carrying a heavy burden. Whether this was at work, at home, or in school, how did you approach the need for having help?
- Who is the person(s) who helps you most often when it comes to times of overload and burden?
- Integrity and accountability go hand-in-hand. How do you seek to maintain integrity and have accountability in your life? Who is that person(s) who helps keep you accountable?
- What happens to a person who does not have any accountability? Why is that detrimental to more than just that one individual?
- Consider any situation where you had the same amount of authority as another individual(s), whether at work, home, or school. How did you handle equal authority? Was that authority beneficial for the task at hand? Explain why or why not?

PASTORAL EPISTLES

BOOK DISCUSSION

CHAPTER 2 - IT PROVIDES HELP & ACCOUNTABILITY FOR A PASTOR

ELDERS & THEIR DUTIES
ELDERS & THE SHARING OF DUTIES
ELDERS & EQUALITY
ELDERS & ACCOUNTABILITY
CONCLUSION

READING TOTAL - 18 PAGES

As a group, utilize the following set of questions to discuss your reading and understanding of Chapter 2 of "Why Elders?". In this chapter, we will discuss in further detail the duties and function of elders as described in Scripture and explained by Benjamin Merkle.

The goal of today's content is to help us become better acquainted with how elders help and encourage a lead pastor. Today's chapter builds upon last week's content. If you were unable to complete the previous reading and/or discussion, my encouragement would be to go back and read that chapter and consider the questions from the curriculum. The content at hand, and the direction we are considering as a church, is vitally important.

- Prior to reading this chapter, what did you think the duties and responsibilities of a pastor and/or elder were?

- Has Chapter 2 helped solidify or even clarify what you had in mind? Explain how things have stayed the same. Or explain how things have changed.

- On **pages 43 through 51**, Merkle explains the duties of elders, primarily that they are to lead, shepherd, teach, and equip the congregation they oversee. Which of these four duties have you seen displayed in church leadership? Is there a duty that seems to come (super)naturally to our church leadership? Is there anything from this list that surprises you? Is there a duty from this list that you imagine is difficult? If so, why do you believe it to be difficult?

- Let us now look deeper into these four duties. The elder's first duty is to lead. According to Merkle on **page 45**, the elder leads by -
not demanding respect
being teachable
being willing to work with others
being a servant
doing all things to the glory of God

Why are these elements indicative of Biblical leadership?

- Merkle asserts on **page 46** that a shepherd's "primary task is not to run an organization but to care for people's souls." In an effort to care for the souls of church members, elders must be willing to protect people from harmful doctrine and they need to visit and pray for church members. As the writer of Hebrews states "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account." Why is it helpful to obey a shepherd when it comes to caring for your soul? In what ways have you benefited from having pastoral care (whether from a pastor, elder, or church member)? Does the fact that elders will be held accountable to God for caring for your soul impact your view?

- The goal of teaching must be two-fold. The first is to encourage believers by giving them Biblical instruction. The second is to rebuke those who oppose the truth. Because of this goal, elders must be able to teach, since healthy, gospel teaching is vital to the Church's existence. Where have you seen people who teach contrary to Biblical truth? Where have you seen people in our church teach well? How does one grow as a teacher of truth?

PASTORAL EPISTLES

BOOK DISCUSSION

- On **page 51**, Merkle states that it *"is the task of the elders to identify those young (and not so young) men who will be faithful to carry on the gospel message."* The author makes the case that this is the responsibility of the elder because he must also equip the church to grow. In what ways have you grown because of someone identifying and discipling you? What benefits have you received as a result of this relationship? What challenges arise because of this task?

- On **pages 51 through 54**, Merkle discusses the necessity of sharing burdens among a plurality of elders. For example, caring for a congregation is too much for one person to handle, and will lead to frustration, or worse, burnout! When a single elder shoulders the sole responsibility for an entire church, he will begin to neglect his own spiritual life and/or family. Consider your own life for a moment. In what ways have you found yourself tired or burned out from caring for others? How have you found peace and joy from having other Christians help bear the weight of responsibility in your own life? What other reasons stand out to you as you consider how a plurality of elders help share burdens in congregational leadership?

- Merkle, on **page 54**, highlights that single pastor/elder churches can fall into the trap of calling a church by the name of the senior pastor, i.e. Pastor John's church rather than acknowledging that every local congregation belongs solely to the Lord Jesus Christ. Have you ever been tempted to follow a personality at a church, rather than following the leadership of Jesus. What detriment is there in seeing a church as a person's, rather than God's? How does plurality of elders help to combat a faulty view of pastoral ministry?

- **Pages 54 through 58** discusses the concept of elders and equality. In your opinion, should all elders have equal responsibility? Why or why not? What is Merkle's view of equal responsibility? How does he explain his answer? What does "first among equals" mean? How have you seen this happen before? If you haven't seen this executed well, what concerns you about this concept?

- What are some of the challenges to plurality? What are some of the benefits?

- On **pages 58 through 60**, Merkle discusses accountability among a plurality of elders. He contends there are two reasons for accountability among elders. The first is to help protect the pastor from error, while the second is to help foster maturity and godliness among the elders. Consider your Life Group for a moment. How does engaging with one another on a regular basis help us avoid doctrinal error (heresy)? Can you identify a moment where someone helped you understand or articulate a Biblical view by correcting you? Is there a time where you have helped someone else? What did that situation look like?

- How does your Life Group help us to foster maturity and godliness? Where else has community (outside of this Life Group) helped you grow in spiritual maturity and godliness? Why is it important for elders to have others that help cultivate an environment where maturity and godliness are important?

CLOSING

As the group closes, continue praying for

- Understanding
- Clarity
- Humility
- Wisdom

This will benefit you, your Life Group, and Legacy as a whole. Pastor Kevin, the Leadership Team, and the staff is praying for you and your group as we continue this study of *"Why Elders?"*.