

A STUDY & DISCUSSION GUIDE

Developing Elders In Your Church

DISCERN THE CALL · DEVELOP DOCTRINE
& CHARACTER · DEPLOY FOR THE WORK

UNIT 1 · CALLING

Discerning the Call

UNIT 2 · QUALIFICATION

Developing Doctrine
& Character

UNIT 3 · COMMISSIONING

Deployed for the
Work



OVERVIEW

How We Develop Elders

Every church needs *good* elders. Elders shepherd God's people, lead the church on Jesus's mission, and guard the doctrine and culture of the church. *Good* elders do this work together in healthy plurality. *Good* elders are men who are called by God, qualified according to 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9, and commissioned by other elders to do the work.

This guide outlines the process we use to help emerging leaders **discern** their calling, **develop** their doctrine and character, and be **deployed** into the work of eldership.

1

Discerning the Call

CALLING · 10 SESSIONS

Emerging leaders are invited into a cohort to work through *Gospel Eldership* by Bob Thune and discern whether God is calling them to the work.

2

Developing Doctrine & Character

QUALIFICATION · 9 SESSIONS

Men whose calling has been confirmed enter a season of training to develop doctrinal alignment and evaluate character qualification. Candidates are presented to the church and feedback is gathered.

3

Deployed for the Work

COMMISSIONING · 2 WEEKS

Qualified candidates are onboarded into team dynamics, given a clear role, and publicly commissioned as elders in a Sunday gathering.

RECOMMENDED LISTENING

Elder-Led · Redeemer Network Podcast

Season 1, Episode 3. Jordan Elder, Paden Behrens, Austin Lawrence, and JR Cochran talk through *elder-led*, one of the ten health metrics of the Redeemer Network, and why healthy churches are led by a plurality of qualified elders.

Example Schedule

Here's what the process looks like from start to finish. Plan on about six months. Use the right-hand column to set target dates for your church.

STEP	TARGET DATE
UNIT 1 · DISCERNING THE CALL	
1 Identify emerging leaders. Elders identify men whose lives and doctrine they know and who have excelled in faithful ministry as deacons, staff, or lay leaders.	
2 Invite them into a cohort. Share the process and the commitment it takes. Give them <i>Gospel Eldership</i> before Session 1.	
3 Sessions 1–10. One <i>Gospel Eldership</i> lesson each week, using its discussion questions. Read <i>The Plurality Principle</i> alongside as extra reading.	
4 Confirm calling. Elders meet with each man and invite those whose calling is confirmed into candidacy.	
UNIT 2 · DEVELOPING DOCTRINE & CHARACTER	
5 Sessions 1–4: Core Christianity. Hand out the Theological Questionnaire at Session 1; it's due at Session 4. Email the case studies.	
6 Session 5: Elder Case Studies. Group discussion and role play.	
7 Sessions 6–9. Knowing your leadership shadow and your patterns in conflict.	
8 Present candidates to the church and send out the Leadership Evaluation (consider adapting it into a Google Form).	
9 Review feedback and debrief. Affirm strengths, address weaknesses, and discern readiness.	
UNIT 3 · DEPLOYED FOR THE WORK	
10 Two weeks of onboarding. One discussion on each Keller reading, plus a clear role and scope for each man.	
11 Commissioning Sunday. Use the order of service and prayer at the end of this guide.	

How to Use This Guide

Most churches don't have a problem finding men who want to lead. The harder work is helping the right men discern whether God is calling them to shepherd, shaping their doctrine and character before they carry the weight of the office, and bringing them into a healthy plurality instead of just adding names to a board. This guide grew out of the process we use at Redeemer to do exactly that.

You should be able to hand this guide to an elder and have it walk him through the whole process, from the first invitation to the commissioning prayer. Here's how I'd encourage you to use it.

- 1 Invite carefully.** Unit 1 is for men whose lives and doctrine your elders already know, men who have been faithful as deacons, staff, or lay leaders. An invitation to discern is not a promise of the office, so say that clearly up front.
- 2 Meet as a cohort.** Gather weekly at a consistent time (we meet early on weekday mornings) and plan on nine or ten sessions for each of the first two units. Share the leading among your elders so candidates get to know the whole team.
- 3 Read before you meet.** Each unit is built around a core book or a few short readings and podcast episodes. Assign the reading ahead of time so everyone comes ready to discuss.
- 4 Take your time with character.** Doctrine can be learned in a semester, but character is proven over time and in community. The theological questionnaire, case studies, and congregational evaluation exist to help you see both.
- 5 Write it down.** Use the notes pages after Units 1 and 2 to capture convictions, questions, and next steps for each candidate.
- 6 Celebrate the commissioning.** When a man is ready, set him apart in front of the church. The order of service and prayer at the back of this guide will help you make it a moment your church remembers.

A note on terms. We believe the biblical words *elder*, *pastor*, *overseer*, and *bishop* all speak of the same, single office, so we use *elder* and *pastor* interchangeably throughout this guide.

UNIT 1 · PRE-CANDIDACY

Discerning the Call

In this unit, emerging leaders are invited into a cohort to discuss the work of eldership and discern their calling toward it. Those invited are men whose lives and doctrine are known by the existing elders and who have excelled in faithful ministry as deacons, staff members, or lay leaders.

WORKING TEXT FOR UNIT 1

Gospel Eldership

Robert H. Thune · *Equipping a New Generation of Servant Leaders*

Each session works through one lesson. Read the lesson and complete its exercise before you meet, then use the book’s **Discussion Questions** to guide your time together.

SESSIONS

GOSPEL ELDERSHIP LESSON	DISCUSS & COMPLETE
1 Servant Leadership	Discussion questions · “Know Thyself”
2 A Biblical Approach to Church Leadership	Discussion questions · False Righteousness
3 The Primacy of Character	Discussion questions · Identifying Idols
4 The Leadership Triangle	Discussion questions · Self-Assessment
5 Elders Feed the Church	Discussion questions · Spiritual Disciplines
6 Elders Lead the Church	Discussion questions · Examining Your Character
7 Elders Protect the Church	Discussion questions · The Gospel & Conflict
8 Elders Care for the Church	Discussion questions · Identifying Pride
9 Missional Eldership	Discussion questions · Mission & Your Heart
10 The Temptations of Leadership	Discussion questions · Your Temptations

EXTRA READING *The Plurality Principle* by Dave Harvey. Read it alongside the cohort for a fuller picture of how elders lead together.

OUTCOMES

- A clear understanding of the work of elders as outlined in the New Testament
 - A clear understanding of your church’s eldership structure and the commitment it takes
- A better understanding of each man’s personal calling
 - A better understanding of what it means to teach, defend, and shepherd in the gospel

DISCERNING THE CALL

Unit 1 Notes

UNIT 2 · CANDIDACY

Developing Doctrine & Character

Men whose calling toward eldership has been confirmed are invited into a season of training. The goal of this unit is to develop doctrinal alignment and evaluate character qualification.

RESOURCES

[Core Christianity](#) · Michael Horton

[The Emotionally Healthy Leader study guide](#)

[Managing Leadership Anxiety](#) · Steve Cuss

ASSESSMENTS

[Theological Questionnaire](#) · p. 8

[Elder Case Studies](#) · p. 10

[Leadership Evaluation](#) · p. 12

Printable copies at ministrythatmatters.org

SESSIONS

1	<i>Core Christianity: Getting Started – Ch. 3</i>	Hand out questionnaire & case studies
2	<i>Core Christianity: Ch. 4–6</i>	
3	<i>Core Christianity: Ch. 7–8</i>	
4	<i>Core Christianity: Ch. 9 – Afterword</i>	Questionnaire due
5	Elder Case Studies	Discussion & role play
6	Knowing Your Leadership Shadow, Pt. 1	<u>Emotionally Unhealthy Leader</u>
7	Knowing Your Leadership Shadow, Pt. 2	<u>Facing Your Shadow</u>
8	Knowing Your Patterns in Conflict, Pt. 1	<u>Assumptions</u> · <u>Reactivity</u>
9	Knowing Your Patterns in Conflict, Pt. 2	<u>Stuck Patterns</u> · <u>Attempted Solutions</u>

OUTCOMES

- Strengthened in doctrinal and theological positions
- Strengthened in emotional intelligence
- Strengthened in relational health
- Unified in theology, culture, and relationship with current elders
- Presented to the church as an elder candidate
- Feedback gathered to affirm strengths and address weaknesses

ELDER CANDIDATE

Theological Questionnaire

As elders, it's important that we align on theological and doctrinal points. There are both closed-handed and open-handed areas of theology for us. Overall, we want to preach, teach, disciple, and counsel in alignment with each other for the name of Christ and the glory of God. This questionnaire, and the time spent in this portion of candidacy, will help us gain clarity on our alignment in these things.

We are grateful for your thoughtful responses. Please use additional sheets (digital or written) to respond fully.

LIFE & MINISTRY

- 1 Share how you met Jesus and came to follow him. Include what your life was like prior, the key factors that led you to Jesus, and how your life changed after meeting him (begin very briefly with your family of origin).
- 2 Describe your spiritual disciplines and how you walk with, hear from, and learn from God.
- 3 How are you currently developing relationships and making contact with unchurched and unsaved people?
- 4 What is your belief from Scripture of how the church should be engaged in missions both locally and globally?
- 5 What is your philosophy of how to equip the church to be engaged in missions locally and internationally, including church planting and sending missionaries?
- 6 Who are you currently discipling? Are you willing to provide contact information for that person?
- 7 Pastors and elders seem to be tempted most often in four areas: money, sex, power, and pride. Describe yourself in relation to these temptation areas.
- 8 Who have been the voices that have shaped you and are currently shaping you? Apart from the Bible, who have been your primary theological teachers or influences? What authors, theologians (living or dead), movements, denominations, or schools of thought have most influenced your theology?

Theological Questionnaire *(continued)*

DOCTRINE & PRACTICE

- 9 What is the gospel?
-
- 10 What is your view of the Scriptures?
-
- 11 What is your view of the Trinity, and what role does it play in your daily spiritual walk?
-
- 12 What is our role in saving the lost, and what is God's role?
-
- 13 In your own words, how do you understand the doctrine of predestination, and what view do you personally hold on this doctrine? (e.g., God's sovereignty vs. man's responsibility, free will, who are the elect, etc.)
-
- 14 How has Adam's sin affected our nature and our ability to choose good and evil?
-
- 15 What is the role of the church?
-
- 16 What is your view on baptism?
-
- 17 What is your view of the Lord's Supper?
-
- 18 What is your view on spiritual gifts?
-
- 19 What is your view of church government, including the offices, who can hold each one, and who has final decision-making authority?
-
- 20 What is your view on the institution of marriage, and how does it play out with today's cultural view on sexuality?
-
- 21 What is your view on racial division and injustice, and how are we to respond biblically as followers of Jesus?
-

ELDER CANDIDATE

Case Studies

These case studies are designed to help you think through some of the relational and theological issues you may encounter as an elder. Think through each one and come prepared to discuss them, and to role-play a few, at your case study session.

-
- 1 How would you respond to a couple in your church who just miscarried nine weeks into a pregnancy? What scriptures would you take them to?
 - 2 A college student approaches you wanting to know who God is and has a vague idea of this thing called “the Trinity.” How would you pastorally go about talking with this confused person about God and the Trinity?
 - 3 In a follow-up conversation, the student brings a couple of friends to talk more in depth about who Jesus is, since this is often confused at the local university. They want the biblical answer of who Jesus is and what he did. How would you talk with these seekers of truth about Jesus Christ and his work?
 - 4 You are counseling a couple who claim to be Christians, are sleeping together, and believe they are “married in their hearts.” They would like to become members of your church. Describe how you would handle this couple, including how you would address the idea of being “married in their hearts.”
 - 5 A group of people invite you into a question they’ve been trying to answer: “What role does prayer have in the Christian life if you preach the sovereignty of God?” What would you tell them?
 - 6 A same-sex couple begins attending the church and even joins a Gospel Community or small group. After a few months of regular attendance, they ask about church membership. How would you respond to them?
 - 7 A married church member confesses to having multiple encounters with prostitutes at massage parlors. What would be some next steps to take with him?
 - 8 Describe someone in your life whom you consider a strong leader. Explain why his or her leadership has impacted you.
-

EXAMINATION & FEEDBACK

Presenting Candidates

Toward the end of Unit 2, introduce your elder candidates to the church in a Sunday gathering and invite the congregation to fill out the Leadership Evaluation on the following pages. Elders are called to be above reproach, and the people who serve alongside, under, and in community with a candidate will often see what a cohort can't.

WHAT TO SHARE WITH YOUR CHURCH

We are an elder-led church. We believe the New Testament is clear that local churches are to be led by a plurality of elders (Acts 14:21–23; Titus 1:5; 1 Peter 5:1–5). Elders shepherd God's people, lead the church on Jesus's mission, and teach and protect gospel doctrine. Our candidates have walked through three phases:

Calling

8–10 weeks discerning their call to eldership

Qualification

6–8 weeks of training, including seeking feedback from you, the church

Commissioning

Set apart in a Sunday gathering

AFTER THE FEEDBACK

- 1 Review the responses as an elder team.** Look for patterns rather than single comments, and follow up personally on any serious concern.
- 2 Debrief with each candidate.** Affirm the strengths and evidence of grace others see in him, and talk honestly about areas of growth.
- 3 Discern readiness together.** Decide whether each man is qualified and ready to move into Unit 3, or whether he needs more time.

Leadership Evaluation

ELDER CANDIDATE

These qualifications come from 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9. Please read both passages prayerfully before filling out this form. No leader is perfect (only Jesus), but it's important that elder candidates have a track record of maturing in Christ-like character.

Your name (first & last) _____

Name of the candidate you're assessing _____

How long have you known this candidate? _____

CIRCLE ONE FOR EACH

1 = MAJOR CONCERN · 5 = DOING GREAT

Above reproach: How do you evaluate his reputation as a Christian, both among fellow believers and among non-Christians?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

The husband of one wife: How do you evaluate his relationship with his wife?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Temperate: How do you evaluate the degree to which he is maintaining balance in his Christian life?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Prudent: How do you evaluate his ability to be wise and discerning?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Respectable: How satisfied are you with the way his life reflects the life of Jesus Christ?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Hospitable: How do you evaluate his level of generosity?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Able to teach: How do you evaluate his ability to communicate with others who may disagree with him?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not addicted to wine: How satisfied are you with his ability to control various kinds of obsessions and compulsions?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not self-willed: How satisfied are you with his ability to relate to other people without being self-centered or controlling?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Not quick-tempered: How satisfied are you with the way he handles anger?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Continued on next page

Leadership Evaluation (*continued*)**1 = MAJOR CONCERN · 5 = DOING GREAT****Gentle:** How objective and fair-minded is he in his relationships with others?
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
Uncontentious: How satisfied are you with his ability to avoid arguments?
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
Free from the love of money: How satisfied are you with his ability to be nonmaterialistic?
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
Manages his household well: If he is a father, how satisfied are you with his ability to function in this role according to God's plan?
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
Loving what is good: How satisfied are you with his efforts to overcome evil with good?
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
Just (upright): How satisfied are you with his ability to be just and fair in relationships with others?
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
Devout (holy): How satisfied are you with the way his life reflects God's holiness?
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
Disciplined: How satisfied are you with his ability to live a disciplined Christian life?
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
Overall spiritual maturity: How do you evaluate his overall maturity as a Christian?
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
Please explain any and all concerns you have about this candidate.

Please affirm any strengths you see in this person and why he would make a great church leader.

DEVELOPING DOCTRINE & CHARACTER

Unit 2 Notes

UNIT 3 • TWO WEEKS

Deployed for the Work

Candidates who have completed training and proved qualified spend two weeks being onboarded into team dynamics, with one discussion on each reading below. Then they are publicly commissioned as elders in a Sunday gathering. This is a special moment, and it should be celebrated! Following commissioning, new elders begin attending elder meetings.

Week 1 • *Leadership and Church Size Dynamics*

Tim Keller • free PDF

- 1 Keller says the difference between churches of 100 and 1,000 may be greater than the difference between denominations. What “size culture” is our church in right now, and what evidence do you see?
- 2 Which size culture do you personally prefer? Where might you be “moralizing” that preference?
- 3 “In small churches, policy is decided by many and ministry is done by a few. In the large church, ministry is done by many, and policy is decided by a few.” Where are we on that spectrum, and what does it mean for how our elders make decisions?
- 4 As a church grows, more pastoral care is carried by lay shepherds. How should that shape the way you will care for people as an elder?
- 5 What growth threshold might our church face in the next few years, and what would it cost us to cross it?

Week 2 • *Six Marks of a Missional Church*

Tim Keller • *Serving a Movement*, pp. 52–55

- 1 Which of the six marks is strongest in our church today? Which is weakest?
- 2 What idols most shape the people in our city, and how should our preaching and shepherding confront them?
- 3 Keller says lay Christians must be equipped to witness, to love their neighbors and do justice, and to integrate faith and work. Which of these do we do well, and where do our people need more help?
- 4 How “porous” is our church? Where would a skeptic or seeker feel welcomed, and where would they feel out of place?
- 5 What is one step our elders could take this year to practice unity with other churches in our city?

OUTCOMES

- Growth in team dynamics
- A determined date for commissioning
- A clear role and scope in the work of eldering that aligns with each man’s gifts and capacity

ORDER OF SERVICE

Elder Commissioning

Here's the order we follow when we commission new elders in a Sunday gathering. A pastor leads each part, speaking directly to the church.

1 WELCOME

Today is a special day in the life of this church. Today we are commissioning new elders, which means the leadership of our church increases with gifts and wisdom. We are getting stronger!

2 WHAT ARE ELDERS?

We are an elder-led church. We believe the New Testament is clear: local churches are to be led by a plurality of elders (Acts 14:21–23; Titus 1:5; 1 Peter 5:1–5). Elders shepherd God's people, lead the church on Jesus's mission, and teach and protect gospel doctrine. Good elders do this work together in healthy plurality. Elders are men who are called by God and qualified according to 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9.

We believe the biblical words *elder*, *pastor*, *overseer*, and *bishop* all speak of the same, single office, so we use *elder* and *pastor* interchangeably.

3 HOW HAVE THEY BEEN PREPARED?

Over the last year, these men have been through a process of discerning their calling and capacity and developing their character and competency.

4 SO, WHAT NOW?

We hear God's word speak to us, and then we lay hands on them to pray. Both are on the next page.

We Hear God's Word Speak to Us

TO THE CHURCH

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. Hebrews 13:17

We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. 1 Thess. 5:12–13

TO THE ELDERS

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. 1 Peter 5:1–4

Present each new elder with a framed copy of this passage, so these words stay in front of him.

We Lay Hands on Them to Pray

In the New Testament, when church leaders are appointed, they are commissioned by the laying on of hands in prayer (Acts 14:23). Invite the other elders and their wives to come forward and gather around the new elders.

COMMISSIONING PRAYER

Father, we thank you for giving shepherds to your church. As we lay hands on these men, we set them apart for this noble task. Fill them with your Spirit; give them wisdom to lead, courage to protect, and humility to serve. May they shepherd your flock willingly and eagerly, as examples of Christ our Chief Shepherd, to whom belongs all glory. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Want help developing elders?

Reach out at ministrythatmatters.org/connect

