

# discipleship essentials

Essentials for Spiritual Leadership  
Leader's Guide

## PASTORAL BASICS

### LESSON 4: BIBLICAL QUALIFICATIONS FOR CHURCH LEADERSHIP

#### INTRODUCTION

This lesson is part of a Discipleship Essentials module titled Pastoral Basics. This module will be helpful for untrained leaders who are serving as pastors, for churches who are looking for a pastor, and for those pursuing a pastoral role. It will outline the many duties a pastor may have in a local church, and what church members should expect from their pastor. Some specific challenges are also included, such as ministry to different age groups as well as considerations for church growth.

#### INTENDED AUDIENCE

The intended audience for these lessons is Christians who are maturing in their faith and desiring to serve God sincerely. The lessons will also benefit church leaders who wish to encourage people in their Christian service, and identify spiritual gifts in those they are discipling.

The Leader's Guide is intended to help you as a leader in your preparation. These lesson outlines may be used in conjunction with other Discipleship Essentials materials found online at [www.discipleshipessentials.org](http://www.discipleshipessentials.org).

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# PASTORAL BASICS

## LESSON 4: BIBLICAL QUALIFICATIONS FOR CHURCH LEADERSHIP

### PURPOSE

The Bible tells us who should be appointed to leadership roles within the church (pastors, elders and others). This lesson outlines the qualifications for such positions.

### LEADER'S NOTE

Churches of different denominations or regional affiliations set up their church governance in diverse ways. According to the New Testament, there is a variety of titles used for church leaders and a number of structures for organizing them. However, there are several guiding principles for the selection of these leaders which we will discuss in this lesson. Feel free to teach the process for determining elders, pastors and other leaders that your particular church employs. Traditions for ordination, installation, or church governance can also be discussed. Keep in mind that exact church structure and qualifications for leadership are debated among Christians, especially regarding women in leadership. You should adapt the content of this lesson to the needs of your participants and your own convictions, understanding that these are peripheral doctrines.

## INTRODUCTION

*Select two or three of the following questions to ask the group.*

- ❖ What qualities make an ideal pastor in your opinion? What qualities would be detrimental for pastoral leadership?
- ❖ What are the benefits of having specific leaders named within the church? What difficulties arise when specific people are identified as leaders and others are not?
- ❖ What is the greatest leadership challenge facing your church? Is it too few leaders, too many, leaders not working well together, etc.? What do you feel could be done to improve the situation?



## STUDY

*Instruct the group on the following points.*

### TEACH

- ❖ **Spiritual Leadership in the Christian Church:** Churches are made up of ordinary Christians going through a process of extraordinary transformation! The Church has been given the truths of God to defend and pass down to the next generation.
  - A church can be any number of believers meeting together for the purposes of proclaiming truth, worshiping together, growing in holiness, and serving in love. This assembly, in order to accomplish its mission, will benefit from leaders who keep people focused on the vision and mission of the church.
  - Church leadership can consist of one pastor, multiple pastors and staff members, or elders chosen by the church to act as pastors. In addition to these leaders, deacons, overseers, teachers, or small group leaders may be chosen.
  - There is much Biblical guidance for choosing leaders and what should be expected of them. When selecting a leader from among the people or from outside the community, care must be taken to seek God's choice to ensure the health of the Church.
- ❖ **Why appoint leaders at all?** Because we are all equal in God's sight and follow Jesus as our master and King, it may seem strange to appoint people as church leaders. Most Christian churches have some form of church leadership, and there are some very good reasons why:
  - **Leaders help in orderly worship:** When we come together and worship God, read from the Word, and remember Jesus through communion, we are told to do so in an orderly and peaceful fashion (1 Corinthians 14:26-40). If certain people are not designated to lead the worship, to teach, to serve or to pray, then the worship service could be chaotic. If the congregation wants to have someone teach and someone to lead worship, those leaders need to be recognized.
  - **Some leadership gifts require public recognition:** While every member of a church community should serve with their spiritual gifts, some gifts require public recognition. You can serve, encourage, or give financially without being given an official position within the church. But the gifts of preaching or leading worship are acknowledged publicly with a title or designation, even if the position is shared with others who are also gifted in these areas (2 Timothy 1:11).
  - **Leaders provide good examples to follow:** We all need good examples to follow, and we're instructed to obey and submit to our spiritual leaders. When a church carefully appoints leaders based on Biblical qualifications, the church community will willingly respect and follow them. (Hebrews 13:7,17).



- **Leaders create unity within a church:** The work of the church is important and complex, and too many leaders can make it complicated to know which person to follow. A group of leaders can create unity if they work together with a single vision and purpose. God uses designated leaders who provide vision for the church, and who equip and encourage the people (Philippians 2:2).
- **Appointing leaders follows a Biblical pattern:** Throughout the Old Testament, God ordained specific people (priests) to oversee the worship activities of the temple. In the New Testament Church, God chose and equipped specific men to be Apostles, and Paul chose specific men in the churches to be elders. God gives people gifts for them to use in His work. When we recognize the gifts of others and give them the authority to lead us, we honour God and act Biblically (2 Timothy 1:6, 1 Corinthians 12:27-31).
- ❖ **Church Government:** Churches today have many different forms of government, or leadership hierarchy. The Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches have a world-wide governing body, while some protestant churches have regional authorities. Many have no governing authority but affiliate with one another through denominations. The exact nature of church government is a peripheral doctrine – that is, church government is not a requirement for salvation. And it is a matter on which Christians may disagree.
  - The New Testament gives guidance on church leadership which can be applied to churches today. The following task focuses on that teaching.

### TASK:

Divide participants into small groups. Have them look at the following verses, and then answer the questions. Take no more than 10 minutes for this activity, then allow participants to share answers with the larger group. Make note of the answers on chart paper, blackboard or other media if available.

Verses:

Colossians 1:18

Ephesians 4:11

Titus 1:5

Acts 14:23

1 Timothy 5:17

1 Peter 5:1-2

Questions:

Who has the highest place of authority within a church?

Who was appointed and to what positions?

How many were appointed to these positions?

In what ways is this leadership model good for the Church?

### TEACH:

- **Elders:** The churches of the New Testament were each governed by a group of elders (a select group of older, wiser men). There is no mention of one elder only governing a church no matter how small, so we know that leadership was always held by a group.



Before the New Testament church age, the people of God appointed elders to deal with matters of faith and practice. When they began to gather together under the name of Jesus in the New Testament, they continued with the tradition of appointing these elders.

- o **Many Names:** The New Testament uses various names for appointed church leaders, usually elders or overseers. They are all equal in position and are interchangeable designations, though they may differ in their various gifts and roles.
  - *Elders* are older, wiser men and experienced in the faith.
  - *Overseers* are supervisors or administrators.
  - *Pastors* are those who shepherd and care for the people.
  - *Stewards* are those who protect the shared resources of the church.
  
- o **Elders and Pastors:** The role of pastor receives little mention in the Bible, but it is a more common practice among churches today to appoint a single pastor or sometimes several pastors. The historical Biblical pattern is that a group of elders govern the church according to their gifts. Of the elders, one may be appointed a pastor or teacher. Our modern day practice of appointing or hiring a pastor to oversee and lead the people does not conflict with the Biblical model because the pastor is accountable to the elders, and they serve alongside one another according to their gifts.
  
- o **Responsibility of Elders:** There is no authority without responsibility, and elders are specifically responsible for many things.
  - **Shepherd the flock** (1 Peter 5:2)
  - **Exercise oversight** (1 Peter 5:2)
  - **Live as an example** (1 Peter 5:3)
  - **Pray for the sick** (James 5:14)
  - **Teach the people** (1 Timothy 5:17)
  - **Settle disputes** (Acts 15:2, 22-29)
  - **Make decisions respecting doctrine** (Acts 15:6, 16:4)
  
- **Deacons:** A second level of leadership in the church is the role of deacon. The qualifications required for deacons are like those of elders, but without the suggestion of being older and more mature. The role of a deacon in the church is more practical in nature, as it includes ministering to the functional and physical needs of the people. They hold a recognized office in order to serve the church; they are servants with honour, but distinct from elders (Philippians 1:1).
  
- **Other Roles within a Church:** Modern churches may have different roles in the church and hire, appoint or otherwise recognize individuals who serve as administrators, worship leaders, teaching pastors, administrative pastors, missionaries, evangelists, children's ministry or youth workers, counselors, or any number of other roles. While



these roles are not specifically mentioned in the Bible, they function in ministries that require specialized skills. Some may even be designated as elders or deacons.

- ❖ **Qualifications for Leadership:** Those appointed to a position of leadership within a church should meet all the qualifications set out in Scripture. These are not easy to fulfill, but it is the responsibility of the people to select and recognize only those who are worthy of the title.

Qualifications for Elders	
1 Timothy 3:1-7	Titus 1: 5-9
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Above reproach (vs. 2)</li> <li>• The husband of one wife (vs. 2)</li> <li>• Self-controlled (vs. 2)</li> <li>• Respectable (vs. 2)</li> <li>• Hospitable (vs. 2)</li> <li>• Able to teach (vs. 2)</li> <li>• Not a drunkard (vs. 3)</li> <li>• Gentle (vs 3)</li> <li>• Not quarrelsome (vs. 3)</li> <li>• Not a lover of money (vs. 3)</li> <li>• Manage children and household well (vs. 4-5)</li> <li>• Mature in the faith (vs. 6)</li> <li>• Well thought of by outsiders (vs. 7)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Above reproach (vs. 6)</li> <li>• Husband of one wife (vs. 6)</li> <li>• Children are believers (vs. 6)</li> <li>• Not arrogant or quick tempered (vs. 7)</li> <li>• Not a drunkard (vs. 7)</li> <li>• Not violent (vs. 7)</li> <li>• Not greedy for dishonest gain (vs. 7)</li> <li>• Hospitable (vs. 8)</li> <li>• Lover of good (vs. 8)</li> <li>• Self-controlled (vs. 8)</li> <li>• Upright and Holy (vs. 8)</li> <li>• Disciplined (vs. 8)</li> <li>• Hold firmly to the truth (vs. 9)</li> <li>• Able to instruct in doctrine (vs. 9)</li> <li>• Able to rebuke false teachers (vs. 9)</li> </ul>

- These are incredibly high standards for an individual to live up to, but they demonstrate the importance of the Church to God. He does not merely want someone who aspires to have power and control to govern His people. Someone very hungry for attention and power should in fact be considered suspicious as a candidate for leadership!

Qualifications for Deacons
1 Timothy 3:8-13
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be dignified (vs. 8)</li> <li>• Speak truth (vs. 8)</li> <li>• Don't drink too much (vs. 8)</li> <li>• Not dishonest with money (vs. 8)</li> <li>• Sure of and committed to their faith (vs. 9)</li> <li>• Have a clear conscience (vs. 9)</li> <li>• Tested and proven blameless (vs. 10)</li> <li>• Their wives must be dignified, exercise faithfulness and self-control, and not slander</li> </ul>



others (vs. 11)

- Husband of one wife (vs. 12)
- Manage children and household well (vs. 12)

- Even though the qualifications are similar to those of elders, deacons serve the church in different ways than elders. The word we translate as 'deacon' is also translated as servant, but not overseer. One interesting example is the reference to a woman named Phoebe ([Romans 16:1](#)) who in the original Greek is listed as a deaconess (or a female deacon). It is unclear whether women served as deacons, or whether deacons' wives held this particular role.

❖ **Questions about Leadership in the Church:** The previous lists will cause us to ask certain questions about the practical application of these requirements. While the Church varies widely on these issues, we have outlined some of the most common positions below.

- **The Role of Women in Leadership in the Church:** Traditionally, only men have served as elders or pastors within the Church, but now churches differ on this matter.
  - o The Bible indicates that men and women are equal in value to God and to the Church. Women receive the same blessings of salvation and relationship with God without regard to their gender. Women are gifted by God and should be encouraged to serve where their gifts meet needs.
  - o There are those who propose that only men are permitted to be elders (and therefore pastors or senior leaders). They understand verses of the Bible (such as [1 Timothy 2:11-14](#) and [1 Corinthians 14:33-36](#)) to support this belief, which prohibits women from certain necessary activities. They also hold to the Biblical example of only men in the role of apostle and elder, or men exclusively teaching the Word. These people may allow a woman to function as a deaconess, or have specific leadership over areas such as ministry to children or hospitality.
  - o Those who now allow women to hold positions of elder (and therefore pastor or senior leader) point to the Biblical examples of women serving in their churches. Priscilla was well educated, served alongside Paul, and taught Apollos in Ephesus ([Acts 18:18-26](#)). Other women held offices such as judge, queen and prophetess. They believe that if God has gifted a woman with the skills necessary to be a pastor or elder, He will bless her in that capacity.
  - o It should be noted that in many places in the world today, a lack of qualified godly men may require women to take positions of leadership within the Church.
- **The Issue of Divorced Leaders in the Church:** The description of a church leader requires that they are the 'husband of one wife' ([1 Timothy 3:2, 12](#) and [Titus 1:6](#)). These passages are sometimes used in discussion about divorced people serving in the church.



- o Some Christians believe that because divorce is often the result of sin and is not desirable in God's eyes, a man who has been divorced is disqualified from church leadership. They understand the above passages to mean that a divorced man who has been remarried has been the husband of more than one wife.
  - o Many Christians believe that divorce or remarriage because of death does not necessarily disqualify someone from church leadership. They hold that these passages refer to being married to only one woman at a time, and therefore rule out those in polygamous marriages or those who are married but having sexual relations with others at the same time. Some Christians may allow a divorced person to be a leader in the church if the divorce took place prior to their conversion, or if they were not at fault for the failed marriage. Taking into account a person's entire character is necessary for choosing wisely, but it is wiser to assess how a person is living and following God now, rather than what they were like in their youth.
- **The Issue of Family Life of Church Leaders :** What does family life have to do with Christian leadership? And why is the faith of a child an indication of the leadership skills of the parent?
- o The qualifications for an elder specify that children of the candidate are required to follow in the faith, and be obedient and well-behaved (Titus 1:6). Ability to lead one's family well is a good indicator of their ability to lead a church.
  - o Some Christians have taken this statement to mean that elders must be married, and must have children who are old enough to make a profession of faith. They may also require an elder to step down from this position if their child renounces Christianity.
  - o Many Christians would hold that men who have demonstrated good parenting and management of their household are qualified for eldership, even if their child leaves the faith. They also say that a man who is advanced in years but single and not a father, may also be an elder.
- **The Issue of Church Leadership Being a Paid Position:** It is the practice in many churches to appoint or elect elders (who are volunteers), and to also hire a pastor with a salary. There is some disagreement about the issue of who should receive financial support and whether those who teach and lead should be compensated by the church in some way.
- o Some Christians believe that spiritual leaders should not accept monetary compensation for their work. They refer to the apostles not acquiring gold or silver as they ministered, and the rebuke to not be greedy (Matthew 10:5-11, Luke 9:1-5). Indeed, we should not all expect to be paid when using the gifts God has given us.
  - o Many Christians look at the teachings of Paul which instruct churches to give honour – which can also be understood as wages – to those who rule well and preach and teach (1 Timothy 5:17-18, 1 Corinthians 9:3-18).



- o If the church expects full-time availability of spiritual leaders so that working a regular job would be impossible, then they must financially support the pastor and his family. Many pastors work very long hours, and their payment ensures they have time to serve the people of God.
  - o It is not necessary to pay every leader in a church. For example, those who serve as elders, advisors, or who occasionally teach or counsel. This decision should be made by each church individually. There is Biblical evidence for financially supporting some of those who serve in a church, and those sent out from a church to preach the Gospel.
- ❖ **Choosing and Installing the Right People:** With all of these qualifications in mind, how can a church select competent elders, pastors, and administrators to serve the people?
- **Determine what service is needed:** The needs of each individual congregation are different. A small church of 25 people may not need a paid pastor and several elders. Two or three may be sufficient. The larger a church grows, and the more complex and far reaching their ministry, the more leaders are required. A church should come together and elect or appoint people who can make these decisions and select leadership.
  - **Pray:** It is the Holy Spirit who sets apart people to be leaders within the Church (Acts 20:28), so the job of the congregation is to discern who God has chosen. This requires prayer and may be accompanied by fasting, waiting and watching.
  - **Appoint those who serve without Recognition:** If a church is functioning well, some people will already be using their gifts of teaching, administration, serving, giving, shepherding, preaching etc. without a formal position. The people who are already serving well and have a good reputation should be the first considered for positions of spiritual leadership.
  - **Observe the character of qualified candidates:** It is important to observe the character of leadership candidates and assess them in light of the Scripture. Actions, attitudes and character should be addressed, which is why a candidate should not be appointed until enough time has passed to make a careful, prayerful decision.
  - **Publically appoint key ministry leaders:** Once leaders have been chosen, they should be publically recognized in the church community. There are references in the Bible to elders laying hands on and praying over individuals commissioned for ministry, recognizing the gifts of the Spirit within them (1 Timothy 5:22, 2 Timothy 1:6).
- ❖ **Conclusion:** Aspiring to leadership within the Church is no small task, and those who wish to appoint leaders must carefully evaluate each person's suitability for the task. It is not in ourselves that we are able to serve God, rather it is God who equips and trains us for righteousness. God blesses His church through individuals who aspire to serve Him faithfully in whatever capacity He chooses for them.



## DISCUSSION

- ❖ What spiritual gifts are necessary for a pastor or elder of a church? Must each person possess all of these gifts?
- ❖ Why would a team of elders be appointed to the early churches? What does a team of people leading together protect against?
- ❖ What process does your church have for appointing elders, pastors, administrators and other servants? Does it reflect well what is taught in this lesson?
- ❖ Of the issues discussed in this lesson regarding leadership within the Church, which are you still unsure of? How can you learn more and discuss the matter with others in order to draw a conclusion?

## PRAYER

*Close the lesson in prayer. Pray that your participants would desire the noble task of overseeing the people of God, but that they would do so with humility and submission to Jesus Christ, who is the head of the Church. Pray for Godly leaders to be given to the churches of your community, and that these churches would be strong and healthy because of the leaders. Pray that leaders would not be domineering, but rather be examples to the flock and lovingly keep watch over everyone.*