

**LEADING
ONE
ANOTHER:
CHURCH
LEADERSHIP**



Leading One Another: Church Leadership

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INTRODUCTION

What does the local church mean to you?

Maybe you love your church. You love the people. You love the preaching, the singing. You can't wait to show up on Sunday, and you cherish fellowship with other church members throughout the week.

Maybe the church is just a place you show up to a couple times a month. You sneak in late, duck out early.

We at 9Marks are convinced that the local church is God's plan for displaying his glory to the nations. And we want to help you catch and live out that vision, together with your whole church.

The 9Marks Healthy Church Study Guides are a series of six- or seven-week studies on each of the "nine marks of a healthy church" plus one introductory study. These nine marks are the core convictions of our ministry. To provide a quick introduction to them, we've included a chapter from Mark Dever's book *What Is a Healthy Church?* with each study. We don't claim that these nine marks are the most important things about the church or the only important things about the church. But we do believe that they are biblical and therefore are helpful for churches.

So, in these studies, we're going to work through the biblical foundations and practical applications of each one. The ten studies are:

- *Built upon the Rock: The Church* (the introductory study)
- *Hearing God's Word: Expositional Preaching*
- *The Whole Truth about God: Biblical Theology*
- *God's Good News: The Gospel*
- *Real Change: Conversion*
- *Reaching the Lost: Evangelism*
- *Committing to One Another: Church Membership*

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- *Guarding One Another: Church Discipline*
- *Growing One Another: Discipleship in the Church*
- *Leading One Another: Church Leadership*

Each session of these studies takes a close look at one or more passages of Scripture and considers how it applies to the life of the whole church. So, we hope that these studies are equally appropriate for Sunday school, small groups, and other contexts where a group of anywhere from two to two-hundred people can come together and discuss God's Word.

These studies are mainly driven by observation, interpretation, and application questions, so get ready to speak up! We also hope that these studies provide opportunities for people to reflect together on their experiences in the church, whatever those experiences may be.

Leaders can make life much better or much worse, can't they? Think of loving parents who make countless sacrifices for their children's good, a gifted teacher who not only instructs but also inspires, a wise head of state who pursues justice and peace, a pastor who faithfully teaches, preaches, counsels, and cares for his people.

On the other hand, we are all too familiar with abusive or irresponsible parents, teachers who are lazy or uncaring, oppressive military dictators, and pastors who spout heresy and fleece their flocks.

In view of these abuses, the first session in this study answers the question, is authority bad? Next, we take a look at God's revelation of himself as the Shepherd of his people and how God calls his people's leaders to image him. The remaining sessions in the study consider individuals who have special responsibilities within the church: elders, deacons, and you.

Because it can be abused, leadership is a risky business for those in it and those under it. But God has good plans for leadership within the church. Let's explore those plans together and ask God to bless our churches with leaders—shepherds, in fact—after his own heart.

AN IMPORTANT MARK OF A HEALTHY CHURCH: BIBLICAL CHURCH LEADERSHIP

BY MARK DEVER

(Originally published as chapter 13 of What Is a Healthy Church?)

What kind of leadership does a healthy church have? Is it a congregation that strives to ensure that the gospel is faithfully preached? Yes (Galatians 1). Is it deacons who model service in the affairs of the church? Yes (Acts 6). Is it a pastor who is faithful in preaching the Word of God? Yes (2 Timothy 4). But the Bible presents one more leadership gift to churches to help them become healthy: the position of elder.

Surely there are many useful things we could say about church leadership from the Bible; yet I want to focus primarily on this question of elders, since I fear a lot of churches don't know what they're missing. As a pastor, I pray that Christ will place within our fellowships men whose spiritual gifts and pastoral concern indicate that God has called them to be elders. May he prepare many such men!

If God has so gifted a certain man in the church with exemplary character, pastoral wisdom, and gifts of teaching, and if, after prayer, the church recognizes these things, then he should be set apart as an elder.

WHAT IS AN ELDER?

In Acts 6, the young church in Jerusalem began to bicker over how food was being distributed to widows. The apostles therefore called upon the church to select several men who could better oversee this

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distribution. The apostles chose to delegate this particular task so that they could then “give [their] attention to prayer and the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4 NIV).

That, in the briefest terms, appears to be the division of labor between elders and deacons that the rest of the New Testament develops. Elders are especially devoted to prayer and the ministry of the Word for the church, while deacons help to sustain the church’s physical operations.

Are you beginning to see what a gift this is to you, churches? God is essentially saying, “I’m going to take several men from among you and set them aside to pray for you and to teach you about me.”

ELDERS AND CONGREGATIONS

All churches have had individuals designated to perform the functions of elders, even if those individuals are called by other titles, such as deacon or director. The three New Testament titles for this office, which are used interchangeably, are *episkopos* (overseer or bishop), *presbuteros* (elder), and *poimain* (shepherd or pastor). All three are used for the same men, for instance, in Acts 20:17 and 20:28.

When evangelicals hear the word *elder*, however, many of them immediately think “Presbyterian.” Yet the first Congregationalists (capital C, pointing to a formal group of churches) back in the sixteenth century taught that eldership was an office for New Testament churches. Elders could also be found in Baptist churches in America throughout the eighteenth and into the nineteenth centuries. In fact, the first president of the Southern Baptist Convention, W. B. Johnson, wrote a treatise in 1846 calling Baptist churches to use a plurality of elders since the practice was biblical.

Baptists and Presbyterians do disagree in two areas concerning elders (and I think the issues at play here are relevant to those who are not Baptist or Presbyterian). First and most fundamentally, we who are Baptists are congregationalists (lowercase c, referring to a practice). We believe that the Bible teaches that the final decision on matters rests with the congregation as a whole, not with a church’s elders or anyone outside the church body. When Jesus was teaching his disciples about confronting a sinful brother, he said that the con-

gregation was the final court of appeal—not the elders, not a bishop or pope, not a council or convention (Matt. 18:17). When the apostles sought out several men to act as deacons, as we just discussed, they gave the decision over to the congregation.

In Paul's letters, too, the congregation appears to assume final responsibility. In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul blames not the pastor, elders, or deacons for tolerating a man's sin, but the congregation. In 2 Corinthians 2, Paul refers to what a majority of them had done in disciplining an erring member. In Galatians 1, Paul calls on the congregations themselves to judge the false teaching they had been hearing. In 2 Timothy 4, Paul reproves not just the false teachers but also those who paid them to teach what their itching ears wanted to hear. Elders lead, but they do so, biblically and necessarily, within the bounds recognized by the congregation. In that sense, elders and every other board or committee in a Baptist church act in what is finally an advisory capacity to the whole congregation.

Second, Baptists and Presbyterians have disagreed over the roles and responsibilities of elders, largely due to different understandings of the following words written by Paul for Timothy: "The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching" (1 Tim. 5:17 NIV). Presbyterians understand this verse to be establishing two classes of elders—ruling elders and teaching elders. Baptists don't recognize this formal division but understand the verse to suggest that certain individuals among a group of elders will simply be given more fully, as a practical matter, to preaching and teaching. After all, Paul clearly tells Timothy earlier in the letter that a basic qualification of every elder is that he is "able to teach" (1 Tim. 3:2; see also Titus 1:9). Baptists, therefore, have often denied the appropriateness of appointing elders who are not capable of teaching Scripture.

PLURALITY OF ELDERS

Where Baptists and Presbyterians often agreed in the eighteenth century was that there should be a plurality (or multiple number) of elders in each local church. The New Testament never suggests a specific number of elders for a particular congregation, but it clearly and

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consistently refers to the “elders” of a local church in the plural (for example, Acts 14:23; 16:4; 20:17; 21:18; Titus 1:5; James 5:14).

Today, not only are more and more Baptist churches rediscovering this, but also churches from many other denominations, as well as independent churches, are increasingly recognizing this basic biblical idea.

A plurality of elders does not mean that the pastor has no distinctive role. There are many references in the New Testament to preaching and preachers that would not apply to all the elders in a congregation. In Corinth, for instance, Paul gave himself exclusively to preaching in a way that lay elders in a church could not (Acts 18:5; 1 Cor. 9:14; 1 Tim. 4:13; 5:17). Also, preachers seemed to relocate to an area for the express purpose of preaching (Rom. 10:14–15), whereas elders seemed settled among the community (Titus 1:5).

As the regular voice that proclaims God’s Word, a faithful preacher will probably find that a congregation and the other elders treat him as the first among equals and “especially” worthy of double honor (1 Tim. 5:17). Still, the preacher or pastor is, fundamentally, just one more elder, formally equal with every other man called by the congregation to act in this capacity.

BENEFITS OF ELDERS

My own experience as a pastor has confirmed the usefulness of following the New Testament practice of sharing, wherever possible, the responsibility for pastoring a local church with other men rooted in the congregation.

Decisions involving the church but not requiring the attention of all the members should fall not to the pastor alone, but to the elders as a whole. This is sometimes cumbersome, but it has immense benefits. It rounds out the pastor’s gifts, making up for some of his defects and supplementing his judgment. It creates support in the congregation for decisions, helping unity and leaving leaders less exposed to unjust criticism. It makes leadership more rooted and permanent and allows for more mature continuity. It encourages the church to take more responsibility for its spirituality and helps make the church less dependent on its employees.

This practice of a plurality of elders is unusual among Baptist churches today, but there is a growing trend toward it among Baptists and many others—and for good reason. It was needed in New Testament churches and it is needed now.

WHAT ABOUT DEACONS?

Many modern churches tend to confuse elders with either the church staff or the deacons. Deacons also fill a New Testament office, one rooted in Acts 6, as we saw. While any absolute distinction between the two offices is difficult, deacons are generally concerned with the practical details of church life: administration, maintenance, and the care of church members with physical needs. In many churches today, the deacons have either taken over the role of spiritual oversight or they have left it entirely in the hands of one man, the pastor. It would benefit churches to again distinguish the roles of elders and deacons. Do churches not need both types of servants?

SHOULDERING THE BURDEN AND PRIVILEGE

Eldership is the biblical office that I hold as a pastor—I am the main preaching elder. But I work together with a group of elders for the edification of the church. Some are on staff, but the majority are not. We meet regularly to pray, to talk, and to form recommendations for the deacons or the whole church. It's difficult to put into words how much these men have loved both me and our entire congregation by sharing the burden—and privilege—of pastoring. I thank God regularly for these fellow workers.

Clearly, eldership is a biblical idea that has practical value. If implemented in our churches, it could help pastors immensely by removing weight from their shoulders and even removing their own petty tyrannies from their churches. Furthermore, the character qualities listed by Paul for eldership, aside from the ability to teach, are qualities every Christian should work toward (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1). Publicly affirming certain individuals as exemplary, then, helps to present a model for other Christians, especially Christian men. Indeed, the practice of recognizing godly, discerning, trusted laymen as elders is another mark of a healthy church.



WEEK 1

IS AUTHORITY BAD?

GETTING STARTED

1. *What kind of authority relationships are you in? Whose authority are you under? Do you exercise authority over anyone?*

2. *What are some experiences with authority you've had that stand out to you? Were they good, bad, or ugly?*

Many people in our culture are highly suspicious of authority. After all, it can be used to oppress, abuse, and denigrate people. The fact that authority is so often abused has led some people to regard authority itself as inherently evil. But, as we'll see from Scripture in this study, authority itself is a good gift from God that images his rule over us.

MAIN IDEA

Authority is a good gift from God that images his rule over us.

DIGGING IN

In Daniel 4, God sends Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, out into the wilderness. God throws him down from his high place and causes him to live as a wild beast, so that he would know who was truly in charge in the universe. Here's what Nebuchadnezzar says at the end of that period:

³⁴ At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever,

for his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
and his kingdom endures from generation to generation;

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³⁵ all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing,
and he does according to his will among the host of heaven
and among the inhabitants of the earth;
and none can stay his hand
or say to him, "What have you done?" (Dan. 4:34–35)

1. *What does Nebuchadnezzar confess about God's dominion and kingdom in this passage?*
2. *What does Nebuchadnezzar say about God's relationship to people? How would you describe that relationship?*
3. *How does your heart react to this kind of language, to the idea that God rules over everything and does all that he pleases in heaven and on earth?*

In Genesis 1, we read about how God created the whole universe, including the earth and humankind. Here's what God said when he created humans:

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

²⁷ So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Gen. 1:26–28)

4. *In whose image is man created (v. 26)?*
5. *What does the fact of being made in the image of God mean for man's relationship to creation (vv. 26, 28)?*
6. *What do we learn about authority from this passage?*

7. In a number of different places in Scripture, God gives special kinds of authority to specific groups of people. Read each of the following passages:

- Romans 13:1–7
- Ephesians 6:1–4
- Hebrews 13:7, 17

Answer the following questions about each passage:

- To whom does God grant authority?
- What does he grant them authority to do?
- What response does God require from those who are under this authority?

King David had more experience with authority than most people in the Bible. He knew what good came when authority was used wisely, and he knew by sad experience what happened when people abused authority—because he did so himself (2 Sam. 11–12). It should arrest our attention, then, that David’s last words, which are recorded for us in 2 Samuel 23, are about authority:

¹ Now these are the last words of David:

The oracle of David, the son of Jesse,
the oracle of the man who was raised on high,
the anointed of the God of Jacob,
the sweet psalmist of Israel:

² “The Spirit of the LORD speaks by me;
his word is on my tongue.

³ The God of Israel has spoken;
the Rock of Israel has said to me:

When one rules justly over men,
ruling in the fear of God,

⁴ he dawns on them like the morning light,
like the sun shining forth on a cloudless morning,
like rain that makes grass to sprout from the earth.” (vv. 1–4)

8. What characterizes the exercise of authority that David describes in verse 3?

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9. *Why is it important for kings, and all those who exercise authority, to wield their authority “in the fear of God” (v. 3)? What will happen if they don’t?*

10. *According to David, what happens when a king rules justly and in the fear of God? Have you ever experienced fruit like this in your own life from the godly exercise of authority?*

11. *In light of all of these passages, how would you respond to someone who thought that authority itself is a bad thing?*

12. *List out all the authorities you are under and all the ways you exercise authority over others. What does it practically look like for you to live under authority and exercise authority in a godly way? Consider passages such as:*

- Ephesians 5:22–33
- Ephesians 6:1–4
- Ephesians 6:5–9
- 1 Peter 2:13–17
- 1 Peter 2:18–25

PERSONAL NOTES

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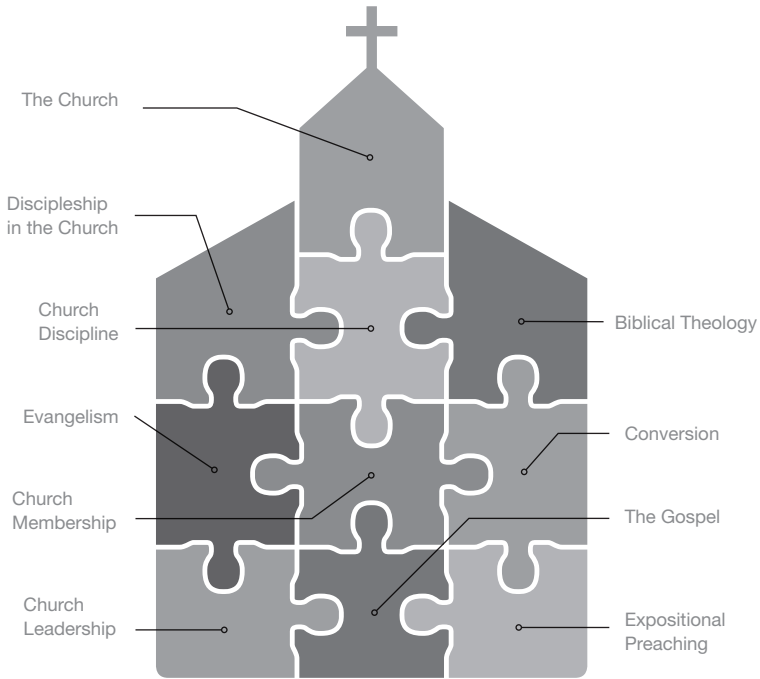
Building Healthy Churches

9Marks exists to equip church leaders with a biblical vision and practical resources for displaying God's glory to the nations through healthy churches.

To that end, we want to see churches characterized by these nine marks of health:

- 1** **Expositional Preaching**
- 2** **Biblical Theology**
- 3** **A Biblical Understanding of the Gospel**
- 4** **A Biblical Understanding of Conversion**
- 5** **A Biblical Understanding of Evangelism**
- 6** **Biblical Church Membership**
- 7** **Biblical Church Discipline**
- 8** **Biblical Discipleship**
- 9** **Biblical Church Leadership**

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Be sure to check out the rest of the
**9MARKS HEALTHY CHURCH
STUDY GUIDE SERIES**

This series covers the nine distinctives of a healthy church as originally laid out in *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* by Mark Dever. Each book explores the biblical foundations of key aspects of the church, helping Christians to live out those realities as members of a local body. A perfect resource for use in Sunday school, church-wide studies, or small group contexts.





CHURCH LEADERSHIP.

Because it can be abused, leadership is a risky business—both for those in it and those under it. But God has good plans for leadership within the church. This study explores God’s plans for authority by focusing on God’s revelation of himself as shepherd, and how God calls leaders to image him. The rest of the study looks at the special responsibilities and roles within the church, fulfilled by elders, deacons, and church members themselves.

“I am unaware of any other tool that so thoroughly and practically helps Christians understand God’s plan for the local church. I can’t wait to use these studies in my own congregation.”

JERAMIE RINNE, Senior Pastor, South Shore Baptist Church, Hingham, Massachusetts

“Rich exposition, compelling questions, and clear syntheses combine to give a guided tour of ecclesiology—the theology of the church. I know of no better curriculum for generating understanding of and involvement in the church than this.”

RICK HOLLAND, Senior Pastor, Mission Road Bible Church, Prairie Village, Kansas

“I have used these guides for the last year at my own church and appreciate how easy they are to adapt to my own setting. Highly recommended!”

MICHAEL LAWRENCE, Senior Pastor, Hinson Baptist Church, Portland, Oregon

9MARKS HEALTHY CHURCH STUDY GUIDES are a series of ten 6–7 week studies covering the nine distinctives of a healthy church originally laid out in *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* by Mark Dever. This series explores the biblical foundations of key aspects of the church, helping Christians to live out those realities as members of a local body. Conveniently packaged and accessibly written, the format of this series is guided, inductive discussion of Scripture passages and is ideal for use in Sunday school, church-wide studies, and individual or small group contexts.

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