



DISCIPLESCHURCH

Membership Class

Class Session 4

Elder Priorities &

The Membership Covenant

Glorifying God Through Lives Transformed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ

CLASS SESSION 4: Elder Priorities & The Covenant

I. *What Is an Elder?*

The elders (also called pastors/overseers) are the men God has ordained and qualified to serve as the leaders of the local church. Biblical elders have the high responsibility of managing and shepherding the flock God has entrusted to their care. God's word calls for the elders to protect, feed, lead/manage, and care for the members of the church. They are servant leaders who consistently seek direction for the body from the Lord through prayer and diligent study of the Bible, while maintaining the highest biblical standards of integrity and maturity before God and man.

II. *Some Scriptures That Reveal This Office/Role to Us*

- **Hebrews 13:17** 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.
- **1 Thessalonians 5:12-13** 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 ...
- **Hebrews 13:7** Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.
- **Acts 20:28** (NIV) [Speaking to the elders of Ephesus] "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you *overseers*. Be *shepherds* of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood."
 - The Greek word for "overseer" means "supervisor, manager, guardian" (Acts 20:28; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 2:25).
- **Ephesians 4:11-12** And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the *shepherds* and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ
 - The Greek word for "shepherd" is where we get the title "pastor" (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2; Ephesians 4:11).
- **1 Peter 5:1-4** 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.
 - The Greek word for "elder" means "a mature man, fatherly leader" (1 Timothy 5:17; Titus 1:5; James 5:14; etc.).

In all these instructions to/for the local church leadership, these terms/titles (elder, overseer, and pastor/shepherd) all describe the same office of church leadership in Scripture!

- What that means is, biblically speaking, an elder is not a different position or office than an overseer or a pastor. We use these terms interchangeably at Disciples, like Scripture does: elder-pastor-overseer.

III. The Scriptures Give Four Main Duties for Which the Elders Are Responsible

FEED, PROTECT, LEAD, and CARE

1. FEEDING the Flock

Elders are required to feed the flock by teaching them the word of God (1 Timothy 3:2). Further, biblical elders are responsible for using the Bible to encourage and exhort others in sound doctrine (Titus 1:9; Ephesians 4:11-12). Though not every elder will have full-time preaching responsibilities (some will be more naturally gifted in communication and/or have more time for preparation), every elder must be able to teach the full counsel of God in the Bible.

In John 21, Jesus tells Peter, "Feed my sheep."

This is the charge given, not just Josh, as the primary preaching pastor, but to every man whom God will raise up to the office of biblical elder.

Paul is clear in 1 Timothy 3:2 that elders must "be able to teach."

1 Timothy 3:2 Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach

In Titus 1:9, Paul goes on to say an elder must be able to use the Bible to exhort others in sound doctrine.

Titus 1:9 (NIV) He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

Practically, what this looks like for us:

- Teach-Sunday
- Teach-Midweek
- Teach/train leaders
- Disciple others
- Know and explain theology/doctrine

2. PROTECTING the Flock

A major role of a biblical elder's work is to protect the church from false teachers, false gospels, spiritual predators (wolves), and sin from festering in the church. The New Testament is clear that false teachers are a real threat to the church and should be taken very seriously (Acts 20:30-31). Therefore, biblical elders are responsible for having enough biblical knowledge to refute any false doctrine, and they are responsible for giving the church's official stance on any issue that might come up (Acts 15:6; Titus 1:5, 9).

Acts 20:28-31 (NIV) **Keep watch** over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So **be on your guard!** Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

Keep watch:

Verse 28 starts "Keep watch," ("Pay careful attention to" - ESV) and then verse 31 says "be on your guard ..."

Practically, what this looks like for us:

- Prayer
- Doctrine
- Accountability
- Combating false teaching
- Christian discipline

3. LEADING the Flock

Biblical elders are responsible for leading the church by providing the direction and vision of the church as well as managing the church's people, property, finances, and other resources (1 Timothy 5:17; Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 5:1-2).

The kind of leadership Jesus modeled for us and commissions our elders to is servant leadership. It is vital that we have the right kind of shepherd leadership, or as a church we are in trouble.

Proverbs 29:18 (NASB) Where there is no vision, the people are unrestrained ...

1 Peter 5:2 (NIV) Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care ...

1 Corinthians 11:1 (NIV) Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

Practically, what this looks like for us:

- Vision/Direction:
 - Prayerful and Bible-saturated
 - Communication of vision/direction with the congregation
 - Communication of vision/direction with group leaders
 - Pastors' collaboration/training
 - Community/regional relations
 - Leading by example

- Management:
 - Non-profit roles/responsibilities
 - Finances
 - Campus
 - Missions
 - Membership
 - Testimony
 - Staff
 - Deacon
 - Group leaders/disciple-makers
 - Service team leaders (church and community)

4. CARING for the Flock

Biblical elders are responsible for being sure the practical needs of the flock are being met by the ministry of pastoral care to the church, visiting the sick, comforting the bereaved, praying for members in crisis or hardship, providing counseling for a wide variety of issues, and anything else that relates to the inner life of the flock.

➤ **Elders provide direct care**

Biblical elders are responsible for providing the pastoral care to the church by meeting the practical and diverse needs of the flock.

Acts 20:35 “In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

James 5:14 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.

➤ **Elders are to equip the saints to provide care**

The simple truth is the elders will not be able to tend to every need or ministry the church requires. This is why God calls the shepherds “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (**Ephesians 4:12**).

Practically, what this look like for us:

- **Care/visitation shut in**
- **Care/visitation emergency/hardship**
- **Prayer chain**
- **Counseling**
- **Deacons and *Love Others* funds**
- **Appreciation and encouragement**

DISCIPLES CHURCH

MEMBERSHIP COVENANT

Introduction

As Christians, we are members of God's household called to function, participate, and minister in a particular local church within the body of Christ. A healthy body requires that each member do its part well. A healthy church requires the same: members who are sacrificially committed and well-equipped to grow and to do the works of service that God has prepared in advance for them to do. Being a member of the local church is really about being a committed and accountable part of a family. The elders of that local church are called to assist members in growth, to love and lead, to provide counsel and aid, and to pray for, teach, and guide them.

What is a Church Membership Covenant?

A church membership covenant is not a vow of "till death do us part," but it is a promise. By covenanting with a local church, you are agreeing to biblically participate and remain faithful to the specifics stated in the signed covenant for as long of a season as God has you in that city while that church is operating in a biblical manner. Because you value and respect the promise you have made, the authority of that church's leadership, and the other members God has placed in your life, a Covenant Member needs to prayerfully seek God, His word, and those over and around him or her before seeking to part ways with the church to which you have covenanted to.

Disciples Church Membership Covenant

The Disciples Church membership covenant includes a personal statement of faith, a statement of agreement on core biblical doctrines as stated in our Statement of Beliefs, the obligations of church elders to the Disciples Church members, and the obligations of members to each other and the Lord. Though the covenant does define the relationship between members and the church, it is first and foremost a promise made to God as a commitment to His glory and then to His bride, the church, to faithfully participate in fulfilling the mission of this local body.

I. PERSONAL STATEMENT OF FAITH

- I am a Christian saved from the perfect, eternal wrath of God by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior, based on His life, death, and resurrection. In Christ, I am assured of eternal life.
- I believe Jesus Christ is exactly who He claimed to be.
- I have been made a new creation in Christ, and I repent of my sin.
- In obedience to Scripture, I have been baptized to personally identify with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, and to publicly demonstrate my commitment as a disciple of Jesus.

II. STATEMENT OF AGREEMENT ON CORE BIBLICAL DOCTRINES

- I understand and affirm the Statement of Beliefs, which are an expression of the core beliefs of Disciples Church.
- I understand the importance of submission to church leadership and will adhere to Disciples Church's position on primary theological issues, and I will not be divisive over secondary issues.
- I agree that the 66 books of the Bible are the ultimate doctrinal authority on all matters.

III. DISCIPLES CHURCH BYLAWS

- I have been given the opportunity to read and understand the church's bylaws, and I agree to be bound by them.

IV. OBLIGATION OF DISCIPLES CHURCH ELDERS TO ITS MEMBERS

- We agree to meet the criteria assigned to us in the Scriptures.
- We agree to seek God's will for our church to the best of our ability as we study the Scriptures and follow the Spirit.
- We agree to care for the individual members of the church and seek their growth in grace, truth, and love.
- We agree to equip the members of the church for the work of ministry.
- We agree to provide teaching and counsel from the whole of Scripture.
- We agree to be on guard against false teachers.
- We agree to exercise church discipline when necessary.
- We agree to set an example and join in fulfilling the duties of church members.

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V. MY OBLIGATION TO DISCIPLES CHURCH AS A MEMBER

I have taken the Covenant Membership class, and having understood the Five Priorities of Covenant Membership, I agree:

TESTIMONY

- to share the story of God's grace in my life with others, including those who do not know Jesus;
- to regularly share testimony with Disciples Church about how God is working in my life; and
- to follow the command and example of Jesus by participating in the ordinances prescribed to His Church:
 - by being baptized after conversion and
 - by regularly and accountably remembering and celebrating the person and work of Christ through the Lord's Supper.

WORSHIP

- to actively seek to worship God with my entire life;
- to make it a top priority to regularly attend and participate in weekly worship services at Disciples Church;
- to commit to daily enjoying unity with and submitting to Jesus through regular Bible reading, prayer, fellowship, and the practice of spiritual disciplines; and
- to steward the resources God has given me, including my time, talents, and treasure. This includes regular financial giving, service, and participation in this church that is sacrificial, cheerful, consistent, and voluntary.

DISCIPLESHIP

- to actively pursue and be a part of intentional relationships with mature believers of Disciples Church, where others can know me and help me as I seek to glorify God with my whole life;
- to commit myself to reading, understanding, and applying the Bible;
- to utilize the resources of the church to help me grow in my understanding and application of the gospel; and
- to be disciplined unto making disciples of Jesus.

SERVICE

- to be committed to regularly serving in the church where needed;
- to seek to understand how God has gifted me, actively pursuing biblical growth in my gift;
- to serve and encourage the faith of others in this church with the biblical use of my gifts; and
- to serve those outside of this church with the biblical use of my gifts.

ACCOUNTABILITY

- to continually uphold the Disciples Church doctrinal statements and not be divisive to its teaching;
- to submit myself to the ultimate authority of the Bible on all issues;
- to submit myself to the leadership, care, and correction from the elders;
- to walk in holiness, by God's grace, as an act of worship to Jesus Christ, and should I sin, to confess my sins to Christian brothers and sisters and to repent of my sin;
- to uphold the Peacemaker's Pledge by resolving any conflict that arises with another person biblically and without delay;
- to not be an active member of another local church while being a covenant member at Disciples Church; and
- to participate in surveys and/or special meetings as the elders deem necessary.

VI. MY COMMITMENT TO THE MISSION OF DISCIPLES CHURCH

The mission of Disciples Church is to glorify God through lives transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I understand the mission statement of Disciples Church and commit to participate in this mission as a diligent, faithful disciple of Jesus, wherein my identity would be in Him, my worship would be for Him, my fellowship would be through Him, and my interaction with the culture would be for His glory. I understand that this covenant obligates me to the members of Disciples Church and is an acknowledgment of my submission to the elders of this church. I accept the responsibility to proactively talk with Disciples Church elders if I have any concerns regarding Disciples Church, and I commit to have in-person discussion and consideration of Scripture with the elders unto unified agreement if at any time I believe there is biblical warrant to leave this church and/or I desire to make a transfer from this church family to another church.

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