

The Ministry of Elders

a sermon by John Brandon

This morning, as we continue our series on the church, I'm going to tackle the topic of biblical eldership. I would propose that you can't actually understand how the church is to function unless you clearly understand what Scripture teaches about biblical eldership.

I will warn you, I've got too much material. I learned that in the first service. We are going to look at five key passages and we are going to wade right in. When we are all done, you are going to have Scripture all over you.

Then we are going to make a list of all the biblical principles we've gleaned out of those five passages about eldership. And as you know, all great preachers make either one great point or three points. Unfortunately, I've got 18 points. When Mark sees these slides, he's going to die. But he's not here, so we are okay.

After we review those biblical principles, I want to talk about how we apply those here at Central Peninsula Church, both in areas that I think are strengths and also in areas that I think are weaknesses.

So grab your Bibles, fasten your seat belt, as this is going to be a bit like getting a drink out of a fire hose. We've decided to do all of this in a 40-minute sermon. If Mark were teaching these passages, we'd be here till May! For some of you, you are probably thinking, what's the big deal? I mean, it seems that God would just be glad that people are in church at all. Why does he really care how the church is run? Well, he does care. And after you wade through the Scriptures with me, you will see that he has an awful lot to say about biblical eldership.

Three Forms of Church Government

There have been three forms of church government that are very popular in this country and we should spend a minute just talking about each of these. While I am sure the people that hold to each of these views of church government have good hearts, they do fall short of the biblical model. But here at CPC, we take Scripture seriously. And in our eldership we try to line up with exactly what Scripture teaches, not subtracting anything and not adding anything.

So let me talk to you about the three most popular types of church government. The first one, and without a doubt the oldest, is called the Episcopal type of church government.

Episcopal is from the Greek word for "bishop." The idea is that the final authority of the church should answer to a group of men or a single man. So when you think of that, whom do you think of? Well, of course the Episcopalians, the Anglicans, and the Roman Catholics work that way. The Roman Catholics even take it to the point where they believe in a pope who is the final authority in the church. This actually got started in the early centuries of the church. In a very real sense they tried to recapture the apostolic ministry and authority that was true in the founding of the New Testament church.

The second form, and the one that is the most popular here in the United States and other parts of the world, is the Congregational form of government. For those of you that grew up in Baptist churches like I did, that's the kind of government they use. While it's the most popular, it's also the newest. There was no type of this kind of church government until the late 1600s and early 1700s. You might suspect what this grew out of. It grew out of the ideal of democracy. It grew out of the idea that every individual mattered and every individual should have a vote.

The third is similar to ours but not exactly, and it's the Presbyterian form of government. Presbyterian comes directly from the Greek word for "elder." The best example of this, as you might guess, are the Presbyterians. But they have actually put a bit of a twist on it. In most Presbyterian churches, they have decided that there should be a presbytery, which is made up of ordained pastors in a district or an area, and the primary final authority for those churches should reside in that group of clergy. Their problem is that there is an overemphasis on those in full-time ministry and especially those that are ordained, which are ideas that you don't see in Scripture.

We at CPC have decided that there's actually a clearer biblical model. Having said that, we are absolutely confident that we've got our own blind spots. Our culture blinds us, it's blinded the church from day one, but we are trying to be as accurate as we can be with Scripture and are committed to adhering to its model.

1 Peter 5:1–4

Let's go to the first passage, 1 Peter 5:1–4. Let me set the context for you. This is the apostle Peter, one of the apostles

closest to Jesus. At the end of his life, he wrote this letter to be shared with multiple churches, all of whom were under severe persecution and tribulation. Right before this passage, he's talking about how the church needs to hang in there in spite of the sufferings, following the model of Jesus. Out of that background, Peter speaks to the local leadership.

“Therefore I exhort the elders among you as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed. Shepherd the flock of God among you, not under compulsion but voluntarily according to the will of God, and not for sorted gain, but with eagerness, not yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples of the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.”

As you look at this passage, a few things should jump out at you because they are at the core of biblical eldership. First, this is addressed to elders, not a single elder. When you study the entire New Testament there is no biblical model for a single leader of a church. In this country, it is very popular to have a senior pastor. Many times he's referred as being the leader of the church. That is not a biblical model. That is not taught anywhere. There is, in fact, only one example in all of the New Testament where a single leader is identified with a church and that's in 3 John, and the apostle John criticizes him. So the first idea behind biblical leadership is it's always to be elders (plural). There's always to be a team of qualified men that lead.

The second thing you should notice from this passage is that Peter, who was an apostle and one of the closest disciples of Jesus, does not appeal to these elders as an apostle, he appeals to them as a fellow elder. At that time in the church, about 30 years after Jesus died, it was very clear that the leadership for the church were to be elders. Peter had every right to appeal to them as an apostle with all of the authority of that office, but chooses to model this idea of true servant leadership. He “steps down” from being an apostle and says, listen, I'm a fellow elder just like you.

John, who was the closest disciple to Jesus, does the very same thing. When you read all of his later writings, he identifies himself as John, the elder. He too had this commitment to this new form of church government.

Look at verse 2 because here's the job description of an elder. It says, *“Shepherd the flock of God among you.”* You will see as we walk through these five passages that the idea of elder, shepherd, and overseer are terms that are used interchangeably.

Elder being a reflection of character qualities in the man's life; overseer being a reflection of kind of the job or the task they need to do; and shepherd with the kind of heart they are to have.

Look how they are to shepherd. The first thing is they are to shepherd not out of compulsion. What does that mean? It means that biblical elders are not to serve for any other reason than they want to and the Lord has led them to do that. They are not to shepherd because of guilt or because “if they don't do it, who is going to do it?” They are not to do it for any kind of ego reasons either. Instead, they are to shepherd with eagerness, gratefully, and without compulsion.

By the way, who owns the flock? Is it theirs? No. In fact, you will see as we walk through these five passages and it's demonstrated here, that it's the Chief Shepherd's flock - Jesus Christ. All elders are called to be stewards, to be faithful shepherds of the people that the Lord's entrusted to them for a certain period of time. And the elders have no control; the Lord has complete control about how long they can do this.

Two weeks ago when Mark was teaching on the church and he made a very important point about how he worries when he hears pastors talking about that this is “their church”, and “my church does this,” or “my church does that.” Sometimes that happens to elders, too. They assume it's their flock. It's not their flock. It's the Lord's flock. They are just meant to be stewards. So if you ever see a pastor or if you ever see an elder that holds on very tight to their ministry or to the people they serve, they are modeling the wrong thing. The model is to be faithful, to hold it loosely because the flock belongs only to the Chief Shepherd.

Let me explain how the organizational chart works. For those of you in the Silicon Valley, how could you not want to know what the organizational chart looks like? The organizational chart looks like this: there is Jesus at the top of the organizational chart. He is the Chief Shepherd. You see him referred to that in verse 4. The next layer are the under shepherds. Who are they? They are the elders. And they are to be faithful stewards of the next layer, which are God's people or the flock.

That is the organizational chart of the New Testament. There is no room for senior pastor. So when you see a church organizational chart that has Jesus at the top, senior pastor next, then associate pastors, and so forth, know that's not ever demonstrated or taught in Scripture.

Notice verse 3. There's a warning to these elders and that is they need to shepherd as an under-shepherd where they don't “lord it” over the people. They are not to act like they are a “cut

above.” Historically much of the church has created a split between the clergy and the laity, which has no foundation in Scripture whatsoever. We are going to see where the Bible gives us the right to pull some people out of the marketplace and allow them to have full time ministry. But the idea that there should be a group that “lords it” over the other members of the flock is not a biblical one.

Titus 1:5–9

Now let’s go to Titus 1:5-9. Let me set the historical context for this. Paul did missionary work on the island of Crete and was successful enough that it was now time to establish some churches. Paul needed to leave, so he placed one of his trusted disciples, Titus, there to put in some organization of these new churches. This is how Paul instructs him how to do that. This is the first passage where we see the qualifications of an elder. The biblical teaching is that an elder earns it first and foremost by the character of his life.

When we read through this, pay close attention to not only what is stated as the qualifications, because you will notice that every single one of them is character-based. Also notice what is not mentioned. There is no age requirement mentioned. Though Paul easily could have done that. In fact, in 1 Timothy 5, he does that when it comes to the care of widows. Nor does he say anything about education or the affluence or importance of the elders. Elders are not to be chosen because they are the biggest givers. That’s been a model that’s shown up in a lot of the American churches. There is none of that modeled here. Instead, you will only see a list of character-based qualities.

Paul writes,

“For this reason I left you in Crete that you might set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you.”

Let’s stop right there. The phrase that I want you to focus on is “appoint elders.” That is how elders should be chosen. They should be appointed. There is no example in the New Testament of people electing their leadership—none whatsoever. Instead, the model is that leadership is to be appointed by other mature spiritual leaders endorsed and chosen by the Holy Spirit. It’s the same idea that Paul teaches in Acts 20. This is a wonderful, tender passage where Paul needs to say goodbye to the elders in the church of Ephesus. It’s a group of men that he personally disciplined. They were dear friends of his, and now it’s time for him to leave. And he makes it very clear that they are probably not going to see each other again.

Many of them Paul led to the Lord, but listen to how he describes their job. He says,

“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to shepherd the church of God which he purchased with his own blood.”

Who made them overseers? The Holy Spirit did, not Paul. Paul teaches that the Holy Spirit is alive and well in the church. It was true in the first century, and it’s true today. The Holy Spirit appoints elders and the local spiritual leadership recognizes that appointing.

Go to verse 6 where we see the character qualities for an elder. *“Namely if any man be above reproach.”* That means he should live a life where nobody can make a legitimate accusation against him.

“The husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion.” He’s actually referring to the children’s rebellion. Although Scripture doesn’t assume that every elder has to be married, it does clearly assume that if an elder is married with children, how the children behave is a reflection of what goes on in the home. And you will see when we look at 1 Timothy 3 there’s a logical conclusion where Paul argues if the elders can’t manage their home life well, how can they manage the affairs of the church.

“For the overseer...” By the way, this is important because if you remember he’s appointing elders, and here he uses the term overseer. Overseer, shepherd, and elder are used interchangeably through all of these passages.

“For the overseer must be above reproach as God’s steward, not self-willed (not looking out for his own self interest), not quick tempered...” (not a man that has a temper problem, neither quick tempered or someone who loses their temper when the heat begins to rise).

“Not addicted to wine...” As you read through this passage, you will see that because of the cultural dynamics of the first century church there was much concern about how the elders dealt with alcohol. We could apply that now, not only to alcohol but any kind of drug.

“Not pugnacious...” (not a fighter).

“Not fond of sordid gain...” It was a real concern in the establishment of the early church that elders did nothing for their own financial gain. That is one reason, by the way, that we have adopted the practice in this church that our elders have no idea what anybody gives. If you are here and you are giving a lot to impress us, you came to the wrong place. We don’t

even know. We have a church administrator who knows. We have a church CPA who balances our books, and if you gave to us last year we provided you a tax receipt that you will turn in to the IRS. But the elders decided we are just not going to be involved with any of that stuff. There is consistent warning in Scripture that no one should minister, nobody should lead as elders, where there's any hint of financial impropriety.

“But hospitable, loving what is good.” This doesn't mean that elders need to have good taste. If you hang around the elders here, that's a good thing or none of us would be elders! This means loving what is good in terms of what is right, morally correct.

“Sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with teaching that he may be able to both exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it.” This is one of the primary functions of biblical elders; they must be able to teach. One of their primary roles as shepherds is to teach the Scriptures and adhere to sound doctrine. The American church is swinging away from this idea. There are many American churches who have decided that the two things they want to do most is meet felt needs and entertain. Neither of those are necessarily biblical ideas, the second one is not even mentioned. It's all right to meet felt needs but not at the expense of regularly teaching the Scriptures. That is why we are committed to expository preaching here at CPC. Every Sunday, or almost every Sunday, whoever is in this pulpit is going to be wading through the Scriptures because that's what elders are called to do, that's what biblical leadership is called to do. If they can't teach, if they can't instruct biblically, they can't be an elder.

1 Timothy 3:1–7

Let's look at the third passage—1 Timothy 3. This is the companion passage with another 15 characteristics that Paul had written to Timothy because Timothy was doing the same work as Titus and he needed to instruct Timothy as well.

Look at the very first verse.

“It is a trust worthy statement if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do.”

This should be an encouragement to you. Although elders are to lead humbly as servant leaders and as under-shepherds, Scripture says it's a good thing if you want to be an elder. If that's what God has called you to be, do it; that is a good thing.

Then we see this long list of qualifications. Again, they are all character-based and it's a nice compliment to the Titus

passage we just saw. Verse 2, *“An overseer then must be above reproach (we've already seen that), the husband of one wife.”* Literally, the Greek says “a one-woman sort of man.” What does that mean? Too many times people just focus on the obvious. Well, the first thing it means is that we don't believe in polygamy. Elders can't have multiple wives at the same time, that's obvious. However, this is not saying that an elder can never have been divorced. We believe that as long as someone was divorced under the few biblical exceptions that are made, they can serve as an elder. But that's not really the point here. The point of this phrase is that these elders should be “one woman sort of men” and that woman needs to be his wife. The way they think, the way they act, the way they care for, and where they put their focus is on one single woman—his wife. They don't have wandering eyes, they don't have time for any other woman. The issue isn't so much about divorce but fidelity. I know a lot of married guys that are not and have never been divorced, but are not one-woman sort of men. You know them too. Paul's saying that those aren't the kind of guys you want as elders. You want them to model a fidelity that is shown in their marriage because that will be a reflection on the church.

“Temperate (a better way to think of this is be sober-minded), prudent (another word would be self-controlled), respectful, hospitable, able to teach (see that again), not addicted to wine or pugnacious but gentle.” How many of you men here want to be described as gentle? Unfortunately, in our culture this is an idea that we've lost in our sense of masculinity. A better way to think about this is to be gracious, kind and patient with others. This is a character quality that elders should have.

“Uncontentious (he's not quarrelsome), free from the love of money (we've already seen this), he must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity.” Why? Because here's the logical conclusion, *“but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?”* You can tell what kind of leader an elder will be in the church by what happens in his home.

“And not a new convert less he become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil.” I think you know that the Old Testament teaches that Satan is a created being, once an angel that had fellowship with God, but because of pride issues went into rebellion and has been at odds with God since then. That is the image Paul is using when it talks about the risk for new converts if you put them into spiritual leadership as elders way too soon.

“And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church so that he may not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.”

Isn't that interesting? Paul says one of the important things to seek for leadership in the church is how those leaders are viewed outside the church. Here at CPC we check on how all potential elders are viewed by nonbelievers.

1 Timothy 5:17–20

Next we want to go to 1 Timothy 5, where starting with verse 17, there are two verses that are very important.

“Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing’ and ‘The laborer is worthy of his wages.’”

This is the passage, by the way, that gives us biblical permission to support people in full time ministry. Now, at our church, we only have one elder that is also a pastor and is paid. That is Mark Mitchell. In fact, you've heard of the old joke—we pay Mark to be good, the rest of the elders are just good for nothing! But there is a biblical principle that says it's okay to pull certain people out of the workplace and allow them to work full time to equip the saints to do the work of ministry. That's why we have a church staff of pastors. And one of them also happens to be an elder, but this is the biblical model for that. The idea about double honor clearly has to do with financial support.

Look also at verses 19 and 20.

“Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses. Those elders who continue in sin rebuke in the presence of all so that the rest also may be fearful of sinning.”

This is an important principle to understand. We take this principle very seriously. We believe because of the unique place that God has called elders in the leading of the church that they are held to a higher standard. And if we have an elder who is caught in sin, and if he does not repent, we are to rebuke him so that others can learn from it. It's not completely clear from the passage whether you rebuke the elder in front of the entire body or just in front of the other elders. It is clear, however, that the last phrase “so that the rest also might be fearful of sinning” is not talking about the people of the church, but it is a warning to the other elders. They are “the rest.”

So if there's an accusation made against an elder, first of all, make sure that it's true. Don't take it lightly. Make sure that there are multiple witnesses. Don't respond to rumor, don't respond to innuendo, get right to the specifics of the facts. If

that elder is confronted and chooses not to repent and change his ways, the right thing for the other elders is to rebuke him, at a minimum in front of all the other elders, some would say in front of the entire body, so that all the other elders are reminded that sin is a serious thing. This is very important and something that we want every man who becomes an elder to know. This “higher standard” goes with the responsibility of being an elder.

Hebrews 13:17

Finally, let's go to our fifth and final passage, which is in Hebrews. It says, “Obey your leaders and submit to them.” I'm not even going to say anything about this. You guys can read that and figure out how to apply that one. I want to focus though on the elders' part in here. “For they,” meaning the leaders or the elders of a church “keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief for this would be unprofitable for you.”

This is teaching that every elder will one day stand before the Lord and give an account of how they have acted as an elder. This is very sobering. This is something we talk about as an elder board regularly. When we make major decisions we are very aware that although we love all of you, we don't ultimately answer to you. Some day every elder of CPC is going to stand before the Lord and give an account on what he did. That's the biblical model.

The last thing taught here is actually an encouragement to the people to appreciate the elders carrying this kind of burden and to respond to them in a way that allows them to do their work with joy, without groaning or grief. I've been blessed to be an elder here over 19 years, and I can tell you it's almost always been with joy, not with grief. You folks have been wonderful in this regard, and I just want to say thank you on behalf of myself and all my fellow elders because I know they feel the very same way.

18 Biblical Principals of Eldership

Having waded through five passages of Scripture, let's now go to some biblical principles concerning biblical eldership. This is the 18-point slide that Mark's gonna hate, as I told you.

1. **The head of the church is Jesus Christ.** Elders are to serve as under-shepherds. It's very clear on the biblical organizational chart that there is no room for a senior pastor in this model at all.
2. **Biblical eldership is the only governing model clearly taught in Scripture for the New Testament church.** I

hope this tweaks some of you and you go home and say I'm going to read the entire New Testament this week. I hope lots of you do that, because I already know you will see this is the only model shown.

3. **There are always to be multiple elders.** There is no New Testament model for just one elder or leader in a church.
4. **It is a good thing if a man aspires to be an elder.** We saw that at the beginning of 1 Timothy 3.
5. **The terms elder and overseer are used interchangeably.** We've already seen that both in the Titus and 1 Timothy passages.
6. **The qualifications for an elder are character-based.** If there are two things I want you to walk away with today, this is the first one. You can forget a lot of the other points, but don't miss this one. Biblical eldership has nothing to do with age, it has nothing to do with seminary degrees, it has nothing to do with power or affluence. You earn it only with your life.
7. **Elders are appointed and not elected.** This appointing is by the Holy Spirit and is recognized by existing elders. You might say, "So how does that work in a brand new church?" Let me tell you how it worked in this church. This church is over 35 years old. It's a daughter church of a church by the name of Peninsula Bible Church, a wonderful church that's still thriving in Palo Alto. It was a group of men who came out of that body who established elders here, under the direction and the help of the elders of Peninsula Bible Church. They believed, as we believe, that the Holy Spirit makes it clear who are to be the elders, then the elders are to recognize them. I believe Peninsula Bible Church has modeled since the late 40's one of the most biblically accurate forms of church government I know of. In doing so, they've ended up teaching and influencing churches around the world. We are lucky to have learned from them.
8. **Elders are to serve willingly and not out of compulsion.**
9. **Elders are to be true servant leaders.** They are not to lord it over the flock. They are servants of a flock that belongs to Jesus, not to them.
10. **Elders must manage their own households well.**
11. **Elders cannot be new converts.**
12. **Elders must have a good reputation with those outside the church.** We will talk a little bit about how we apply that here at the church in just a second.
13. **One of the primary functions of the elders is to accurately teach the Scripture.** If an elder can't teach and handle Scripture, he can't be an elder. That's his primary function. They are not only to shepherd the flock, but

in that shepherding they need to be able to handle the Scripture well.

14. **It is appropriate to pay elders who rule and teach and preach well.** The emphasis here is the freedom that Scripture gives us to take some people out of the business world, and financially support them full time, especially those that rule and teach and preach well.
15. **There are specific rules for dealing with elders who are sinning.**
16. **Elders are held to a higher standard.**
17. **Elders are to be men.** Why do you think I left this until number 17 on my list? My momma didn't raise no dumb boy! We believe that Scripture teaches there's only one thing women can't do in the New Testament church. They can pastor, they can teach, but the one thing they can't be is elders. But because this is such an important discussion and study, you either wade in the whole way or you don't wade in at all. I've chosen not to wade in. I'm going to let Mark deal with this at another time!
18. **Elders will answer to the Lord for what they do.**

Applications at CPC

Finally, let's go to the next part, which is very important. How do we uniquely apply eldership at CPC? If you are going to make this your home church, you need to understand this or you won't understand us.

First, all major decisions are unanimously made. We only move as fast as the slowest elder. This principle is not taught in Scripture however. This is actually a principle of leadership that we borrowed from Peninsula Bible Church. Here is the reason: because when you have a group of elders, you are going to have very different gifts and very different styles and you never want to have anyone feel like they are rushed or they have not heard from the Lord. When dealing with serious issues, elders move at different paces. You may have somebody like me who thinks well on his feet. I'm articulate, and I'm a professional sales guy. I get paid to persuade people. I'm a dangerous elder! You have other men on our board who are a lot smarter than me, who are godlier than me, but they move at a different pace. Every elder has the right to say, "I can't decide yet. I'm not there. I need some time to pray about it." None of us have the right nor will we ever take the right to force the others to make a decision.

The beautiful thing about this is that it protects us. I have seen multiple times in my 19 years as an elder situations where there's been one holdout, and the Lord was speaking to us through that one person. Everybody else eventually came to

see that that was the Lord's leading and direction. This also means that when there's a major decision that's made here and you don't agree with it, you disagree with all of us, not just one of us. Every elder has committed to his brothers that he's going to go before the Lord to get the Lord's mind on the decision.

Second, we should explain to you about our process of selecting an elder. The first thing we do is we watch to see who's already shepherding and who may be qualified. The best way to find elders is to find those who are already doing the work of an elder. We then approach them and find out if they are interested. If they are interested, we ask them to start a 12 month process of meeting with the elders - which means they come to every elders' meeting, they listen to every discussion, etc. We affectionately call those guys "elderettes", but that's not a biblical term. By the way, in the first six months, we muzzle them. We don't allow them to talk because they are not elders yet. They don't know what it's like to carry the weight of being an elder. And we want to find out if they've got an ego problem. The fastest way to find out if they've got an ego problem is to see if they can be quiet for six months. We then meet and discuss the process with their wives. On several occasions the process ended with the wife saying, "This is the wrong time in our lives." Or in one case the wife came to us and said, "I just don't think this is the right thing for my husband. I love him, I'm committed to him. But he's not at the spiritual place you guys think he is, and I just don't think it's the right thing." By the way, he completely concurred with that. We never appoint an elder unless we unanimously agree. I love this next step. One of us gets to call their boss or someone who knows him from outside the church. This is so fun. You can't believe how nonbelievers respond to the idea that in your church character quality is the most important thing in selecting leaders. They say "What?" They haven't seen that modeled before. They haven't seen it modeled in their own companies. Most of them have never seen it modeled in their churches. They just love it. That's why it's one of my favorite things to call and talk to them about it. Finally, we announce it to the church. We announce that over the next two weeks if any person knows if there's a reason that this man shouldn't become an elder, please let us know. By the way, this has happened to us. Years ago we were going to announce on a Sunday morning that we were starting this two-week process with this particular man. Multiple people called the elders the previous week and said we know something to be true about this man's life and we don't think he should be an elder. With some investigation, we agreed with them. Some of you that were around here remember showing up on a certain

Sunday where there was no bulletin. You wondered if we were just organizationally inept. No, it was because that bulletin announced that guy's eldership, so we pulled it. After we get through that two-week process, if there are no legitimate reasons why the man can't become an elder, we lay hands on him before the whole church and pray for him.

Third, elders serve as long as they are qualified. We want to model a lifetime of godly character. Scripture gives us a lot of freedom here. I know some very godly churches that appoint elders for three to five years, and then they take a year off. We don't have a set time period at CPC. Our elders serve as long as they are qualified. However, the other elders have a right to remove any elder immediately if there is an issue of character in that man's life. But what we really want is to have elders that model a lifetime of godly character. That's what we want. We don't think there's any better thing than to watch godly men model their lives year in year out through all seasons of life.

Fourth, elders can request sabbaticals. We have one of our most effective elders, Allen Johansen, on sabbatical right now. He came to us and talked to us about where he was in his life. He said, "You know what, guys, I've been an elder here 15 years without a break. I'm tired and I want out for a while." We love him and so we want him to take a break. That's why you saw his name come out of the bulletin, as he's no longer an active elder.

Fifth, every elder must have a ministry besides eldering. This is very important. We want our elders to be involved in ministry. Sometimes it's going to be a ministry primarily in this church such as leading a community group, but it doesn't have to be. For example, the Lord's been really gracious to me and has opened up some outside ministries that are aimed at nonbelievers. I've talked to the elders about it and said, "You know what, I'd really like to devote more time there." My wife and I are also highly committed to the Young Life ministry, dealing with unchurched kids. That's how my wife came to know the Lord. We wanted that to be a ministry for us. Every elder needs to have some sort of ministry going on in their lives.

Sixth, there is no C.E.O. of our board. Normally somebody says, "Yeah, I hear this, but who's the real leader? I'll bet it's Mark." It's not Mark. If you were to come to our elder meetings, you would see that Mark, most of the time, brings an agenda just so we can get to the important things. And I love Mark like a brother, but he's not very effective at running those meetings.

For legal reasons, we have to have a president of the Board of Elders as part of us being a nonprofit organization in

California. But we just rotate it year to year. And most of the time, to be honest with you, nobody knows who it is until they have to sign something. Then Tara calls them and says, “You need to sign this,” and he says, “Oh, I guess I’m the president this year.”

Weaknesses of Our Model

Finally, let me just say that we know we have some weaknesses in our current model. Some of you have been sources of some very good constructive feedback to the elder board, and I think that’s really healthy. And so I want to highlight three recognized weaknesses in our model.

The first is that there sometimes isn’t enough feedback and input. I don’t think we are doing this very well, and we’ve talked about this as an elder board a lot. Let me put in a commercial for you. This is going to be one of the ways we are going to respond: Next Sunday night, if you are someone who feels like you don’t have enough input, feedback, or exposure to the elders, please be at our Elders’ Forum. It will be a great time with no agenda other than to talk about the issues in the church with the elders.

Another weakness has to do with shepherding in a way that keeps up with our church growth. When I became an elder here, there were less than 200 people every Sunday. I knew

everybody. I look out now, and half of you I don’t even know your names. How do we keep up with the growth? We’ve got to figure this out. We wrestle with this constantly. Part of our model, not the biblical part, but some of the other parts needs to change.

Finally, we get caught up in too much administrative demands. Now that we’ve got a church building and a bigger budget and more staff, and all this sort of stuff in our current model, too much of that comes directly to the elder board. That’s why, as you will see, our response is to appoint deacons. We’ve already begun to talk to some people about becoming deacons. Pray with us on this one. We need to begin to appoint some deacons that take more and more of the administrative load off of the elders.

Let me close with this: I really covet your prayers. And I covet them not only personally but for the entire elder board. Putting myself aside, let me tell you, that you have very godly men here who are elders. I have been in the heat of battle with them, and you would be proud of them as they go before the Lord, and as they seek to do the right thing - whether it is popular or not. Regularly I am so amazed I get to be part of them. So will you pray for our protection? Will you pray that we have wisdom and discernment? Will you keep telling us the truth? It’s crucial. We are committed to biblical eldership here at CPC.