



Leadership in the New Testament and at Lighthouse Church

What does the New Testament say about Leadership within a Church? How have Christians who have delved into the pages of the Scriptures pieced this together? What are areas of certainty and what are areas of freedom that the Scriptures give?

A question often asked of a Church is ‘who are the leaders’, or ‘who are the elders of this church?’.

To work this out, we are going to consider several concepts. First, we are going to look at different passages in the Bible. Then we are going to consider the biblical boundaries in which there is freedom. Third, we will consider our own heritage and how church size may influence this. Lastly, we will see the leadership structure of Lighthouse.

Firstly, what does God say in the Bible?

1. Different passages in the Bible on leadership

It is worth noting that several different terms are used in the NT that relate to leadership. They are:

Presbyteros -	translated ‘elder’ Eg 1 Tim 5:19
Episkopos -	translated ‘overseer or’ bishop’. Eg 1 Tim 3:1
Diakonos -	translated ‘deacon’ or ‘servant’ Eg 1 Tim 3:8
Proistemi -	translated ‘lead’, ‘rule’, ‘manage’, ‘care’ or ‘have authority over’. Eg Rom 12:8; 1 Tim 3:4
Ehgomai -	lead or rule Eg Heb 13:7,17

It is worth noting that with any word, it only gets its meaning from its context. And sometimes words are used interchangeably, or have very similar meanings.¹ Also, ‘overseer’ is a Greek term. They were people appointed by the emperor to lead captured or newly formed cities.² They would regulate the affairs of the city, demonstrating a role of management over key organisations.³ Let us see some key passages that use the above words, so as to start forming a picture of leadership.

1 Timothy 1:2-3 To Timothy my true son in the faith: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. 3 As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer

Paul commands Timothy to stay in Ephesus, to command false teachers to stop. Timothy appears to be functioning as an elder/overseer/bishop, as we’ll see this is part of what an elder/overseer/bishop was to do – teach truth, and refute error. We also note that Timothy is not old⁴, but is functioning as a leader/elder/teacher.

1 Timothy 3:1-5 Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer (*episkopos*), he desires a noble task. 2 Now the overseer (*episkopos*) must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, 3 not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. 4 He must manage (*proistemi*) his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. 5 (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?)

Here we see that an overseer is a desirable and noble work. An overseer is to be a man. He is to be godly. And the gifts he is to have is the ability to teach and lead/manage his own family/household, along with the bigger family/household (the church).

¹ To try and keep this as simple as possible for the English read, I have purposely not modified the Greek words in this document to reflect if it’s a verb, noun, participle, or infinitive.

² ‘overseer’ J. B. Lightfoot, *the Christian Ministry*, 1868.

³ D Carson, *Themelios*, 40.2 (2015), 195-197.

⁴ 1 Tim 4:12. Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but *rather* in speech, conduct, love, faith *and* purity, show yourself an example of those who believe.

1 Timothy 3:8 Deacons (diakonos – servant/deacon), likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain.⁵

Here, we see that these are people who are servants. The significant thing is that they are godly, like the overseer is to be. However, it is noteworthy that the distinctive gift of overseers (being able to teach) is absent. Whether this is meant to be a particular ‘office’ (position) is not made clear. They are servants.

1 Timothy 5:1 Do not rebuke an older man (*presbyteros*) harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers.

Here, Paul is outlining different groups to be cared for: older men, older women, younger men, younger women, widows, elders/bishops, and slaves and masters (6:1). It seems that ‘presbyteros’ is being used of older men in general rather than a particular role. Some of these men will have an ‘office/position’ mentioned in 5:17.

1 Timothy 5:17-18 The elders (*presbyteros*) who direct (*proistemi*- lead/manage) the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially (or ‘that is’) those whose work is preaching and teaching. 18 For the Scripture says, "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages." ¹⁹ Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses.

Briefly, elders (*presbyteros*) who lead the church (household/family – cf 3:4-5, 15) are to get double honour. This at least includes financial payment for serving as verse 18 makes clear.⁶ Some like Mark Driscoll⁷ and the Good News Bible⁸ take this as meaning teaching pastors are to get a high pay. However, double honour probably includes financial payment *and* honour, particularly the honour of not entertaining an accusation quickly, seen in the following verse 19.

Here it seems that there are *multiple* elders of the church in Ephesus.⁹

Titus 1:5-7 The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders (*presbyteros*) in every town, as I directed you. 6 An elder (*presbyteros*) must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. 7 Since an overseer/ bishops (*episkopos*) is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless-- not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain.

Paul gives an indication of how elders/overseer/bishops were selected. In this passage, the elders were not elected by a congregation, but selected by Titus who was a co-worker with Paul. This is similar in Acts 14:23 where Paul (an apostle) and Barnabas (a non-apostolic co-worker) select elders from among the disciples in a previous church plant. We will come back to this when we consider how leaders are appointed. Paul doesn't mention how overseers come into their office in 1 Timothy. It is possible that he is telling Timothy what qualifications an overseer is to have, so he could choose them, as part of his way to curb false teaching.

Again, there are multiple elders in Crete. And their qualifications are similar to 1 Timothy 3, in that they are to be godly, and the only gift mentioned in verse 9 is that they are to encourage by sound teaching and refuting false teaching.

Significantly, elders are the same group as overseers/bishops. Paul interchanges them (v5,7). This is the same in Acts 20:17 (elders) and v28 (overseers).

⁵ In 1 Tim 4:11 the women referred to could be wives of the ‘deacons / servants’ or could be deaconesses/servants.

⁶ Paul states that those who are involved in Word ministry are to receive material provision (1 Cor 9:7-18) and supports this teaching of *material* provision in 1 Corinthians 9:9, by quoting the same OT passage (Deut 25:4) and refers to Jesus' command (1 Cor 9:14), as he does in 1 Timothy 5:18. The two quotes in verse 18 also support the *monetary* aspect of honour.

⁷ Quotes 1 Tim 5:17 and says: ‘while all elders deserve respect and honour, this is especially true of primary preaching pastor, and as the context of this verse shows, part of that honouring often includes the highest salary of all paid elders.’ M. Driscoll, *On Church Leadership*, Crossway Books, Illinois, 2008, p 24.

⁸ ‘double pay’.

⁹ It is possible that this is *one* group being discussed: the elders who direct the affairs of the church, ‘that is’ the work of preaching and teaching. Or it could be *two* groups: the elders who direct the affairs of the church, and a smaller subset who preach and teach. The Greek word ‘*malista*’ can be taken as ‘especially’ or ‘that is’.

1 Peter 5:1-2 To the elders (*presbyteros*) among you, I appeal as a fellow elder (*presbyteros*), a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: 2 Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers/bishops (*episkopos*) -- not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve;

The elders (*presbyteros*) again are plural. They are to shepherd the flock, overseeing them (*episkopos* - NIV watching over them). In 2:25 Jesus is The Shepherd and Overseer (*episkopos*). Peter calls himself an elder, even though he is not part of one of the congregations (which are scattered over an area around modern Turkey).

Since the shepherd is the elder, which is the overseer, these terms seem interchangeable to a significant extent. They are to be godly, and able to teach. Teaching and refuting is what they are to do. They will watch their life and teaching closely (1 Tim 4:16).

Romans 12:8 if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership/managing (*proistemi*), let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully

'Leadership' here is the same word here as 'managing' in 1 Tim 3:4-5. Besides that, Paul doesn't elaborate what this looks like. But it seems that *proistemi* – *managing*, is leading in some way that could be broader than just teaching leadership.¹⁰

Hebrews 13:7, 17. Remember your leaders (*ehgeomai*), who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.

17 Obey your leaders (*ehgeomai*) and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Leaders are multiple, and again they bring the word to bear. They are to be obeyed, showing authority. Their life is to be imitated. Therefore, again, they would need to be godly.

Acts 6:2 So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait (diakonos – servant/deacon) on table 3 Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them 4 and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word." 5 This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism.

The apostles are keen to continue word and prayer ministry. They need people who will serve to allow the disciples to focus on word ministry. These are to be godly men. This could be a similar group to those in 1 Tim 3:8-10 – servants or deacons. However, even if in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and then in 3:8-10 it appears two separate groups of overseers and deacons, in Acts, both Stephen (Acts 7) and Philip (Acts 8) go on to preach/teach, which is what they were meant to be freeing up the apostles to do. So, it appears that it is difficult to hold hard and fast categories for elders/overseers and deacons.¹¹

Drawing some conclusions from the Bible passages

We can draw some conclusions from the above passages

- i. The terms overseer, bishop, elder, shepherd seem to be reasonably interchangeable.
- ii. Those who are an overseer/bishop/elder/shepherd (i.e. leaders) will lead in their congregation.
- iii. They are to be men.
- iv. These leaders are to be godly and able to teach and refute error.
- v. There usually seems to be multiple leaders in a congregation(s)
- vi. Appointing of leaders was done by those outside of the congregation like Paul and Barnabas, or someone left in an area to appoint leaders like with Titus. And yet, Titus would seem to be an overseer/elder, as would Paul. There doesn't seem to be a 'democratic vote' for leaders. It would seem to be overseers/elders appointing overseers/elders.
- vii. These leaders may be older, but not necessarily. But they must be godly and able to teach.

However, in addition to the uncertainties of appointment of elders mentioned above, there are other uncertainties:

¹⁰ *proistemi* - be a leader, have authority over, manage; rule, care for, give help

¹¹ As does the Anglican Church in the Australian Book of Common Prayer 1978, page 604, paragraph 5 in The Making of Deacons.

- i. How do we categorise and see a modern equivalents of 'elders', who are not part of a congregation like with 1 Peter 5?
- ii. There is a possibility, although it is not certain, that there are non-teaching elders in 1 Tim 5. However, there may not be two groups, but only one.
- iii. What are 'deacons' or 'servants'? Are they just those who are godly and serve, and perhaps have some leadership function in non-word ministry (i.e. no 'teaching' gift in 1 Timothy 3, and they 'serve' on tables in Acts 6). However, in Acts 7 and 8 they exercise word ministries. This seems a slippery category.
- iv. Therefore, what is the relationship between an overseer/elder and a deacon?

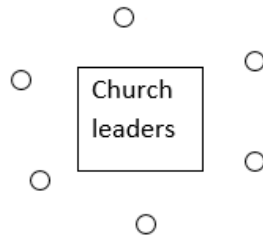
Therefore, there seems to be several things that God doesn't spell out about all the specifics of leadership for the church. However, there does seem to be biblical boundaries, amongst which there is freedom.

2. Biblical Boundaries amongst which there is freedom

It may be helpful to picture the Bible giving us a few boundaries or 'pegs in the ground' within which there is some freedom when understanding God's desire for leadership in church.

Some of these pegs have already been stated are:

- i. Multiple overseers/elders. But if a church starts and only has one, that could be ok until others are raised up. Eg as Paul started a church, as a planter, he was the leader, until growth happened, then he handed it over to leaders.
- ii. These leaders are to be men.
- iii. They are to be godly, and gifted in being able to teach and manage/lead the church (which will involve teaching).
- iv. There is possibly another category of leaders who manage, but not necessary teach. These could be 'deacons' or could be non-teaching elders.



In the Bible, God outlines some things for church leadership, that seem clear (pegs in the ground/boundaries) and some things that are 'uncertain' or we could have freedom and choice.

This possibility of freedom in the NT, with different expressions of leadership, is seen with different denominations coming up with different church leadership models that could be said to be biblical. There are three major types:

- i. Episcopacy. This is where the chief ministers of the church are bishops. There are presbyters (or 'priests') and deacons. This threefold structure is the oldest one in church history.¹² We have seen some support for this, with the apostles who are overseers/elders electing other elders for the church, along with the concept of deacons. Examples of this are Sydney Anglican Church. They also have 'wardens' and parish council, which do administrative tasks, like deacons.
- ii. Presbyterianism. This is where there is an importance placed on elders or presbyters. Usually there is a group of presbyters in charge of a local church. Seen strongly in Scottish churches. Churches are independent of each other, but often they have a common confession. The local congregation elects its 'session' which governs the congregation. It also has a 'teaching elder' who is chosen by the congregation or other elders. There is a 'presbytery' which is made up of a teaching and ruling elder from a group of congregations. There is a General Assembly. Examples are Presbyterian churches.
- iii. Congregationalism. Emphasises the place of the congregation and that there is no overseeing control of the church. It has a more democratic principle in church seen in election of leaders. Churches are independent. Eg are some Baptist churches.

These three denominations would say they are basing their theology on the Scriptures, yet come up with different methods of church leadership. This supports the concepts of freedom of expressing the theology of the NT. They are working 'within' the boundaries/pegs outlined in the NT.

This should also cause us to have humility.

¹² Seen mentioned by Ignatius (post NT), and Irenaeus and Tertullian in 2nd cent.

3. Humility and our own heritage

We often come to the Bible with our own views, which are often formed by our Christian heritage and upbringing. There will be teachings we wish to hold as 'life or death', like 'being saved by Jesus' death alone, by faith alone'. Yet there are other teachings, which we need to realise that perhaps there is more 'freedom' in applying the Scriptures.

When we come to the Scriptures, we need to wrestle hard with all the different passages, and come, willing to be changed. Perhaps our view is not the right view, or perhaps it fits within the boundaries of the NT, but it is not the only way to fit within the boundaries of the NT. Other methods of leadership may also fit within the biblical boundaries. Or we may realise there are enough uncertainties, that make us hold 'our view' a little less strongly, and be willing to see how other bible based believers, get to their view of church leadership from the above passages.

Moreover, it is worth keeping the teaching of 'the weak' and 'the strong' brother/sister of Romans 14 in mind. Some believers will think that something is definitely right (e.g. you shouldn't eat meat offered to idols, or you must keep the Sabbath). God calls these the 'weak' brother'. Other 'strong' brothers or sisters realise some things don't really matter, or matter as much. Some 'weak' brothers/sisters may be adamant that church leadership *must* be a certain way. Eg democratic view of church leadership. Leaders must be have certain titles (e.g. elder or bishop). Yet a strong brother will realise there is biblical freedom mentioned above and have the humility to see the possible different expressions of application of the NT teaching.

It is also worth noting that we live in an age that does not like authority of any kind, especially in Australia. Therefore, Australian culture will tend towards structures that are democratic. Our culture may affect us seeing the other possibilities in the NT of leadership, including obedience to leadership.

It may also be worth considering the more recent movement in culture to be even more anti-authority. This is seen in the increased accusations of bullying of those in authority. Ungodly forceful leadership may have occurred. Yet it would be good to consider what constitutes bullying and what is godly, strong, visionary leadership, that some may not like because of past abuse of leadership or because of our anti-authoritarian culture.

This brings us to how Lighthouse expresses leadership.

4. Leadership structure at Lighthouse

- i. We have bishops/elders/overseers/shepherds. There are multiple of them, and they have varied levels of those they oversee. They are all men.

We have Staff (Three senior staff at present and an MTS trainee). They shepherd other leaders in church.

We have Purpose leaders.

These lead the multiple purpose areas of church: being a large warm family (Membership), hungering for the Bible so we love, trust and have joy in Jesus (Maturity), joyfully and sacrificially serving (Ministry), love for the lost (Mission), Next Gen (youth, kids and their parents), Gatherings (Sundays). We would see that these leaders are in the category of 'elders/overseers/leaders', so we have men (staff) who are ultimately responsible in these areas. We also have both men and women who are working alongside men in these areas. For example, we have or had women lead Maturity, Ministry, Next Gen and Gatherings alongside male staff. These are very high level leaders who significantly grow Church.

We have Growth Group leaders. They teach/shepherd/manage a smaller group. We have men lead mixed (men and women) groups because we have our Growth Groups leaders lead and teach the bible, rather than a more 'facilitatory role'.

We have a Selection panel. These are 5 men who are godly and able to teach and will chose another lead pastor.

We have Board of Reference. They are teacher/shepherds/elders/overseers of other churches. They could be like Peter as a fellow elder of 1 Peter 5

We have leaders of our gatherings who are men. We recognise this area is less obvious on whether this should include men as well as women. We see this role as a fatherly figure (1 Tim 3) who leads the largest gatherings at Lighthouse church which may also include teaching.

We call these people '**leaders**'. They lead in different ways. They have different levels of authority. Some may want to call them elders, even though we have not.

It is important to note the concept of language. We don't call people 'elders' necessarily, because what happens is, people come from another denomination with their 'heritage-understanding' of 'elder' and are looking for the same type of thing. Often there is not the understanding of the above biblical teaching, but just a denominational view. And once we call someone an elder, they import their 'heritage-understanding' onto that 'role', even if we mean something different by that word.

It is significant that many have asked, 'who are the elders at Lighthouse', but no one has ever asked who are the overseers, or who are the bishops, or even the shepherds. That's because Christians are so used to our denominational heritage, rather than working hard in God's word to see what it says about it, and try and hold it altogether with its subtleties and uncertainties.

It is also noteworthy to consider the concept of biblical language compared with modern usage. For example, bishops in the Anglican Church, do not necessarily function like a 'bishop' in the bible. Although they could be similar to Peter in 1 Peter 5. That is, using language today (like 'bishop') in a different way than it was in the bible is not necessarily wrong, but the word 'bishop' today is not necessarily used the same way as the Bible. We also see the need to be aware of how we use language with women growth group leaders. They are godly and are able to teach women. They shepherd their groups of women, but what do we call them? Biblical elders are male. But they function in an elder/overseeing way of women. They are doing what Titus 2 tells them to do.

- ii. We also have an Administration Committee. They manage the church in multiple ways, including finances, building and administration. These are both men and women.
- iii. We have other layers of leadership.
 - We have Purpose Leaders as mentioned above.
 - We have Area Leaders, who lead multiple Team Leaders. Team leaders lead team members in a ministry. These are both men and women.
 - These layers have developed as church has grown.
- iv. When considering a church structure, a church's size needs to be taken in account. As a church grows from 30 people to 150 people, to 300 people, to 1000 people, the leadership structure will become more hierarchical. There will be more layers to leadership and probably more specialisation. This is very important to note, since some confuse a certain church size with a more biblical church leadership structure. That is, some think that a church of 50 should have the same leadership structure as a church of 200 to 400 with how decisions are made, and who does the 'pastoring' of individuals. In a church of 400, a shepherd/pastor/leader will not be able to know everyone. If a person expects a certain pastor to spend lot of time with each individual person, then that pastor will be a bottle neck to growing God's church. More layers of leadership will need to be grown.

It is noteworthy in the Bible, that the word 'pastoring or shepherding' is *not* used in the way that some Christians use it today to mean we have an intimate personal relationship with those we pastor. In the OT, Moses was a shepherd/pastor of Israel who had over a million people (Numbers 27:12-23), as is King David (Psalm 78:72). They were to lead God's people in a way that was not personally intimate or knew everyone's name. God wants them to shepherd his people, but this shows that depending on the number of people it will need to look different.

The bigger a church gets, the more time the senior leaders will need to spend training, teaching and coaching leaders, who will train, teach and coach those under them. Those who have smaller groups have less responsibility and less authority.

We have this at Lighthouse with Growth Group leaders and also Purpose Leaders, Area Leaders and Team Leaders of different ministries. This may mean that someone doesn't have a particular person as 'their individual pastor at Lighthouse'. It may be multiple people who lead and shepherd them. It could include their growth group leader or their team leader. Or if there is a particular issue they could see one of the staff for love, help and wisdom, too.

If staff are seen as everyone's pastor, this will stop growth because staff will only be able to pastor a certain number. As church gets over a hundred or so, then staff will need to spend more time with leaders, to make sure shepherding is done across church by multiple people.

In addition to multiple layers of leadership increasing as a church grows, there will be a centralisation of decision making to the leaders. This occurs because the complexity of church grows with its size. It eventually requires those who are full-

time in paid ministry to be able to keep their heads around everything, to be able to make decisions on behalf of the whole church. Eventually a church will grow to a certain size that full time pastors will need to specialise themselves.¹³

5. The relationship of leaders and those led

i. **What is expected from a leader?** As seen above, a leader should:

- Be godly
- Teach well. This is what they are to be gifted in. If they can't teach, they shouldn't be pastors. This is how they will pastor you. By bringing the word to bear on all areas of life.
- Lead well. They are to be able to lead/manage their family, as they are to lead/manage their church. Pastors are to be able to gather and lead groups of people, and raise other leaders up to teach and love other groups of people, so church can grow. If they can't grow groups and leaders, then they will stop church growing. They will not be able to enable others to be raised up. They will be the blockage. Leaders can't get involved in every ministry. Nor would you want them to. God has a body: the church. The church has all different gifts as 1 Cor 12 says. If the pastor is seen to be the jack of all trades and the one who does everything, then church will be much the poorer. So don't expect that staff will do everything. They're not gifted to and they won't have the time, just like in Acts 6. In addition it's not their job description (Ephesians 4:11-16).

Leaders at different levels should take note of this, since we will be judged more harshly (James 3:1).

ii. **What's expected from those who are led?**

- Double honour – pay and not accused too quickly
As 1 Timothy 5:17-19 above showed, a leader is to be given double honour. They are to be paid and accusations against them are not to be made too quickly. There needs to be a couple of witnesses.

Now this doesn't mean they are above the law. It doesn't mean we don't take their godliness seriously. We've seen that. And appropriate action should be taken if ungodliness occurs. However, don't be too quick to hear gossip about a leader.

- Imitate, obey and submit to them. As Hebrews 13:7,17 says. Not absolutely in everything. If they tell you to do something wrong or immoral, then don't obey. However, that's not usually where the problem is. Obedience is often in the gray areas of ministry. The judgement calls that someone needs to make. Help those who are leading you, lead, by letting them make the call in the many areas of ministry life that wisdom is needed. Most leaders won't go it alone, but will take onboard the opinions of others. But that doesn't mean they will do everything everyone wants, otherwise they won't be leading. And everyone doesn't always want the same thing. So they work hard at understanding the Bible, they listen to people, they look at the situation and then make a decision. Submit to that.

People lead, because they love Jesus and love you. It's hard being a leader, at all levels. So don't make their work tough. It's like a parent. They don't do things to make life miserable. They do it out of love for their kids. For all the levels of leadership, whether you are led by a growth group leader, your ministry overseer or staff, obey them so that your leader may have joy and it may not be a burden to them.

¹³ See more in Tim Keller, *Leadership and Church Size Dynamics*, http://theresurgence.com/files/2011/02/14/Leadership_and_Church_Size_Dynamics.pdf cited 7th Oct 2014