



PLURALITY OF ELDERS: CHANGE, BUT NO CHANGE

Since the early seventies, books and articles have presented a church leadership concept in which a plurality of elders, rather than a single elder, takes responsibility for the welfare of each local church body. Biblical support for a plurality of elders in a single church is numerous, and the idea of sharing ministry responsibilities is attractive. As a result, a number of evangelical churches have undergone a transformation in the way they view church leadership.

The re-emergence of multiple elders sharing ministry responsibilities has indeed involved larger numbers more intimately in leadership positions. Obviously, this is beneficial for the church. However, it is the contention of some, including myself, that current practice still falls short of the biblical model of the first century church. In fact, in many churches that have instituted this renewal concept, there is little difference between the current *elders'* meetings and the former *board* meetings. The name is changed, but the activities remain the same.

Pragmatic Approach

Having correct biblical titles does not necessarily mean that those holding the titles will function biblically. Changing the board's name from the *deacons'* board to the *elders'* board and relegating each of those elders to oversee a particular ministry (i.e., men, children, high school, ushers, music, etc.) does not conform to the biblical pattern. Yes, the titles are correct and the participation is intensified, but is that the biblical model?

Once again we must go back to the manual. Most agree that the New Testament teaches that multiple elders in singular churches were normative. The rub comes when we consider responsibilities and activities of the elders—their ministries. The past twenty years have seen some churches institute an elder system that includes two types of elders—those who stand before the church and proclaim God's word (teaching elders) and those who are responsible for the spectrum of various church ministries (ruling elders). It is my contention that no such distinction between elders existed in the first century church. Rather, all functioned in the same activities in the same office.

Those who have instituted the two-type elder concept will quickly point out the passage (and let me add that it is the *only* passage) that distinguishes between elders—1 Timothy 5:17. But before we get to that particular passage, later in this article, let us note that although 1 Timothy 5:17 does address a distinction between elders, it is a distinction based upon diligence rather than upon capabilities or functions. That passage teaches that elders should be honored on the basis of diligence in service. No other distinction is addressed.

On the other hand, there are churches that have instituted an elder system in which all elders are considered equal in every way. Alongside the elders is another office, however, the pastor-teacher. The pastor-teacher functions in a different role than the elders. He stands before the church and proclaims God's word, whereas the elders oversee the spectrum of various church ministries.

Those who hold to this plurality position quickly point to Ephesians 4:11, suggesting that the pastor-teacher is different from the elder. We will examine that particular passage later in this article; for now, let us remember that the *only* use of *pastor (shepherd)* is in Ephesians 4. A conclusion based solely upon a single occurrence, particularly when in two other passages the

elders are instructed to pastor or shepherd the flock, rests on shaky ground. Frankly, there is a better conclusion.

Whatever the particular approach, it does not take a brain surgeon to realize that the two approaches typically taken to transform leadership in the church essentially lead to the same result—a plurality of elders overseeing programs, with some special person (teaching elder or pastor-teacher) designated to proclaim (preach) God’s word. The question must be asked, “How do these approaches differ from the old single-elder, plural-deacon arrangement?” Basically, there is no difference except that more individuals are intimately involved in managing the various programs of the church. And that is why the typical pastor likes either of the new approaches—he can delegate responsibilities! Pragmatically, the new approaches are attractive; biblically, they are lacking.

Biblical Approach

So that we may correctly address a transformation in church leaders, let us consider the implications of the following analyses concerning a plurality of elders:

- Historical analysis
- Definitional analysis
- Logical analysis
- Contextual analysis
- Grammatical analysis

Historical Analysis

A historical perspective on church leadership is attainable from six passages written between AD 49 and AD 62: Acts 14 (AD 49), Acts 15 (AD 49), Acts 19 (AD 53-AD 56), Acts 20 (AD 57), Ephesians 4 (AD 60), and 1 Timothy 3 (AD 62). During this thirteen-year period, the office of elder emerged in the local church, with Paul appointing elders during his first missionary journey (Acts 14), and with leadership responsibilities being shared by both apostles and elders in Jerusalem at least as early as the Jerusalem council (Acts 15). One would then assume that Paul appointed elders and shared leadership responsibilities in Ephesus during his extended stay on his third missionary journey (Acts 19). When Paul requests a meeting of the elders from Ephesus on his return trip to Jerusalem (Acts 20), he obviously knows them intimately. Then, imprisoned, Paul pens a letter to the church at Ephesus three years after his last meeting with these elders. In addition, two years later, he pens a letter to encourage Timothy, who was located in Ephesus. From the beginning of Paul’s two-and-one-half-year stay in Ephesus in AD 53 to the letter to Timothy in AD 62, Paul had intimate contact with and influence upon the church in Ephesus. So let us look at his instructions to these believers concerning leadership.

Luke tells us that when Paul requested the elders (not the apostles, not the prophets, not the preachers, not the pastor-teachers, etc.) to meet with him in Acts 20 (AD 57), he instructed them to pastor (shepherd) the church. (Paul used this word only twice in his writings: once in a verb form as a shepherd tending a flock of sheep—1 Cor. 9:7—and once in a noun form as a shepherd tending a flock of people—Eph. 4:11.) When Paul writes the letter to the church at Ephesus (AD 60), he does not mention the elders, mentioning pastor-teachers, however. Then, when he writes to Timothy in Ephesus (AD 62), he neglects to mention pastor-teachers (remember he designated that office only once), addressing elders, however. Those exclusions and/or inclusions are significant. The reader tends to wonder if Paul was trying to confuse his readers in Ephesus as to leadership, or if they would understand that the offices of pastor-teachers and elders were identical. I do not believe he was trying to confuse them.

One must therefore assume that elders and pastor-teachers had identical responsibilities and capabilities, since Paul never indicated a distinction among elders: all were to shepherd—all were to lead and teach. The grammatical analysis presented later in this article provides overwhelming biblical support for this position. (Note: one cannot argue that 1 Timothy 3 does not

mention giftedness, and thus that elders do not have the gift of teaching, without also taking the same position with respect to Ephesians 4, since Ephesians 4 likewise does not mention giftedness. Conversely, if one assumes pastor-teachers are gifted, then elders are likewise gifted. In both passages, offices and responsibilities are addressed, and capabilities to accomplish those responsibilities are assumed.)

Definitional Analysis

Shepherd/ To Shepherd

To understand leadership in the church, three critical words must be addressed: shepherd, lead, and teacher.

New Testament authors who use the term *shepherd* in the context of church leadership are Luke, Peter, and Paul. Luke uses shepherd six times on only three occasions: first as the shepherds in the Christmas story (Lk 2:8, 15, 18, 20), second as a shepherd tending a flock of sheep (Lk 17:7), and third as elders tending a flock of people (Acts 20:28). Peter used the term only twice: first of Christ (1 Pet. 2:25) and second of elders (1 Pet. 5:2). The second occurrence refers to elders shepherding (pastoring) a flock of people and parallels Luke's account (Acts 20) of Paul's instruction to the elders at Ephesus to likewise shepherd (pastor) a flock of people. Paul also uses the term only twice: first as a shepherd tending a flock of sheep (1 Cor. 9:7) and second referring to the pastor (shepherd)-teacher in Ephesians 4:11.

One can observe that of the ten times these writers use *shepherd* (noun form) or *to shepherd* (verb form), they use the term six times in reference to men who shepherd flocks of sheep and four times in reference to those who shepherd flocks of people—Christ (once), pastor-teachers (once), and elders (twice). Since the function of elders (to shepherd) and the title of pastor (shepherd) are identical, it can easily be assumed that the offices are one and the same. In fact, a position that distinguishes between the two offices is tenuous at best.

Lead/To Lead

The second term (*lead*) under consideration occurs only eight times in the New Testament (Rom. 12:8, 1 Thess. 5:12, 1 Tim. 3:4, 5, 12, 5:17, and Titus 3:8, 14). Five of these eight occurrences refer to those who lead the church (1 Thess. and 1 Tim.). Once the term refers to a spiritual gift for service to be used within the church (Rom. 12:8). The assumption that those who lead in the church would be given by God the ability (giftedness) to perform in that function is supported by the context. Logic and word usage argue for that viewpoint.

Teacher/ Skilled in Teaching

Paul uses the term teacher, or a derivative, eleven times. Teacher (*didaskalos*) occurs seven times (Rom. 2:20, 1 Cor. 12:28, 29, Eph. 4:11, 1 Tim. 2:7, 2 Tim. 1:11, and 2 Tim. 4:3), with two references to a spiritual gift to individuals and three references to corporate gifts to the church. *Teacher of the law (nomodidaskalos)* is used once (1 Tim. 1:7) and *teacher of good things (kalodidaskalos)* occurs once (Titus 2:3). In each of these occurrences, the term appears in the noun form. Paul also uses the term *skilled in teaching (didaktikos)*, which is in the form of an adjective that explains or clarifies that which it modifies. Paul uses this last term once to identify skilled servants (2 Tim. 2:24) and, in addition, uses the term to indicate the criterion for being an elder (1 Tim. 3:2)—he must be skilled in teaching.

Since nine of the eleven times these terms are used are in the Pastoral Epistles (six times) or in the context of giftedness (three times), word usage would support the position that *skilled in teaching* refers to giftedness—he is a teacher. (Obviously, one is hard pressed to support the view that skilled in teaching means “teachable.”)

Conclusion

Not only does the usage of the three words under consideration support the position that the office of pastor-teacher is equivalent to the office of elder, but such usage supports the view that all elders evidenced, and thus possessed, the abilities (giftedness) to lead and teach. These abilities would be identical to those equipping skills of a pastor-teacher—leading and teaching.

Logical Analysis

A search of the Scriptures reveals a general model of God's dealing with mankind: God equips those He desires to accomplish tasks. He enables them so that they can perform their responsibilities, and then He holds them accountable. This model is seen in the Old Testament prophets. Enabled by direct revelation, they spoke for God to the nation of Israel and to others. Jonah is an example of God's moving in history through miraculous events to ensure that Jonah accomplished his responsibility to speak God's word to Nineveh. In the New Testament, this model is observable in the apostles. Empowered with authenticating signs and wonders, the apostles established the early church. Believers, likewise, have been regenerated by a living God who desires them to walk in holiness. Believers will be judged individually at the second coming (2 Cor. 5) as to their conformity, as believers, to His desires. The pattern is that God enables men for ministry responsibilities, holding them accountable.

This pattern is likewise applicable to leadership in the local church. Hebrews 13:17 provides the insight that the local body of believers is to obey its leaders, since God has placed them in that leadership position with the responsibility *to keep watch over* them. The passage goes on to explain that these church leaders will be held accountable for compliance to their responsibilities. Does it not seem logical that if God holds men accountable, since He has delegated a responsibility to them, that He would have provided them with the abilities to accomplish the task for which they are accountable. Yes—that is the pattern! So where do we find reference to an enablement of church leaders for service? Can we not use the criteria for elders, whose responsibility it is to shepherd the church, to enlighten us?

The qualifications of elders in 1 Timothy 3 require not only desirable character traits but also manifested ministry abilities. As suggested in the definitional analysis, *able to teach* means *skilled in teaching*. Therefore, elders must manifest the ability to teach—be gifted by God to teach. Also, elders must manifest the ability to lead the family of God, as manifested by their leadership of their own families—they are gifted leaders. Enabled by the gifts of leading and teaching, elders are to shepherd the flock, knowing they are accountable to a living God.

Contextual Analysis

Here are the key passages that address local church leadership and that must be understood in relation to one another:

- Ephesians 4—Delineates the corporate gifts (offices) to the church
- 1 Timothy 3/Titus 1—Provides the criteria for elders
- Acts 20/1 Peter 5—Reveals the ministry of the elders
- 1 Timothy 5—Makes a distinction between elders

Ephesians 4:11

Ephesians 2:19-22 informs us that the New Testament apostles and prophets were gifts (corporate) given to establish the infant church. They were foundational gifts that would fade and cease in use. This is supported by Acts 1, which states the requirements for apostleship: (1) had known Christ from the beginning of His ministry and (2) had seen the resurrected Christ. These requirements could be associated only with the apostles (sent ones) that Christ Himself sent out.

When Paul addresses the corporate gifts (individuals given to the church, representing offices in the church) in Ephesians 4, it must be understood that in the context of the book of Ephesians the apostles and prophets are but temporary offices, given to the church but benefiting the church throughout history—they laid the foundation. Some also assume that the evangelist and pastor-teacher were given to the first century church and were likewise temporary gifts. The better view, however, is that these latter offices are permanent gifts that build upon the ministry of the apostles and prophets—they are structural gifts. First Corinthians 3 supports this view when verses 4-15 inform us that teachers, represented by Apollos, build upon the work (the foundation) of those who have ministered before them.

Assuming that the office (corporate gift) of the pastor-teacher is valid for today, who are

these people and what do they do? The text informs us that their responsibility is to *equip the saints* for their own ministries. The title, *pastor* (shepherd)-*teacher*, implies that they tend the flock, with an emphasis on feeding the sheep. On the basis of the historical and definitional analyses, however, a better position is that *pastor-teacher* and *elder* are synonymous and are one and the same office. They are to lead and teach the church. Does it not seem natural to think that elders would equip the body? (Since this passage is the *only* one in which the title *shepherd* is used and there are no scriptural indications that pastor-teachers are not equivalent to elders, any position that distinguishes between the two is a weak one.)

1 Timothy 3:2-7/
Titus 1:6-9

These two sections in the Pastoral Epistles delineate the criteria for leaders in the local church. Rather than listing only the character traits of these men, the passage obviously indicates abilities required—teaching and leading. As suggested in the definitional analysis, the abilities required of the elders parallel the title of pastor-teacher: both are to lead and teach.

Acts 20:28-35/
1 Peter 5:1-4

These passages provide insight into the ministry of the elder—to shepherd the flock. Remember that the term *shepherd* is used *only* three times in reference to church leaders: once in the noun form in Ephesians 4:11 of the *pastor* (shepherd)-teacher and twice in the verb form of the responsibility of elders to *shepherd* (to pastor) the flock of believers. The obvious conclusion is: (1) that both offices perform the same ministry or (2) that both offices are one and the same (i.e., that one office is being called by two different names). The latter view is supported in the historical analysis and the definitional analysis.

1 Timothy 5:17

The *only* passage that indicates any distinctions among elders in the church is 1 Timothy 5:17. Some have taken this passage to suggest there is a distinction between teaching elders and ruling elders. And some even equate the teaching elders with the pastor-teacher. However, as the grammatical analysis will show, this passage distinguishes elders not by capabilities, and thus ministry, but rather only by diligence in accomplishing similar ministries. This is a critical point because, it means that, all elders would have identical ministry activities.

Conclusion

The context informs us that *all* elders are to *shepherd* the flock of Christ: they are to possess the same qualifications for that office and they are to perform the same functions in that office. The historical, definitional, and logical analyses heavily weight on the side of elders' being equivalent to pastor-teachers. Frankly, the opposing view is tenuous. In addition, the grammatical analysis that follows clearly shows that there cannot be a distinction between elders on the basis of ministry (function), just on the basis of diligence in the performance of identical ministries.

Grammatical
Analysis

First Timothy 5:17 is the crucial passage that makes a distinction between elders. Once again, let's remember that this is the *only* passage to make a distinction between elders. The type of distinction is the critical issue—distinction in ministry or distinction in diligence of ministry.

Three approaches are generally taken when 1 Timothy 5:17 is addressed. The passage says, *Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in word and doctrine.* We will address each approach to gain a perspective on the different interpretations of this passage.

Older
Traditional
Interpretation

This view agrees with the next two approaches in that the elders in the passage are in the plural form. The proponents of this view, however, understand plural elders to correspond to plural churches. The conclusion is that each church has one elder. Those elders that rule well, and particularly those elders that *labor* in preaching and teaching, are so recognized and will have the larger churches through appointment by a dominational hierarchy or because they attract parishioners by their reputation in a community.

*Newer
Traditional
Interpretation*

Distinguishing one elder in one church from another elder in another church on the basis of superior ministry skills in leading and, particularly, in preaching and teaching is the crux of this view. The better preacher is recognized and thus honored.

This approach is widely held in the evangelical community. However, the view cannot account for the numerous passages that address a plurality of elders in singular churches (Jam. 5:14; Gal. 2:1-10; Acts 11:30; 14:21-23; 15:2, 4, 6, 22; 20:17; 21:17-18; Phil. 1:1; 1 Pet. 5:1; Ti. 1:5). Also this view tends to support a *mediator mentality*—the preacher is the sole guide to and/or giver of revelation for the local church.

The newer traditional view also understands the elders in the passage to be in the plural form. But rather than multiple churches, singular churches are understood. Thus, there are multiple elders in each given church. How the individual elders in a particular church are distinguished varies. Proponents of this position hold that all elders rule (lead), but some lead better than others and are therefore to be honored. Further, this view holds that within that complete group of elders there are particular elders who work at preaching and should also be honored; these particular elders are recognized as teaching elders. Others understand the “they” in the second clause of 1 Timothy 5:17 to equate with pastor-teachers. The pastor-teacher may also be an elder, but his preaching ministry distinguishes him from the others and thus he is due more honor.

Distinction among elders in one church is based upon superior ministry skills in leading. Teaching elders or pastor-teachers, those who preach and teach, are further distinguished and honored. The better preacher, again, is recognized and thus honored.

This approach is becoming accepted by the evangelical community. However, those who hold this view do not generally account for the plural form (*they*) in the second clause of the verse when the closest antecedent of *they* is *elders*. If this plural form is taken into account, not only is there a plurality of elders in each singular church, but there is also a plurality of teaching elders in each singular church. Lacking this interpretation, and thus application, this newer view likewise tends to support a *mediator mentality*—the preacher as the sole guide to and/or giver of revelation for the local church.

Additionally, the proponents of this view, which suggests that *they* refers to pastor-teachers (not necessarily elders), tend to slip into the older traditional position respecting the second clause: the plural *they* corresponding to plural churches. The conclusion is that each church has only one pastor-teacher. This twist again supports the *mediator mentality*—the preacher is the sole guide to and/or giver of revelation for the local church.

*Better
Interpretation*

One’s interpretation of a passage is important, but none is more important to a proper understanding of the functioning of the church than the passage under consideration. Let’s look at the passage carefully.

As we have already observed, the text addresses a plurality of elders in singular churches. In addition, the *they* (plural) in the second clause agrees with the antecedent *elders* in the main clause. Thus, there are elders (plural) in each church who are distinguished by the manner in which they lead and, additionally, elders (plural) who are further distinguished by the manner in which they minister in the word. One must therefore decide if the second distinction is (1) for a separate set of individuals or (2) for a further identification of the same group (“those that lead well”) addressed in the main clause. The first option allows for two types of elders with differing ministries; the second option allows for only one type of elder with all having similar ministries. Let’s look at the text to get some indication of the best approach.

The key to the passage is the emphasis of the passage: to distinguish ministries of elders or to distinguish effort put forth by elders in their ministries. A simple reading of the passage would support the latter emphasis—*how* they do what they do is the emphasis. Now, do the contents of the text support this emphasis?

First consider the terms *well* and *labor* in this context. As set forth in the definitional analysis, all elders are to rule, direct, or lead. The distinction in the passage is not whether they

lead or not, but rather the *manner* in which they lead—a comparison not of activity but of the manner in which that activity was accomplished. Additional honor is bestowed on those who lead well—diligently and carefully. The logical extension of this emphasis is likewise carried into the latter part of the text—*especially those who labor*. The Greek word for work is *kopos*, meaning to labor or toil. Additional honor (note: it is not necessary to determine the meaning of honor for this discussion) is to be bestowed upon those elders, previously addressed, that toil in the ministry of the word. The emphasis is on the *effort* taken in the accomplishment of the task. Rather than differentiating among elders' tasks, the text addresses the manner in which each elder accomplishes similar tasks. Those who perform their tasks well, with extra labor expended to accomplish them, are to be honored. Thus distinction is based not on gifts or abilities, but on diligence in ministry.

A second consideration is the translation of the second clause of the text. The typical English translation “especially those whose work is preaching and teaching” is somewhat misleading. In fact, this translation does not indicate a comparison of effort, but rather supports the typical practice of most churches today. A better translation would be “especially those who labor in the word (*logos*) and doctrine (*didaskalia*).” This translation indicates a comparison of effort that is consistent with the former conclusions—distinctions among elders come from differences of effort, not ability—diligence in ministry, not different ministries.

This better translation also brings to our attention a change from “preaching and teaching” to “word and doctrine.” The traditional translation seems to present a distinction in verbal functions by those who stand before the congregation. (Note: not only does this passage not necessarily make such a distinction, but one can question whether any passage makes such a distinction. Preaching in the New Testament can better be associated with the heralding—evangelizing—ministry, but again we do not have space to develop that concept here.) So what do *word* and *doctrine* mean in the better translation. The *word* obviously brings to mind the ministry of the apostles—a ministry of the word of God that was not to be neglected (Acts 6:2). It is a verbalization of the truths of God. The second word, *doctrine*, is either an additional verbal ministry (translated “teaching”) or a nonverbal ministry that is the internalization of a system of thought—“doctrine” or “the teachings.” The nonverbal option obviously better fits the context, with *word* relating to oral teaching by elders and *doctrine* relating to the accumulation of a scriptural frame of reference as a result of diligent study by the elders. The word refers to what one says; doctrine refers to what one thinks. Thus, *doctrine* issues into *word*.

Before treating this idea as an obscure concept, observe the grammatical construction of these two terms combined together in other nearby texts. Paul reminds Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:6 that he was “nourished by *words* of the faith and sound *doctrine*.” Translated as a prepositional phrase, “of sound doctrine,” the genitive form indicates the source of the words. Doctrine issued into words. Paul again in 1 Timothy 6 instructs that what is taught must be consistent with the words of Christ and doctrine (see verse 3). What is verbally taught must be consistent with the teachings (system of thought or doctrine.) Doctrine again issues into words. When Paul pens his letter to Titus, he instructs that a characteristic of an elder must be that he is “holding to the faithful word according to the doctrine” (Titus 1:9). The prepositional phrase (“according to the doctrine”) indicates the word's relationship to doctrine—with respect to or in alignment with doctrine. Doctrine again issues into words. Internalized truth issues into verbalized truth. Truth should be diligently and carefully studied so that it can be diligently and carefully taught. Those elders who labor in word and doctrine, in addition to leading well, are to be double honored.

The characteristics of the elders that are to be double honored are not that they lead, teach, and study. All elders were to do that and were therefore honored. The characteristics of the elders that are to be double honored are that they are *more diligent* (they labor) in their leading, teaching, and studying. There are not two kinds of elders; however, there are differences in the manner in which the activities of all the elders are accomplished. Those that are diligent are to be double honored.

Conclusion

Since 1 Timothy 5:17 does not distinguish between kinds of elders, it cannot be used as a

**Peers,
Not Superstars**

club, as it usually is, to bludgeon all other passages into submission in order to distinguish elders by function or activity. Rather, all elders (plural in each church) perform the same activities—they all shepherd (lead and teach). The weight of biblical evidence supports this position.

First Timothy 5:17 is the *only* passage that makes a distinction among elders. That distinction is based upon diligence in accomplishing of similar activities by all the elders. When one understands this text correctly, the historical, the definitional, the historical, the logical, and the contextual analyses all confirm, support, and clarify this understanding of 1 Timothy 5:17. Therefore, each local church should be shepherded by a plurality of elders, each leading, teaching, and studying. Rather than making a pragmatic decision that only encourages increased participation by a few in order to elevate ministry responsibilities for one (“the pastor”), all elders are to actually pastor (shepherd) the church so that the church can be actually equipped.

One day over lunch, I was discussing the principles and scriptural basis for a biblical plurality of elders that I have just presented with a senior pastor of a large evangelical church in California. Obviously understanding the implications, the pastor said, “What would I do then?” I immediately responded, “Make disciples, of course!” The pastor countered, “But my gift is preaching. Everyone does it that way, that is what I am paid to do, and God has seemingly been blessing my ministry. Therefore, it must be right.”

When culture, rather than biblical principles, mandates ministry (and we have been trained to fit into the cultural mold), one becomes perplexed when it is suggested that he rethink his role as superstar and conform to biblical principles. With terror showing in the eyes, they ask, “What would I do then?”

“Make disciples” is the command to all believers and when the church gathers the primary responsibility of the elders is “teaching them to obey all I have commanded you.” Yes, it would involve instruction delivered in larger group settings. However, imparting facts is only part of the work in the teaching ministry of the elders. The end product of biblical teaching is not just the transmission of words but the transformation of lives (“to obey”). Therefore, intimate exposure and modeling is necessary to meet the requirements of the biblical pattern. This is what real shepherds do. The sheep know them because the shepherds diligently care for and diligently teach the sheep. Christ demonstrated the pattern during His earthly ministry. Likewise, Paul continued the pattern:

- Be imitators of me. (1 Cor. 4:16)
- Be imitators of me. (1 Cor. 11:1)
- Follow my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. (Phil. 3:17)
- The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things. (Phil. 4:9)
- Become imitators of us. (1 Thess. 1:6)
- Follow our example . . . Follow our example. (2 Thess. 3:7, 9)

The biblical mandate has not changed. Therefore, men must not only share the domain of the platform with others but must develop intimate relationships with leaders and potential leaders in a true discipling (instructing and modeling) ministry. In turn, these leaders will be equipped to do the same.