

Biblical Elder: A Shepherd, Not a Celebrity

A Bible Study on Christian Eldership

Reflections Family, Discipleship and the Christian Life 19 June 2026

Mark 10:43

1 Corinthians 11:1

Hebrews 13:17

Inspired by a devotional I recently read on 1 Peter 5:1-4, I was reminded that the Biblical concept of an elder is very different from the modern fascination with influential personalities, charismatic speakers, or powerful administrators. In Scripture, elders are not primarily executives, celebrities, or decision-makers; they are shepherds, appointed by God to care for His people. The New Testament uses the terms elder, overseer, and shepherd interchangeably (Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5-7), emphasising that their calling is to nurture, protect, teach, guide, and pray for the flock. Above all, elders must never forget that the church belongs to Christ. It is not their flock, their ministry, or their kingdom, but God's flock, entrusted to their care.

The role of an elder is, therefore, one of servant leadership. Peter exhorts elders to serve willingly and eagerly, and not for personal gain or recognition (1 Peter 5:2). Paul teaches that elders must be spiritually mature, above reproach, hospitable, able to teach, and exemplary in character (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9). Their authority is moral and spiritual, rather than positional or coercive. Jesus Himself set the pattern, when He declared, "But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister" (Mark 10:43). Elders lead best, not by commanding from above, but by walking before the flock as examples worthy of imitation — just as Paul himself could say, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1).

The ministry of elders extends beyond administration into the shepherding of souls. They watch over the spiritual welfare of God's people, guard the church from false teaching, encourage the weak, restore the wandering, and equip believers for ministry (Acts 20:28-31; Ephesians 4:11-13; James 5:14). Hebrews 13:17 reminds us that they "watch for your souls, as they that must give account." What a solemn responsibility! Faithful elders may receive little applause here below; still, they labour with an eternal perspective, looking forward to the day when the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ, shall appear, and reward those who have shepherded His flock with humility, integrity, and love (1 Peter 5:4). May God raise up such elders in every church, and may every congregation pray for them, and support them faithfully.

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