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STRENGTHENING THE MEMBERS OF FIRST BAPTIST
CHURCH IN HOLLY POND, ALABAMA, IN A BIBLICAL
UNDERSTANDING OF A PLURALITY OF PASTORS

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Robert Benjamin Smothers

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STRENGTHENING THE MEMBERS OF FIRST BAPTIST
CHURCH IN HOLLY POND, ALABAMA, IN A BIBLICAL
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Robert Benjamin Smothers

Read and Approved by:

Faculty Supervisor: Michael E. Pohlman

Second Reader: Joseph C. Harrod

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To my wife, our children, and the faithful members of First Baptist Church of
Holly Pond who serve as avenues of God's grace in my life.

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PREFACE

This project was accomplished through the provision of God's glorious grace, and the support of more people than could be rightfully mentioned.

Dr. Pohlman's wisdom, encouragement and gracious leadership proved more than a treasure throughout the project. His clear and gentle instructions were always profitable, and I am forever endeared to this man for shepherding me through every peak and valley of this journey.

Steve and Sherry Smothers, along with their three oldest sons—Woody, David, and Seth—deserve many thanks for the way they have influenced my life. I am blessed to be the son of Steve and Sherry, and the baby brother of the aforementioned men.

My fellow pastors—Colby Adams and Allen Murphy—along with the people who make up the faith family at FBC Holly Pond, have no idea how valuable their ministry is to me. If I could properly communicate to them exactly how weak and cowardly I am, they would perhaps begin to understand how God uses their prayers, support, and encouragement to sustain me in God's call on my life.

My children—Titus, Maylie Grace, Jude, Karis, and Lydia—are tools in the hand of God. Knowing that my affection for them is not even a fraction of the love God has for me is a constant source of peace and joy. These children drive me to know Christ more in order that I may not only raise them in the instruction of the Lord, but also that I may equip them to tell of God's glorious deeds to the coming generations.

Finally, and second only to my gratitude for God, is my thankfulness for my wife, Jada Nicole Smothers. No words can describe the steadfast blessing she is in my life. When I found her, I found a good thing from the Lord. She is my helper, my greatest companion, a speaker of truth into my life, and an obvious example of how God has done far more abundantly than I could ever ask or imagine.

Benjamin Smothers

Holly Pond, Alabama

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The First Baptist Church in Holly Pond, Alabama (FBCHP) has been preserved by God for approximately 130 years. For 122 of those years, the church government model operated by an unwritten rule that the leadership of the church would be shared between a single pastor and a deacon board. However, in 2012, the church formally added an associate pastor to aid in pastoral ministry, and with that addition, a biblical model featuring leadership by a plurality of pastors began to take shape. A few years later, the church body identified and affirmed a layman who had been gifted by God to serve as a pastor and added him to the pastoral leadership as the administrative pastor. These three pastoral positions—each of which were formally approved by the church body—now form a plurality of pastors and serve as the leadership arm of the church government structure at FBCHP. This project aimed to strengthen the faith family’s understanding of a plurality of pastors and bolster their confidence in the biblical model of church government that they have put in place at FBCHP.

Context

In 2009, at the age of 27, FBCHP called me to my first pastorate. Having never been a lead pastor, and accepting God’s call to lead a church with no formal policy on church government, I was confident in only one strategy: expository preaching. As the discipline of expository preaching became the mainstay in the pulpit at FBCHP, one of the results was that I—along with faithful remnant of the congregation—developed the conviction that the biblical model of church government features a congregation led by a plurality of pastors and served by a body of deacons. Even though the unwritten tradition for leadership was that of a single pastor who shared leadership duties with a deacon body,

the congregation began to affirm men from the faith family who had been gifted by God to serve as pastors and appoint these men to pastoral roles. This shift in the understanding of church government led to the dissipation of the single pastor and deacon body model of church leadership. Presently, the single pastor and deacon body model has been replaced with a plurality of pastors who lead the church in spiritual matters. Those pastors are supported by deacons who carry out the functional needs of church gatherings, meet practical needs of the faith family, and assist in maintaining campus facilities. Although the faith family trusts that the new leadership structure is biblical, that does not negate the fact that it is a young concept in the life of the church and in need of a stronger understanding. Because of a lack of understanding in regard to a plurality of pastors, three concerns were present.

The first concern was that a small minority of the congregation's most tenured members are not in full agreement with a leadership model that features a plurality of pastors. Up until the last decade, the church had always functioned under a single pastor and deacon body system of leadership. Even though that model of leadership is not found in Scripture, pulling away from the traditional way of operation is difficult for a few long standing members. This inability, or perhaps unwillingness, to see and agree with Scripture's clear pattern of church leadership hampers the overall unity of the faith family.

The second concern was that members do not thoroughly grasp the biblical foundation for a plurality of pastors confidently enough to give a clear explanation. Even though the church members overwhelmingly trust in the leadership structure that features a plurality of pastors—as evidenced by their approval of additional pastors to serve alongside their senior pastor—their only interaction with these truths has been via the multiple sermons they have heard on the matter over the past decade. Most of the congregation has no problem proclaiming their trust in a system that features a plurality of pastors, but there is no evidence they could point to specific biblical passages as their reason for trusting a leadership structure consisting of a plurality of pastors.

A third reason the church members needed to be strengthened in their understanding of a plurality of pastors was because this particular leadership structure was not the normative pattern of the church culture that surrounds FBCHP. As prospective members visit the fellowship at FBCHP, they often come from congregations that operate by governmental structures where a single pastor and a deacon body share the leadership responsibilities of the church. Unless members have a strong understanding of a plurality of pastors, the different views on leadership from surrounding churches may infiltrate FBCHP. Such an infiltration could lead to confusion or discord (or both) and negatively impact the health of the church.

A final concern related to the way pastors and deacons serve together. Currently, there is great liberty for both pastors and deacons. Pastors can focus on their top priorities of prayer, ministering the Word, and overseeing the flock through pastoral care and administration. Deacons consider their ministry a joy as they have no unrealistic expectations and are simply able to walk in the strengths of their calling to serve the faith family in the practical areas of ministry. This liberty was not the case in the former model of leadership. Often, the pastor felt restricted in his leadership as he was expected to run every detail of church life through the deacon body for approval. From the implementation of a new members class, to the selection of Sunday School curriculum, deacons served more like a checks and balances system for the pastor instead of the model servants that Scripture prescribes. Just as the pastor lacked the liberty to lead, so also faithful deacons felt undue pressure because they were expected to make leadership decisions. These decisions often caused deacons to be dragged into church politics, be unfairly criticized, and made many of them regret their decision to serve on the deacon body.

Rationale

Although the model of a plurality of pastors at FBCHP is biblical, it is still relatively new and not thoroughly grasped by all members. Therefore, this project intended to increase the confidence of members, aged twelve years and up, in

understanding how a plurality of pastors is a biblical leadership structure. A strong understanding that this leadership model is founded on God’s Word would benefit the church in at least three ways.

The first benefit would be unity. When the understanding of a plurality of pastors is strengthened among the congregation, the church will have a greater opportunity to stand in agreement around the church’s leadership model. Clear exposure to what Scripture teaches about a plurality of pastors not only assures genuine converts that the model of leadership at FBCHP is biblical, but also “equips the saints” to engage in the ministry of providing clarity on the subject to other members in “the body of Christ” (Eph 4:12). When clarity on this model of church leadership flows from both the pulpit and the pew, the minds of all the faith family will have a greater opportunity to avoid “divisions” and “be united in the same mind and the same judgment” (1 Cor 1:10).¹

Another benefit of a congregation who is strong in their understanding of a plurality of pastors would be their ability to serve prospective members by providing clear biblical evidence in regard to FBCHP’s leadership model. Prospective members have a variety of opportunities to interact with current members. Whether in small groups, D² groups, or personal interaction via other areas of life, current members who are confident in the biblical foundation of the church’s leadership model would gain the wisdom needed to give an answer for the church’s leadership model if the topic should arise during these interactions. Members who have these truths dwelling in them would excel in “teaching and admonishing” non-members, and dramatically increase the potential for wisdom to grow in biblical leadership (Col 3:16).

The final benefit of strengthening the faith family’s confidence in a plurality of pastors is that the church would be moving into the future with an accurate picture of the pastor, deacon, and congregation relationship. Pastors would be able to lead with joy and feel no need to be on the lookout for an angry deacon whose imagined authority has been

¹ All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

usurped (Heb 13:17). Deacons would no longer feel the pressure of weighty decisions and church politics, but instead be liberated to use their gifts from God to serve His people and pursue the “good standing . . . and great confidence” that comes from faithful deaconship (1 Tim 3:13). When members understand the Bible’s message concerning a plurality of pastors, they no longer view deacons as a branch of government to balance the pastors, and the church can move into the days ahead with a greater opportunity for sustained health.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to strengthen the membership of First Baptist Church in Holly Pond, Alabama, in a biblical understanding of a plurality of pastors.

Goals

The following three goals determine the completion of this project. Once these goals were attained, the membership of FBCHP would be strengthened in the biblical understanding of a plurality of pastors.

1. The first goal was to assess the current level of knowledge concerning the Bible’s principles for a plurality of pastors among members of FBCHP.
2. The second goal was to develop a six-session curriculum to equip members of FBCHP with a biblical understanding of a plurality of pastors.
3. The third goal was to increase the knowledge concerning the Bible’s principles for a plurality of pastors among members of FBCHP.

Research Methodology

The first goal was to assess the current level of knowledge concerning the Bible’s principles for a plurality of pastors among members of FBCHP. This goal was measured by administering the Biblical Church Leadership Survey (BCLS).² This goal was considered successfully met when at least 70 percent of church members who are in

² See appendix 1. All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use.

at least 18 years of age, and are active in Sunday school, completed the BCLS, and the inventory had been analyzed yielding a clearer picture of the current level of knowledge concerning the Bible's principles for church leadership among those surveyed.

The second goal was to develop a six-session curriculum to equip members with a biblical understanding of a plurality of pastors. The curriculum explored how a plurality of pastors is a pattern of church leadership found in the Bible, in historical Baptist life, and is practically beneficial for pastors, deacons and congregation. This goal was measured by an expert panel who utilized a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum.³ This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criteria met or exceeded the sufficient level. If the 90 percent benchmark failed to be met, then the material would have been revised until it met the standard. Because the initial curriculum reached the standard, no revision was necessary.

The third goal was to assess the level of increase (if any) in the knowledge concerning the Bible's principles for a plurality of pastors among members of FBCHP. This goal was measured by re-administering the Biblical Church Leadership Survey.⁴ This goal was considered successfully met when a *t*-test for dependent samples revealed an increase in the knowledge concerning the Bible's principles for church leadership.

Definitions and Limitation/Delimitations

The following definition, of the phrase *plurality of pastors*, is meant to bring clarity to the readers of this project.

Plurality of pastors. *Plurality of pastors* is the terminology used at FBCHP to describe the pastors' position in the church's leadership structure. In most evangelical circles, this leadership structure is known as a plurality of elders. Alexander Strauch

³ See appendix 3.

⁴ See appendix 1.

defines this type of leadership as a “biblically qualified council of men that jointly pastors the local church.”⁵ Strauch’s definition perfectly sums up what the leadership of FBCHP means by a *plurality of pastors*. Although the term *elder* is widely used throughout the New Testament, the average FBCHP church member has never attended a church where the leadership was identified by any term other than *pastor*. Therefore, for the sake of clarity, the leadership of FBCHP feels it best to use the term *pastors* when referring to those who lead the church.

Conclusion

First Baptist Church of Holly Pond is in the early years of being led by a plurality of pastors, and a thorough understanding of that leadership model from a biblical perspective is lacking among the membership. By preaching what God’s Word teaches in regard to a plurality of pastors, and providing a curriculum that explains this model of leadership from Scriptures, FBCHP was strengthened in their understanding of a plurality of pastors and was in a position to move toward greater church health with unity and confidence.

⁵ Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Eldership* (Littleton, CO: Lewis & Roth, 1995), 31.

CHAPTER 2
BIBLICAL EVIDENCE FOR A PLURALITY OF
PASTORS AS THE MODEL OF
CHURCH LEADERSHIP

While the concept of shared leadership among a plurality of pastors is new to FBCHP, an examination of passages from Scripture reveals evidence for a plurality of pastors as a biblically founded model. Exegesis from portions of Exodus 18:13-26, 1 Timothy 3:1-13, and Acts 14:23 will verify that shared leadership is an acceptable plan from God, is placed upon the office of the pastor in the New Testament, and is the model practiced by churches throughout the New Testament. An understanding of these three truths should serve as sufficient evidence to help genuine believers become comfortable with a church leadership model featuring a plurality of pastors.

**Shared Leadership: An Acceptable
Plan (Exod 18:13-26)**

A detailed look at Exodus 18:13-26 reveals how shared leadership is an acceptable plan from God and is demonstrated early in the nation of Israel's history. The children of Israel are fresh out of bondage in Egypt and Moses is their leader. His tenure is young, but the difficulties of leadership are already abundant. Having been exiled from the rule of Egypt, God's people are dealing with disputes and questions concerning their new life under the exclusive rule of God. In the near future these issues will be amplified as Moses officially delivers God's Law for how He demands His people live as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation among the nations of the earth (Exod 19:5-6).¹ As the questions and disputes are destined to continue, and as Moses will become more incapable of bearing

¹ Exod 20:1-23:33 records where Moses delivers God's Law to His people.

the judicial burden alone, Brevard Childs notes how God makes “historical changes in Israel’s legal structure.”²

Exodus 18:13-26 reveals how a key component of Israel’s new legal structure is plural leadership. In other words, the responsibility for overseeing Israel’s new legal structure will not rest upon one man but will be shared by a plurality of men. As Moses enrolls men to aid him in his leadership, the God approved plan of shared leadership begins to weave its way into the Old Testament life of Israel and eventually the New Testament church.

Before diving into the passage at hand, it is important to note that the shared leadership principle seen in Israel’s judicial system is not meant to serve as a model for the leadership structure in the New Testament church. Tony Merida rightly asserts, “In regard to the church, our situation is not exactly the same.”³ However, that does not mean this text does not contain principles that educate the church in regard to leadership. Merida continues, “Our situation is different, but there is still a general connection to shared ministry.”⁴ One such way this passage instructs those in the church today who are not familiar with shared leadership is by showing that the principle of shared leadership is not a new approach or an idea of man; rather, it is a pattern approved by God and on display in the earliest days of the Israel’s history.

The events of Exodus 18:13-26 showcase how Moses needs wise counsel. Therefore, God providentially orders the steps of Moses’s father-in-law (Jethro) to the camp of Israel. After only one day of observing the leadership model in Moses’s judicial system, Jethro shares a twofold message with his son-in-law. First, he cautions Moses against utilizing a one-man leadership model. Second, he counsels the leader of Israel to

² Brevard Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 329.

³ Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Exodus*, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary Series (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2014), 114.

⁴ Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Exodus*, 115.

adopt a shared leadership model into his judicial system. With God’s confirmation, Moses heeds the caution and counsel of his father-in-law. He abandons the one-man leadership model, adopts a shared leadership model, and thus shared leadership displays itself as an acceptable plan from God.

Caution to Avoid the One-Man Leadership Model

Jethro’s first morning in Israel’s camp gives him a front row seat to Moses’s leadership responsibilities. Exodus 18:13 records Jethro encountering how “Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood around Moses from morning till evening.” Obviously, Moses’s day began early, ended late, and overflowed with an enormous amount of work—but what kind of work? What was Moses doing? The passage at hand reveals at least two tasks.

First, as the leader of God’s people, he acted as judge. As Moses provides an explanation of his work to Jethro, the leader of Israel explains that when the Israelites “have a dispute, they come to me and I decide between one person and another” (v. 16). Clearly, Moses operates as a settler of disputes, or as Peter Enns notes, he is carrying out the “adjudication between parties.”⁵ However, settling disputes is not the only responsibility Moses performs for the people.

Second, Moses reveals his responsibility to teach God’s people. After explaining his role as judge to Jethro, Moses says, “And,” which indicates the reality of a second task, “I make them know the statutes of God and his laws” (v. 16). In other words, Moses is teaching. He is helping the people find answers as they come and “inquire of God” (v. 15). The reality of Moses’s teaching role is voiced by Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch. They note how the language of verse 20 calls for Moses “to instruct the people

⁵ Peter Enns, *Exodus*, The NIV Application Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 288.

in the commandments of God and their own walk and conduct.”⁶ Clearly, then, Moses is not simply tending to the legal issues but is also teaching the instructions of God.

The workload of judging disputes and teaching God’s ways to an entire nation is a gargantuan assignment; especially for one man. Jethro understands the weight of such a task and promptly asks Moses, “Why do you sit alone, and all the people stand around you from morning till evening?” (v. 14). To state Jethro’s question another way: why have you adopted a one-man leadership model?

One would hope Moses would respond, “I lead in this way because it is the manner God has prescribed.” However, that is not the answer in the text. Instead, Moses explains that he does what he does “because the people come to me to inquire of God” (v. 15). This is not an acceptable response to Jethro, and he quickly opposes his son-in-law’s answer. Douglas Stuart suggests that Jethro’s opposition to Moses’s strategy implies that Moses’s method of operation stems from logic as opposed to God’s instruction.⁷ In other words, Stuart implies that Moses’s use of the one-man leadership model is not prescribed by God.

Following Moses’s unacceptable explanation to Jethro, Jethro again takes charge of the conversation and issues a stern word of caution: “What you are doing is not good” (v. 17). That is, your one-man leadership model is not good. The wise father-in-law does not stop there but presses the issue to caution Moses about the outcome of his one-man leadership model. Jethro warns, “You and the people with you will certainly wear yourselves out, for the thing is too heavy for you. You are not able to do it alone” (v. 18). Jethro is concerned and proceeds to caution Moses. Three features of Jethro’s caution to Moses are noteworthy.

⁶ Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 1:377.

⁷ Douglas Stuart, *Exodus*, The New American Commentary, vol. 2 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 416.

First, Jethro is concerned with Moses working by himself. Jethro sees the certain failure in the one-man method of leadership and explains to his son-in-law, “The thing is too heavy for you. You are not able to do it alone” (v. 18). The language Jethro uses here urges Moses to see his inability. In Genesis 15:5, God uses similar language when He asks Abraham to “number the stars, if you are able.” The implication of course is that Abraham is not able to count the stars; he literally cannot accomplish such a task. Just as Abraham is not able to count the stars, neither is Moses able to lead the people alone.

Also, within Jethro’s caution comes the promise of not simply a failed leadership model, but the reality of Moses reaching a place where he will “wear . . . out” (v. 18). This phrase comes from a Hebrew word that means to wither, decay, or crumble away and is used in other places to describe the withering of a leaf (Isa 1:30) and the fading of grass (Ps 37:2).⁸ Jethro is warning Moses that his system of leadership is pushing him down a path where he will “lose heart.”⁹ Today’s church culture would be warning Moses of burnout. Notice that Jethro does not warn of the failure of a system, but the failure of a soul. The one-man leadership model currently in use by Moses is headed for the disastrous scenario where Moses quits because he cannot go on, and God’s people are left without a leader.

A third feature of Jethro’s caution involves the people. If Moses were to wither away, one might suggest another leader would take his place. However, do not miss Jethro’s warning that the one-man leadership model is not only detrimental for the leader, but also for the people whom he leads. Jethro notes for Moses, “You and the people with you will certainly wear yourselves out” (v. 18). Stuart comments, “The method can’t be

⁸ Ludwig Kohler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. Johann Jakob Stamm, trans. M. E. J. Richardson, electronic ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), 663.

⁹ Kohler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 663.

right if it results in everyone's frustration and exhaustion."¹⁰ If Moses continues to work alone, everyone will suffer.

Jethro's observation of Moses's one-man leadership method stirs great concern within his heart. He refuses to keep silent over the inevitable outcome of both Moses and God's people crumbling beneath the weight of a poor leadership structure. Therefore, Jethro lovingly implores Moses to abandon his strategy, and offers him counsel for a model of shared leadership.

Counsel to Adopt a Shared Leadership Model

Jethro's counsel for Moses to adopt a model of shared leadership begins in verse 19 and reaches into verse 22. God's desire for His people to be under the direction of shared leadership is made clear by at least two features of this text. First, the Scripture shows the counsel Jethro gives is from God. Second, the Scripture reveals that the counsel Jethro gives calls for Moses to share his leadership responsibilities with other men.

The source of the counsel. At first glance, the counsel given to Moses appears to flow solely from the mind of Jethro. Understandably then, one may see this advice as a pragmatic tactic that employs a strategy of man. Furthermore, the counsel comes not from a priest of Israel, but of Midian (v 1). However, two observations from the text verify that the wisdom of God is behind this counsel.

First, a strong case can be made that Jethro is not simply offering counsel from the world's tool kit. Rather, the text is clear that Jethro is an instrument used of God. After hearing of all that "God had done for Moses and for Israel" (v. 1), Jethro becomes a man committed to the God of Israel. News of God's gracious acts to His children prods Jethro to not only rejoice (v. 9), but also confess the following realization: "Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods" (v. 11). Enns puts forth the thought that with this confession:

¹⁰ Stuart, *Exodus*, 417.

“Jethro bears witness to God’s saving power and thus acknowledges him as the true God.”¹¹ His confession is followed with a burnt offering. Merida suggests the offering “was understood to atone for . . . sins and to appeal for forgiveness and acceptance before God.”¹² Merida states confidently that “at some point Jethro got converted” and aptly notes how after the offering, Jethro joins Aaron, Moses, and all the elders of Israel for a meal in the very presence of God.¹³ Jethro’s conversion gives him credibility as a voice from God. Amazingly, the priest of Midian is converted to follow the God of Israel, and the very next day he is used by God to speak divine instruction to Moses. Therefore, any concern that Jethro’s counsel is worldly or somehow not from God may be dismissed.

A second observation makes it clearer that Jethro’s counsel is not the counsel of man. It is undeniable that the casual reading of Jethro’s words “obey my voice; I will give you advice, and God be with you” (v. 19) appears to establish Jethro as the authority behind his counsel. However, Stuart notes that the phrase “and God be with you” is Jethro’s way of saying his counsel is “subject to God’s confirmation.”¹⁴ Commenting on this text, John Calvin and Charles Bingham note that Jethro “does . . . not proudly boast that this will be the fruit of his own prudence, but ascribes it to God’s blessing and grace.”¹⁵ Later in the passage, the NIV translates Jethro’s exhortation to Moses as, “If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain” (v. 23). Enns notes how “a number of commentators have mentioned, Jethro’s advice is also God’s command” and furthermore states how it makes most sense to read the “clause [of verse 23] as Jethro adding “punch” to his advice: “If you do this—*God commands you*—you will be able to

¹¹ Enns, *Exodus*, 290.

¹² Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Exodus*, 113.

¹³ Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Exodus*, 112-13.

¹⁴ Stuart, *Exodus*, 417.

¹⁵ John Calvin and Charles W. Bingham, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses Arranged in the Form of a Harmony* (Bellingham, WA: Logos, 2010), 1:305.

stand the strain.”¹⁶ In other words, Jethro takes no credit for his proposal for shared leadership, but insists that his counsel is God’s command.

The writer of Proverbs informs of how “iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another” (27:17). One glorious implication of this truth is that God will often send counsel through the avenue of other individuals to aid His people. Jethro’s commitment to the God of Israel, along with his exhortation for Moses to affirm that his counsel is from God, verifies that this man from Midian is God’s chosen avenue to bring counsel to Moses.

The substance of the counsel. The thrust of Jethro’s God-given counsel to Moses is, “Get some help.”¹⁷ It is obvious the concerned father-in-law is perplexed at Moses’s single-leader strategy, for after observing his work he asks, “Why do you sit alone” (v. 14). Later in the conversation Jethro moves from displaying curiosity to divulging counsel: “Look for able men . . . place such men over the people . . . let them judge the people . . . and they will bear the burden with you” (vv. 21-23). Jethro does not mince his words as he clearly counsels Moses to adopt a shared leadership model. In other words, Moses is instructed to find some men who can be counted on to carry out some of the exact duties he himself performs. These men—just as Moses has been doing—will “judge the people at all times” (v. 22).

Several words highlighting how these men are being called to a leadership role could be considered, but a quick look at the word “chiefs” in Exodus 18:21 will suffice to show that the men Moses selects for these judicial appointments will serve as leaders. Moses is told to take the men who meet certain character qualifications and “place such men over the people as chiefs” (v. 21). The reading of this verse in English clearly indicates these men are responsible to be in a position of authority—“over the people”—and a quick

¹⁶ Enns, *Exodus*, 288-89, emphasis added.

¹⁷ Enns, *Exodus*, 288.

look at the Hebrew language makes the case stronger. “Chiefs” is translated from the Hebrew term *śar*. Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs note the word “ruler” is an acceptable translation, and the King James Version foregoes the use of “chiefs” for “rulers.”¹⁸ Clarity concerning these men as leaders is brought into greater focus as William Propp observes how an angry Israelite once used the word *śar* as he sarcastically asks Moses, “Who made you a prince (*śar*) . . . over us” (Exod 2:14).¹⁹ Just as the angry Israelite views Moses as placing himself in a position of leadership, so also the honest interpreter of Scripture must view the appointees of Exodus 18 as men being placed in positions of leadership with Moses.

Summary

Whether Moses realizes it or not, he is on the brink of crumbling beneath the weight of responsibilities associated with leading God’s people. Furthermore, God’s people are headed for failure because they had only one man to help shepherd their hearts to God. However, in accordance with God’s grace and purpose, He providentially orders the steps of Jethro to address Moses’s problem. Jethro—a man who declares that “the LORD is greater than all gods” (v. 11)—clearly counsels Moses to avoid the one-man leadership model and quickly adopt a shared leadership model. Moses obviously views Jethro’s counsel as counsel from God, and adopts the new, shared leadership strategy.

Admittedly, this text alone cannot stand as the sole basis for a plurality of pastors in a New Testament church, nor is that the purpose of its investigation. However, for those who serve in a context where the idea of a plurality of pastors is foreign, this portion of Scripture verifies that shared leadership is not unusual or something new. Exodus 18 gives the assurance that shared leadership is a model employed from the

¹⁸ Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), 978.

¹⁹ William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, The Anchor Yale Bible, vol 2. (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1999), 632.

earliest days of God’s people and is clearly set forth as an acceptable plan in some of the earliest days of the Old Testament.

The Office of Overall Leadership (1 Tim 3:1-13)

Many congregations in Southern Baptist life are confused in regard to the overall leadership of the church. A proper understanding of 1 Timothy 3:1-13 helps eliminate that confusion. In this text, Paul reveals how God assigns the overall leadership responsibility of the church to the office of pastor. This is one of several places where Scripture clearly places the overall leadership of the church upon the pastoral office (1 Tim 3:4-5; 5:17; Heb 13:17; 1 Pet 5:2-3). David Platt states the issue of the leadership of the church: “Elders are entrusted by Christ with the responsibility of overall leadership in the church.”²⁰ It is important to stress the word *overall* in the phrase *overall leadership* because even though the pastoral office is responsible for the overall leadership of the church, it is not the only place from which leadership flows in the church. For the church to function in a healthy manner, some leadership responsibilities must be delegated by the pastors to those outside the pastoral office. Arguably the most common place of pastor assigned leadership resides with the office of a deacon.

For those serving in a context where plural leadership is absent, one of the most popular leadership models is that of a one-pastor model. In this particular model, as explained by Wayne Grudem, “the pastor is seen as the only elder in the church, and there is an elected board of deacons who serve under his authority and give him support.”²¹ Unfortunately, a pastor in this leadership model is often expected to share the overall leadership responsibilities with the deacons, which leads to confusion among the church body regarding to who possesses the overall leadership responsibility in the church. Benjamin Merkle is aware of such situations and explains, “In single-pastor churches

²⁰ David Platt, *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary Series (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2013), 54.

²¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 1140.

deacons are sometimes treated as de facto elders or something in between elders and deacons.”²² Grudem also warns that “the ‘single elder’ system can change and *function* more like a ‘plural elders’ government, only those who function as elders are instead called ‘deacons.’”²³ Because there are confused congregations concerning which office of the church bears the overall responsibility to lead the church, it is helpful to ask, “What does the Bible say in regards as to whom God assigns the task of overall leadership in the local church?” To ask more specifically, “Which office of the church does God commission for overall leadership in the church?” Is it the office of pastor, or the office of deacon? First Timothy 3:1-13 helps verify that the overall leadership of the church is the responsibility of those who hold the office of pastor.

Deacon Leadership

Before diving too deep into the issue of how those who occupy the office of pastor are responsible for the overall leadership in the church, a few clarifying comments are necessary in regard to deacons and their leadership role. It must be stated plainly: deacons do have a leadership role. Scripture is clear that the office of a deacon is predominantly connected to acts of service; it is also clear that a degree of deacon leadership is necessary for those acts of service to operate effectively. Even Alexander Strauch, one of the loudest voices in support of elder-led congregations, admits that deacons do indeed possess a “designated authority.”²⁴ Perhaps aware of situations where deacons abuse their leadership,²⁵ Robert Howell stresses that deacons are not to rule in

²² Benjamin Merkle, “The Office of Deacon,” in *Baptist Foundations: Church Government for an Anti-Institutional Age*, ed. Mark Dever and Jonathan Leeman (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2015), 311.

²³ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1145.

²⁴ Alexander Strauch, *Minister of Mercy: The New Testament Deacon* (Littleton, CO: Lewis & Roth, 1992), 71.

²⁵ Matt Smethurst does an excellent job of illustrating the reality of how there are deacons who misunderstand their relationship to the pastoral office and “fall short of the Bible’s right vision for the

the church “except in their own peculiar department.”²⁶ The department of a deacon’s leadership involves various tasks, but all the tasks fall within the scope of being a leading servant to the body of Christ while under the overall leadership of the pastors.

The idea of deacons leading in the department of service is on display in Acts 6. The Hellenist widows are “being neglected in the daily distribution” (v. 1). These ladies have true physical needs that are unmet and someone needs to lead the way in serving them. This of course prompts the apostles to establish what many scholars believe is the first deacon body. As this scene unfolds, the text tells that the deacons are appointed to the duty of caring for the neglected widows. The details of how they serve are absent from the passage, but it is safe to assume the apostles are delegating a measure of authority to the deacons that they may lead the way in this matter. Clearly then, although deacons are not the overall leaders of the church, they are the leaders of service.

Pastoral Leadership

The letter of 1 Timothy features Paul’s counsel to his “child in the faith” (1:2) who is leading the church in Ephesus concerning how they “ought to behave in the household of God” (3:15). Commenting on the main idea of 1 Timothy, John MacArthur notes that “conduct in the church is the theme.”²⁷ Strauch asserts, “First Timothy is the primary New Testament epistle on church order.”²⁸ No demographic of the church body goes untouched by Paul’s counsel, and in chapter 3 the office of pastor and deacon is dealt with extensively.

office.” Matt Smethurst, *Deacons: How They Serve and Strengthen the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 32-37.

²⁶ Robert Howell, *The Deaconship: Its Nature, Qualifications, Relations and Duties* (Philadelphia: Judson, 1946), 67.

²⁷ John MacArthur, *1 Timothy, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary Series* (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 134.

²⁸ Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Eldership* (Littleton, CO: Lewis & Roth, 1995), 128.

This section of Scripture affirms the existence of two vital and distinct offices within in the church. In verse 1, Paul speaks concerning “the office of overseer.” After giving the qualifications for the overseer in verses 1-7, the apostle transitions to yet another essential office of the church and gives his counsel for “deacons” (3:8). This is not the only place in the New Testament where Paul makes mention of two different offices in the church. One should consider his address to the Philippian church, “To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons” (Phil 1:1). Clearly then, Paul views the office of pastor and office of deacon as two different offices.

Many truths concerning these two offices can be unpacked from 1 Timothy 3:1-13, but the purpose of this work is to focus on the office of the pastor to show how the pastoral office is expected to mediate Jesus’s leadership in His church. An examination of three elements in this passage reveals how the overall leadership duty of the church rests upon those who occupy the office of pastor.

First, consideration will be given to the word used for the office’s title, *episkopos*, to see how this word points to leadership. The leadership element of *episkopos* is especially evident when contrasted with Paul’s use of *diakonos* to identify the other church office mentioned in the text. Second, attention will be given to the requirement for the pastor to have the ability to teach God’s Word. An investigation of this teaching requirement will reveal another link that binds the pastoral office to the overall responsibility for leadership. Finally, attention will be given to an analogy within the text that serves as evidence that just as a father is to be the overall leader of the home, so also the pastor is to be the overall leader of the church.

Examination of Church Office Titles

As Paul begins his counsel for the office of what many commonly refer to as pastor, the Greek word he uses is *episkopos* (1 Tim 3:1-2). Aside from the King James Version (which uses the word “bishop”) most English Bibles translate *episkopos* as

“overseer.” A detailed look at *episkopos* not only shows the word “overseer” to be an excellent translation, but also reveals how *episkopos* clearly communicates leadership.

William Arndt et al. define *episkopos* as “one who has the responsibility of safe guarding or seeing to it that something is done in the correct way, guardian.”²⁹ Timothy, along with those in Ephesus, would easily associate *episkopos* with leadership. Strauch, commenting on the word *episkopos* observes, “In ancient Greek society, the word was a well-known designation of office; it was broadly used to describe any official who acted as a superintendent, manager, supervisor, guardian, controller, inspector, or ruler.”³⁰

MacArthur differs from Strauch’s assessment that Paul’s use of *episkopos* is derived from Greek culture, and argues that the word “more closely parallels that of the Essene Jews of the Qumran community. The overseers among the Essenes preached, taught, presided, exercised care and authority, and enforced discipline. Those functions more closely mirror that of the New Testament overseer than the more narrow use of the term in Greek culture.”³¹ Although scholars may disagree concerning whether or not Paul’s use of *episkopos* is derived from the Greek culture or the Qumran Community, one truth is clear; the word Paul uses to identify the office of a pastor is commonly known as being strongly connected to leadership.

A deeper understanding that the title “overseer” points to leadership is gained when one contrasts the word Paul uses to identify the second office discussed in this passage; the office of deacon. The English word “deacon”—which Paul uses in verses 8 and 12—is transliterated from the Greek word *diakonos*. Why translators choose to transliterate this word, as opposed to translate it, is not confidently known. Strauch surmises that “the English and Latin translators probably transliterated *diakonos* because

²⁹ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000), 379.

³⁰ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 148.

³¹ MacArthur, *1 Timothy*, 98.

they didn't exactly know how to render this special use of *diakonos*.³² *Diakonos* is used throughout the New Testament in both noun and verb form to refer to all types of servants, and service or ministry. For example, when Jesus describes those who are great in His kingdom, he says "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant [*diakonos*]" (Matt 20:26). When Mary addresses those who are servants at the wedding in Cana, John explains that she is speaking to the *diakonois* (John 2:5). Clearly, this noun points to people of service.

Likewise, the verb form, *diakoneo*, points to acts of service. When the family of Lazarus hosts a meal for Jesus and His disciples, John uses the word *diakoneo* to describe how Mary "served" (John 12:2). Reference after reference could be shared from throughout the New Testament, and all of them would indicate that the word *diakonos* means to serve. Hence, there can be no doubt that God's design for those who occupy the office of deacon is to be the leading servants of the church, while the title given to the office of pastor points to overall leadership.

The Required Ability of Teaching God's Word and the Link to Leadership

Paul's instruction concerning pastors focuses heavily upon the character of the men who occupy the office. However, character is not the apostle's only concern. In verse 3, Paul extends beyond the pertinent character qualifications and states that the man in the pastoral role must be "able to teach" (1 Tim 3:3). His concern for the pastor's ability to teach is not limited to the passage at hand. In 2 Timothy 2:24, he tells Timothy, "The Lord's servant must . . . be able to teach." When addressing Titus about pastoral requirements, Paul stresses how the pastor must be able to "give instruction in sound doctrine" (Titus 1:9). The ability to teach is an obvious expectation of God concerning His pastors, and it will be shown that the expectation to teach implies an expectation to lead.

³² Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 76. The special use being that of using the word to identify an office in the church.

Before linking the ability to teach with the call to leadership, a few clarifying comments are essential. First, although the text at hand stresses that pastors must be able to teach, that is not the only responsibility. Mark Dever and Paul Alexander package the details of pastoral responsibility nicely by noting “three general obligations: graze, guard, and guide.”³³ The essence of the counsel offered by Dever and Alexander highlights the pastoral responsibility to teach the Scripture, guard believers from false doctrine, and lead them by God’s Word through the various aspects of life while also guiding them administratively that the church may be equipped for ministry. More can be said concerning the specific tasks involved in pastoral leadership, but the point for now is this: pastoral leadership cannot be properly executed without the ability and actions of teaching.

There is a second word of clarification to mention regarding the pastors’ necessary ability to teach. Just because pastors are able to teach does not mean they are the only members of the church who are gifted or expected to do so. Timothy Keller helps the church understand the roll every believer plays in teaching the Word by referencing Paul’s command to all believers in Colossians 3:16, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another.”³⁴ Paul explains that all believers must teach God’s Word in some regard, but Scripture does make a distinction between the teaching for which all believers are called and the teaching to which a pastor is called. For example, First Timothy 5:17 calls for double honor to be given to the elders who “labor in preaching and teaching.” As he calls for double honor to be given to elders who focus on preaching and teaching, Paul obviously has a role of teaching in mind that is distinct from the type of teaching he calls for in Colossians 3. Consider James’s exhortation to his audience: “Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness” (Jas 3:1) As James warns against

³³ Mark Dever and Paul Alexander, *The Deliberate Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 94.

³⁴ Timothy Keller, *Preaching* (New York: Viking, 2015), 1-2.

becoming teachers, is he asking believers to shy away from making disciples, which requires they teach others to observe the commands of Jesus? Is he asking believers to ignore exhortations like the one Paul makes in Colossians? Obviously, James would make no such requests that clearly violate God's Word. Rather, James is cautioning against entering lightly into a role that calls for the distinct and formal act of instructing the church. This distinct act of giving instruction to the church goes beyond a simple ability for the pastor. This distinct role of teaching is an act of leadership for which he is responsible.

Interestingly, when comparing qualifications for the office of pastor and deacon, the ability to teach is a requirement found only in the qualifications for the office of pastor. Although the requirements for a deacon are in many ways like those of a pastor, the skill of formally teaching God's Word is a requirement that gives a clear distinction between the two offices. This truth in no way prevents the deacon who is able to teach from formally teaching God's Word. After all, deacon Philip formally address an audience in Acts 8 and is called an evangelist in Acts 21. However, Paul's words are clear: the teaching responsibility falls upon the office of the pastor. A deacon will perhaps be able to teach, but a pastor *must* be able to teach.

This unique responsibility to teach serves as yet another layer of evidence that the man in the pastoral office is expected to lead. MacArthur notes that formal teaching is "a role reserved for elders."³⁵ Platt reminds believers that "the Word alone has the power to build up the church, which means the elder's leadership is tied to the Word."³⁶ Commenting on the pastoral office, Jonathan Griffiths notes, "As Jesus set about establishing the church, he appointed his twelve apostles to teach his word and through

³⁵ MacArthur, *1 Timothy*, 16.

³⁶ Platt, *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, 55.

that *teaching*, give *leadership* to his people.”³⁷ Jeramie Rinne echoes the same sentiment: “The fact that God requires elders to teach his people shouldn’t surprise us. God rules his people by his Word, so the leaders of God’s people have always been entrusted with communicating God’s Word.”³⁸ Scripture’s clear implication is that the expectation to formally teach God’s Word is placed upon the pastor because he is responsible to lead God’s church. The thought of formal teaching being linked to leadership becomes more evident as one considers the instances of Scripture where teaching and leadership go hand in hand.

Consider some of the places in Scripture where teaching is forged with leadership. For example, the link of leadership and teaching is on display in the ministry of Moses as part of his leadership involves the task of making people to “know the statutes of God and his laws” (Exod 18:16). Aaron, the first to serve as priest for the nation of Israel and lead God’s people in offering sacrifices to God, is also instructed by God to “teach the people of Israel all the statutes that the Lord has spoken to them by Moses” (Lev 10:11). Moses’s successor, Joshua, is seen bearing the responsibility of teaching God’s Word as a component of his leadership when he summons Israel to “come here and listen to the words of the LORD your God” (Josh 3:9). In the book of Nehemiah, Ezra—the priest and scribe used of God to lead a remnant of God’s people out of Persia and back to Jerusalem—leads other priests in the role of not only reading God’s Word to the people, but also in explaining it in order that the people may understand (Neh 8:8). The apostle Peter, a foundational leader in Jesus’s church (Eph 2:20), is exhorted by Jesus to “feed my sheep” (John 21:17), which of course is another way of saying, “teach my people.” Commenting on Jesus’s words to Peter, J. C. Ryle asserts that Jesus “meant that Peter was to feed souls

³⁷ Jonathan Griffiths, “The Role of the Elder, Bishop, and Pastor,” The Gospel Coalition, accessed January 28, 2022, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-role-of-the-elder-bishop-pastor/>, emphasis added.

³⁸ Jeramie Rinne, *Church Elders: How to Shepherd God’s People Like Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 46.

with the precious food of God’s Word.”³⁹ Paul clearly links teaching and leadership in 1 Timothy 5:17, where he writes, “Let the elders who rule⁴⁰ well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.” Titus, the man left at Crete by Paul for the purpose of leading the way in setting the church in order is told that an essential component of his leadership is to “teach what accords with sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1). Although the list could go on, the reality of teaching being linked to leadership is settled convincingly as one considers the ministry of Jesus Christ. The head of the church, the Chief Shepherd Himself, founded His leadership ministry upon the teaching of God’s Word (Matt 9:35; 11:1; John 7:16; Acts 1:1). These examples from Scripture verify that God’s design for leadership includes the component of teaching. Therefore, one can conclude that pastors are expected to possess all the skills required to teach God’s Word because that is the source by which they are expected to lead God’s people. The pastor is to have the ability to teach because he has the responsibility to lead.

Paul’s Analogy That Points to Leadership

Within Paul’s counsel concerning the men who occupy the office of pastor is a responsibility that involves the man’s home. Verse 4 reveals how a pastor’s responsibility to lead the home is directly connected with the pastor’s responsibility to lead the church. Paul forcefully declares that the pastor “must manage his own household well” (1 Tim 3:4). The Greek word Paul uses for manage is *proistamenon*. It is defined as follows: “to exercise a position of leadership, rule, direct, be at the head.”⁴¹ Paul uses this word in his letter to the Thessalonians when he exhorts the congregation “to respect those who are over [*proistamenous*] you” (1 Thess 5:12). After giving Timothy the requirement for pastors to manage their households well, Paul explains his reasoning and connects his thoughts to

³⁹ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on John* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1987), 3:506

⁴⁰ The word *rule* pointing to leadership.

⁴¹ Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 870.

leading the church: “If someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church?” (1 Tim 3:5). MacArthur observes how Paul is “showing the link between leading the home and leading the church.”⁴² In other words, Paul creates an analogy between the father of the home and the pastor of the church. In doing so, he implies that just as a father is responsible to lead the home, so also the pastor is responsible to lead the church.

Summary

Paul’s words in 1 Timothy 3:1-13 convincingly indicate that the overall leadership responsibilities of the church fall upon those who occupy the office of pastor. That is not to say that deacons are not granted a measure of leadership, but that the office of pastor is ultimately responsible to manage God’s church. The term used to identify this office (*episkopos*) is easily understood by the people in the original audience to be a term pointing to leadership. The leadership demand of the pastor is further evidenced by the expectation that he possess the skill to formally teach God’s Word. Throughout Scripture God’s design of leadership always features the component of teaching, and the pastoral leadership office is no exception. The pastor must be able to teach because he is responsible to lead. Finally, Paul’s analogy for how the pastor is to lead the church just as a father is to lead his home leaves no ground to deny that God mediates His leadership to His church through the office of pastor.

The New Testament Practice of Shared Leadership (Acts 14:23)

In the book of Acts, Luke charts the Holy Spirit’s work in using the people of God as His “witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, to the end of the earth” (1:8). One of the most well-known witnesses is the apostle Paul. As Luke records his three

⁴² MacArthur, *1 Timothy*, 116.

missionary journeys, he gives insight into Paul’s “church planting practices.”⁴³

Specifically, in Acts 14:23 Luke reveals Paul’s practice of setting up a shared leadership model in the newly found churches of Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch in Pisidia. A focus on this passage reveals how Paul appoints a plurality of pastors to serve each individual church and thereby validates shared pastoral leadership as the normative practice in New Testament churches.

Acts 14:23 establishes a plurality of pastors as the New Testament model for church leadership in three ways. First, the language conveys that Paul appoints a plurality of pastors to lead each church. Second, the fact that God is sought through the act of prayer and fasting verifies His approval of the shared leadership model Paul establishes in these churches. Finally, a look at how the leadership model of Acts 14:23 is a common practice among other New Testament churches verifies that shared leadership among a plurality of pastors is the biblical model for church leadership.

The Language of Acts 14:23

The language of Acts 14:23 makes it clear that Paul appoints a plurality of pastors to serve individual churches. First, notice the word “elders” is plural. Next, notice Paul uses the singular form of the word “church.” In other words, a plurality of “elders” is appointed to each “church.” Strauch explains the literal reading of the passage as follows: “Having appointed for them *church by church*, elders.”⁴⁴ Although this observation of the language may seem elementary⁴⁵, it is helpful for those who have only ever known a single-pastor model to see how the language paints a clear picture of Paul appointing multiple pastors to individual churches.

⁴³ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 121.

⁴⁴ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 135, emphasis original.

⁴⁵ Rinne, *Church Elders*, 88.

God's Approval of the Shared Leadership Model

Appointing multiple pastors to a shared leadership model in each of these churches is a serious task for which God's wisdom is sought by Paul and those who are with him. Luke explains that Paul's appointment of the pastors is done in conjunction "with prayer and fasting" (Acts 14:23). Although some scholars suggest the act of prayer and fasting took place after the appointment, and was meant only to bring intensity to the prayer that God keep these believers faithful in the midst of persecution, MacArthur notes that these "elders were chosen only after they had prayed and fasted"—an action which indicates the seriousness of this process.⁴⁶ In no way does Paul see the appointment of shared leadership among a plurality of pastors as trivial, but instead considers this a serious action in need of God's approval. The act of prayer and fasting shows that the will of God is being sought in this matter, and as Paul moves forward in the process one can trust he does so under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Just as the Holy Spirit set Paul and Barnabas apart for this missionary journey (Acts 13:2), so also it is no stretch to say that the Holy Spirit is now setting apart multiple pastors to serve in the God appointed model of shared leadership in each of the churches mentioned in this passage. Hence, the shared leadership model is far beyond Paul's idea or preference; it is the leadership model approved by God for His local churches.

Shared Leadership: A Common Practice among New Testament Churches

The leadership model of Acts 14:23 is not an anomaly. Throughout the New Testament, one finds multiple congregations led by a plurality of pastors. A brief glance at these instances illustrates that shared leadership is a common practice among New Testament churches.

The foundational church of the New Testament is the church in Jerusalem, and it features a leadership model that includes a plurality of pastors. These men are first

⁴⁶ MacArthur, *1 Timothy*, 55.

mentioned in Acts 11:30 where they are seen as recipients of a financial gift sent from the church at Antioch to the famine struck believers in Jerusalem.⁴⁷ Fast forward to Acts 15 and one discovers that multiple elders, of the single Jerusalem church, are involved in resolving a doctrinal issue.⁴⁸ Strauch asserts the idea of a plurality of pastors in this first church in this way: “Jerusalem had one citywide church . . . and one body of leaders.”⁴⁹ Therefore, when Paul appoints a plurality of pastors to serve the individual churches mentioned in Acts 14, he does so not only in obedience to the Holy Spirit, but also in accordance with the example of the Jerusalem Church.

The model featuring a plurality of pastors did not stop with Paul’s work in Acts 14; it is the model on display throughout the New Testament. Scholarship does not lack Scripture references pointing to single congregations with multiple pastors. Rinne includes the following list in his work:

When they arrived at Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the *church*, the apostles, and the *elders*. (Acts 15:4; see also vv. 6, 22; 16:4).

When they had appointed *elders* in every *church* and prayed with fasting, they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed. (Acts 14:23).

Now from Miletus, he sent to Ephesus and called for the *elders* of the *church*. (Acts 20:17)

Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus: To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in *Philippi*, including the *overseers* and deacons. (Phil. 1:1)

The reason I left you in Crete was to set right what was left undone and, as I directed you, to appoint *elders* in every *town*. (Titus 1:5)

Therefore, as a fellow elder and witness to the sufferings of the Messiah and also a participant in the glory about to be revealed, I exhort the *elders* among you. (1 Pet. 5:1).

Is anyone among you sick? He should call for the *elders* of the *church*, and they should pray over him after anointing him with olive oil in the name of the Lord. (James 5:14)⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 124.

⁴⁸ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 125-27.

⁴⁹ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 144.

⁵⁰ Rinne, *Church Elders*, 87, emphasis added.

This list confirms that Paul was not alone in his approach to church leadership. The shared leadership model is also one to which Peter and James adhere (1 Pet 5:1; Jas 5:14). The congregation to which the book of Hebrews addresses is led by multiple pastors (Heb 13:17). The adoption of a plurality of pastors in these many instances further strengthens the argument that the shared leadership model spans the landscape of the New Testament as the normative practice in God's local churches.

Summary

Paul's work among the individual churches at Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch in Pisidia includes the appointment of shared leadership for God's local churches. His plural use of "elders" in combination with the singular use of "church" indicates he appointed a plurality of men to lead each individual church. Knowing that his actions were preceded by prayer and fasting assures believers that Paul's strategy of shared leadership by a plurality of pastors is approved by God. As one considers how this same leadership model is used by the Jerusalem church as well as other churches throughout the New Testament, it becomes clear that shared leadership among a plurality of pastors is a model with biblical merit.

Conclusion

This chapter presents scriptural arguments in support of shared leadership among a plurality of pastors as a biblically founded model for overall church leadership. The truths of Exodus 18:13-26 establish shared leadership as an acceptable plan from God. Admittedly, the context of Exodus is not synonymous with the context of a New Testament church, but there is no denying the events of Exodus verify that shared leadership is not a new idea and is in fact a plan acceptable to God from some of the earliest times in the history of His people.

First Timothy 3:1-13 informs the Church of Ephesus concerning the appointment of qualified men to the two distinct offices God gives His church. Only one

of those offices is to assume the overall leadership of the church and is expected to lead. An evaluation of the text clearly places the expectation to lead upon those who hold the office of the pastor.

In Acts 14:23—after prayer and fasting—Paul follows the direction of the Holy Spirit, as well as the model of the Jerusalem church, and appoints multiple pastors to care for each individual church in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch in Pisidia. Paul’s action affirms that shared leadership among a plurality of pastors is the normal leadership model for New Testament churches.

The three passages examined in this chapter serve in tandem to verify the biblical nature of shared leadership. Shared leadership is an acceptable plan from God. It is placed upon those who occupy the office of the pastor in the New Testament. Finally, shared leadership through a plurality of pastors is the model practiced by churches in the New Testament.

CHAPTER 3

THE BENEFITS OF A PLURALITY OF PASTORS

Wayne Grudem reports that the most “common [form of church government] among Baptist churches in the United States, is the ‘single elder’ form of government.”¹ Since the time of Grudem’s statement, men like Alexander Strauch and Mark Dever have educated numerous church leaders in regard to what the Bible teaches about church government. Although these contributions aid many pastors who are striving for plural leadership in their churches, there are still regions of the United States where the idea of a plurality of pastors is foreign.

A far more common system of leadership features one pastor and a body of deacons. This one-pastor system has serious deficiencies when weighed against the benefits of plural leadership. This chapter will record insights from various scholars as well as interviews with local pastors who argue that a church leadership model featuring a plurality of pastors is the most beneficial system of leadership for not only the pastors, but also the deacons and members of the local church.

How Pastors Benefit from a Plurality of Pastors

A system of church government featuring a plurality of pastors provides significant benefits for the men who occupy the office of pastor. Strauch, a leading voice of support for plural leadership, insists that one of the greatest joys of his life flows from the ministry he shares with other pastors who are dedicated to shepherding the people of

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 1140.

God.² The benefits of not leading alone reach into every area of a pastor’s life. Regarding these benefits Strauch writes, “I do not hesitate to say that the relationship with my fellow elders has been the most important tool God has used, outside of my marriage relationship, for the spiritual development of my Christian character, leadership abilities, and teaching ministry.”³ Because the benefits of plural leadership are so abundant to the individual pastor, discussing them in a structured manner proves challenging. Thankfully, men like Strauch pave an organized way of discussing these benefits. He groups the advantages of plural leadership under three headings and makes the following observations: (1) plural leadership provides balance for the pastors’ weaknesses, (2) plural leadership makes the pastors’ workload lighter, and (3) plural leadership provides accountability for pastors.⁴

Plural Leadership Provides Balance for the Pastors’ Weaknesses

Proverbs 27:17 speaks of how “one man sharpens another.” Commenting on this verse, Robert Alden notes, “The image here is striking; as knives are sharpened by other tools of steel, so scholars, artists or athletes can ‘sharpen’ each other by competition, the exchange of ideas, and constructive criticism.”⁵ One clear implication of this verse is the humbling fact that all men have weaknesses. After all, why would a man need to be sharpened?—because he is plagued with weaknesses, and weaknesses in pastoral ministry will often yield eternally devastating consequences.

Even the most gifted pastor is plagued with weaknesses and stands in need of other men to sharpen him. Benjamin Merkle emphasizes, “As elders serve and lead

² Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Eldership* (Littleton, CO: Lewis & Roth, 1995), 35.

³ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 35.

⁴ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 40-43.

⁵ Robert Alden, *Proverbs: A Commentary on an Ancient Book of Timeless Advice* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 192.

together, they will often be challenged by the godly examples they see in each other.”⁶ A clear picture is painted by Strauch concerning how pastors sharpen one another and make up for weaknesses among the pastoral body “If one elder has a tendency to act too harshly with people, the others can temper his harshness . . . Elders who are more doctrinally oriented can sharpen those who are more outreach- or service-oriented, and outreach- or service-minded elders can ignite the intellectually oriented members to more evangelism and service.”⁷

The truth of one man sharpening another is evident in my own ministry. FBCHP is currently led by myself and two other pastors. One of these men is more than ten years my younger, and the other is roughly ten years older. The younger pastor is full of energy, ideas, and zeal for evangelism. He pushes me. The older pastor is gifted differently. Although he is as burdened for the lost as anyone else on our pastoral body, his greatest strength perhaps lies in his wisdom and ability to see potential issues to which I would be blind. He protects me.

My experience is not unique among pastors. Pastor Josh Sellers of Mt. Zion Baptist Church serves with one other pastor (Eric Jones) in overseeing a local church of God’s people in Cullman, Alabama. Sellers—whose main area of giftedness is preaching God’s Word—praises God for Eric’s prowess in one-on-one discipleship. Sellers unashamedly admits that if it were not for Jones’s giftedness, the people of Mt. Zion would not be as strong in discipleship.⁸ Jones’s strength not only shores up one of Sellers’s perceived weaknesses, but also frees him to exert more energy to the preeminent task of preaching of God’s Word.

⁶ Benjamin Merkle, *Why Elders? A Biblical and Practical Guide for Church Members* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009), 59.

⁷ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 41.

⁸ Josh Sellers, pastor at Mt. Zion Baptist Church in Cullman, AL, interview by author, August 10, 2022.

In Sellers's situation, his weakness is one of which he is aware. However, weaknesses are often hidden to the pastor. Hidden weaknesses are dangerous and can bring destruction to a pastor's personal well-being and his ministry. Commenting on the deceptive nature of weaknesses, Strauch writes,

Fatal flaws or blind spots distort our judgement. They deceive us. They can even destroy us. This is particularly true of multitalented, charismatic leaders. Blind to their own flaws and extreme views, some talented leaders have destroyed themselves because they had no peers to confront and balance them and, in fact, wanted none.⁹

All can agree with Strauch's use of the phrase "blind spots" and admit that weaknesses can be unseen. However, many people overlook that the consequences produced by those weakness can be unseen as well. To say it another way, there are times when weaknesses produce hidden consequences.

Imagine the following scenario. Pastor A serves alone, and he flourishes at being relational among the people. He prays at the monthly city council meeting, attends all the home games of the local high school's sporting events, and never misses a hospital visit. This pastor smells like the sheep. Everyone loves his personality, and he is celebrated as a wonderful pastor. However, the effort required to be liked by everyone causes him to neglect study. As a result, he is weak in doctrinal understanding and thereby fails to give his flock the truths they need for sound faith.

Now consider Pastor B, who also serves alone. He constantly immerses himself in study and remains steadfast on filling his flock with substantial amounts of doctrine. His weakness however is that he neglects to walk among the sheep and fails to exemplify how doctrine shapes deeds. He is unaware of the significant events in the lives of his congregation, is a recluse to the community, and considers any interruption to his office hours a great inconvenience.

Both pastors have weaknesses and are creating devastating consequence about which they may never be aware. Unknowingly, Pastor A leaves his congregation

⁹ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 40-41.

doctrinally deficient, while Pastor B leaves his congregation deedless. In each of these scenarios the pastoral weakness, as well as the consequences, are both unseen and destructive. Situations of this kind are less likely to take place where a team of pastors are sharpening one another in areas of deficiencies and helping their fellow pastor to identify the consequences that flow from individual weaknesses.

Plural Leadership Makes Pastors' Workload Lighter

The heavy workload of pastoral ministry cannot be adequately measured. Busy schedules and burdened souls are common among men who serve as pastors. Scripture is replete with passages highlighting the various duties which must be carried out by the men who hold the office of pastor. John Hammett organizes his thoughts concerning the primary responsibilities of pastoral ministry and places them in the following categories: (1) the ministry of the Word,¹⁰ (2) pastoral ministry carried out in “acts like pastoral visitation, personal counseling and ministry in times of sickness,”¹¹ (3) oversight or leadership involving administrative responsibilities,¹² and (4) serving “as an example to the flock.”¹³ Certainly some see the pastor’s life as one of ease, requiring only Sunday to be a day of work; however, those privy to the Bible’s expectations clearly see pastoral ministry as an exceptionally busy mission.

Busy schedules. One example of a busy pastor is Jared Folks. Folks, the only pastor of Faith Baptist Church in Cullman, Alabama, labors extensively in the tasks of pastoral ministry. God faithfully rewards his labor and continues to raise up believers who

¹⁰ John Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), 163.

¹¹ Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*, 163-64.

¹² Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*, 164.

¹³ Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*, 165-66.

are “growing in desire for obedience and depth of the Word.”¹⁴ However, as the congregation’s only pastor, he shoulders the responsibility of all the congregational teaching, counseling, weddings, funerals, etc. A workload of this magnitude explains the mindset behind Folk’s statement that he “cannot be convinced the church was supposed to be pastored by one guy. It is too much for one man to do well.”¹⁵ Thankfully, due to his biblical leadership and God’s faithfulness to surround him with other godly men, Faith Baptist Church is moving in the direction of a plural model, which will dramatically lighten his workload.

In addition to pastoral demands creating busyness, one must not overlook the tremendous burden of soul these chores cause within the pastor. It is not a burden in the sense of not wanting to carry out the responsibilities—although most pastors have had to battle the thought of quitting more than once—but rather, a burden in the sense of a genuine concern for the well-being of the sheep. Paul speaks of this type of burden: “Apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me and my anxiety for all the churches” (2 Cor 11:28). With the pastoral ministry consisting of such busyness and burdens, no wonder scholars like Merkle adamantly state, “A pastor needs others who can share this burden.”¹⁶

Burdened by church discipline. Among the many burdens of pastoral ministry, one of the most frequently mentioned is church discipline. Pastors who fear God and care about the health of Jesus’s church understand that sin in the church must be addressed. Every pastor interviewed for the purpose of this work agrees that discipline is a heavy chore. It presents an array of challenges more easily met and overcome when pastors are sharing the workload in a plural leadership model. Phil Newtown asserts, “If a pastor

¹⁴ Jared Folks, pastor at Faith Baptist Church in Vinemont, AL, telephone interview by author, August 16, 2022.

¹⁵ Folks, interview.

¹⁶ Merkle, *Why Elders?*, 43.

stands alone in bringing a matter to the congregation, opponents will likely skewer him. But the strength of godly leaders within the church, standing together in such matters, urges the entire church to recognize the seriousness of discipline.”¹⁷ The man who leads alone does not have the privilege of being helped and protected by other godly pastors during the tumultuous task of church discipline. He alone is left with the burden of convincing the congregation of the seriousness of sin and great need of discipline.

In addition to a plural leadership model protecting pastors and promoting the seriousness of sin during church discipline, a plural model of church government also aids the congregation to move through the discipline process with unity. A congregation under the direction of men they deem as godly and trustworthy will more easily understand and accept the outcome of church discipline. Folks longs for the day when discipline can occur under the leadership of a body of pastors who have been appointed by the congregation. He wisely points out that a plural leadership model would provide the church with an opportunity to “recognize and see the issues because [they will] have a united front of godly men” who are leading the church in the difficult matter of church discipline.¹⁸ In other words, the issue of discipline is carried out in greater unity and more easily accepted by the congregation when they see it coming from multiple pastors. This is especially true when the congregation reflects on the fact that they themselves appointed these pastors to lead them.

Busy, burdened and burned out. Sadly, many men are expected to keep to the busy schedules of pastoral ministry all the while the congregation gives no thought to the weight of the burden within the souls of their leaders. In the situation where a man is expected to lead alone, that man is destined for either ineffectiveness or burnout. Commenting on the burden of pastoral ministry, Merkle notes, “Caring for the church is

¹⁷ Phil Newton and Matt Schmucker, *Elders in the Life of the Church: Rediscovering the Biblical Model for Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014), 56.

¹⁸ Folks, interview.

often too much for one man to handle and can lead to frustration and burnout,” and then poses the question, “Is it any wonder that so many pastorates are short-lived?”¹⁹

Exodus 18:18 unveils the reality of burnout coming for the man who attempts to carry a leadership workload alone. Jethro warns Moses, “The thing is too heavy for you. You are not able to do it alone.” As Merkle advocates for multiple pastors, he points to God’s counsel shared through the voice of Solomon:

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken. (Eccl 4:9-12)²⁰

If done alone, the workload of pastoral ministry inevitably leads to schedules that are too busy, souls that are too burdened, and shepherds that are too burned out to continue. To see more men persevere in ministry, the church must aim to bring its leadership model in line with God’s design and allow pastors to benefit from multiple men sharing the workload of pastoral ministry.

Plural Leadership Provides the Pastors with Accountability

Scripture counsels against isolation of self. “Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire, he breaks out against all sound judgement” (Prov 18:1). Although the warning to avoid isolation is clear, a great number of pastors are expected to shepherd God’s people that way. A one-pastor leadership model creates the potential for an array of troubling issues, one of which is a lack of accountability. Such a scenario forces a man to rely on himself and forfeits him the blessing of sound judgment that often resides in the guidance of other men. However, a pastor who labors with a team of godly shepherds will have the opportunity to know the beauty of receiving words from the “wise reprov-er” who can share words that are “fitly spoken” (Prov 25:11, 12). The fitly spoken words from

¹⁹ Merkle, *Why Elders?*, 52.

²⁰ Merkle, *Why Elders?*, 52.

the wise reprove are needed in at least three areas for the pastor: (1) his morality, (2) his priorities, and (3) his courage.

The moral failures of pastors are incredibly heartbreaking and widespread. A man who serves in a plural leadership model has access to morally sustaining accountability from other pastors. Understanding the potential for a pastor to experience a moral failure, Paul urges Timothy to “keep a close watch on yourself” (1 Tim 4:16). Perhaps the fear of a lapse in morality is a portion of Paul’s motivation as he admonishes the elders of the Ephesian church to “pay careful attention to yourselves” (Acts 20:28). No one disagrees that it is a pastor’s personal responsibility to keep himself pure from sin, but it is a wise strategy to employ other men as accountability partners to aid in the effort of holiness. Urging accountability, Newton asks, “Are pastors and staff members held accountable to anyone besides themselves?”²¹ Through the form of a rhetorical question, Newton takes a stance against the dangerous scenario where accountability is lacking. The man who serves in a single-pastor model is less likely to know the blessing of accountability. Even in a situation where a godly lay member can provide accountability, every pastor will hesitate to share his greatest struggles with a member of his congregation and therefore never know the freedom of being pastored through personal struggles. However, for the man who serves in a plural model, although accountability may involve the occasional stinging rebuke, essentially it is a benefit because it may very well save a pastor from a breakdown in morality.

In addition to moral failure, a pastor’s priorities can quickly become misaligned. The rigorous demands of pastoral ministry have more than enough strength to push a pastor’s marriage, parenting, personal evangelism, health, and rest to the proverbial “back burner.” Newton’s testimony provides a wonderful illustration to support for how elders can help keep one another’s priorities in the right perspective:

²¹ Newton and Schmucker, *Elders in the Life of the Church*, 37.

My fellow elders serve to protect me so that I can fulfill my calling and ministry. For instance, my summer schedule in 2002 was unusually packed. I led a mission trip; spent a week out of town, wrote for an online journal; spoke for a week to six hundred kids at a youth camp; participated in a conference; directed our summer internship program; took a family vacation; and fulfilled normal ministry demands. In the meantime, a friend invited me to lead a mission conference at his church during the fall. I submitted this request to the elders . . . they knew that I was being overloaded. So they told me that accepting this preaching assignment would not be a good decision.²²

Newton, like other pastors, was ready to pour himself out for the sake of ministry but was doing so at the expense of his own well-being. Thankfully, he was surrounded by godly pastors willing to provide loving accountability and inform him that “we want to protect you *from you*.”²³ The protection gained through accountability is a gift to pastor Newton.

Countless other pastors need such accountability. They need to be asked about their marriage, family worship, last evangelistic conversation, eating plan, exercise routine, and the last time they took a day of leisure. These are topics the average church member will not think to ask their pastor, and the man who serves alone risks being enslaved to misplaced priorities; whereas a man who serves within a plural leadership model will know the benefit of being among men who are intentional at helping him guard his priorities.

Another area where a pastor needs accountability is within the realm of courage. Pastoring is often times confrontational, and the man who leads alone will find it a great challenge to avoid retreating in fear. In Galatians 2:11-14, Paul recalls the instance where he confronted Peter for acting “hypocritically” by withholding fellowship from the Gentiles because he feared certain Jews. Peter’s cowardly fear of man prompted this rebuke. The intention here was not to malign Peter, but only to show that even godly men may need to be rebuked for their lack of courage. Strauch keenly observes the pastor’s need for godly men to help him be courageous:

²² Newton and Schmucker, *Elders in the Life of the Church*, 53-54.

²³ Newton and Schmucker, *Elders in the Life of the Church*, 54, emphasis original.

Left to ourselves, we do mainly what we want to do, not what we should do or what is best for others. This is especially true if we face tense, confrontational situations with erring members. Most people will avoid unpleasant confrontation at all costs. Thus church leaders need the loving encouragement and close accountability that team leadership provides.²⁴

Rare is the pastor who enjoys gathering up the courage necessary to issue a rebuke. The temptation to look the other way is real and far easier than confrontation, especially for the man who pastors alone. Men who serve within a body of godly pastors, on the other hand, will not be allowed to bow to their cowardice and will instead know the benefit of having men who will hold them accountable to take the godly course of action, no matter the cost.

Deacons Benefit from a Plurality of Pastors

Churches led by a healthy plurality of pastors who teach the whole counsel of God will most likely be familiar with what Scripture teaches concerning the biblical expectations of both pastors and deacons. Hammett notes how the “establishment of a plural eldership . . . would force churches to think through the relationship of the two offices.”²⁵ As the distinctions between pastors and deacons become clear, deacons will benefit in a variety of ways. Perhaps, the chief benefit is being freed from unbiblical expectations.

Many evangelical congregations are absent of plural leadership. Merkle observes that having a plurality of elders is a foreign concept in most evangelical churches.²⁶ Strauch makes the same observation and shares how even during his seminary training he took a class on church polity, and the professor “stubbornly resisted any notion of an elder-led church.”²⁷ Congregations without plural leadership often follow the one-pastor model

²⁴ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 44.

²⁵ Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*, 197.

²⁶ Merkle, *Why Elders?*, 62.

²⁷ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 9.

of church government. This type of polity runs the risk of creating a situation where the overall leadership of the church shifts to the deacons. The reasons for this shift in leadership vary, but one such reason lies in the fact that many churches are dependent more so on the tactics of a successful corporate world than on the truths of Scripture.

A look at the corporate world reveals a model that utilizes a CEO surrounded by a board of executives. Sadly, this model has crept into the church, especially among congregations who are led by a one-pastor model of church government. These models view the pastor as the CEO, while the deacons operate like a board of executives who possess the real power to make decisions. Henry Webb, in his prominent work on deacons, acknowledges that “many churches have assigned primarily business management responsibilities to their deacons.”²⁸ Matt Smethurst likens deacons in these situations to “a second house of legislature to ‘check and balance’ pastoral decisions.”²⁹ Likeminded with Smethurst and Webb, Merkle is not blind to the situations where deacons leave the role of servant and morph into a role of authority. He asserts that in the one-pastor and deacon leadership model, often “the senior pastor is accountable to deacons, who really are responsible for the business of the church.”³⁰ There are two obvious reasons this model so easily makes its way into churches without plural leadership.

First, the one-pastor model leaves massive amounts of ministry undone, and those tasks are then taken up by deacons. In many cases, this creates a scenario where deacons may not wear the official title associated with overall leadership, but they certainly function in that capacity and are viewed as the primary leaders by the bulk of the congregation. Second, because the one-man leadership model is beyond strenuous for the pastor, the tenure of such men in one place is often short lived. Therefore, when a pastor

²⁸ Henry Webb, *Deacons: Servant Models in the Church* (Nashville: Convention, 1980), 110.

²⁹ Matt Smethurst, *Deacons: How They Serve and Strengthen the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 36.

³⁰ Merkle, *Why Elders?*, 14.

transitions to a new ministry—because there are no other pastors to lead the church—the leadership void is filled by deacons. No one should fault deacons for this. They love their church and want to see the ministry continue. Smethurst alludes to the all-too-common situation of a church without a pastor and applauds the initiative of deacons as they “fill the leadership vacuum in the wake of another departed pastor.”³¹ On the one hand, Smethurst is rightly willing to rejoice over deacons. On the other hand, he contends that many in deacon service are worthy of rebuke. He records the sad and all too common fact that

some churches have revolving door of pastors because the deacons are insufferable. Still, what often occurs is a new pastor arrives—armed to the hilt with new energy! new vision! new initiatives!—only to become an episode in a very old series. Conflict arises. Eventually the pastor leaves. People assume he left for greener pastures. And who stays? Who always stays? The deacons. It’s natural that a certain authority would accrue to the church’s living furniture.³²

Whether taking up the slack for the one pastor who cannot do it all, or filling the leadership void when another pastor leaves or is run off, the outcome is the same: the deacons are looked to as leaders and are pressed into an unbiblical role.

An unfortunate consequence of deacons being plunged into the unbiblical role of overall leadership in the church is that both the deacons and congregation reach a state of confusion as to what God truly desires for the deacon. According to Smethurst, “When deacons start to function as leading shepherds over the whole congregation, or as a board of directors overseeing various staff and committees, the Bible’s job description for deacons has become blurred.”³³ Alert to this fact, and using the same analogy of many congregations being “blurred” in their understanding of a deacon’s role, Hammett concurs that when the deacon board idea crept into the church, “the distinction between the overall

³¹ Smethurst, *Deacons*, 37.

³² Smethurst, *Deacons*, 37.

³³ Smethurst, *Deacons*, 36.

leadership role of the elders and the serving role of deacons began to blur.”³⁴ The distinctions concerning the role of pastors and deacons may be blurred, but one matter is clear: there are congregations—and deacons for that matter—who are confused about biblical leadership.

The confusion that comes from deacons operating in an unbiblical role of course leads to the congregation possessing unbiblical expectations. These expectations vary from congregation to congregation, but often manifest themselves in deacons functioning as both “permission granters” for all aspects of ministry, and “police officers” for all perceived violations from the pastor. Unfortunately, these expectations are far more common than one would hope. Smethurst—writing in a sarcastic tone—imagines a scene where a deacon says, “Welcome to First Baptist Church, where the pastors say things and the deacons run things. (Seriously, though, if you want to get something important done around here, you’ve got to convince those deacons).”³⁵ Sadly, Smethurst’s imagination almost perfectly depicts the mentality of a deacon-ruled congregation I once knew.

A common misunderstanding and even a common phrase in this deacon-led setting was, “Ask the deacons.” You want to change the curriculum for the children’s ministry? You must ask the deacons. You want a new order for the worship service? You must ask the deacons. You want to counsel with prospective members before they join the church? You must ask the deacons. You want to adopt a new strategy to better emphasize the financial support of missions? You must ask the deacons. This setting even featured a moment when the pastor graciously led the music director away from a song that featured weak and faulty doctrine. The pastor left the cordial meeting feeling encouraged by the apparent and joyful compliance of the music director. However, he was soon approached by a deacon who had been contacted as if he were the police officer of the church whose jurisdiction reached to the area of keeping the pastor in check.

³⁴ Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*, 196-97.

³⁵ Smethurst, *Deacons*, 36.

Another similar instance occurred when the pastor declined a request to take a middle-aged woman to the doctor in a perceived emergency situation. Aware that the lady had other transportation options, and sensing the situation was not as urgent as she believed, the pastor declined the request. His denial was also driven because his wife was away in their only reliable vehicle, and he had always been wisely counseled to never be alone with a woman who is not his wife. Confident that the woman was in no serious danger and did indeed have transportation, the pastor explained why he had to deny the request. The denial was met with anger, and a few days later the pastor was asked to explain himself to the “police of the church” in a deacons’ meeting.

Many deacons in leadership structures like the one mentioned here are thrilled with their power and sincerely convinced they must hold to it for the good of the congregation. However, other deacons are very uncomfortable in their role as permission granters and police of the church. As a result, many men see deacon ministry as a stressful chore as opposed to a joyful ministry. Because the only picture of deacon ministry they see is the unbiblical expectations of being an avenue of authority and a conduit for complaints, some men would make wonderful deacons but decline the position to avoid the stress and drama.

Most of the blame in these situations should not be cast at the feet of those who make phone calls to deacons, or even with the deacons who continue to carry out unbiblical expectations. Rather, the heaviest of the blame must fall upon the unbiblical leadership structure that conditions both the church members and the deacons to see the office of a deacon in an unbiblical fashion. Only a pursuit of biblical leadership can ensure that deacons are rescued from unbiblical expectations and restored to the joyful task of serving God’s people.

Deacons are a gift to the church and will thrive when given the biblical opportunity to serve under a plurality of pastors. The plural model makes it clear to the congregation that the pastors are the overall leaders of the church. Therefore, the

congregation sees no need to thrust unbiblical expectations upon the deacons, and the men who occupy the office of a servant are freed to enjoy the role in which God has placed them.

How Members of the Local Church Benefit from a Plurality of Pastors

Disciples of Jesus Christ need pastoral leadership that can both serve and strengthen them. Perhaps a small congregation can be served and strengthened by one man, but as the congregation grows, both the pastor and church members will discover that one man cannot provide all the congregation needs. However, a church led by a plurality of pastors will find itself in a position to know the benefits of being served and strengthened by pastoral leadership.

Members Are Served

Church members need the service of prayers and the Word from the office of pastor. In Acts 6, the apostles establish prayer and the ministry of the Word as a priority for church leadership (v. 4). A look at Paul's ministry reveals his commitment to prayer (Eph 1:16; 1 Thess 1:2-3; 2 Tim 1:13) and showcases his efforts to extend the ministry of the Word beyond public settings and into the homes of those he aimed to serve (Acts 20:20). A clear implication of these New Testament patterns is that church members will benefit as they are served well by their leaders in the areas of prayer and the ministry of the Word.

Church members under the care of multiple pastors are more likely to receive the service of prayer as opposed to believers under the care of only one shepherd. Cory Drummond—a bi-vocational pastor of a one-pastor congregation—lends support to this claim. Due to a demanding schedule that calls for a balance between being a husband, father, pastor, and school teacher, Drummond notes he is simply not able to serve his people in prayer as much as he would like.³⁶ His congregation does not know the benefit

³⁶ Cory Drummond, pastor of Salem Baptist Church in Cullman, AL, telephone interview by author, August 11, 2022.

of a pastor who can frequently intercede for them on an individual basis. The believers at Salem Baptist Church miss out on the benefit of consistently receiving a text or phone call specifically dedicated to the ministry of prayer. However, should the day arrive when his congregation adopts a plural leadership model, Drummond would have the time and man power to devise a strategy that features a plurality of pastors sharing prayer responsibilities and thereby benefiting the members of the church in a significant way.

Just as being served well in prayer is a benefit of those under the care of multiple pastors, so also is the benefit of receiving thorough ministry of the Word in settings that reach beyond the pulpit. However, members who belong to churches that follow the one-pastor leadership model rarely receive the ministry of the Word in settings other than the preaching service. Pastor Jared Folks gives a concrete example of how a one-man leadership model limits the ministry of the Word to at least some degree. For the homebound in his congregation, there is no denying that Folks has tremendous concern for them and testifies of how he loves to visit them. Unfortunately, because he is the only pastor serving all the demands of ministry, he finds it a challenge to budget time that he may minister the Word to these beloved members of his flock.³⁷

Situations like Folks's are less frequent where multiple pastors can devote themselves to the ministry of the Word. When several pastors work together to carry God's Word to His people, it is not uncommon for church members to receive the ministry of the Word in a variety of settings. Members under the care of multiple men may receive a pastoral visit featuring encouragement from the Word while in the hospital, at home recovering from some type of accident, or while in the ordinary pattern of life that so often leaves people in need of encouragement from God's Word. As members are pointed to the Word of God by their pastors, these members then experience the benefit of being led to truths that generate joy and peace. This benefit is more likely to take place in congregations

³⁷ Folks, interview.

where multiple pastors can devote time to serving God’s Word beyond the walls of the church building.

Members Are Strengthened

The God honoring pastor who takes his shepherding role seriously is used of God to strengthen church members. A church with multiple pastors of this nature is blessed with multiple avenues by which they may gain strength. Jono Simms—a pastor with over thirty-five years of ministry experience—leads the congregation of Shelbyville Mills Baptist Church in Shelbyville, Tennessee with a team consisting of two other pastors. Speaking to the fact that pastors are used of God to strengthen the church, Simms celebrates by noting that God has given him “two brothers that are tripling my effort, output, [and] energy.”³⁸ In other words, the more godly shepherds available, the more strength available.

Strengthened through preaching. The strength provided to members through pastors does not reside with the pastors themselves, but in the Spirit inspired Word of God. This is why Jesus told Peter to “feed my sheep” (John 21:17); a statement that according to D. A. Carson is Jesus’s way of emphasizing “the pastoral rather than the evangelistic.”³⁹ J. C. Ryle sides with Carson, noting that Peter’s task “was to feed souls with the precious food of God’s Word.”⁴⁰ Stressing the importance of God’s people receiving God’s Word, Paul leaves the following instruction for Timothy: “Preach the Word” (2 Tim 4:2). The value of preaching is of such high worth in God’s economy that He inspires Paul to note how the elders who labor well in preaching and teaching must “be considered worthy of double honor” (1 Tim 5:17). One reason God’s Word is of mighty significance is because

³⁸ Jono Simms, senior pastor of Shelbyville Mills Baptist Church in Shelbyville, TN, telephone interview by author, September 21, 2022.

³⁹ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 678.

⁴⁰ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on John* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1987), 3:506.

it is sufficient to strengthen God's people. Consequently, church members will benefit from having multiple pastors who partner together to ensure that the preaching of God's Word is of a healthy nature.

There are at least two actions that multiple pastors can take toward the preaching pastor that will ensure the church is set on course to hear healthy preaching. First, pastors must protect the preaching pastor from laziness. Second, they must protect him from busyness.

Without a plurality of men, a congregation may fall prey to a lazy pastor. Great discipline is required to rightly divide God's Word. Strauch reminds, "Church leaders (like all of us) can be lazy . . . Thus they need colleagues in ministry to whom they are answerable for their work."⁴¹ Lazy preparation leads to lousy preaching. The congregation with multiple pastors stands a greater chance to avoid a neglectful preaching pastor thanks to the accountability he receives from his fellow pastors. As a result, the plural led congregation will know the benefit of healthy preaching.

Healthy preaching is also hampered by the busy nature of pastoral ministry. An overly busy pastor is an overly burdened pastor. If the preaching pastor cannot give proper energy and attention to sermon preparation, then both his sermons and his sheep will suffer. Jeff Noblit—pastor at Grace Life Church of the Shoals in Muscle Shoals, Alabama and featured in Hammett's work on ecclesiology in *Baptist Churches*⁴²—adamantly calls for pastors to protect their sermon preparation time and argues that a team of elders helps in that effort. Noblit says, "If you have got to be called all the time, available all the time and do that hand to hand, day to day, in and out of ministry, it will definitely affect the pulpit and that would be the greatest tragedy of all."⁴³ Churches led by multiple pastors

⁴¹ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 44.

⁴² Hammett, *Biblical Foundations*, 184.

⁴³ Jeff Noblit, senior pastor/teacher of Grace Life Church of the Shoals in Muscle Shoals, AL, telephone interview by author, September 21, 2022.

who understand the value of preaching are set up to enjoy the benefit of avoiding the tragedy of a weak pulpit.

Not every congregation led by the one-pastor model suffers from a weak pulpit. Both Folks and Drummond are the only pastors of their respective churches and by God's grace are able to rightly divide His Word. The people under their care receive a spiritually healthy diet from God's Word. However—and we pray God forbids—what if tragedy strikes in the lives of one of these men and they are out of the pulpit for a lengthy time, or even worse, forever? One should also consider a scenario where these men are called by God to a new work of ministry. Sadly, if either of these situations take place, their congregations are left with a weak pulpit because no other pastors are ready to take up the mantle. On the contrary, should the preaching pastor of a plural led fellowship find himself unable to function in his preaching role—whatever the reason—the congregation to whom he preaches will still have the benefit of a strong pulpit thanks to the existence of other pastors who can assume the task of preaching.

Strengthened for ministry. The positive effects of healthy preaching are immeasurable. Congregations who have the benefit of sitting under strong preaching are congregations being equipped for ministry. Strong preaching equips couples to walk in godly marriages. Strong preaching equips parents and grandparents—as well as all Christians—to reach the next generation for Christ. Strong preaching equips laymen to model Christ in their lives and speak of Him with their lips at school, work, and in every avenue whereby they encounter the lost world. However, being equipped for ministry is not the same as being engaged in ministry. Often, Christians can have zeal for ministry but no knowledge of how to go about creating an avenue whereby they can carry out ministry. For this reason, churches need pastors to stir them unto good works and be men who cast vision, organize, and lead the way in clear strategies that get members involved in work for God's kingdom.

Finding the time to meditate on God's Word, develop a clear vision, and then cast that vision to the church is near impossible for the man in the one-pastor leadership model. Merkle acknowledges the challenge of equipping a congregation for ministry via "a single pastor."⁴⁴ Congregations under the leadership of one man run the risk of being hearers of the Word only. The reason for their lack of doing ministry is not necessarily a result of laziness or apathy; rather, they struggle to be active in ministry because no clear path of service is placed before them. Drummond is once again helpful concerning this reality. He regrets his lack of time to lead his church to be more active in missions, and admits, "We need to be more strategically involved in missions, but my time is very limited as a bi-vocational pastor and the only one on staff. I do not have the time to even organize short-term mission trips, so a team of pastors could really take the load off me in that area and help us be more mission minded."⁴⁵ Although Drummond's church periodically participates in mission work and other service activities, he longs for the day when his people will know the benefit of having a consistent platform for a variety of ministries; a benefit which is far more common among churches with multiple pastors.

God commands that all church members be disciple makers. That task involves evangelism to the lost world as well as works of ministry to fellow church members. To effectively walk in these ministries, the people of God must be equipped for ministry through the preaching of God's Word. Furthermore, church members often need pastors to strategically organize ministry opportunities in which God's people can use their spiritual gifts. Those pastoral duties are challenging, especially for the pastor who leads alone. However, when multiple pastors combine their unique giftings, their congregations will know the benefit of being strengthened by preaching and strengthened for ministry.

⁴⁴ Merkle, *Why Elders?*, 52.

⁴⁵ Drummond, interview.

Conclusion

There is pleasure in God's ways. He Himself is good and even His commands are for the good of His people (Deut 10:13). Merkle reminds, "God's way is always the best way . . . In the end (and even in the journey) it will prove to be full of blessings."⁴⁶ Although Scripture gives no command for all churches to be led by a plurality of pastors, there is no denying the existence of that model in the New Testament. Furthermore, there is no denying that a plurality of pastors is a blessed model that proves beneficial for the pastors themselves, the deacons, and the members of the congregation.

⁴⁶ Merkle, *Why Elders?*, 15.

CHAPTER 4

DESCRIPTION OF THE MINISTRY PROJECT

This chapter describes the details involved in developing and carrying out this ministry project. The purpose of the project was to strengthen the membership of FBCHP in Holly Pond, Alabama, in a biblical understanding of a plurality of pastors. For the project's purpose to be fulfilled, three goals were required. These goals will serve as the outline for this chapter.

The targeted audience for each goal was FBCHP members who are at least 18 years of age, and are active in Sunday school. The first goal was to assess the current level of knowledge concerning the Bible's principles for a plurality of pastors among members of FBCHP. Goal 2 featured the development of a six-session curriculum to equip members of FBCHP with a biblical understanding of a plurality of pastors. The final goal was to increase the knowledge concerning the Bible's principles for a plurality of pastors among members of FBCHP.

Project Promotion

Promotion for the project began on July 15, 2022. Promotion took place via several avenues. First, the pastoral staff was made aware of the details of the project. These men helped schedule the dates for when a class featuring the six-session curriculum on church leadership would be taught. Once those dates were established, the class was promoted to the entire congregation at a members' meeting on August 21, 2022. On August 31, Sunday school leaders were made aware that their classes would be joining together in a large group setting during the Sunday school hour from October 16 until November 20 for the purpose of studying what the Bible teaches in regard to church leadership. On October 9, the class was promoted in two more ways: (1) I personally

visited the adult Sunday school classes that would be joining me for the class and I gave them a personal reminder that the class would begin the next week, and (2) a message promoting the class and start time was shared through the church's app. Finally, during the week leading up to the class—specifically on October 11—the church's app was once again utilized to promote the class, which would begin the following Sunday.

Summary of Project Goals

The first goal was to assess the current level of knowledge concerning the Bible's principles for a plurality of pastors among members of FBCHP. This goal was measured by administering the Biblical Church Leadership Survey (BCLS).¹ The success of this goal was dependent on at least 70 percent of my targeted audience completing the BCLS, and then analyzing the inventory.

The second goal was to develop a six-session curriculum to equip members with a biblical understanding of a plurality of pastors. This goal was measured by an expert panel who utilized a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum.² This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criteria met or exceeded the sufficient level.

The third goal was to increase the knowledge concerning the Bible's principles for a plurality of pastors among members of FBCHP. This goal was measured by re-administering the Biblical Church Leadership Survey.³ This goal considered successfully met when a *t*-test for dependent samples revealed an increase in knowledge concerning the Bible's principles for a plurality of pastors.

¹ See appendix 1.

² See appendix 3.

³ See appendix 1.

Goal 1: Assessment of Knowledge

Striving to accomplish the goal of assessing knowledge concerning the Bible's principles for a plurality of pastors through use of the BCLS involved two critical steps. First, I formulated the questions and Likert Scale statements to aid in properly assessing the participants' understanding of church leadership. Second, once the BCLS was developed, I then administered the survey, collected it, and evaluated the results.

Formulating the survey. I wanted to explore at least five specific areas regarding the participants' understanding of church leadership. I formulated the BCLS in a way to help me investigate those specific areas. First, if I were to be successful in assessing participants' understanding of church leadership, it was critical to know whether the target audience was aware that the Bible does indeed address church leadership. The methods of many churches in the area that surround FBCHP indicate that they view church leadership structures as an area of liberty where the cleverness of man is free to design whatever structure he feels will best fit his context. To assess whether the project's participants shared a similar view, I utilized the following Likert Scale statement: "The Bible gives instructions as to who should provide overall leadership to the church." Those being surveyed were asked to choose from the following responses: "strongly disagree, disagree, disagree somewhat, agree somewhat, strongly agree." I was confident that as participants completed this portion of the survey, I would have an understanding in regard to their view on whether the Bible addresses church leadership.

A second area of interest worthy of my investigation aimed at those who do believe the Bible gives instruction on church leadership. Specifically, what form of church government did they see taught in the Bible? For example, did they believe the Bible taught a single-pastor and deacon led model (perhaps the most prominent model in the geographical context of FBCHP), a single-pastor and deacon served model, a plural model where pastors share authority with deacons, or did they believe a plurality of leading pastors supported by serving deacons was the model best supported in Scripture? To

gauge this particular area of understanding, I included one multiple choice question and several Likert Scale statements in the BCLS. The multiple-choice question—and optional answers—was written as follows: “Which form of church leadership do you believe is the most biblical?” (a) shared leadership among one pastor and a deacon body, (b) leadership from a plurality of pastors, (c) neither, or (d) not sure.⁴

A third area of exploration involved in the assessment of the participants’ view on church leadership revolved around whether participants who believe in a plurality of pastors could support their view by identifying specific passages of Scripture that describe a plural model. To measure their ability (or lack thereof) to anchor their belief about church leadership to Scripture, I included the following multiple choice question (item 6 on the BCLS) and optional answers: “Without consulting a Bible, or seeking any other form of help, please mark which passages (if any) describe individual churches being led by a plurality of pastors” (a) Titus 1:5, (b) 1 Peter 5:1, (c) Hebrews 13:17, (d) Philippians 1:1, or (e) Acts 20:17. The potential answers I offered to this question are some of the most well-known passages that describe a single congregation being led by multiple pastors, and it was my assumption that those who have built their belief in plural leadership on Scripture would be able to identify one of these passages. Although there are many passages that argue for plural leadership, the assumption was that those who believe the Bible advocates for plural leadership would be able to identify one of the passages included in the optional answers as a place in Scripture that describes a plural leadership model.

A fourth area of interest that was important to understand as I aimed to assess participants’ understanding of church leadership lay in the area of Baptist history. Were the participants aware that plural leadership has a place in Baptist history? To properly estimate their knowledge of leadership in Baptist history I included the following Likert Statement on the BCLS: “Historically speaking, a plurality of pastors has never been used

⁴ The results and evaluation of this question are included in chap. 5.

or promoted as a leadership model in Southern Baptist Churches.” Participants were asked to respond to that statement by circling strongly disagree, disagree, disagree somewhat, agree somewhat, agree, strongly agree.⁵

A fifth area I viewed as important for the assessment of church leadership knowledge was in the area of participants’ ability to distinguish between the role of pastors and deacons. This had been a particular weakness in the recent history of the church and I was curious to know how much—if any—of that weakness remained. To evaluate this issue, I included the following Likert Statement on the BCLS: “A local church should be led by one pastor who shares authority with a body of deacons.” Participants were asked to choose either a response of strongly disagree, disagree, disagree somewhat, agree somewhat, agree, or strongly agree.

Administering, collecting, and evaluating the survey. As previously mentioned, this project included the development and teaching of a six-session curriculum on a biblical understanding of a plurality of pastors. During the first class session I administered the BLCS. Because the pastoral leadership of FBCHP felt it was important for a growth in the understanding of church leadership to impact a broad range of members, the class consisted of people ranging in age from sixth grade through senior adults. However, only the participants who were eighteen years of age and older were surveyed. Furthermore, the class consisted of both church members and visitors, but my target audience did not include visitors. Therefore, to only analyze the surveys of members, I instructed church members to mark their survey with the letter “m” and visitors to mark their survey with the letter “v.” Once participants completed the survey, I instructed them to pass their surveys to the end of the aisle where I collected them and placed them in a file folder. The folder was then taken to my office and the surveys were evaluated.

⁵ The results and evaluation of the Likert Scale statement and participants’ responses are included in chap. 5.

Goal 2: Developing a Curriculum

The second goal was to develop a six-session curriculum for the purpose of equipping members who are in at least 18 years of age, and are active in active in Sunday School, with a biblical understanding of a plurality of pastors. Four different actions were taken to accomplish this goal. First, the curriculum had to be developed. Second, to enhance the learning opportunity, the curriculum needed to be taught via several teaching methods. Third, the lessons had to be delivered to the target audience. Fourth, the lessons had to be evaluated.

Development of the curriculum. It was essential that the lessons cover (1) the biblical nature of plural leadership, (2) the benefits gained from plural leadership, and (3) the historically Baptist nature of plural leadership. The specific information shared in the curriculum was formulated by taking the truths discovered during the writing process of chapters 2 and 3 of this project and presenting them in a lecture format.

I developed lessons 1 and 2 to help students understand that the Bible gives instruction concerning both the importance of leadership as well an acceptable pattern of leadership. To teach this truth, I utilized Exodus 18:13-26. The curriculum showed students that leadership is of such a critical nature that God providentially sent Jethro to advise Moses on the subject. The curriculum stressed that Jethro counseled Moses to abandon the pattern of a one-man leadership model—which was dangerous for both Moses and the people of Israel—and then adopt a shared leadership model that would bring peace to the people and cause the load for Moses to be much lighter (Exod 18:22-23).

To be biblically faithful, I was careful to point out that this passage in Exodus is not a passage that gives a prescription—or even a description—of a plurality of pastors. However, as Tony Merida asserts, even though “our situation is different . . . there is still

a general connection to shared ministry.”⁶ To put in another way, Exodus 18:13-26 was presented to students to drive home two main points: (1) Exodus 18:13-26 verifies the essential nature of leadership among God’s people, and (2) Exodus 18:13-26 verifies that shared leadership is a model of leadership acceptable to God and employed by His people in even the earliest days of the Old Testament.

Lessons 3 and 4 showed how the Bible calls for a specific office in the church to take on the overall leadership responsibilities in the church. These lessons unpacked truths from 1 Timothy 3:1-13. It was important for the class to understand at least two key truths in regard to the office of overall leadership. First, they needed to understand that the office of pastor—and not the office of deacon—is the office of overall leadership in the church. Therefore, the curriculum emphasized that the word used to identify the office of pastor (*episkopos*) would have been clearly understood by the original audience to communicate leadership. Second, I wanted to ensure that the students had a proper view of the office of a deacon. The deacons are the leading servants in the church, and even though the deacon office does not carry the same authority as the pastoral office, the deacon ministry is still vital to the health of the church. To help foster this view, I emphasized that even though deacons are not the overall leaders of the church, their acts of service often call for a certain amount of authority to be delegated to them by the pastors so that the leading servants may fulfill their ministry.

The aim of lesson 5 was to show the abundant pattern of plural leadership featured throughout the New Testament. In no way did I want the target audience to believe that the plural leadership featured at FBCHP is disconnected from Scripture. Although many passages could have been used to jumpstart a study of plural leadership in the New Testament, Acts 14:23 was the passage selected for the curriculum. This lesson emphasized that Acts 14:23 reveals Paul’s practice of setting up a shared

⁶ Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Exodus*, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary Series (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2014), 114.

leadership model in newly founded churches. This lesson also took the student on a tour through many more places in the New Testament which verify that the leadership model in Acts 14:23 is a common model among other New Testament churches.

The last session of the Bible study was written with two points of emphasis in mind. First, I wanted students to see that plural leadership is a model used throughout Baptist history. Second, I wanted the students to meditate on some of the benefits of a plural model as opposed to a single-pastor model.

The first emphasis of this final lesson—plural leadership in Baptist history—was not difficult to formulate. Many sources, the chief of which is perhaps Dever’s work entitled *Polity*, report on the use of plural leadership in Baptist history.⁷ The second point of emphasis—the benefits of plural leadership—is not difficult to investigate either. Men like Strauch, Merkle, Hammett, Newton, and Johnson are just a few of the many authors who have written extensively on the benefits of plural leadership. These benefits reach into the lives of the pastors themselves, but this final lesson featured a great deal of information concerning how even the deacons and congregation stand to benefit when led by a plurality of godly men. Although the previously mentioned scholars sufficiently reveal the benefits of plural leadership, I felt the need for participants to hear testimonies from men who seemed a little closer to their context. To accomplish this, I set up interviews with pastors with whom I could personally interact. These interviews took place during the development of the curriculum, and some of the information gained from these interviews were included in the final session of the class.

I wanted the subjects of the interview to be men who were actively serving in one of two categories: (1) men who were not in a plural leadership model but wanted to be, and (2) men who had transitioned from a single-pastor leadership model to a plural model. Five men in pastoral leadership came to my mind, and all five were serving in one

⁷ Mark E. Dever, ed., *Polity: Biblical Arguments on How to Conduct Church Life* (Washington, DC: Nine Marks, 2011), 190, 349, 531.

of the aforementioned categories. Three were pastors without the help of a plural model, and two had transitioned from the single-pastor model to a plural model. I contacted each man and explained that I would like to interview them in regard to the benefits of plural leadership in the church. All five agreed to be interviewed. One interview was done in person, while the other four were carried out via a telephone. With permission from the interviewee, I recorded each interview in order that I could go back and review the information they shared.

The following questions or statements were presented to the men who were pastoring alone but desired plural leadership:

1. Tell me about a time ministry (day, week, or season) when you especially desired a team of pastors to help you.
2. I would never ask you to share anything that would make you uncomfortable, but can you tell me about a time when you perhaps needed accountability from fellow pastors?
3. What are your personal weaknesses that you believe a team of pastors could help you with?
4. Where does the health of your church suffer because you lack of team of pastors to help you?
5. How do you perceive that confrontation and church discipline would be different if you had a team of pastors to help you?
6. In what areas of ministry could you be stronger if you had a team of pastors to help you?
7. How would your family benefit from you having a team of pastors to help you?

As I interviewed the men who had transitioned from the single-pastor model to a plural model, I made slight changes to the questions. The questions to these men were as follows:

1. Tell me about a time in ministry (day, week, or season) when you were especially thankful for a team of pastors to help you.
2. I would never ask you to share anything that would make you uncomfortable, but can you tell me about a time when you perhaps needed accountability from fellow pastors?
3. What are your personal weakness that the other pastors around you are able to help you with?

4. When and how did you become aware of your personal weaknesses?
5. Where did the health of your church become greater because you have a team of pastors to help you?
6. How is confrontation and church discipline different because you have a team of pastors to help you?
7. In what areas of ministry did you become stronger because you have a team of pastors to help you?
8. How has your family benefited from you having a team of pastors?

Some of the information gained from these interviews was put into lesson 6. I believed that these personal testimonies would help the class understand the intense challenges of ministry and see how a team of pastors is of great benefit to the overall leadership of the church.

Various teaching methods. The main method for teaching the curriculum was lecture. However, each lesson also included discussion questions, group activity, illustrations, a fill-in-the-blank outline to aid the participants to stay engaged during the lecture, and a challenge for Scripture memory.

The Scripture memory challenge was a heavy emphasis in the curriculum. I chose five of the most popular passages from Scripture that describe individual churches being led by a plurality of pastors, and I put these passages before the participants on many occasions. My hope was that each participant would memorize these passages, and at the very least remember their references. To drill these passages into the minds of the participants, I performed two exercises at the beginning of classes 1 through 5.

First, I informed the class that I wanted them to be familiar with five Scripture references that describe a scene where individual churches are being led by a plurality of pastors. For this reason, each class began by mentioning Titus 1:5, 1 Peter 5:1, Hebrews 13:17, Philippians 1:1, and Acts 20:17. I would say the references and I would have the class repeat them after me.

A second exercise I utilized to help students become familiar with places in Scripture that describe a scene featuring a plurality of pastors was Scripture memory. The

Scriptures I chose for the class to commit to memory were the same ones repeated at the beginning of each class. I challenged the class to memorize one verse per week for five weeks.

At the beginning of class 1, I called the class's attention to Titus 1:5 and challenged them to commit it to memory. To get them off to a good start I read the verse aloud three times. When the students returned to class the next week, I personally recited Titus 1:5 and then asked for a volunteer to do the same. I repeated this same pattern with the aforementioned passages of Scripture for the remainder of the class sessions.

Delivering the lessons. I taught the curriculum in a joint Sunday school class which included an age demographic ranging from sixth graders through senior adults. Although participants under the age of 18 were not included in the pre- and post-survey, pastoral leadership believed youth-aged students would benefit from being introduced to the biblical truths upon which the church leadership practices of FBCHP are built. The course was taught over the span of six consecutive Sundays (October 16, 2022, thru November 20, 2022).

Evaluation of the lessons. The goal of developing a curriculum was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criteria met or exceeded the sufficient level. This evaluation was made by a three-person expert panel consisting of (1) an active pastor with a MDiv from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, (2) a former church planter with the North American Mission Board who has pastoral experience and holds a BS in biblical studies from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and (3) a pastoral intern who is currently enrolled at Mid-Western Baptist Theological Seminary where he is majoring in biblical counseling. The expert panel utilized an evaluation rubric (Plurality of Pastors Bible Study Evaluation Rubric) to assess the curriculum in four key areas.⁸ First, they inspected the biblical faithfulness of

⁸ See appendix 3.

each lesson. The reviewers were examining whether each lesson was delivered in light of the theological, historical, and literary context of the passage used in the lesson. Second, the examiners assessed the teaching methodology. They were asked to evaluate whether the lessons featured a variety of learning approaches and whether the lessons were constructed in a way that they could be re-taught by another person. Third, the panel scrutinized the scope of the lesson and were asked to affirm whether the lessons thoroughly addressed the intended topic. Finally, the experts gave a critique of the applicability of the curriculum. In other words, the reviewers were observing whether the curriculum was sufficient to actually strengthen participants in a biblical understanding of a plurality of pastors.

Goal 3: Assessment of Knowledge Increase

The third goal was to increase the knowledge concerning the Bible's principles for a plurality of pastors among members of FBCHP. This goal was measured by re-administering the Biblical Church Leadership Survey.⁹ This goal considered successfully met when a *t*-test for dependent samples revealed an increase in the knowledge concerning the Bible's principles for church leadership.

I administered the BCLS for a second time at the end of the final class session to all participants who were at least 18 years of age. The class consisted of both church members and visitors, so in order to access the knowledge of members only, I instructed church members to mark their survey with the letter "m" and visitors to mark their survey with the letter "v." Because many participants battled sickness in their family or in themselves during the span of the class, I asked them to write the number of class sessions they were able to attend at the top of the survey. I did this just in case the post-survey did not reflect an increase in knowledge. If there was a failure to increase in knowledge among those who did not attend all the sessions, then the lack of increase

⁹ See appendix 1.

could perhaps be attributed to sickness as opposed to an insufficient curriculum. Once students completed the BCLS they were asked to place their surveys in a stack on a table in the classroom. After all participants had turned in their surveys, I placed them in a file folder in my office until an opportune time to analyze the data.

Conclusion

The purpose of the project was to strengthen the membership of FBCHP in Holly Pond, Alabama in a biblical understanding of a plurality of pastors. I attempted to fulfill that purpose by pursuing three different goals. First, I designed a survey that assessed the current level of knowledge concerning the Bible's principles for a plurality of pastors among my targeted audience. Second, I developed a six-session curriculum in an effort to equip class participants with a Biblical understanding of a plurality of pastors. Third, I readministered the survey utilized in my first goal in order to conduct a *t*-test of dependent samples for the purpose of assessing the level of increase (if any) in the knowledge concerning the Bible's principles for a plurality of pastors among those who were taught the curriculum.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

This chapter features three main objectives. First, I will give my evaluation of the purpose, goals, strengths, and weaknesses of the project. Second, I will outline the changes needed if I were to conduct the project again. Third, I will offer my theological and personal reflections and overall conclusion for the entire project.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The purpose of this project was to strengthen the membership of FBCHP in Holly Pond, Alabama, in a biblical understanding of a plurality of pastors. Although the church began transitioning to a plurality of pastors in 2009, it was not until May of 2022 that the church officially recognized this model of leadership in its constitution. Therefore, a plurality of pastors is still a relatively new concept at FBCHP, and it is vital to church health that the congregation grows in their understanding of the biblical nature of plural leadership as this model leads the church into the future. Three key elements at FBCHP inspired the purpose of this project.

First, the church's most longstanding members lacked full confidence in a leadership model that features a plurality of pastors. These members have never been taught how the Bible addresses church leadership—particularly the distinction between pastors and deacons—and the only model of leadership that has been present in their lives is a model involving a single pastor who shares authority with a deacon body. Similarly, prospective and new members who relocate to FBCHP are rarely familiar with plural leadership. Therefore, this project was formulated to demonstrate the biblical nature of a plurality of pastors to offer assurance to these older members—as well as prospective and

new members—that even though the plural model may seem new or unusual, it is in fact birthed from Scripture and not from the mind of man.

A second factor that motivated this project was the need for members to be able to support their understanding of church leadership with Scripture. Although most FBCHP members were confident in the biblical nature of a plurality of pastors before the project, I feared their confidence was based solely upon their trust in their pastoral leadership and not in their ability to see their view in Scripture. Therefore, the project featured a heavy emphasis on developing the ability to locate several New Testament passages that demonstrate a plurality of pastors.

A final element that inspired this project was the confusion that had existed at FBCHP concerning the distinction between pastors and deacons. In the past, deacons had been so overwhelmed trying to carry out unbiblical responsibilities that the office was viewed as extremely burdensome. For that reason, many godly men who would make excellent deacons had refused the office. I was confident that if the congregation could see the distinction between the authoritative nature of pastors and the service role of deacons, then more men would be liberated to give their lives to the blessed, church benefiting, office of a deacon.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

Three goals were established for the purpose of strengthening the believers at FBCHP in a biblical understanding of a plurality of pastors. The first goal was to assess the current level of knowledge concerning the Bible's principles for a plurality of pastors among members of FBCHP. The second goal was to develop a six-session curriculum to equip members of FBCHP with a biblical understanding of a plurality of pastors. The third goal of the project was to assess the level of increase (if any) in the knowledge concerning the Bible's principles for a plurality of pastors among members of FBCHP.

Goal 1: Assessment of Knowledge

The first goal of this project was to assess the current level of knowledge concerning the Bible's principles for a plurality of pastors among members of FBCHP. This goal was measured by administering the BCLS.¹ This goal was to be considered successfully met when at least 70 percent of church members who are at least 18 years of age, and are active in Sunday school completed the BCLS, and the inventory was analyzed.

This goal was not successfully achieved. There are thirty-four church members who are at least 18 years of age and are active in Sunday school, but only seventeen of those members were present for the first class, which featured the distribution, completion, and gathering of the survey. At least three factors—all of which were beyond my control—contributed to the sparse attendance of the first class, and therefore the failure to meet the first goal.

First, sickness caused sparse attendance. Not only did enrolled participants miss the initial class because of their own sickness or the sickness of their children, but also the sickness of a teacher responsible for a children's Sunday class required volunteers be drafted from my Bible study class. Second, one individual, who is a regular attendee of Sunday school was on call with his job and was called into work. Finally, of the nine senior adults who were invited to the class, only two were willing to participate. If all the members of the senior adults class would have attended, then a total of twenty-five out of thirty-four targeted participants would have completed the survey and my goal would have been reached.

Although I missed the goal in regard to the number of people I aimed to survey, the BCLS was not a complete failure. The data gathered helped me in at least four ways. First, the BCLS provided a baseline for the knowledge concerning the Bible's principles for church leadership among the targeted demographic. Second, the survey helped me assess whether participants viewed plural leadership as a biblical model, and if they did

¹ See appendix 1.

view it as biblical, I was able to assess whether they knew where the Bible affirmed their belief. Third, information gained from the BCLS allowed me to discover whether participants understood that plural leadership was historically Baptist. Fourth, the data was telling in regard to whether the participants understood the distinction between pastors and deacons.

A baseline for knowledge regarding plural leadership. The results obtained from the BCLS provided data revealing the knowledge participants had in regard to a plurality of pastors before taking part in the Bible study curriculum. The baseline data, in combination with the post-survey data, helped me to discover whether the Bible study curriculum was effective at increasing the knowledge of a biblical understanding regarding a plurality of pastors.

Participants view of plural leadership as biblical. The BCLS revealed whether participants in the targeted audience believe plural leadership is a biblical model. Because FBCHP has been led by multiple pastors for over ten years, I anticipated that most participants held the view that the leadership model at FBCHP was in fact biblical. However, I also anticipated that although they knew *what* they believed in regard to plural leadership, they may not know *why* they believe it. In other words, before the Bible study curriculum was taught, I was curious to find out if participants knew where to go in the Bible to support their belief in a plurality of pastors? To have my questions answered, I developed two avenues of information within the survey to draw out what my targeted audience believed about plural leadership and whether they could support their belief with Scripture.

The first avenue came in the form of the following question: Which form of church leadership do you believe is the most biblical? Participants chose from the following options: (1) shared leadership among one pastor and a deacon body, (2) leadership from a plurality of pastors, (3) neither, and (4) not sure. The question, optional answers, and results are included in table 1.

Table 1. Survey results concerning belief about church leadership

Survey Question	Shared leadership among one pastor and a deacon body	Leadership from a plurality of pastors	Neither	Not Sure
Which form of church leadership do you believe is most biblical?	1	15	1	0

As I anticipated, the most marked answer for the question “Which form of church leadership do you believe is most biblical?” was, “leadership from a plurality of pastors.” An overwhelming 88 percent (15/17) of those surveyed believe plural leadership is biblical, but do they know why they believe that? That is, can they support their belief with Scripture?

I assessed whether they could support their belief with Scripture in the form of a multiple choice activity. I presented the survey participants with the following challenge:

6. Without consulting a Bible, or seeking any other form of help, please mark which passages (if any) describe individual churches being led by a plurality of pastors:
- A. Titus 1:5
 - B. 1 Peter 5:1
 - C. Hebrews 13:17
 - D. Philippians 1:1
 - E. Acts 20:17

This statement yielded a variety of responses, as seen in table 2.

Table 2. Results of survey participants who are able to support their belief in plural leadership with Scripture

Number of passages	Successful Participants
Participants who can identify 5 passages of Scripture supporting plural leadership	3
Participants who can identify 4 passages of Scripture supporting plural leadership	0
Participants who can identify 3 passages of Scripture supporting plural leadership	0
Participants who can identify 2 passages of Scripture supporting plural leadership	3
Participants who can identify 1 passages of Scripture supporting plural leadership	3
Participants who can identify 0 passages of Scripture supporting plural leadership	5

Of the 15 people who stated they believed a plurality of pastors to be a biblical model, only 20 percent were able to identify all five passages as being places in Scripture where that truth is taught. Roughly 25 percent of respondents identified two of the passages where the idea of plural leadership is on display. Another 20 percent were able to identify one of the passages demonstrating plural leadership, but the majority of participants (33 percent) who believe the Bible teaches a plural leadership model were not able to identify a single passage to support their belief.

Participants knowledge that plural leadership is historically Baptist.

FBCHP is located in a region of the United States where the most well-known form of church leadership in Southern Baptist life is that of a single pastor and a body or board of deacons. However, Southern Baptist history records that plural leadership is not uncommon among Southern Baptist churches of the past. The BCLS allowed me to gauge whether my targeted audience was privy to the fact that plural leadership has a place in Southern Baptist history.

I gathered this information through use of a Likert Scale statement. The statement read, “Historically speaking, a plurality of pastors has never been used or promoted as a leadership model in Southern Baptist Churches.” Participants were asked

to choose a response between strongly disagree and strongly agree. The results, which are displayed in table 3, show that 58 percent (10/17) of the participants either agreed, agreed somewhat, or strongly agreed that a plurality of pastors has never been used or promoted in Southern Baptist life, while only roughly 42 percent (7/17) viewed plural leadership as having a place in Southern Baptist history.

Table 3. Participants view on the historically Baptist nature of a plurality of pastors

Statement	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
Historically speaking, a plurality of pastors has never been used or promoted as a leadership model in Southern Baptist Churches.	4	1	2	3	4	3

It is of interest to note that of the participants surveyed, five fell in the age range of 50 years of age and up. Of those five, 80 percent fell somewhere in the range of agreeing that a plurality of pastors is not a model of leadership that has been used or promoted among Southern Baptist churches of the past. This is an indication that in FBCHP’s region of the United States, churches have—for many decades—failed to teach the historical nature of plural leadership among Southern Baptists.

Participants understanding the distinction between pastors and deacons.

Until as recent as ten years ago, FBCHP utilized a leadership model featuring a single pastor who shared authority with a body of deacons. This leadership model caused confusion among the congregation in regard to how the role of pastor and deacon are distinct. In times past, because there was confusion, deacons have been asked to assume responsibilities outside of their biblical parameters as well as their own comfort zones.

I was curious to know if the confusion still lingered in the minds of my target audience, so the BCLS included the following statement: “A local church should be led by one pastor who shares authority with a body of deacons.” Participants were asked to choose either a response between strongly disagree and strongly agree. The responses, which are displayed in table 3, show that only roughly 12 percent (2/17) were on the

agreement end of a Likert Scale in regard to pastors sharing leadership authority with deacons. The overwhelming majority (88 percent or 15/17) strongly disagreed, disagreed, or disagreed somewhat that a local church should be led by one pastor who shares authority with a body of deacons. Therefore, even before the curriculum was taught, their seemed to be an understanding that the role of pastor and deacon are distinct in regard to church leadership.

Table 4. Participants’ view on the distinction of leadership roles among pastors and deacons

Statement	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
A local church should be led by one pastor who shares authority with a body of deacons.	7	5	3	1	0	1

Goal 2: Developing a Curriculum

The second goal was to develop a six-session curriculum to equip members with a biblical understanding of a plurality of pastors. The lessons covered three key areas: (1) the biblical nature of plural leadership, (2) the benefits gained from plural leadership, and (3) the historically Baptist nature of plural leadership.

The goal of developing a curriculum was to be considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level. An expert panel—which consisted of an active pastor with a MDiv from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, a former church planter with the North American Mission Board who has pastoral experience and a holds a BS in biblical studies from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and a pastoral intern who is currently enrolled at Mid-Western Baptist Theological Seminary where he is majoring in biblical counseling—utilized an evaluation rubric (Plurality of Pastors Bible Study Evaluation Rubric) to examine the curriculum.²

² See appendix 2.

Two of the three panel members noted the curriculum as being exemplarily in all areas. The third member gave exemplary marks in all but one category. This member noted that although lessons 1 and 2 of the curriculum were sufficient in regard to biblical faithfulness, he felt those lessons fell just short of exemplary. Although the curriculum did not receive exemplary marks in every aspect, it proved sufficient to meet the stated goal (see table 5).

Table 5. Evaluation rubric results

Criteria	Insufficient	Requires Attention	Sufficient	Exemplary
Biblical Faithfulness			1	2
Teaching Methodology				3
Reproducible Lessons				3
Scope				3
Applicability of the Curriculum				3

Goal 3: Assessment of Knowledge Increase

The third goal was to increase the knowledge concerning the Bible's principles for a plurality of pastors among members of FBCHP. This goal was measured by re-administering the BCLS once the Bible study curriculum was taught, and was to be considered successfully met when a *t*-test for dependent samples revealed an increase in knowledge. The third goal was met as the *t*-test for dependent samples revealed an increase in participants' knowledge concerning the Bible's principles for a plurality of pastors ($t_{(9)} = -2.437, p < .018$).

Although goal 3 was a success, I was disappointed in the low number of observable data. Seventeen members of FBCHP participated in the pre-survey. However, six of those members were not in attendance when the post-survey was given, and two of the members available for post-survey did not complete the pre-survey. Therefore, only eleven members participated in both surveys. At least two factors contributed to the failure to meet the third goal. First, a large contingent of the class consisted of parents with young children. Several of the parents or children were battling sickness and

therefore the parents were unable to attend. Furthermore, our children’s Sunday school classes were missing teachers due to sickness and those roles had to be filled by members who would have been participating in my class. Second, the final class was scheduled on the Sunday before Thanksgiving. The largest local school system had cancelled classes for the entire week, and some participants were already traveling for the holidays.

Project Strengths

The predominant strength of this project was its ability to strengthen the FBCHP members in a biblical understanding of a plurality of pastors. It is especially encouraging to see an increase in participants’ ability to identify passages describing individual churches being led by a plurality of pastors. This is an indication that class participants not only grew in *what* they believed, but also in *why* they believed it. Before the curriculum was taught, less than 30 percent of surveyed participants were able to identify even one passage of Scripture that supports plural leadership. However, once the curriculum was taught, 100 percent of surveyed participants could identify at least one passage of Scripture that describes a scene where a plurality of pastors is on display, and an overwhelming 77 percent could identify five passages that support plural leadership. These distinctions are summarized in table 6.

Table 6. A comparison of participants’ ability to identify passages supporting plural before and after going through Bible study curriculum

	Before Bible Study Curriculum	After Bible Study Curriculum
Participants who can identify 5 passages of Scripture supporting plural leadership	3	10
Participants who can identify 4 passages of Scripture supporting plural leadership	0	1
Participants who can identify 3 passages of Scripture supporting plural leadership	0	1
Participants who can identify 2 passages of Scripture supporting plural leadership	3	0
Participants who can identify 1 passages of Scripture supporting plural leadership	3	1
Participants who can identify 0 passages of Scripture supporting plural leadership	5	0

A second strength of the project was found in the fact that participants now understand that Baptist history reflects the promotion and use of plural leadership. Prior to going through the Bible study curriculum, 42 percent of participants surveyed either disagreed somewhat, disagreed, or disagreed strongly with the following statement: Historically speaking, a plurality of pastors has never been used or promoted as a leadership model in Southern Baptist churches. To state it more clearly, before the Bible study curriculum, 42 percent of participants surveyed believed a plural leadership model was historically Baptist. However, after having heard the Bible study curriculum—which features a section on the historical nature of plural leadership among Southern Baptists—that number jumped to roughly 77 percent.

The third noteworthy strength of the project was its ability to bring an increase in the participants' understanding concerning the leadership distinctions of pastors and deacons. Before the curriculum was taught, 88 percent of those surveyed indicated that a local church should not be led by one pastor who shares authority with a body of deacons. After teaching the curriculum, 92 percent of those surveyed agreed that a local church should not be led by one pastor who shares authority with deacons.

It is of interest to note that the one individual who indicated a belief that a local church should be led by one pastor who shares authority with a body of deacons also contradicted him or herself in other areas of the survey. For example, this individual, who indicated support for a one pastor and deacon led model of church leadership in one place, in another place in the survey indicated a belief that leadership from a plurality of pastors is the most biblical form of church leadership. This person was also able to identify five passages of Scripture that describe individual churches being led by a plurality of pastors, and strongly agreed that a local church should be led by a plurality of pastors supported by a body of deacons that serve the functional and practical needs of the faith family. Apparently there was some confusion in the thought process of this individual or perhaps it was a poorly designed survey that prevented the results reaching 100 percent in

regard to participants agreeing that a local church should not be led by one pastor who shares authority with deacons. Nevertheless, it is encouraging to see a growing understanding concerning the distinction between pastors and deacons among the majority of participants.

A final strength of the project was found in the fact that the developed Bible study curriculum can be retaught. It is unfortunate reality the pre- and post-surveys were not widely participated in, but poor participation does not negate the fact that a Bible study curriculum that increases an understanding in plural leadership was developed. As FBCHP continues to raise up the many children of young families and reach new families in the community, it is a joy to know that this Bible study curriculum could be taught to these individuals, which will help them understand the biblical nature of the leadership model employed by the church. Furthermore, in His kind providence, God has given me favor in the sight of several young pastors in the area who see the biblical nature and practical benefits of plural leadership, but the congregations they serve remain uneducated in the realm of church leadership. Because of this project, I can offer a Bible study curriculum to these men and be confident that their congregations will be strengthened in an understanding of plural leadership.

Project Weaknesses

In order to accomplish the goals of this project, I employed two separate surveys and developed a Bible study curriculum. The strengths of the surveys and the Bible study curriculum served to make the project an overall success. However, there are also weaknesses in both of these areas.

The survey portion of the project contains the most glaring insufficiencies, and they manifest themselves in several ways. Initially, my third goal was to re-administer the BCLS to assess the level of increase (if any) in the knowledge concerning the Bible's principles for a plurality of pastors among members of FBCHP. This goal was to be considered successfully met when at least 90 percent of those who participated in the pre-

survey completed the post-survey (a goal I was unable to attain). Thanks to the counsel of my second reader, Joe Harrod, I realized this original approach to goal 3 was flawed in two key ways.

First, my measure for success (having at least 90 percent of participants re-surveyed) did not actually measure whether there was an increase in knowledge. Rather, my measure of success only revealed whether I was able to get 90 percent of participants to take the post-survey. Even if I were able to get 90 percent of students to complete the post-survey that would not in itself prove that participants had any increase in learning the subject matter. Therefore, goal 3 was adjusted and measured by a *t*-test of dependent samples. This led to another major issue.

A *t*-test of dependent samples requires tracking participants. Unfortunately, my original goal 3 did not require tracking participants, so I faced the challenge of rightly pairing each members' pre-survey with their post-survey. Thankfully, I kept the pre-surveys and post-surveys separate.

Only thirteen members participated in the post-survey, so I began the challenging and fairly uncertain task of trying to pair thirteen post-surveys with their pre-surveys in hopes that they came from the same participant. Making the task even more difficult is that I had seventeen pre-surveys to choose from. Thankfully, the survey included questions concerning the participants' age group and number of years they had been FBCHP members. This allowed me to group surveys according to age, and then form a subset from each group based on the number of years participants had FBCHP members

Once these sets and subsets were formed, there were three surveys that had no obvious matches. Two surveys were post-surveys completed by members who had been at FBCHP for over twenty years. However, no pre-surveys fit that same description. Another survey (a pre-survey) was filled out by a member in the sixty-year-old range, but there was no post-survey filled out by someone matching that description. The age group

of 30-39 who had been members for ten to nineteen years had one more pre-survey than post-survey. Therefore, one survey had to be eliminated. I choose which one to eliminate by comparing the handwriting of the pre-survey with the remaining post-surveys of the same demographic. Once these surveys were eliminated, this reduced my task to pairing ten surveys.

Three matching surveys were quickly discovered because they were completed by participants who stood alone in both age and the number of years as a FBCHP member. To state this more clearly, only one participant's survey reflected that he or she belonged to the 18-29 year old group and had been a member of FBCHP from zero to four years. Additionally, only two participants belonged in the 50-59 age group, but one participant had only been a member for five to nine years while the other participant in the same age group had been a member for ten to nineteen years.

Another pair of matching surveys was discovered by noting a comment that had been written on both the pre and post-survey. The comment was added to the same multiple choice question, featured the same hand-writing, and shared the same message. Therefore, I could confidently match those two surveys as belonging to the same participant.

This left me with the challenge of matching six more surveys. They fell within the following demographics: (1) two pairs of surveys matched up with participants in the age range of 18-29 who had been members from zero to four years, (2) three pairs of surveys matched up with participants in the age range of 18-29 who had been members from five to nine years, and (3) because of the comments written on the survey mentioned above, only one pair of surveys were in the age range of 30-39 years of age who had been a member from ten to nineteen years.

I could be certain that I matched five sets of surveys to their respective participants, and by comparing the hand writing and other observable features of the remaining surveys, I have a high degree of confidence that those surveys are matched

correctly as well. Therefore, I believe measures were taken so that the *t*-test of dependent samples serves as an accurate measurement of the reported increase in knowledge, but also accept the reality that the handling of this aspect of goal 3 serves as a weakness of the project.

Another weakness displayed in goal 3 is found in the limited opportunity for participants to fill out both the pre and post-surveys. Participants were only offered one occasion to complete each survey, and the limited opportunity for participants led to a small sampling of the targeted audience. Furthermore, the time allotted for participants to complete each survey was only about fifteen minutes. This timeframe was too short for at least two reasons. First, the use of a Likert Scale format to gather information was an unfamiliar practice for most in the class and those participants could have used more time to process what was being asked of them. Second, although many of the questions required little thought, other portions of the survey consisted of questions where participants were expected to give thoughtful attention to their answers, and I fear the short time allotment caused them to feel rushed and therefore not fully engaged.

Just as the time allotted for surveys was inadequate, so too was the time given for teaching the individual sessions of the Bible study. Sunday school at FBC Holly Pond is scheduled to last from 9:45 a.m. to 10:45 a.m. However, the habit of being late is a popular vice for the overwhelming majority of attendees, and classes often do not begin until as late as 10:10 a.m. I was diligent to begin every session by 10:00 a.m., but that only left 45 minutes for a session that included review, Scripture memory, lecture, illustrations, group activity, and discussion questions. Although I managed to get through all that I intended to say, I was forced to move at a pace that was not optimal for the listeners.

Another weakness of the Bible study curriculum was that it only presents arguments in favor of a plurality of pastors. There are godly men in Southern Baptist circles who argue for a single-pastor model. For example, in *Perspectives on Church Government*, Danny Akin contends, “Both a single elder and a plurality of elders within a

Congregational structure fit the pattern of church government and polity that emerges from a study of the New Testament.”³ However, arguments from men like Akin are absent from the curriculum, and as a result the curriculum is weaker.

What I Would Do Differently

After evaluating the project and noting several weaknesses, I would make at least three changes. These changes would take place in the areas of surveys, timing of when the curriculum was taught, and the substance of the curriculum.

Changes to Surveys

If I were to do this project again, I would modify the survey in two ways. First, I would take the necessary steps to use the survey to carry out a *t*-test of dependent samples from the very beginning of the project. As noted, the *t*-test of dependent samples was not planned for until after the surveys were conducted in such a way that made matching each survey to its respective participant difficult and uncertain. If I were to do this project again, I would find a way to keep track of each participant’s surveys while also protecting him or her from being identified with their responses.

Second, I would provide more opportunities for participants to fill out the pre-survey and post-survey. In regard to the pre-survey, I would exhort participants to take it during the promotional phase of the curriculum and return a completed version before the first session of the Bible study curriculum. I would also deliver the pre-surveys to individual Sunday school groups on several occasions leading up to the class. Another way I would labor to widely distribute both surveys and therefore increase participation would be to utilize the known e-mails of the participants. For those who do not use e-mail, I would provide written copies of both surveys, place them in various locations of the church facilities, announce these locations, and encourage participants to pick them up.

³ Daniel Akin, “The Single-Elder-Led Church: The Bible’s Witness to a Congregation/Single-Elder-Led Polity,” in *Perspectives on Church Government*, ed. Chad Owen Brand and R. Stanton Norman (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2004), 26.

Finally, to get more survey participation I would use our church app and website as additional places where participants could fill out the survey. All these options would increase the sample size of data, give participants a sufficient measure of time to complete the surveys, and make the project stronger.

Timing of the Bible Study Curriculum

If I were to carry out this project again, I would make changes concerning the timing of when the Bible study curriculum is offered. Because the Sunday school hour rarely starts on time, and because many of the most active members volunteer to serve in the children's Sunday school activities, I would schedule the Bible study sessions for Sunday afternoons as well as offer make-up sessions during an evening throughout the week. This would be more taxing on me as the teacher, but participation would be better, and more time would be allotted for teaching. Furthermore, I would change the time of year in which the Bible study was taught. The class began on October 16, 2022, and ran through November 20, 2022. During these six weeks, the largest school system in the area had a week out of school for fall break, and sickness was prevalent. These two factors made consistent attendance a challenge, and the timing of Thanksgiving holiday travel served to pull many participants away from the final session. If I were to offer the class again, I would schedule it for the time of year when students first start back to school. During that time of the year summer vacation travel is over, reasons for fall travel have yet to begin, and church attendance at FBCHP is most consistent.

Curriculum Modification

A final change I would make if I were to perform this project has to do with the Bible study curriculum. The curriculum would need to be modified to include interaction with at least one opposing view and the weaknesses of that view. Interacting with and drawing attention to the flaws of an opposing view would serve to strengthen participants' understanding in the biblical merit of a plurality of pastors. Because the

single-pastor model is the most dominant in our Baptist context, I would feature arguments that support that particular model, and then explain the defects of those arguments.

To present the arguments for a single-pastor model, I would employ Akin's work in *Perspectives on Church Government: Five Views of Church Polity*. Akin is no doubt a gift to the church and has been used to impact the kingdom of God in an immeasurable degree. Akin loves Jesus, the church, and God's Word. I would consider myself beyond blessed to have only a measure of Akin's heart and giftedness. However, his stance on the single-pastor led church is a stance that is—in my opinion—scripturally deficient. In fact, there is evidence that Akin himself sees his position as one without scriptural support as he describes the single-pastor option “as a scripturally acceptable option” whereas he notes “the argument for a plurality . . . is easier to make based on the biblical evidence.”⁴ Nevertheless, he presents the single-pastor model as a scripturally permissible position. He pleads his case by utilizing at least two lines of reasoning: (1) the reality of house churches, and (2) the thought that Ephesians 4:11 speaks of a distinctive elder.

First, Akin points to the strong possibility of house churches in the New Testament.⁵ It stands to reason that when over 3,000 souls were saved on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41) the church at Jerusalem was forced to gather in different homes. Therefore, Akin argues that leaders had to be multiplied quickly and it is not unreasonable to imagine a house church with only one elder.⁶

In an attempt to add credibility to his single-pastor led house church theory, Akin quotes D. A. Carson: “It is possible, though not certain, that a single elder may have exercised authority in relation to one house group—a house group that in some cases

⁴ Akin, “The Single-Elder-Led Church,” 64.

⁵ Ibid, 64-65.

⁶ Ibid, 65.

constituted part of the citywide church—so that the individual elder would nevertheless be one of many.”⁷ Akin also mentions in the notes of his essay how Gordon Fee is on record as envisioning “a scene in which the various house churches . . . had one or more elders.”⁸ Carson’s mentioning the possibility of a single elder over a house group and Fee’s envisioning a scene where a single elder may be over a house church seems to make Akin more comfortable with a single-pastor model. However, Carson seems to indicate even that single-pastor would still be part of a plurality of other pastors, and even Fee’s comments on the single-pastor at a house church points to the possibility of multiple pastors at the house church. In other words, neither Carson nor Fee solidly state the certainty of house churches being led by a single pastor.

To be fair, Akin’s house church theory is not at all outlandish and more than one notable scholar from Baptist history—A. H. Strong—would lend support to Akin’s argument.⁹ Furthermore, Akin is helped by Greg Wills’ work featuring Baptist history where Wills notes that both William Williams and J. L. Reynolds (Baptist leaders from the nineteenth century) taught that “persecution forced congregations to meet separately in small groups in houses and each meeting needed the service of an elder. But since modern congregations can meet together, they no longer needed plural elders.”¹⁰ There is no denying these arguments make practical sense, but a measure of conjecture is needed to make these arguments stand. Therefore, I submit this question: should one be comfortable with establishing pastoral leadership models on possibilities or potential

⁷ D. A. Carson, “Church Authority in the,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 250, quoted in Akin, “The Single-Elder-Led Church,” 65.

⁸ Gordon D. Fee, “Reflections on Church Order in the Pastoral Epistles, with Further Reflection on the Hermeneutics of *Ad Hoc* Documents,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 28 (1985): 141-51, quoted in Akin, “The Single-Elder-Led Church,” 305.

⁹ See A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: Judson, 1907), 3:915-16

¹⁰ Greg Wills, “The Church: Baptists and Their Churches in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” in *Polity: Biblical Arguments on How to Conduct Church Life*, ed. Mark E. Dever (Washington, DC: Nine Marks, 2011), 34.

scenarios that can be envisioned? A far more reasonable approach is to allow the plain reading of the Scriptures to determine practices, and many places in Scripture clearly describe a scene where a single congregation is led by multiple pastors.¹¹

A second line of reasoning in Akin's argument flows from the thought that Ephesians 4:11 speaks of a distinctive elder. Akin, like many reputable scholars, believes "shepherds and teachers" refers to an elder that could be called the pastor-teacher. He states, "It is extremely likely that the pastor-teacher is an elder, but the unique designation (pastor-teacher occurs only here) and context strongly suggests that this office is also distinctive (within the category of elder)."¹² In other words, he sees the pastor-teacher as unique among elders and therefore feels liberated to see the main teaching elder as the "first among equals," or as what many congregations today would call the "senior pastor." Exactly how Akin's idea of a senior pastor in Ephesians 4:11 translates to a single pastor is not made perfectly clear to me by Akin. I would never want to misrepresent his view, but it seems he is arguing that there is a possibility that the church in Ephesus was scattered all over the city and met in various house churches which were under the leadership of a single-pastor-teacher.

As Akin presents a situation where a New Testament church is being led by a single pastor, he presents a scene that is not hard to imagine. However, it is hard to imagine that the single pastor would be content with maintaining that model. Paul's pattern was to appoint multiple pastors (Acts 14:23). Also, Paul counseled Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:24 to take what he was taught by Paul and teach it to "faithful men who will be able to teach others also." In light of Paul's demand in 1 Timothy 3:2 that those who occupy the office overseer be able to teach, one can reason that part of Paul's encouragement in 2 Timothy 2:2 is for Timothy to raise up more elders. However, if that evidence seems lacking, there is no denying that Paul's instructions for Titus in Crete is that Titus would set churches in

¹¹ Acts 14:23; 20:17; Phil 1:1; Titus 1:5; 1 Pet 5:1; Jas 5:14; Heb 13:17

¹² Akin, "The Single-Elder-Led Church," 65.

order by appointing men to be elders in every town (Titus 1:5). The implication is that although there are churches in Crete, those churches are not in order as they should be, and the remedy for all their maladies begins with the task of appointing more elders.

Understandably there may be settings in the New Testament—whether because of fast growth or persecution—where congregations were led by a single pastor. Furthermore, our present day can undoubtedly create scenarios where a congregation will have only one pastor (consider a new church among an unreached people, or a small congregation in a rural or abandoned town). Churches in these situations will lack enough qualified men to make up a plurality of pastors and Akin is right to note that “where only one [man] is qualified, God would only want one.”¹³ I would gladly stand with Akin and say that having a single pastor in some circumstances is not sinful, but perhaps we would part ways when I state my confidence that a single pastor-led congregation is not the biblical norm and should it never be the goal. An exhortation to raise up more men who can shepherd the church is far easier to make from Scripture than that of a charge to live in a perpetual model that features the sub-optimal situation of one man enduring the strain and responsibility of shepherding God’s people.

Interacting with Akin’s view gave me the blessing of visiting Baptist history and forced me to give more thorough thought to some of the arguments for a single-pastor model. In doing so, I discovered that the reasons for a single-pastor model are not as scripturally founded as the reasons for a plural model. Although the single-pastor approach may be necessary in some situations, it is not the approach most plainly presented in the New Testament and those who operate under the single-pastor system have biblical warrant to work their way toward a plurality of pastors. By introducing opposing views into the curriculum of this project, participants would be forced to more thoroughly consider the reasoning behind the single-pastor model and develop an even greater confidence in a leadership structure that features a plurality of pastors.

¹³ Akin, “The Single-Elder-Led Church,” 67-68.

Theological Reflections

The writing of chapter 2 in this project required the deep study of God's Word. During that study my theological understanding of God, His church, and His Word was strengthened. As I reflected on the biblical nature of plural leadership I was reminded of the wisdom of God. In Exodus 18, it is obvious that our Father knows that Moses and the people will wear out. Also in His wisdom, God knows that shared leadership will prevent their withering away. In 1 Timothy 3, God is wise enough to know the necessary character and skills needed to lead His local churches to be the pillar and buttress of truth in their respective locations, and in Acts 14 God is wise enough to know His pastors need a plurality of men who will stand together as they strive to persevere in the faith and endure the coming tribulations of ministry (Acts 14:22).

In addition to God being wise enough to know the best type of leadership for those situations, He is also good enough to share His wisdom with His people. Psalm 119:68 affirms that God is not only good, but He also does good. That is, God provides His goodness for the purpose of benefiting His people. In His goodness, God sends Jethro to Moses. In His goodness, God uses Paul to teach the church leaders of his day that no man is expected to carry the weight of leading the church alone, but that God in His wisdom and goodness offers the pattern of plural leadership to help His pastors in their work.

Another area where my theological understanding was strengthened was in regard to God's church and His desire for its holiness. My study of 1 Timothy 3 reminded me of God's desire for leaders to be holy. However, the godly character qualifications for the pastor in 1 Timothy 3 are not meant to abide only in the men who hold the office of pastor, but these holy characteristics are meant to be displayed and duplicated in the pastor's household and every household throughout the church. In other words, the pastor must not strive for holiness to simply meet the qualifications for pastor, but to set a proper example for the congregation. Peter's exhortation to holiness in 1 Peter 1:16 was given to the entire church. Therefore, I must strive for holiness in hopes of others following my

pattern and thereby setting up the flock of God to be a people who strive for the holiness He desires.

A final theological reflection has to do with my increased understanding in the fact that God shepherds His people through the teaching of His Word. In His holiness and justice, God would have been right to leave us to wander in the darkness of sin and rebellion. However, in His goodness He gave His sufficient Word to lead His people. As early as Exodus 18 we see Moses helping people to understand the “statutes of God and his laws” (v. 16). First Timothy 3:2 stresses that the man who holds the office of pastor must be “able to teach.” In Acts 20:28—a section of Scripture where Paul addresses the elders of the church at Ephesus—a critical strategy in those pastors fending off false teachers who are to come is to employ Paul’s model of declaring “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). My time in this project once again brought me face to face not only with Jesus’s desire for His under shepherds to lead His sheep by feeding them the green grass of God’s Word (John 21:17), but also to once again see the joyful reminder that His Word is sufficient to lead His people in His perfect ways.

Personal Reflections

The theological discoveries and reminders delivered to my heart through this project must make their way into my actions. As a result of this project, I am resolved to make changes in at least three areas of my life. First, my role in my family must continue to be my first ministry. The biblical qualifications for the office of a pastor leave a clear expectation that I am to manage my household well. Therefore, by God’s grace, I aim to keep my wife and children at the forefront of my mind and be intentional to shepherd their hearts toward Christ.

A second area where this project has called me to action is in pastoral ministry. When writing in the Bible study curriculum concerning the benefits of a plurality of pastors, my studies led me to the many responsibilities of the pastoral office. As I reflect on those responsibilities, I am determined to always be mindful of the seriousness of this

task and never approach it in an arrogant and prayerless manner. Furthermore, as a result of this project, my pastoral ministry has gained confidence. Through the reminder of God's wisdom and goodness, my heart is stirred in a fresh way to trust His plans for leadership as well as His plans for shepherding His people through the preaching and teaching of His Word. This project affirmed that I am not a fool to give great labor to rightly divide God's Word. Finally, this project has made me unashamed in my view of plural leadership. In my ministry context, a plural model is rare and often times ridiculed. However, the many biblical instances of plural leadership, and the testimony of those in Baptist history, emboldened me to be proud to serve with a team of pastors.

A final area in which this project has called me to personal change is in the area of humility. My preferred model of church leadership is plural leadership, and I am convinced it is the most biblical pattern. However, during this project I came across men who would see alternatives to my view and I am confident that those men are men of God who love His Word and His church. It has been a joy to interact with opposing arguments. Through those interactions my understanding in the area of a plurality of elders has been strengthened, and so also has my respect toward those with opposing views.

Conclusion

This project aimed to strengthen FBCHP members in a biblical understanding of a plurality of pastors, and it was successful in so doing. Before the project, the majority of participants believed a plurality of pastors was the biblical model of church leadership but most were not able to anchor that belief to God's Word. Now that the project is complete, over 75 percent of participants can point to the Scriptures that shape their belief in a plurality of pastors. I am confident that the fruit of this project will aid future members of FBCHP to see the biblical validity of our leadership model. Furthermore, it is my prayer that this project can be used by another pastor or pastoral staff to strengthen their congregation in a biblical understanding of a plurality of pastors.

APPENDIX 1

BIBLICAL CHURCH LEADERSHIP SURVEY

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify the current understanding of biblical church leadership at FBC Holly Pond. This research is being conducted by Benjamin Smothers at First Baptist Church in Holly Pond, Alabama for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will answer questions before the project and you will answer the same questions at the conclusion of the project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses.

Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Part 1

Directions: Answer the following multiple-choice questions by placing an 'X' next to your answer.

1. To what age group do you belong?
 A. 18-29
 B. 30-39
 C. 40-49
 D. 50-59
 E. 60+
2. How long have you been a member of FBC Holly Pond?
 A. 0-4 years
 B. 5-9 years
 C. 10-19 years
 D. 20+ years
3. Which form of church leadership do you believe is most biblical?
 A. Shared leadership among one pastor and a deacon body
 B. Leadership from a plurality of pastors
 C. Neither
4. Which form of church leadership does FBC Holly Pond utilize?
 A. Shared leadership among one pastor and a deacon body
 B. Leadership from a plurality of pastors
 C. Not sure

5. Without consulting a Bible, or seeking any other form of help, please mark which passages (if any) describe individual churches being led by one pastor and a deacon body:
- A. Acts 21:18
 - B. Philippians 1:1
 - C. Revelation 2:8
 - D. 1 Timothy 3:2
 - E. Acts 15:1-2
6. Without consulting a Bible, or seeking any other form of help, please mark which passages (if any) describe individual churches being led by a plurality of pastors:
- A. Titus 1:5
 - B. 1 Peter 5:1
 - C. Hebrews 13:17
 - D. Philippians 1:1
 - E. Acts 20:17

Part 2

Directions: These questions ask for your opinion using the following scale:

SD strongly disagree
 D disagree
 DS disagree somewhat
 AS agree somewhat
 A agree
 SA strongly agree

Please circle the appropriate answer in the chart below:

- | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 1. The Bible gives instructions as to who should provide overall leadership to the church. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 2. The Bible gives many instances of individual churches being led by one pastor. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 3. The Bible gives many instances of individual churches being led by a plurality of pastors. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 4. A local church should be led by one pastor who shares authority with a body of deacons. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 5. A local church should be led by one pastor who is supported by a body of deacons that serve the functional and practical needs of the faith family. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 6. A local church should be led by a plurality of pastors who share authority with a body of deacons. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

- | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 7. A local church should be led by a plurality of pastors who are supported by a body of deacons that serve the functional and practical needs of the faith family. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 8. Historically speaking, a plurality of pastors has never been promoted in Southern Baptist Churches. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

APPENDIX 2

PLURALITY OF PASTORS BIBLE
STUDY EVALUATION RUBRIC

Plurality of Pastors Bible Study Evaluation Tool					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
<p>Biblical Faithfulness The content of each lesson was delivered in light of the theological, historical, and literary context of the passage.</p>					
<p>Teaching Methodology The lessons feature a variety of learning approaches such as lecture, discussion, group activity, and illustrations.</p>					
<p>The lessons are constructed in a way they could be re-taught by another person.</p>					
<p>Scope The content of each lesson thoroughly addresses the intended topic.</p>					
<p>Applicability of the Curriculum Students will be strengthened in a biblical understanding of a plurality of pastors.</p>					

APPENDIX 3

TEACHER'S NOTES FOR BIBLE STUDY CURRICULUM

BIBLICAL CHURCH LEADERSHIP – Lesson 1 Teacher Notes

The Caution to Avoid a One-Man Leadership Model

Exodus 18:13-26

Introduction

Barna Group is an organization that conducts research in an attempt to understand cultural trends. They report that, “As of March 2022, the percentage of pastors who have considered quitting full-time ministry within the past year sits at 42 percent.” This number is up from 29% in January of 2021. Of those pastors who have considered quitting, 43% say the reason they have considered quitting is because they feel lonely and isolated.¹

Paul Tripp tells the story of a pastor who abruptly quit the ministry and notes how “the pastor lived in . . . day to day ministry . . . fundamentally unknown and uncared for.”²

I do not know all of the reasons pastors feel lonely and isolated, and I do not know all the circumstances behind why the pastor in Paul Tripp’s story quit the ministry. However, I am convinced that if more churches would allow their pastors to lead as a part of a team of pastors, the feelings of loneliness and isolation could be combatted and the number of men who quit would dramatically decrease.

¹ Barna Group, “Pastors Share Top Reasons They’ve Considered Quitting Ministry in the Past Year,” accessed July 7, 2022, <https://www.barna.com/research/pastors-quitting-ministry/>.

² Paul David Tripp, *Dangerous Calling* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 31.

Over the course of the next 6 weeks we are going to study what the Bible says about the overall leadership of the local church. During this study you will encounter at least three observations.

First, you will observe how a plurality of pastors is the Biblical model for overall leadership in the church. Second, you will see that overall leadership by a plurality of pastors is not something unusual in the history of Baptist churches. Third, you will be shown how overall leadership by a plurality of pastors is beneficial for the pastors.

Group Activity

Each week we will begin with five Scripture references that describe a scene where individual churches are being led by a plurality of pastors. We will mention all five references each week, and try to memorize one of the references before the next class.

Here are the Scripture references that I want you to hear over and over and over: Titus 1:5, 1 Peter 5:1, Hebrews 13:17, Philippians 1:1, and Acts 20:17.

I am going to say those references again, and this time I want to get all of you involved. I will say the Scripture reference, and then I want all of you to repeat it after me. **[At this point, the teacher will say the references and allow the class to repeat the references after them.]**

Now, next week I want you to do your best to memorize Titus 1:5 and to get you off to a good start I want to lead you through another group activity. Here is how this will work. I am going to read Titus 1:5 three times. After I have read it three times, I will then read the first word of the verse and you all read the second word of the verse. Then I will read the third word of the verse, and you will read the fourth word of the verse. We will follow

this pattern until we have finished the verse. **[At this point, the teacher will lead the group through the activity.]**

Transition to the lesson

Let's turn our attention to the meat of the lesson.

Lecture

Please open your Bible to Exodus 18. In a moment we will begin walking through verses 13 through 26. As you are finding your place in Exodus, let me share an illustration with you.

Illustration & Discussion

Imagine a classroom of high school freshman where there is no teacher leading the way. No imagine telling those high school freshman "In four years you will have to pass an exam that will test your knowledge of science, math, history, and English. Good luck!" Now, let me ask you some questions:

1. How confident are you that these freshman will have the maturity and competence to come up with and execute a valid plan? **[At this point, the teacher will give the group an opportunity to answer the question.]**
2. Because high school freshman lack the maturity and wisdom to come up with a plan that will equip them to gain the knowledge they need in school, who has the educational system placed in the classroom to lead these students? **[At this point, the teacher will give the group an opportunity to answer the question with the correct response being; a teacher.]** The students need the leadership of a teacher.

Now, let's take the same group of kids and put them all at Cracker Barrel and tell them to run a successful business. That will not happen unless they have the leadership of a boss.

Again, imagine the same group of kids on their sports teams. What will they desperately need in order to be successful? They need the leadership of a coach.

The point of these illustrations is for us to remember the fact that leadership is vitally important. It is important for education, for work, for athletics, for the home and the list could go on and on. And just like leadership is essential for basically every part of life, so leadership is essential for the church.

Lecture

As I have already mentioned, the purpose of this study is to show you how the Biblical model for church leadership is a model that consists of multiple pastors who share the leadership responsibility in the local church.

It is important to point out that when we look Exodus 18:13-26 we are not looking at a text that gives us a reason for a plurality of pastors in the New Testament. However, this is a text that verifies how shared leadership is not something unusual or new.

Furthermore, Exodus 18 gives the assurance that shared leadership is a model employed from the earliest days of God's people, and is clearly set forth as an acceptable pattern of leadership in some of the earliest days of the Old Testament. **[10 minutes]**

Transition

So we want to read our text but before we do, let me give you the context of what is happening here in Exodus 18.

In this passage of Scripture, the Children of Israel are fresh out of bondage in Egypt. A man by the name of Moses has been called to lead them. Moses father-in-law, a man by the name of Jethro, has come for a visit. Upon his arrival, Moses tells Jethro about all the amazing things God has done, Jethro puts his faith in the God of Israel, he makes some sacrifices to God, they share a meal together and they go to bed. And now verse 13 picks up with the next morning. **[At this point, the teacher should read the text and pray.]**

Lecture

As we walk through our passage of Scripture, we will organize our thoughts around two main headings. In this first lesson we will think about heading #1 which is: **The Caution to Avoid a One-Man Leadership Model**. And then in our next lesson we will tackle heading #2 and think together about **The Counsel to Adopt a Shared Leadership Model**. So, let's get started with talking about . . .

1. The Caution to Avoid a One-Man Leadership Model

Jethro's first morning in Israel's camp puts him on a front row seat to the leadership responsibilities of Moses. Look with me at . . .

Exodus 18:13 **[At this point the teacher should prompt the class to literally look in their Bible at verse 13.]** Notice with me how the verse says that "Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood around Moses from morning till evening."

Let me ask you a question: According to verse 13, when did Moses leadership responsibilities begin? **[At this point the teacher should give the class the opportunity to provide the correct answer of "In the morning.]** And when did they end? The evening.

So as Jethro, Moses father-in-law, is seeing every bit of this he understand that Moses' day began early, ended late, and overflowed with an enormous amount of work—but, what kind of work? What exactly was Moses doing? The passage at hand reveals at least two tasks. Look with me at verse 16. **[Read verse 16 out loud.]**

Verse 16 reveals to responsibilities that Moses is doing by himself. First of all, verse 16 tells us that Moses was acting as a judge. Moses says that when the Israelites “have a dispute, they come to me and I decide between one person and another” (Ex 18:16). Clearly, Moses operates as a settler of disputes. However, settling disputes is not the only responsibility Moses performs for the people.

Verse 16 also reveal that Moses is shouldering the responsibility, to teach God's people. After explaining his role as judge to Jethro, Moses states: “and ”—which indicates the reality of a second task—“I make them know the statues of God and his laws” (Ex 18:16). In other words, Moses is teaching. He is helping the people find answers as they come and “inquire of God” (Ex 18:15). Even in verse 20 of this text you can see the responsibility of teaching as he warns people about God's ways and teaches them what God expects of them. Clearly then, Moses is not simply acting as a judge in disputes and other issues; he is also teaching the instructions of God. Now I want you to think about how hard that must be.

The workload of judging disputes, and teaching God's ways to an entire nation is a gargantuan assignment; especially for one man. **[At this point the teacher should ask the class; if you agree Moses has an incredibly difficult task will you say ‘Amen’?].** We understand that Moses is in a tough position, and we are not the only ones to see that.

Jethro understands the weight of such a task. Look with me at verse 14. **[At this point the teacher should direct the attention of the students to verse 14.]** Notice what Jethro asks Moses in verse 14. He says “Why do you sit *alone* and all the people stand around you from morning till evening?” Now at this point I want to call your attention to the word alone. **[The teacher should stop and add emphasis to the word alone by saying to the class “On the count of three I want you all to say ‘alone.’ One, two, three ‘alone.’]** So Moses is alone Jethro wants to know why. In other words Jethro is asking: ‘why are you operating under a one-man leadership model?’

At this point, one would hope Moses would respond, “I lead in this way because it is the manner God has prescribed. I lead this way because one man leading everybody is the way God has declared best.” However, that is not the answer in the text. Look at Moses answer in verse 15. Moses explains that he leads the way he leads “because the people come to me to inquire of God” (Ex 18:15). We could argue here that Moses is just reacting to the situation instead of leading. Now we don’t want to be too hard on Moses. He is certainly doing the best that he can. He is doing what he truly believes is best. However that is the problem. Apart from God’s wisdom we don’t know what is best. One commentator suggests that Moses’ method of operation stems from logic as opposed to God’s instruction.³ In other words, Moses’ use of the one-man leadership model is his idea and not God’s. However that is about to change.

After Moses gives an answer to Jethro for why he does what he does, Jethro again takes charge of the conversation and issues a stern word of caution. We see it in verse 17.

Listen to what Jethro says there, **[At this point the teacher should direct the students**

³ Douglas Stuart, *Exodus*, The New American Commentary, vol. 2 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 416.

attention to the end of vs. 17 where Jethro tells Moses...] “What you are doing is not good.”

Jethro clearly tells Moses that his one man leadership model is not good. And Jethro does not stop there but presses the issue to caution Moses about the outcome of his one-man leadership model. Jethro then give Moses a warning in verse 18. Look at it with me where Jethro warns, “You and the people with you will certainly wear yourselves out, for the thing is too heavy for you. You are not able to do it alone.” **[At this point the teacher should ask the students, ‘did you see the last word of verse 18? What was it?’ Give the class time to answer with ‘alone.’]**

It is interesting to note that the language Jethro uses here urges Moses to see his inability. He tells Moses, “you are not able.” In Genesis 15:5, God uses similar language when He asks Abraham to “number the stars, if you are able.” The implication of course is that Abraham is not able to count the stars. He literally cannot accomplish such a task. Just as Abraham is not able to count the stars, neither is Moses able to lead the people alone.

At this point I want us to slow down and note 2 features of Jethro’s caution to Moses. First, leading alone is dangerous for Moses. And second, leading alone is dangerous for the people. Let’s think first about how...

a. Leading alone is dangerous for Moses

Jethro’s caution is simply about a plan that leads to failed leadership model, but Jethro is also concerned about the reality of Moses reaching a place where he himself will “wear . . . out.” Look at verse 18. Jethro says, “You and the people with you will certainly wear yourselves out.” The phrase ‘wear out’ comes from a Hebrew word that literally means to wither, decay, or crumble away and is used in other places to describe the withering of a

leaf (Is 1:30) and the fading of grass (Ps 37:2).⁴ To state it clearly, Jethro is warning Moses that his system of leadership is pushing him down a path where he will literally not be able to go on. Today's church culture would be warning Moses of burnout. **[Pause until the class is looking at you and then say...]**

This is very serious. Jethro does not simply warn of the failure of a system, but the failure of a soul. The one-man leadership model currently in use by Moses is headed for the disastrous scenario where Moses quits because he cannot go on, and God's people are left without a leader. That is why we can say a 2nd feature of Jethro's caution to Moses involves the people. Let's think now about how...

b. Leading alone is dangerous for the people

Now if Moses were to wither away, one might suggest another leader would take his place. However, do not miss Jethro's warning that the one-man leadership model is not only detrimental for the leader, but also for the people whom he leads. When you look at verse 18 you notice that Jethro notes for Moses that "You *and* the people with you will certainly wear yourselves out." So the wrong leadership structure doesn't just impact Moses; it impacts that people. One scholar comments that "The method can't be right if it results in everyone's frustration and exhaustion."⁵ The bottom line is this: if Moses continues to work alone, everyone will suffer.

Jethro's observation of Moses' one-man leadership method stirs great concern within his heart. He refuses to keep silent over the inevitable outcome of both Moses and God's people crumbling beneath the weight of a poor leadership structure. Therefore, Jethro

⁴ Ludwig Kohler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. Johann Jakob Stamm, trans. M. E. J. Richardson, electronic ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), 663.

⁵ Stuart, *Exodus*, 417.

lovingly implores Moses to abandon his one-man leadership strategy, and offers him counsel for a model of shared leadership. And that will be the subject of next week's lesson.

Discussion Questions:

1. What are some of the leadership duties involved in Moses' life when Jethro shows up?
2. How would you describe Moses' work day?
3. How would you describe Jethro's opinion of Moses' leadership practices?
4. Who all is impacted when one person attempts to lead alone?

BIBLICAL CHURCH LEADERSHIP – Lesson 2 Teacher Notes

The Counsel to Adopt a Shared Leadership Model

Exodus 18:13-26

Introduction

Let's take our Bibles and open to Exodus 18:13-26. In a moment we will look at a section of those verses and we will continue our study through what the Bible says about who is responsible for the overall leadership of the local church. Before we get started, I need to ask you about Titus 1:5.

Group Activity

Last week I gave you the challenge of memorizing Titus 1:5. Is there anybody who met the challenge, and would be willing to recite Titus 1:5? **[At this point the teacher will allow any volunteer or volunteers to recite Titus 1:5. If no students volunteer then the teacher should recite it for the class.]**

Last week I told you that we would begin each class with five Scripture references that describe a scene where individual churches are being led by a plurality of pastors. Here are the Scripture references that I want you to hear over and over and over: Titus 1:5, 1 Peter 5:1, Hebrews 13:17, Philippians 1:1, and Acts 20:17.

I am going to say those references again, and this time I want to get all of you involved. I will say the Scripture reference, and then I want all of you to repeat it after me. **[At this point, the teacher will say the references and allow the class to repeat the references after them.]**

Now, next week I want you to do your best to memorize 1 Peter 5:1 and to get you off to a good start I want to lead you through another group activity. Here is how this will work. I am going to read 1 Peter 5:1 three times. After I have read it three times, I will then read

the first word of the verse and you all read the second word of the verse. Then I will read the third word of the verse, and you will read the fourth word of the verse. We will follow this pattern until we have finished the verse. **[At this point, the teacher will lead the group through the activity.]**

Transition to the lesson

Let's turn our attention to our lesson.

Review

Last week we began unpacking Exodus 18:13-26. In this passage of Scripture, the Children of Israel are fresh out of bondage in Egypt. A man by the name of Moses has been called to lead them. Moses father-in-law, a man by the name of Jethro, has come for a visit.

Not long into the visit Jethro discovers that Moses is doing something that is not good? Does anyone remember what Moses is doing that is not good? **[At this point the teacher will give the students the opportunity to respond with the answer. The correct answer is something like, "Moses is trying to do everything by himself."]**

So Moses has adopted a one-man leadership model. In other words, he is trying to do everything. As we studied our text, we heard Jethro give Moses two reasons for why he is concerned with Moses leadership model. He tells Moses that leading the people alone is dangerous for Moses, and it is dangerous for the people. Specifically, he tells Moses that both he and the people are going to wear themselves out. That is; they will all wither, decay, or crumble under the pressure of this new found life away from Egypt.

Now as we walk through today's lesson, we will see that Jethro doesn't simply point out a problem but he also offers a solution. And the solution is this: Jethro lovingly implores

Moses to abandon his one-man leadership strategy, and urges him to adopt a shared leadership model. Let's read about this beginning in verse 19. **[At this point the teacher will read verses 19-26 and pray.]**

Lecture

As we walk through these verses we will see that God desires for His people to be under the direction of shared leadership. There are two observations we can make from this text that will reveal how God is moving Moses from a one-man leadership model to a shared leadership model. First, I want us to note...

1. The source of the counsel Moses receives

Where does the counsel come from? As Moses gets advice in this text; who actually is giving him the advice? At first glance, the counsel given to Moses appears to flow solely from the mind of Jethro. After all, it is Jethro who is speaking to Moses.

Now at this point one may want to dismiss Jethro's counsel because Jethro is only a man. One will perhaps see Jethro's advice as a pragmatic tactic which employs a strategy of man. Furthermore, according to Exodus 18:1 Jethro is a priest of Midian and not Israel. So why should Moses listen to Jethro? Is it possible that Israel's judicial system came from the mind of Jethro and not God? The answer is no. And there are two observations which can be made from this text that verify how the wisdom of God is behind this counsel.

First of all, this text indicates that after hearing of all that "God had done for Moses and for Israel" (Ex 18:1), Jethro becomes a man committed to the God of Israel. News of God's gracious acts to His children prods Jethro to not only rejoice (Ex 18:9), but also confess the following word in Exodus 18:11 **[At this point the teacher should encourage the class to look at verse 11 in their Bible, and exhort them to listen to**

what Jethro says about the God of Israel]: “Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods” (Ex 18:11). One commentator puts forth the thought that with this confession, “Jethro bears witness to God’s saving power and thus acknowledges him as the true God.”⁶ And Jethro doesn’t just give God lip service.

After Jethro makes his confession about God, he then makes a burnt offering which according to Tony Merida would have been “understood to atone for . . . sins and to appeal for forgiveness and acceptance before God.”⁷ Merida goes on to state confidently that “at some point Jethro got converted” and notes how after the offering, Jethro joins Aaron, Moses, and all the elders of Israel for a meal in the very presence of God.⁸ So the text lets us know that Jethro has been converted.

So Jethro’s conversion gives him credibility as one who can give offer counsel from God. Amazingly, the priest of Midian is converted to follow the God of Israel, and the very next day he is used by God to speak divine instruction to Moses. Therefore any concern that Jethro’s counsel is worldly or somehow not from God may be dismissed.

Now there is another observation that makes it even more clear that Jethro’s counsel is not the counsel of man, and it is in verse 19. Let’s look at it together [**At this point the teacher should pause and give the students time to find verse 19 and then read the verse.**]

⁶ Peter Enns, *Exodus*, The NIV Application Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 290.

⁷ Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Exodus*, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary Series (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2014), 113.

⁸ Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Exodus*, 112-13.

Now there is no denying that the casual reading of Jethro’s words “obey my voice; I will give you advice, and God be with you” (Ex 18:19), appears to establish Jethro as the authority behind his counsel. However, Douglas Stuart (an Old Testament language scholar) notes that the phrase “and God be with you” is Jethro’s way of saying his counsel is “subject to God’s confirmation.”⁹ Other commentators agree with Stewart. John Calvin and Charles Bingham note that Jethro “does . . . not proudly boast that this will be the fruit of his own prudence, but ascribes it to God’s blessing and grace.”¹⁰ We can strengthen our understanding as God being the source of this counsel by looking also at verse 23 **[At this point the teacher should pause and give the students time to find verse 23 and then read the verse.]**

I like how the NIV translates this verse. It translates Jethro’s exhortation to Moses like this, “If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain” (Ex 18:23). Peter Enns, a highly credible Bible scholar, notes how “a number of commentators have mentioned, Jethro’s advice is also God’s command” and furthermore states how it makes most sense to read the “clause [of verse 23] as Jethro adding “punch” to his advice: “If you do this—*God commands you*—you will be able to stand the strain.”¹¹ In other words, Jethro takes no credit for his proposal for shared leadership, but insists that his counsel is God’s command.

Now, I want to call to your attention how it is not out of the ordinary for God to use the counsel of others to point us in the right direction. The writer of Proverbs informs us of how “iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another” (Prov 27:17). One glorious

⁹ Stuart, *Exodus*, 417.

¹⁰ John Calvin and Charles W. Bingham, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses Arranged in the Form of a Harmony* (Bellingham, WA: Logos, 2010), 1:305.

¹¹ Enns, *Exodus*, 288-89, emphasis added.

implication of this truth is that God will often send counsel through the avenue of other individuals to aid His people. That is what has happened here in Exodus 18.

Jethro has committed his life to the God of Israel. He has exhorted Moses to affirm that this counsel is from God. Therefore, we can be certain that although Jethro is the avenue of the counsel, God is the source of the counsel. So let's now turn our attention to...

2. The substance of the counsel

We have established that Jethro is speaking for God, but what is he saying? The simple answer is this: (and again I will quote Peter Enns) God is saying “get some help.”¹²

Now I'm not going to read the verses again, but when you look at verses 21-23, Jethro tells Moses things like: “look for able men . . . place such men over the people . . . let them judge the people . . . and they will bear the burden with you” (Ex 18:21-23). Jethro does not mince his words here. He clearly counsels Moses to adopt a shared leadership model consisting of other men. In other words, Moses is instructed to find some men who can be counted on to carry out some of the exact duties he himself performs. These men—just as Moses has been doing—will “judge the people at all times” (Ex 18:22).

Now it is important to point out how these men will be functioning in Israel's judicial system in the exact same way as what Moses and are therefore coming alongside of Moses to share in leadership. Several words highlighting how these men are being called to a leadership role could be considered, but a quick look at the word “chiefs” in Exodus 18:21 will suffice to show that the men Moses selects for these judicial appointments are

¹² Enns, *Exodus*, 288.

men who will serve *as leaders*. Look with me at Exodus 18:21 [**At this point the teacher will give the students time to locate the verse and then read it for the class**].

Did you notice in that verse how Moses is told to take the men who meet certain character qualifications and “place such men over the people as chiefs” (Ex 18:21). The reading of this verse in English clearly indicates these men are responsible to be in a position of authority—“over the people”—and a quick look at the Hebrew language makes the case stronger.

The word “Chiefs” is translated from the Hebrew term *śar*. A highly credible Hebrew language tool notes how the word “ruler” is an acceptable translation.¹³ The KJV actually avoids the word “chiefs” and uses “rulers.”

The fact that these men are being called as leaders becomes more clear as on commentator observes how an angry Israelite once used the word *śar* as he sarcastically asks Moses “who made you a prince (*śar*) . . . over us?” (Ex 2:14).¹⁴ Just as the angry Israelite views Moses as placing himself in a position of leadership, so also the honest interpreter of Scripture must view the appointees of Exodus 18 as men who are being placed in positions of shared leadership with Moses.

So Jethro counsels Moses to abandon the one-man leadership model and adopt the multiple-man leadership model. But did Moses take Jethro’s counsel? Well, let me read to you verses 24-26 and you will discover the answer.

¹³ Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), 978.

¹⁴ William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, The Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1999), 632.

“So Moses listened to the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said. **25** Moses chose able men out of all Israel and made them heads over the people, chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. **26** And they judged the people at all times. Any hard case they brought to Moses, but any small matter they decided themselves.”

Summary of Exodus 18:13-26

As we bring this lesson to a close I believe it is important to note that this text has given us a front row seat to where God is making what one scholar calls “historical changes in Israel’s legal structure.”¹⁵ For centuries the people of Israel have lived under Egyptian rule, but now they will be called to live under God’s rule and part of God’s new rule will feature a shared leadership model.

While the shared leadership principle seen in Israel’s judicial system is not meant to serve as a model for the leadership structure in the New Testament Church, Tony Merida, a Baptist pastor who holds a Ph.D. in preaching from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary rightly asserts that “in regard to the church, our situation is not exactly the same.”¹⁶ In other words, what is going on in Exodus 18 is not the same as what we encounter in our New Testament Church era. However, that does not mean this text does not contain principles that educate the church in regards to leadership. Merida goes on to say that, “our situation is different, but there is still a general connection to shared ministry.”¹⁷ One way this passage instructs the church today is by showing that the principle of shared leadership is not a new approach or an idea of man; rather it is a pattern approved by God and on display in the earliest days of the Old Testament.

¹⁵ Brevard Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 329.

¹⁶ Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Exodus*, 114.

¹⁷ Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Exodus*, 115.

Whether Moses realizes it or not, he is on the brink of crumbling beneath the weight of responsibilities associated with leading God's people. Furthermore, God's people are headed for failure because they had only one man to help shepherd their hearts to God. However, in accordance with God's grace and purpose, He providentially orders the steps of Jethro to address Moses' problem. Jethro—a man who declares that “the LORD is greater than all gods” (Ex 18:11)—clearly counsels Moses to avoid the one-man leadership model and quickly adopt a shared leadership model. Moses obviously views the counsel of Jethro as counsel from God, and adopts the new, shared leadership strategy.

Admittedly, this text alone cannot stand as the sole basis for a plurality of pastors in a New Testament Church; nor is that the purpose of its investigation. However, for those who are perhaps unfamiliar with the idea of multiple pastors, this portion of Scripture verifies that shared leadership is not unusual or something new. Exodus 18 gives the assurance that shared leadership is a model employed from the earliest days of God's people, and is clearly set forth as an acceptable pattern in some of the earliest days of the Old Testament.

Discussion Questions:

1. How would you explain that the counsel from Jethro to Moses was actually the counsel of God?
2. How would you summarize Jethro's counsel to Moses in regards to leadership?
3. What does Exodus 18:13-26 teach us in regards to how God feels about shared leadership?

BIBLICAL CHURCH LEADERSHIP – Lesson 3 Teacher Notes

The Office of Overall Leadership [Part 1]

1 Timothy 3:1-13

Introduction

Let's take our Bibles and open to 1 Timothy 3:1-13. In a moment we will look at a section of those verses and we continue our study through what the Bible says about who is responsible for the overall leadership of the local church. Before we get started, I need to ask you about Titus 1:5 & 1 Peter 5:1.

Group Activity

Two weeks ago I gave you the challenge of memorizing Titus 1:5, and last week I asked you to memorize 1 Peter 5:1. Is there anybody who met the challenge, and would be willing to recite either of these verses? **[At this point the teacher will allow any volunteer or volunteers to recite Titus 1:5 or 1 Peter 5:1. If no students volunteer then the teacher should recite them for the class.]**

Last week I told you that we would begin each class with five Scripture references that describe a scene where individual churches are being led by a plurality of pastors. Here are the Scripture references that I want you to hear over and over and over: Titus 1:5, 1 Peter 5:1, Hebrews 13:17, Philippians 1:1, and Acts 20:17.

I am going to say those references again, and this time I want to get all of you involved. I will say the Scripture reference, and then I want all of you to repeat it after me. **[At this**

point, the teacher will say the references and allow the class to repeat the references after them.]

Now, next week I want you to do your best to memorize Hebrews 13:17 and to get you off to a good start I want to lead you through another group activity. Here is how this will work.

Activity: Practice Scripture Memory

I am going to read Hebrew 13:17 three times. After I have read it three times, I will then read the first word of the verse and you all read the second word of the verse. Then I will read the third word of the verse, and you will read the fourth word of the verse. We will follow this pattern until we have finished the verse. **[At this point, the teacher will lead the group through the activity.]**

Transition to the lesson

Let's turn our attention to our lesson.

Review

Last week we finished unpacking Exodus 18:13-26. The purpose for spending time in that passage was to show that Scripture verifies that shared leadership is not something new or unusual in God's way of doing things. Exodus 18 gives the assurance that shared leadership is a model employed from the earliest days of God's people, and is clearly set forth as an acceptable pattern of leadership.

Lecture

Now before this course is over we will spend time showing how shared leadership is the model practiced by churches throughout the New Testament. But before we look at the *practice* of shared leadership we want to think together about the *office* of shared leadership. Specifically we want to ask the question, “Which office of the church is responsible for the *overall* leadership in the church?” Notice that I stressed the word *overall*. I will tell you why later in the lesson, but for now let me set the context for our passage.

1st Timothy is the first of two letters that the Apostle Paul wrote to a young pastor by the name of Timothy. Timothy has been charged by Paul to teach the church at Ephesus how they “ought to behave in the household of God” (1 Tim. 3:15). In other words, Paul tells Timothy to make sure the church is structured and functions the right way. And one important element of the church being properly structured and cared for involves the office a pastor and deacon. Let’s read what Paul says about these offices **[At this point the teacher will read verses 1-13 and pray.]**

Lecture

The first thing we want to note from this passage is that there are two vital and distinct offices within in the church. In verse 1, Paul speaks concerning “the office of overseer.” After giving the qualifications for the overseer in verses 1-7, the Apostle transitions to yet another essential office of the church, and gives his counsel for “deacons” (1 Tim 3:8).

Now this is not the only place in the New Testament where Paul makes mention of two different offices in the church. Consider his address to the Philippian Church, “. . . to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons” (Phil 1:1). Clearly then, Paul views the office of pastor and office of deacon as two different offices.

And so I remind you that the question we want to answer is this: “Which office is responsible for the *overall* leadership of the church?” Is it the office of pastor? The office of deacon? Is it a combination of both?

Well, as we walk through this text you will see how God assigns the *overall* leadership responsibility of the church to the office of pastor. Now this is one of several places where Scripture clearly places the *overall* leadership of the church upon the pastoral office. If you want some cross references for this truth then write down these verses: **[At this point the teacher speak through the following references slowly and perhaps even repeat them so as to give the class an opportunity to write them down]** 1 Tim 3:4-5; 5:17; Heb 13:17; 1 Pe 5:2-3.

Speaking of church leadership, David Platt (a Baptist Pastor and Author who is a graduate of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and former President of the International Mission Board) states the issue of the overall leadership of the church in this way: “elders **[At this point the teacher should interrupt the quote to make sure the**

class understands the word ‘elders’ is the same as ‘pastors’] are entrusted by Christ with the responsibility of overall leadership in the church.”¹⁸

Now I told you earlier that I am stressing the word *overall* as I speak of overall leadership, and here is why. Even though the pastoral office is responsible for the *overall* leadership of the church, it is not the only office of the church from which leadership flows. In order for the church to function in a healthy manner, some leadership responsibilities must be delegated by the pastors to those outside of the pastoral office. The most common place of pastor assigned leadership resides with the office of a deacon.

So before diving into the issue of how those who occupy the office of pastor are responsible for the overall leadership in the church, let’s talk for a moment about the role of deacons and their leadership.

I want to state very plainly that deacons do have a leadership role. Although Scripture is clear that the office of a deacon is predominantly connected to acts of service, nevertheless it is also clear that a degree of deacon leadership is necessary in order for those acts of service to operate effectively. A man by the name of Alexander Strauch, one of the loudest voices in support of pastor-led congregations, admits that deacons do indeed possess a “designated authority.”¹⁹ Another scholar by the name of Robert Howell

¹⁸ David Platt, *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary Series (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2013), 54.

¹⁹ Alexander Strauch, *Minister of Mercy: The New Testament Deacon* (Littleton, CO: Lewis & Roth, 1992), 71.

spoke of how deacons are to lead in their “own peculiar department.”²⁰ And what is the department of a deacon? Well it can involve various tasks, but all the tasks fall within the scope of being a leading servant to the body of Christ while under the overall leadership of the pastors.

We see the picture of overall leadership from the pastors and a delegated leadership for the deacons play out in Acts 6. Many of you may be familiar with how the Hellenist widows are “being neglected in the daily distribution” (Acts 6:1). These ladies have true physical needs that are going unmet and are in need of someone to lead the way in serving them. This of course prompts the Apostles (the pastors of the church) to establish what many scholars believe is the first deacon body. As this scene unfolds, the text tells us that the deacons are appointed to the duty of caring for the neglected widows. The details of how they serve are absent from the passage, but it is safe to assume that the Apostles are delegating a measure of authority to the deacons in order that they may lead the way in this matter. Clearly then, although deacons are not the overall leaders of the church, they are however the leaders of service.

Now, let’s get back to our passage here in 1st Timothy. As we walk through this passage I want you to see three elements that reveal how the overall leadership duty of the church rests upon those who occupy the office of pastor.

²⁰ Robert Howell, *The Deaconship: Its Nature, Qualifications, Relations and Duties* (Philadelphia: Judson, 1946), 67.

First, we will look at the word Paul uses for the office of a pastor in the original Greek language. Next, we will notice how the requirement to teach is actually linked to leadership. And finally, we will look at an analogy within the text that teaches us just as a father is to be the overall leader of the home, so also the pastor is to be the overall leader of the church.

So let's begin by reading verses 1 and 2. **[At this point, the teacher will once again read verses 1 and 2.]** It is helpful to note that as Paul begins his counsel for the office of what many commonly refer to as pastor, the Greek word he uses is "*episkopos*" (1 Tim 3:1-2). Aside from the *King James Version* (which uses the word "bishop") most English Bibles translate "*episkopos*" as "overseer." When you take a detailed look at "*episkopos*" not only do you see that the word "overseer" to be an excellent translation, but also you see how "*episkopos*" is a word that clearly communicates leadership.

A widely acclaimed dictionary for the Greek New Testament defines "*episkopos*" or overseer, or bishop as "one who has the responsibility of safe guarding or seeing to it that something is done in the correct way, guardian."²¹ Timothy, along with those in Ephesus, would easily associate "*episkopos*" with leadership.

One scholar notes that "In ancient Greek society, the word *overseer (episkopos)* was a well-known designation of office; it was broadly used to describe any official who acted

²¹ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000), 379.

as a superintendent, manager, supervisor, guardian, controller, inspector, or ruler.”²²

John MacArthur ties the word “*episkopos*” to the Essene Jews of the Greek culture and notes that “The overseers among the Essenes preached, taught, presided, exercised care and authority, and enforced discipline.”²³

Clearly then; the word Paul uses to identify the office of a pastor, is a word commonly known in the original language and culture as being strongly connected to leadership. You can especially see the leadership traits of the word “overseer” when you contrast it with the word Paul uses to identify the office of deacon. The English word “deacon”—which Paul uses in verses eight and twelve—is transliterated from the Greek word, “*diakonos*.”

Diakonos is used throughout the New Testament in both noun and verb form to refer to all types of servants, and service or ministry. For example, when Jesus describes those who are great in His Kingdom, he says “whoever would be great among you must be your servant [*diakonos*]” (Matt 20:26). When Mary addresses those who are servants at the wedding in Cana, John tells us she is speaking to the *diakonois* (John 2:5). Clearly, this noun points to people of service.

²² Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Eldership* (Littleton, CO: Lewis & Roth, 1995), 59.

²³ John MacArthur, *1 Timothy, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary Series* (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 98.

Likewise the verb form, *diakoneo*, points to acts of service. When the family of Lazarus hosts a meal for Jesus and His disciples, John uses the word *diakoneo* to describe how Mary “served” (John 12:2). Reference after reference could be shared from throughout the New Testament, and all of them would indicate that the word *diakonos* means to serve. Hence, there can be no doubt that God’s design for those who occupy the office of deacon is to serve, while the title given to the office of pastor points to leadership.

Next week we will share two more insights that connect the overall leadership of the church to the office of pastor, but let’s end our time with a few discussion questions that will help reinforce our understanding of this passage.

Discussion Questions:

1. According to our passage, how many offices are there in the church? What are they?
2. How was the word overseer used in Greek culture?
3. What does the Greek culture’s use of the word overseer tell us about God’s expectation of the office of overseer or pastor in the church?
4. How is the word deacon used throughout Scripture?
5. What does the word deacon tell us about God’s expectation of the office of deacon in the church?
6. Why is it important to use the term *overall* leadership when speaking about the office of a pastor?

BIBLICAL CHURCH LEADERSHIP – Lesson 4 Teacher Notes

The Office of Overall Leadership [Part 2]

1 Timothy 3:1-13

Introduction

Let's take our Bibles and open to 1 Timothy 3:1-13. In a moment we will look at a section of those verses and we continue our study through what the Bible says about who is responsible for the *overall* leadership of the local church. Before we get started, I need to ask you about Titus 1:5, 1 Peter 5:1 and Hebrews 13:17.

Group Activity

Every week thus far, I have given you the challenge of memorizing some Scripture. I have challenged you to memorize Titus 1:5, 1 Peter 5:1, and last week you were asked to work on Hebrews 13:17. Is there anybody who met the challenge, and would be willing to recite any of these verses? **[At this point the teacher will allow any volunteer or volunteers to recite Titus 1:5, 1 Peter 5:1 or Hebrews 13:17. If no students volunteer then the teacher should recite them for the class.]**

When we first started this class I told you that we would begin each class with five Scripture references that describe a scene where individual churches are being led by a plurality of pastors. I've already mentioned some of them today, but let me say them again so that you get to hear them over and over and over: Titus 1:5, 1 Peter 5:1, Hebrews 13:17, Philippians 1:1, and Acts 20:17.

I am going to say those references again, and this time I want to get all of you involved. I will say the Scripture reference, and then I want all of you to repeat it after me. **[At this**

point, the teacher will say the references and allow the class to repeat the references after them.]

Now, next week I want you to do your best to memorize Philippians 1:1, and to get you off to a good start I want to lead you through another group activity. Here is how this will work.

Activity: Practice Scripture Memory

I am going to read Philippians 1:1 three times. After I have read it three times, I will then read the first word of the verse and you all read the second word of the verse. Then I will read the third word of the verse, and you will read the fourth word of the verse. We will follow this pattern until we have finished the verse. **[At this point, the teacher will lead the group through the activity.]**

Transition to the lesson

Let's turn our attention to our lesson.

Review

Thus far in our lessons we have discovered that shared leadership is a model of leadership employed from the earliest days of God's people, and is clearly set forth as an acceptable pattern of leadership.

Last week we began thinking together about the *office* of shared leadership. Specifically we are asking, “Which office of the church is responsible for the *overall* leadership in the church?” Notice that I am stressing the word *overall*. The reason I do so is because in order for the church to function in a healthy way there will be times when the pastors must ascribe leadership responsibilities to those outside the office of pastor, and one of the most common places that pastors will often delegate authority is to the men who occupy the office of a deacon.

Now before we read our text I want to remind you that 1st Timothy is the first of two letters that the Apostle Paul wrote to a young pastor by the name of Timothy. Timothy has been charged by Paul to teach the church at Ephesus how they “ought to behave in the household of God” (1 Tim. 3:15). In other words, Paul tells Timothy to make sure the church is structured and functions the right way. And one important element of the church being properly structured and cared for involves the office a pastor and deacon.

Let’s read what Paul says about these offices [**At this point the teacher will read verses 1-13 and pray.**]

More Review

Now, last week we began looking at the first of three elements from this passage that reveal how the overall leadership duty of the church rests upon those who occupy the office of pastor. We noted first of all that the word Paul uses for the office of a pastor in the original Greek language clearly communicates the idea of leadership.

This morning we will notice Paul's requirement for the pastor to be able to teach, and show how teaching is linked to leadership. Then we will look at an analogy Paul uses in the text to show that just as a father is to be the overall leader of the home, so also the pastor is to be the overall leader of the church. So, let's turn our attention to where Paul tells Timothy that the man who occupies the office of pastor must be able to teach. **[At this point the teacher should ask someone to read 1 Timothy 3:1-3.]**

Lecture

Paul's instruction concerning pastors focuses heavily upon the character of the men who occupy the office. However, character is not the Apostle's only concern. We just read in verse three and saw where Paul extends beyond the pertinent character qualifications and states that the man in the pastoral role must be "able to teach" (1 Tim 3:3).

His concern for the pastor's ability to teach is not limited to the passage at hand. In 2 Timothy 2:24, he tells Timothy that ". . . the Lord's servant must . . . be able to teach." When addressing Titus about pastoral requirements, Paul stresses how the pastor must be able to "give instruction in sound doctrine" (Titus 1:9). The ability to teach is an obvious expectation of God concerning His pastors, and I want to show you how the expectation to teach implies an expectation to lead.

Now before I link the ability to teach with the call to leadership, I want to make a clarifying comment. Just because pastors are able to teach does not mean they are the only members of the church who are gifted or expected to do so. Every believer is expected to teach in some way.

A pastor and author by the name of Tim Keller helps the church understand the roll every believer plays in teaching the word by referencing Paul's command to all believers in Colossians 3:16, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another."²⁴ Paul explains that all believers must teach God's word in some regard, but Scripture does make a distinction between the teaching for which all believers are called and the teaching to which a pastor is called.

For example, First Timothy 5:17 calls for double honor to be given to the elders who "labor in preaching and teaching." As he calls for double honor to be given to the elders who focus on preaching and teaching, Paul obviously has a role of teaching in mind that is distinct from the type of teaching he calls for in Colossians 3. Consider James' exhortation to his audience, "Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness" (Ja 3:1) As James warns against becoming teachers is he asking believers to shy away from making disciples which requires that they teach others to observe the commands of Jesus? Is he asking believers to ignore exhortations like the one Paul makes in Colossians? Obviously, James would make no such requests that clearly violate God's Word. Rather, James is cautioning against entering lightly into a role that calls for the distinct and formal act of instructing the church. This distinct act of giving instruction to the church goes beyond simply being an ability for the pastor. This distinct role of teaching is an act of leadership for which he is responsible.

²⁴ Timothy Keller, *Preaching* (New York: Viking, 2015), 1-2.

Interestingly, when comparing qualifications for the office of pastor and deacon the ability to teach is a requirement found only in the qualifications for the office of pastor. Although the requirements for a deacon are in many ways similar to those of a pastor, the skill of formally teaching God’s Word is a requirement that gives a clear distinction between the two offices. This truth in no way prevents the deacon who is able to teach from formally teaching God’s word. After all, Deacon Philip formally address an audience in Acts 8 and is called an evangelist in Acts 21. However, Paul’s words are clear, the teaching responsibility falls upon the office of the pastor. A deacon will perhaps be able to teach, but a pastor *must* be able to teach.

This unique responsibility to teach serves as yet another layer of evidence that the man in the pastoral office is expected to lead. MacArthur notes that formal teaching is “a role reserved for elders.”²⁵ Platt reminds believers that “The Word alone has the power to build up the church, which means the elder’s leadership is tied to the Word.”²⁶ Commenting on the pastoral office, Jonathan Griffiths notes that “as Jesus set about establishing the church, he appointed his twelve apostles to teach his word and through that *teaching, give leadership* to his people.”²⁷ Another commentator echoes the same sentiment when he writes, “The fact that God requires elders to teach his people shouldn’t surprise us. God rules his people by his Word, so the leaders of God’s people

²⁵ MacArthur, *1 Timothy*, 16.

²⁶ Platt, *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, 55.

²⁷ Jonathan Griffiths, “The Role of the Elder, Bishop, and Pastor,” The Gospel Coalition, accessed January 28, 2022, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-role-of-the-elder-bishop-pastor/>, emphasis added.

have always been entrusted with communicating God’s Word.”²⁸ Scripture’s clear implication is that the expectation to formally teach God’s Word is placed upon the pastor because he is responsible to lead God’s Church. The thought of formal teaching being linked to leadership becomes more evident as one considers the instances of Scripture where teaching and leadership go hand in hand.

Consider some of the places in Scripture where teaching is forged with leadership. For example, the link of leadership and teaching is on display in the ministry of Moses as part of his leadership involves the task of making people to “know the statutes of God and his laws” (Ex 18:16). Moses’ successor Joshua is seen bearing the responsibility of teaching God’s Word as a component of his leadership when he summons Israel to “come here and listen to the words of the LORD your God” (Josh 3:9). In the book of Nehemiah, Ezra—the priest and scribe used of God to lead a remnant of God’s people out of Persia and back to Jerusalem—leads other priests in the role of not only reading God’s Word to the people, but also in explaining it in order that the people may understand (Neh 8:8). The Apostle Peter, a foundational leader in Jesus’ Church (Eph 2:20), is exhorted by Jesus to “feed my sheep” (John 21:17)—which of course is another way of saying, “teach my people.” Paul clearly links teaching and leadership in 1 Timothy 5:17 where he writes, “Let the elders who rule well,”—the word rule pointing to leadership—“be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.” Although the list could go on, the reality of teaching being linked to leadership

²⁸ Jeramie Rinne, *Church Elders: How to Shepherd God’s People Like Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 46.

is settled convincingly as one considers the ministry of Jesus Christ. The head of the Church, the Chief Shepherd Himself, founded His leadership ministry upon the teaching of God's Word (Matt 9:35; 11:1; John 7:16; Acts 1:1). These examples from Scripture verify that God's design for leadership includes the component of teaching. Therefore one can conclude, pastors are expected to possess all the skills required to teach God's Word because that is the source by which they are expected to lead God's people. The pastor is to have the ability to teach, because he has the responsibility to lead.

Now, let's look at the analogy Paul leaves us in this text that leaves us to rightly conclude that the office of pastor is the office of leadership. Will someone please read 1 Timothy 3:4 again **[At this point have a volunteer read the Scripture.]**

I want to call your attention to the phrase "must manage his own household well." By using this phrase Paul is showing how a pastor's responsibility to lead the home is directly connected with the pastor's responsibility to lead the church. Paul forcefully declares that the pastor "must manage his own household well" (1 Tim 3:4).

The Greek word Paul uses for manage is "*proistamenon*." It is defined as follows: "to exercise a position of leadership, rule, direct, be at the head."²⁹ Paul uses this word in his letter to the Thessalonians when he exhorts that congregation "to respect those who are over [*proistamenous*] you" (1 Thess 5:12). After giving Timothy the requirement for pastors to manage their households well, Paul explains his reasoning and connects his

²⁹ Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 870.

thoughts to leading the church (something he does not do with the deacon). He writes; “. . . if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church?” (1 Tim 3:5). MacArthur observes how Paul is showing the link between leading the home and leading the church.”³⁰ In other words, Paul creates an analogy between the father of the home and the pastor of the church. In doing so, he implies that just as a father is responsible to lead the home, so also the pastor is responsible to lead the church.

Summary of 1 Timothy 3:1-13

Paul’s words in 1 Timothy 3:1-13 convincingly indicate that the overall leadership responsibilities of the church fall upon those who occupy the office of pastor. That is not to say that deacons are not granted a measure of leadership, but that the office of pastor is ultimately responsible to manage God’s Church. The term used to identify this office (*episkopos*) is easily understood by the people in the original audience to be a term pointing to leadership. The leadership demand of the pastor is further evidenced by the expectation that he possess the skill to formally teach God’s Word. Throughout Scripture God’s design of leadership always features the component of teaching, and the pastoral leadership office is no exception. The pastor must be able to teach because he is responsible to lead. Finally, Paul’s analogy for how the pastor is to lead the church just as a father is to lead his home leaves no ground to deny that God mediates His leadership to His Church through the office of pastor.

Discussion Questions:

1. Are all believers expected to teach one another in some capacity?

³⁰ MacArthur, *1 Timothy*, 116.

2. Where are places in Scripture that imply a distinction between how church members teach one another as opposed to how a pastor should be teaching?
3. Name some examples in Scripture where the skill of teaching God's Word is linked to leading God's people.
4. With so many similar character qualifications between pastors and deacons, why is it that deacons are not required to have the ability to teach God's Word?
5. Why is the call to manage a household well linked to managing the church well in the qualifications for a pastor, but not in the qualifications for a deacon?

BIBLICAL CHURCH LEADERSHIP – Lesson 5 Teacher Notes

The Plurality Pattern

Acts 14:23

Introduction

Let's take our Bibles and open to Acts 14:23. In a moment we will look at this passage of Scripture as we continue our study through what the Bible says about the overall leadership of the church. Before we get started, I need to ask you about Titus 1:5, 1 Peter 5:1, Hebrews 13:17, and Philippians 1:1.

Group Activity

Throughout our study I have given you the challenge of memorizing these verses, and last week we worked specifically on Philippians 1:1. Is there anybody who can recite Philippians 1:1 or any of the other verses? **[At this point the teacher will allow any volunteer or volunteers to recite the previously mentioned verses. If no students volunteer then the teacher should recite Philippians 1:1 for the class.]**

Also throughout the study, we have been mentioning five Scripture references that describe a scene where individual churches are being led by a plurality of pastors. Here are the Scripture references that I have been putting in your ear over and over and over: Titus 1:5, 1 Peter 5:1, Hebrews 13:17, Philippians 1:1, and Acts 20:17.

I am going to say those references again, and this time I want to get all of you involved. I will say the Scripture reference, and then I want all of you to repeat it after me. **[At this**

point, the teacher will say the references and allow the class to repeat the references after them.]

Now, next week I want you to do your best to memorize Acts 20:17 and to get you off to a good start I want to lead you through another group activity. Here is how this will work.

Activity: Practice Scripture Memory

I am going to read Acts 20:17 three times. After I have read it three times, I will then read the first word of the verse and you all read the second word of the verse. Then I will read the third word of the verse, and you will read the fourth word of the verse. We will follow this pattern until we have finished the verse. **[At this point, the teacher will lead the group through the activity.]**

Transition to the lesson

Let's turn our attention to our lesson, and begin by reviewing what we have learned so far.

Review

In our first two lessons we looked at a passage in Exodus that reveals how plural leadership is not something new or unusual in God's way of doing things. Exodus 18 gives the assurance that shared leadership is a model employed from the earliest days of God's people, and is clearly set forth as an acceptable pattern of leadership.

Our next two lessons looked at 1 Timothy 3:1-13 where Paul gives Timothy the requirements for the office of a pastor and deacon. Those requirements are very similar, but we did note how the language used to name the offices, along with the ability to teach as well as an analogy that calls for a pastor to manage a church all point to the idea that pastors are expected to assume the overall leadership of the church.

This morning, we will notice how the Bible not only calls for pastors to the overall leadership of the church, but also the Bible's pattern is that the pastors provide the leadership alongside other pastors in the same church.

Lecture

Now before we jump into the passage at hand, let's take time to understand the context.

In the Book of Acts, Luke charts the Holy Spirit's work in using the people of God as His "witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

One of the most well-known witnesses is the Apostle Paul. As Luke records his three missionary journeys, he gives insight into Paul's "church planting practices."³¹

Specifically, in Acts 14:23 Luke reveals Paul's practice of setting up a shared leadership model in the newly found churches of Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch in Pisidia. A focus on this passage reveals how Paul appoints a plurality of pastors to serve each individual church and thereby validates shared pastoral leadership as the normative practice in New Testament churches.

³¹ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 121.

Acts 14:23 establishes a plurality of pastors as the New Testament model for church leadership in three ways. First, the language conveys that Paul appoints a plurality of pastors to lead each church. Second, the fact that God is sought through the act of prayer and fasting verifies His approval of the shared leadership model Paul establishes in these churches. Finally, a look at how the leadership model of Acts 14:23 is a common practice among other New Testament Churches verifies that shared leadership among a plurality of pastors is the Biblical model for church leadership. So, let's turn our attention the language of this text.

The Language of Acts 14:23

The language of Acts 14:23 makes it clear that Paul appoints a plurality of pastors to serve individual churches. First, notice the word “elders” is plural. Next, notice Paul uses the singular form of the word “church.” In other words, a plurality of “elders” are appointed to each “church.” One scholar explains how the literal reading of the passage is as follows: “having appointed for them *church by church*, elders.”³² Clearly then, the language of the passage paints a clear picture of Paul appointing multiple pastors to individual churches.

Now, perhaps one would be tempted to say “Well, how do we know that is not just Paul's strategy? How can we be confident that the pattern of multiple pastors in individual churches is something God endorses?” Well, let's look close at the passage and we will see God's approval of shared leadership.

God's Approval of the Shared Leadership Model

Appointing multiple pastors to a shared leadership model in each of these churches is a

³² Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 135, emphasis original.

serious task for which God’s wisdom is sought by Paul and those who are with him. Let’s read Acts 14:23 again. **[At this point the teacher should call on someone to read the passage aloud.]**

I want to draw you attention to the words “with prayer and fasting.” Luke explains that Paul’s appointment of the pastors is done in conjunction “with prayer and fasting” (Acts 14:23). Now some scholars suggest the act of prayer and fasting took place after the appointment and was meant only to bring intensity to the prayer that God keep these believers faithful in the midst of persecution. However, MacArthur notes that these “elders were chosen only after they had prayed and fasted”—an action which indicates the seriousness of this process.³³

It is important to point out that in no way does Paul see the appointment of shared leadership among a plurality of pastors as trivial, but instead considers an action in need of God’s approval. The act of prayer and fasting shows that the will of God is being sought in this matter and as Paul moves forward in the process one can trust he does so under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Just as the Holy Spirit set Paul and Barnabas apart for this missionary journey (Acts 13:2), so also it is no stretch to say that the Holy Spirit is now setting apart multiple pastors to serve in the God appointed model of shared leadership in each of the churches mentioned in this passage. Hence, the shared leadership model is far beyond Paul’s idea or preference; it is the leadership model approved by God for His local churches.

Another question one may have is this: “How do we know this is God’s approval for other churches?” That is a valid question, but as we continue we will now look at how a

³³ MacArthur, *1 Timothy*, 55.

plural leadership model is seen in other places.

Shared Leadership: A Common Practice among New Testament Churches

The leadership model of Acts 14:23 is not an anomaly. Throughout the New Testament, one finds multiple congregations led by a plurality of pastors. A brief glance at these instances illustrates that shared leadership is a common practice among New Testament churches.

The foundational church of the New Testament is the church in Jerusalem and it features a leadership model that includes a plurality of pastors. Acts 11:30 is speaking about a gift sent to the Jerusalem church and that passage speaks of that gift being received by the hands—not of the pastor, but—of the “elders.”³⁴

Fast forward to Acts 15 and one discovers that multiple elders, of the single Jerusalem Church, are involved in resolving a doctrinal issue.³⁵ One commentator asserts the idea of a plurality of pastors in this first church in this way; “Jerusalem had one citywide church . . . and one body of leaders.”³⁶ Therefore, when Paul appoints a plurality of pastors to serve the individual churches mentioned in Acts 14, he does so not only in obedience to the Holy Spirit, but also in accordance with the example of the Jerusalem Church.

The model featuring a plurality of pastors did not stop with Paul’s work in Acts 14. It is the model on display throughout the New Testament. Scholarship is not lacking lists of Scripture references pointing to the single congregations with multiple pastors. A scholar by the name of Rinne includes a list of examples in his book called *Church Elders*. Let’s

³⁴ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 124.

³⁵ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 125-27.

³⁶ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 144.

look at that passages on that list together. **[At this point the teacher should instruct the students to turn to the following passages, and interject the comments in bold into the verse as explanation.]**

Acts 15:4 (ESV) — 4 When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church **[that is a singular church. So the church welcomed them as well as]** . . . the apostles and the elders **[not elder, but elders which implies more than one for the church]**, and they declared all that God had done with them.

Acts 15:6 (ESV) — 6 **[This verse is in the same context and is speaking of one church, and the passage says that...]** The apostles and the elders **[plural]** were gathered together to consider this matter.

Acts 15:22 (ESV) — 22 Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders **[plural]**, with the whole church **[singular]**, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers,

Acts 16:4 (ESV) — 4 As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders **plural]** who were in Jerusalem **[that is the church in Jerusalem]**.

Acts 20:17 (ESV) — 17 Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders **[plural]** of the church **[singular]** to come to him.

Philippians 1:1 (ESV) — 1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi **[So Paul is writing to the singular church at Philippi]**, with the overseers **[another word for pastors and notice that it is plural]** and deacons:

Titus 1:5 (ESV) **[Paul tells one of his disciples by the name of Titus]**— 5 This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders **[plural]** in every town **[singular]** as I directed you—

James 5:14 (ESV) — 14 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders **[plural]** of the church **[singular]**, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.³⁷

³⁷ Rinne, *Church Elders*, 87, emphasis added.

This list confirms that the events of Acts 14:23 are not an anomaly, and that Paul was not alone in his approach to church leadership. The shared leadership model is also one to which Peter and James adhere (1 Pet 5:1; Jas 5:14). If we would have included Hebrews 13:17 we would have seen that the book of Hebrews addresses believers that are led by multiple pastors. The adoption of a plurality of pastors in these many instances further strengthens the argument that the shared leadership model spans the landscape of the New Testament as the normative practice in God's local churches.

Summary of Acts 14:23

Paul's work among the individual churches at Lystra, Iconium and Antioch in Pisidia includes the appointment of shared leadership for God's local churches. His plural use of "elders" in combination with the singular use of "church" indicates Paul appointed a plurality of men to lead each individual church. Knowing that his actions were preceded by prayer and fasting assures believers that Paul's strategy of shared leadership by a plurality of pastors is approved by God. As one considers how this same leadership model is used by the Jerusalem Church as well as other churches throughout the New Testament, it becomes clear that a shared leadership among a plurality of pastors is model with Biblical merit.

Discussion Questions:

How would you describe the church leadership model appointed by Paul in Acts 14:23?

There are many scenes in Scripture where the plural use of the word elders is used within the context of a singular church. What does this tell us about the number of pastors at these churches?

Why would Paul spend time in prayer and fasting before appointing a model of leadership in the churches mentioned in Acts 14:23?

What does Paul's prayer and fasting before appointing multiple pastors for each of the churches in Acts 14:23 tell us about how God feels in regards to multiple pastors?

Besides Acts 14:23, can you name any other passages that describe individual churches being led by multiple pastors?

BIBLICAL CHURCH LEADERSHIP – Lesson 6 Teacher Notes

A Plurality of Pastors: Beneficial & Baptist

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Introduction

Let's take our Bibles and open to Ecclesiastes 4:9-12. Although today's lesson is more topical in nature, we want to begin in Ecclesiastes and notice how the Bible highlights the fact that everyone can benefit from the help of others. Before we get started, I need to ask you about Titus 1:5, 1 Peter 5:1, Hebrews 13:17, Philippians 1:1, and Acts 20:17.

Group Activity

Throughout our study I have given you the challenge of memorizing these verses, and last week we worked specifically on Acts 20:17. Is there anybody who can recite Acts 20:17 or any of the other verses? **[At this point the teacher will allow any volunteer or volunteers to recite the previously mentioned verses. If no students volunteer then the teacher should recite Acts 20:17 for the class.]**

Also throughout the study, we have been mentioning the aforementioned references in hopes that you would be aware of some scenes in Scripture where individual churches are being led by a plurality of pastors. Here are the Scripture references that I have been putting in your ear over and over and over: Titus 1:5, 1 Peter 5:1, Hebrews 13:17, Philippians 1:1, and Acts 20:17. So, one final time I am going to say those references again, and get you all to repeat them after me. **[At this point, the teacher will say the references and allow the class to repeat the references after them.]**

Transition to the lesson

Let's turn our attention to today's lesson.

Lecture

Today's lesson has two parts. First, we will discuss how a plurality of pastors is beneficial. Second, we will talk about how a plurality of pastors is historically Baptist. So, let's begin by looking at...

Part 1: The Benefits of a Plurality of Pastors

We will begin to explore these benefits by reading Ecclesiastes 4:9-12. **[At this point the teacher should call on someone to read the passage aloud.]**

This passage of Scripture paints a picture of toil or labor, and points out the fact that there is a greater reward or pay day—we could say success—when the labor is done in partnership. Notice again how the text says, “Two are better”—that is; of more value—“than one” (Ecc 4:9). The imagery of having someone to help one who has fallen, and the imagery of having someone help keep another warm clearly illustrates that there are benefits to not working alone. In his book, *Why Elders?* Benjamin Merkle (a professor at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary) uses Ecc. 4.9-12 when speaking about the benefit of a plurality of pastors.³⁸

The benefits of plural leadership are so abundant to the individual pastor, discussing all of them in this setting will be impossible. However, we will discuss two benefits of plural leadership. Allow me to give credit where credit is due. I am following the structure provided by Alexander Strauch as we point out that: (1) plural leadership provides balance for the pastors' weaknesses, and (2) plural leadership makes the pastors' workload lighter.³⁹ Let's turn our attention to the fact that...

³⁸ Benjamin Merkle, *Why Elders? A Biblical and Practical Guide for Church Members* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009), 52.

³⁹ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 40-43.

Plural leadership provides balance for the pastors' weaknesses. Proverbs 27:17

speaks of how “one man sharpens another.” Commenting on this verse, Alden notes that “the image here is striking; as knives are sharpened by other tools of steel, so scholars, artists or athletes can “sharpen” each other by competition, the exchange of ideas, and constructive criticism.”⁴⁰ One clear implication of this verse is the humbling fact that all men have weaknesses. Therefore, the pastor stands in need of other men to sharpen him.

Merkle emphasizes that “as elders serve and lead together, they will often be challenged by the godly examples they see in each other.”⁴¹ A clear picture is painted by Strauch concerning how pastors sharpen one another and make up for weaknesses among the pastoral body,

“If one elder has a tendency to act too harshly with people, the others can temper his harshness . . . Elders who are more doctrinally oriented can sharpen those who are more outreach- or service-oriented, and outreach- or service-minded elders can ignite the intellectually oriented members to more evangelism and service.”⁴²

The truth of one man sharpening another is evident in my own ministry. Most of you know our Associate Pastor, Colby. Colby is fifteen years younger than I. He is full of energy, ideas, and zeal for evangelism. He pushes me.

And now consider our Administrative Pastor, Allen. He is roughly eight years older and gifted differently than both me and Colby. Although he is as burdened for the lost as

⁴⁰ Robert Alden, *Proverbs: A Commentary on an Ancient Book of Timeless Advice* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 192.

⁴¹ Merkle, *Why Elders?*, 59.

⁴² Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 41.

anyone else on our pastoral body, his greatest strength perhaps lies in his wisdom and ability to see potential issues to which I would be blind. He protects me.

My experience is not unique among pastors. Pastor Josh Sellers of Mt. Zion Baptist Church serves with one other pastor (Eric Jones) in overseeing a local church of God's people in Cullman, Alabama. Josh—whose main area of giftedness is preaching God's Word—praises God for Eric's prowess in one on one discipleship. Pastor Josh unashamedly admits that if it were not for Eric's giftedness, the people of Mt. Zion would not be as strong in discipleship.⁴³ Eric's strength not only shores up one of Josh's perceived weaknesses, but also frees him to exert more energy to the preaching of God's Word.

In a church leadership model that features only one man, his weaknesses are liabilities that will never go away. However, when you have multiple pastors, those weaknesses will most likely either be balanced or strengthened through the ministry of the other men. Let's turn our attention to a second benefit, which is this...

Plural Leadership Makes the Pastors' Workload Lighter. The heavy workload of pastoral ministry cannot be adequately measured. Busy schedules and burdened souls are common among men who serve as pastors. Scripture is replete with passages highlighting the various duties which must be carried out by the men who hold the office of pastor.

John Hammett—another professor at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary—mentions several passages that must be examined when considering a pastor's responsibilities. I have listed those passages in your outline (Acts 20:28-31; Romans

⁴³ Josh Sellers, interview with author, Holly Pond, AL, August 10, 2022.

12:8; Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Thessalonians 5:12; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; 5:17; Titus 1:5-9; Hebrews 13:7, 17; and 1 Peter 5:1-4).⁴⁴ I agree with Dr. Hammett and would furthermore add Acts 6:4 and James 5:14 where we see prayer as being a vital responsibility for those who lead the church.

An honest evaluation of these passages brings an understanding that the tasks of pastoral ministry are more than what one man can successfully accomplish. These passages teach us that pastors are to be doing the following:

- Praying for God's people
- Preaching God's Word to the congregation
- Prodding the people of God to truths that will give them comfort in times of distress
- Pointing the people of God to truths that will equip them to perform ministry for others
- Protecting the congregation from false doctrine
- Providing administrative leadership for effective ministry
- Proving to be an example of godliness to God's people

For a man in pastoral ministry, it is startling to see all these responsibilities listed on a page. But what is even more startling is to consider how these responsibilities can play out in the life of a pastor. For example: Many pastors who are expected to lead alone are pastors who are expected to preach twice on Sunday. In addition to Sunday preaching there are deacons meetings to attend, committee meetings to lead, doctrines of Church Membership classes to teach, church discipline cases to examine and various calls for

⁴⁴ John Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), 163.

counseling regarding subjects that range from stress about an upcoming surgery to someone lacking assurance of salvation.

Now, in an attempt to help you feel the weight of a pastor, I am going to give you a scenario. And I will be honest; the reason I can give you such a descriptive scenario is because I have lived moments just like what I am about to tell you. Before I was blessed to be joined by other pastors, my life was very similar to this scene:

Most often on Sunday night the pastor is so exhausted he truly wonders if he should quit. His exhaustion is not greater than the stress; therefore, he struggles to sleep. He finally doses off and wakes up on Monday morning only to be greeted by the news that one church member is in the hospital and desires an immediate visit, another member is upset over something he said in his sermon and would like a meeting, another member is broken hearted because he lost his job, and there is a lady from the community standing at the door of his home asking if he can help get her prescription filed. He looks at his to do list and realizes that he has a Bible study to lead at the Middle school, a mid-week service to prepare for all before getting started on two more sermons that have to be preached on Sunday. He has yet to give any attention to being a husband, a father, and has no time to seek the rest that he so desperately needs. It is at this moment where his wondering about quitting actually becomes a desire to do so.

Certainly there are those who see the pastor's life as one of ease requiring only Sunday to be a day of work; however those privy to the Bible's expectations clearly see pastoral ministry as an exceptionally busy mission with the ability to burden down the soul.

One of those busy pastors is Jared Folks. Jared, the only pastor of Faith Baptist Church in Cullman, Al, labors extensively in the tasks of pastoral ministry. As the congregation's

only pastor, Jared shoulders the responsibility of all the congregational teaching, counseling, weddings, funerals, etc. A workload of this magnitude explains the mindset behind Jared’s statement of how he “can’t be convinced the church was supposed to be pastored by one guy. It is too much for one man to do well.”⁴⁵

In addition to pastoral demands creating busyness, one must not overlook the tremendous burden of soul these chores cause within the pastor. Not a burden in the sense of not wanting to carry out the responsibilities—although most pastors have had to battle that thought more than once—but rather, a burden in the sense of a genuine concern for the well-being of the sheep. Paul speaks of this type of burden, “apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me and my anxiety for all the churches” (2 Cor 11:28). With the pastoral ministry consisting of such busyness and burdens, no wonder Merkle adamantly states, “a pastor needs others who can share this burden.”⁴⁶

Among the many burdens of pastoral ministry, one of the most frequently mentioned by pastors is the burden of church discipline. Pastors who fear God and care about the health of His Church understand that sin in the church must be addressed. Discipline is a heavy chore and presents an array of challenges that are more easily met and overcome when pastors are sharing the workload in a plural leadership model. Phil Newtown—an adjunct professor for Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary—explains that “if a pastor stands alone in bringing a matter to the congregation, opponents will likely skewer him. But the strength of godly leaders within the church, standing together in such matters, urges the entire church to recognize the seriousness of discipline.”⁴⁷ The man

⁴⁵ Jared Folks, interview with author, Holly Pond, AL, August 16, 2022.

⁴⁶ Merkle, *Why Elders?*, 43.

⁴⁷ Phil Newton and Matt Schmucker, *Elders in the Life of the Church: Rediscovering the Biblical Model for Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014), 56.

who leads alone does not have the privilege of being helped and protected by other godly pastors during the tumultuous task of church discipline. He alone is left with the burden of convincing the congregation of the seriousness of sin, and the great need of discipline.

If done alone, the workload of pastoral ministry inevitably leads to schedules that are too busy, souls that are too burdened, and shepherds that are too burned out to continue.

However, when a church brings in a leadership model that lines up with God's design and allows pastors to benefit from multiple men sharing the pastoral workload, that church will be led by men who be better equipped to persevere in ministry.

Transition Statement:

In addition to a plurality of pastors being biblical, knowing that a plurality of pastors helps to strengthen weaknesses and lighten the workload, are perhaps two additional reasons we see a plurality of pastors in Baptist History. Let's think together now about part two of our lesson.

Part 2: The Baptist History of a Plurality of Pastors

There is no denying that the most common system of church leadership in our day and region of the United States is that of a single-pastor with a body or board of deacons. This model is so common in fact that many church members have never been made aware of the Biblical system featuring multiple pastors. Another feature hidden from many Southern Baptists is the fact that multiple pastors in one congregation is a model utilized and promoted throughout Baptist History.

For example, The New Hampshire Confession of Faith is the confession of faith upon which the first Southern Baptist Confession of Faith leaned heavily during its formulation. In the New Hampshire Confession of Faith a singular church is spoken of as

having not the office of a pastor, but the office of “pastors.”⁴⁸ It should come as no surprise then to read the same principle in the *1925 Baptist Faith and Message* which makes the following statement in regards to an individual church: “Its Scriptural officers are bishops, or elders.”⁴⁹ Even the language of *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000* uses language that speaks of a church in the singular who has offices that are defined as “pastors” plural.

A great question to ask is how did the language of a plurality of pastors make it into our Southern Baptist Confessions of Faith? One potential answer would be because many of the most well-known Southern Baptists in our past were proponents of a plurality of pastors. Mark Dever, in his book called *Polity*, records the stance many influential Southern Baptists of the past have taken in regards to the structure of church leadership.

For example, Dever makes note of a Southern Baptist pastor from the 1840’s by the name of J.L. Reynolds who stated that “the apostolic churches seem, in general, to have had a plurality of elders as well as deacons.”⁵⁰ William Williams was a professor at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in the late 1800’s as well as “on several occasions elected one of the vice-presidents of the Southern Baptist Convention.”⁵¹ Williams states that “in most, if not all the apostolic churches, there was a plurality of elders.”⁵² Other Southern Baptist examples could be mentioned, but we will only share

⁴⁸ *New Hampshire Confession of Faith*, 1833.

⁴⁹ *The 1925 Baptist Faith and Message*, 1925

⁵⁰ J. L. Reynolds, “Church Polity or The Kingdom of Christ (1849),” in *Polity: Biblical Arguments on How to Conduct Church Life*, ed. Mark Dever (Washington, DC: Nine Marks, 2011), 349.

⁵¹ William Cathcart, “William Williams,” in Dever, *Polity*, 526.

⁵² William Williams, “The Gospel Developed through the Government and Order of the Churches of Jesus Christ (1874),” in Dever, *Polity*, 531.

one more. The first president of the Southern Baptist Convention was W.B. Johnson. Writing in regards to church government he states “that over each church of Christ in the apostolic age a plurality of rulers was ordained, who were designated by the terms elder, bishop, pastor, with authority in the government of the flock.”⁵³ Clearly then, in addition to a plurality of pastors being biblical, a tour through Southern Baptist History verifies that having a church with multiple pastors is also very Baptist.

Discussion Questions

1. What are some of the Biblical duties of a pastor?
2. What imagery is used in Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 to illustrate how it is not good for work to be done alone?
3. What does Proverbs 27:17 teach us about weakness, and how might the principle of this verse play out in the life of a pastor?
4. In what area do you believe a pastor may need to be sharpened by other pastors?
5. How does a plurality of pastors lighten the workload for pastors?
6. How is church discipline different with a plurality of pastors as opposed to the one-pastor model?
7. What sort of things might burden down the soul of a pastor?

⁵³ William B. Johnson, “The Gospel Developed through the Government and Order of the Churches of Jesus Christ (1846),” in Dever, *Polity*, 190.

APPENDIX 4

STUDENT HANDOUTS FOR BIBLE STUDY CURRICULUM

BIBLICAL CHURCH LEADERSHIP – Lesson 1 Student Outline

The Caution to Avoid a One-Man Leadership Model Exodus 18:13-26

Startling Statistics

- “As of March 2022, the percentage of pastors who have considered quitting full-time ministry within the past year sits at 42 percent.” This number is up from 29% in January of 2021. Of those pastors who have considered quitting, 43% say the reason they have considered quitting is because they feel lonely and isolated.¹
- Paul Tripp tells the story of a pastor who abruptly quit the ministry and notes how “the pastor lived in . . . day to day ministry . . . fundamentally unknown and uncared for.”²

Scriptures to Memorize

- Throughout the course: Titus 1:5; 1 Peter 5:1; Hebrews 13:17; Philippians 1:1; Acts 20:17
- This week: Titus 1:5

Lesson Notes

- Leadership is essential for basically every part of life, and the same is true in the church. Biblical church leadership is essential.

Exodus 18:13-26:

- Context: In this passage of Scripture, the Children of Israel are fresh out of bondage in Egypt. A man by the name of Moses has been called to lead them. Moses father-in-law, a man by the name of Jethro, has come for a visit. Upon his arrival, Moses tells Jethro about all the amazing things God has done, Jethro puts his faith in the God of Israel, he makes some sacrifices to God, and they share a meal together before getting some rest.

¹ Barna Group, “Pastors Share Top Reasons They’ve Considered Quitting Ministry in the Past Year,” accessed July 7, 2022, <https://www.barna.com/research/pastors-quitting-ministry/>.

² Paul David Tripp, *Dangerous Calling* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 31.

- Two thoughts to consider:
 - The Caution to Avoid a One-Man Leadership Model
 - The Counsel to Adopt a Shared Leadership Model
- 1. The Caution to Avoid a One-Man Leadership Model (Exodus 18:13-16)**
 - a. Leading alone is dangerous for _____**
 - b. Leading alone is dangerous for the _____**
- 2. The Counsel to Adopt a Share Leadership Model**

Discussion Questions:

1. What are some of the leadership duties involved in Moses' life when Jethro shows up?
2. How would you describe Moses' work day?
3. How would you describe Jethro's opinion of Moses' leadership practices?
4. Who all is impacted when one person attempts to lead alone?

BIBLICAL CHURCH LEADERSHIP – Lesson 2 Student Outline

The Counsel to Adopt a Shared Leadership Model Exodus 18:13-26

Scriptures to Memorize

- Throughout the course: Titus 1:5; 1 Peter 5:1; Hebrews 13:17; Philippians 1:1; Acts 20:17
- This week: 1 Peter 5:1

Lesson Notes

- Leadership is essential for basically every part of life, and the same is true in the church. Biblical church leadership is essential.

Exodus 18:19-26:

- Context: In this passage of Scripture, the Children of Israel are fresh out of bondage in Egypt. A man by the name of Moses has been called to lead them. Moses's father-in-law, a man by the name of Jethro, has come for a visit. Not long into the visit Jethro discovers that Moses has adopted a one-man leadership model. Jethro tells Moses that leading the people alone is dangerous and warns Moses that both he and the people under his leadership are going to wear themselves out. In today's passage we will discover that Jethro's solution to the problem is found in adopting a shared leadership model.

- 1. The Caution to Avoid a One-Man Leadership Model (Exodus 18:13-16)**
 - a. Leading alone is dangerous for Moses**
 - b. Leading alone is dangerous for the people**
- 2. The Counsel to Adopt a Share Leadership Model**
 - a. The _____ of the counsel Moses receives**
 - b. The _____ of the counsel Moses receives**

Discussion Questions:

1. How would you explain that the counsel from Jethro to Moses was actually the counsel of God?
2. How would you summarize Jethro's counsel to Moses in regards to leadership?
3. What does Exodus 18:13-26 teach us in regards to how God feels about shared leadership?

BIBLICAL CHURCH LEADERSHIP – Lesson 3 Student Outline

The Office of Overall Leadership [Part 1] 1 Timothy 3:1-13

Scriptures to Memorize

- Throughout the course: Titus 1:5; 1 Peter 5:1; Hebrews 13:17; Philippians 1:1; Acts 20:17
- This week: Hebrews 13:17

Lesson

- Which office in the New Testament Church is responsible for the **overall** leadership of the church?

1 Timothy 3:1-13:

- Context: 1st Timothy is the first of two letters that the Apostle Paul wrote to a young pastor by the name of Timothy. Timothy has been charged by Paul to teach the church at Ephesus how they “ought to behave in the household of God” (1 Tim. 3:15). In other words, Paul tells Timothy to make sure the church is structured and functions the right way. And one important element of the church being properly structured and involves the office a pastor and deacon.

Two vital offices within the New Testament Church:

- Pastor
- Deacon

Scripture clearly places the **overall** leadership of the church upon the pastoral office.

- Passages that affirm this truth:
-

Elders, overseers, shepherd/pastor all used to refer to the same office (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Peter 5:1-2)

Three elements that reveal how the overall leadership duty of the church rests upon pastors:

1. **The word used to identify the office of a pastor clearly communicates the idea of leadership.**
 - Overseer or bishop – one who has the responsibility of safeguarding or seeing to it that something is done in the correct way, guardian.
 - Secular society used the word for overseer to refer to one who held an office.
 - Overseer differs greatly from deacon which means to serve.

Discussion Questions:

1. According to our passage, how many offices are there in the church? What are they?
2. How was the word overseer used in Greek culture?
3. What does the Greek culture's use of the word overseer tell us about God's expectation of the office of overseer or pastor in the church?
4. How is the word deacon used throughout Scripture?
5. What does the word deacon tell us about God's expectation of the office of deacon in the church?
6. Why is it important to use the term *overall* leadership when speaking about the office of a pastor?

BIBLICAL CHURCH LEADERSHIP – Lesson 4 Student Outline

The Office of Overall Leadership [Part 2]
1 Timothy 3:1-13

Scriptures to Memorize

- Throughout the course: Titus 1:5; 1 Peter 5:1; Hebrews 13:17; Philippians 1:1; Acts 20:17
- This week: Philippians 1:1

Lesson

- Share leadership is a model of leadership employed from the earliest days of God's people, but which office of the church is responsible for the **overall** leadership of the church?

1 Timothy 3:1-13:

- Context: 1st Timothy is the first of two letters that the Apostle Paul wrote to a young pastor by the name of Timothy. Timothy has been charged by Paul to teach the church at Ephesus how they "ought to behave in the household of God" (1 Tim. 3:15). In other words, Paul tells Timothy to make sure the church is structured and functions the right way. And one important element of the church being properly structured and involves the office a pastor and deacon.

Three elements that reveal how the overall leadership duty of the church rests upon pastors:

- 1. The word used to identify the office of a pastor clearly communicates the idea of leadership.**
- 2. The pastor is required to be able to teach which is a gift linked to leadership.**
 - Two other passages which call for the pastor to possess the ability to teach:
 - 2 Timothy 2:24
 - Titus 1:9

Quotes from scholars about teaching being linked to leadership

- "The Word alone has the power to build up the church, which means the elder's leadership is tied to the Word."³
- "The fact that God requires elders to teach his people shouldn't surprise us. God rules his people by his Word, so the leaders of God's people have always been entrusted with communicating God's Word."⁴

³ David Platt, *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary Series (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2013), 55.

⁴ Jeramie Rinne, *Church Elders: How to Shepherd God's People Like Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 46.

Scripture where we see the forging of teaching and leadership

- Moses in Exodus 18:16
- Joshua in Joshua 3:9
- Ezra in Nehemiah 8:8
- Elders/Pastors in 1 Timothy 5:17
- Jesus, The Chief Shepherd of the Church, founded His ministry upon teaching God's Word – Matthew 9:35; 11:1; John 7:16; Acts 1:1.

3. The analogy which teaches that just as a father is to a household so also the office of pastor is to the church.

- The Greek word Paul uses for manage is "*proistamenon*." It is defined as follows: "to exercise a position of leadership, rule, direct, be at the head."⁵
- Paul creates an analogy between the father of the home and the pastor of the church. In doing so, he implies that just as a father is responsible to lead the home, so also the pastor is responsible to lead the church.

Discussion Questions:

1. Are all believers expected to teach one another in some capacity?
2. Where are places in Scripture that imply a distinction between how church members teach one another as opposed to how a pastor should be teaching?
3. Name some examples in Scripture where the skill of teaching God's Word is linked to leading God's people.
4. With so many similar character qualifications between pastors and deacons, why is it that deacons are not required to have the ability to teach God's Word?
5. Why is the call to manage a household well only included in the qualifications of a pastor?

⁵ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000), 870.

BIBLICAL CHURCH LEADERSHIP – Lesson 5 Student Outline

The Plurality Pattern Acts 14:23

Scriptures to Memorize

- Throughout the course: Titus 1:5; 1 Peter 5:1; Hebrews 13:17; Philippians 1:1; Acts 20:17
- This week: Acts 20:17

Lesson

- The Bible’s pattern for overall leadership is a pattern where pastors partner with other pastors to provide leadership in the church.

Acts 14:23

- Context: In the Book of Acts, Luke charts the Holy Spirit’s work of using the people of God as His “witnesses . . . to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). As Luke records this work, he gives us insight into one of the Apostle’s “church planting practices.”⁶ Specifically, in Acts 14:23 Luke reveals Paul’s practice of setting up a shared leadership model in some of the newly found churches, and thereby validates shared pastoral leadership as the normative practice in New Testament churches.

Acts 14:23 establishes a plurality of pastors as the New Testament model for church leadership in three ways:

- 1. The language makes it clear that Paul appoints a plurality of pastors to lead each church.**
 - “Elders” = plural; “Church” = singular
 - The literal reading of the passage is as follows: “having appointed for them *church by church*, elders.”⁷
- 2. God is sought through prayer and fasting before the plurality of pastors is appointed.**
 - John MacArthur notes that these “elders were chosen only after they had prayed and fasted”—an action which indicates the seriousness of this process.⁸

⁶ Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Eldership* (Littleton, CO: Lewis & Roth, 1995), 121.

⁷ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 135, emphasis original.

⁸ John MacArthur, *1 Timothy, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary Series* (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 55.

3. The model in Acts 14:23 is a common practice among other New Testament Churches.

- The foundational church in Jerusalem had a plurality of pastors (Acts 11:30).
- Passages featuring single congregations with multiple pastors:
 - Acts 15:4, 6, 22; 16:4; 20:17
 - Philippians 1:1
 - Titus 1:5
 - James 5:14
 - Hebrews 13:17.

Discussion Questions:

1. How would you describe the church leadership model appointed by Paul in Acts 14:23?
2. There are many scenes in Scripture where the plural use of the word elders is used within the context of a singular church. What does this tell us about the number of pastors at these churches?
3. Why would Paul spend time in prayer and fasting before appointing a model of leadership in the churches mentioned in Acts 14:23?
4. What does Paul's prayer and fasting before appointing multiple pastors for each of the churches in Acts 14:23 tell us about how God feels in regards to multiple pastors?
5. Besides Acts 14:23, can you name any other passages that describe individual churches being led by multiple pastors?

BIBLICAL CHURCH LEADERSHIP – Lesson 6 Student Outline

A Plurality of Pastors: Beneficial & Historically Baptist Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Scriptures to Memorize

- Throughout the course: Titus 1:5; 1 Peter 5:1; Hebrews 13:17; Philippians 1:1; Acts 20:17

Lesson

- A model of church leadership featuring a plurality of pastors is not only biblical, but also beneficial and historically Baptist.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

- This passage of Scripture paints a picture of toil or labor, and points out the fact that there is a greater reward or pay day—we could say success—when the labor is done in partnership. The imagery of having someone to help one who has fallen, and the imagery of having someone help keep another warm clearly illustrates that there are benefits to not working alone.

Two Benefits of a Plurality of Pastors

1. Plural leadership provides balance for the pastors' weaknesses

- Proverbs 27:17 reveals the humbling fact that all men have weaknesses; even pastors.
- Plural leadership may ensure that pastors are protected from error, and pushed to godliness by one another.
- A plurality of pastors gives the congregation a greater opportunity to have strong leadership in multiple areas.

2. Plural leadership makes the pastors' workload lighter

- The pastoral workload makes for busy schedules and burdened souls.
- Passages that help one understand a pastor's workload: Acts 20:28-31; Romans 12:8; Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Thessalonians 5:12; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; 5:17; Titus 1:5-9; Hebrews 13:7, 17; 1 Peter 5:1-4; Acts 6:4; James 5:14.
- Pastors are instructed by God to be:
 - 1) Praying for God's people,
 - 2) Preaching God's Word to the congregation,
 - 3) Prodding the people of God to truths that will give them comfort in times of distress,
 - 4) Pointing the people of God to truths that will equip them to perform ministry for others,
 - 5) Protecting the congregation from false doctrine,
 - 6) Providing administrative leadership for effective ministry,
 - 7) Proving to be an example of godliness to God's people

Quotes concerning the workload of a pastor and the need for a plurality of pastors:

- “I can’t be convinced the church was supposed to be pastored by one guy. It is too much for one man to do well.”⁹
- “A pastor needs others who can share this burden.”¹⁰

Thoughts concerning the workload brought about by healthy church discipline:

- “If a pastor stands alone in bringing a matter to the congregation, opponents will likely skewer him. But the strength of godly leaders within the church, standing together in such matters, urges the entire church to recognize the seriousness of discipline.”¹¹

Plurality of Pastors is Historically Baptist

- The New Hampshire Confession of Faith is the confession of faith upon which the first Southern Baptist Confession of Faith leaned heavily during its formulation. This document speaks of a singular church as having the office of “pastors.”¹²
- The *1925 Baptist Faith and Message* makes the following statement in regards to an individual church: “Its Scriptural officers are bishops, or elders.”¹³
- *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000* uses language that speaks of a church in the singular who has offices that are defined as “pastors” plural.

Quotes from Baptist Leaders who advocate for plural leadership

- A Southern Baptist pastor from the 1840’s by the name of J.L. Reynolds who stated that “the apostolic churches seem, in general, to have had a plurality of elders as well as deacons.”¹⁴

⁹ Jared Folks, interview with author, Holly Pond, AL, August 16, 2022.

¹⁰ Benjamin Merkle, *Why Elders? A Biblical and Practical Guide for Church Members* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009), 43.

¹¹ Phil Newton and Matt Schmucker, *Elders in the Life of the Church: Rediscovering the Biblical Model for Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014), 56.

¹² *New Hampshire Confession of Faith*, 1833.

¹³ *The 1925 Baptist Faith and Message*, 1925

¹⁴ J. L. Reynolds, “Church Polity or the Kingdom of Christ (1849),” in *Polity: Biblical Arguments on How to Conduct Church Life*, ed. Mark Dever (Washington, DC: Nine Marks, 2011), 349.

- William Williams—a professor at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in the late 1800’s—states that “in most, if not all the apostolic churches, there was a plurality of elders.”¹⁵
- The first president of the Southern Baptist Convention was W.B. Johnson. Writing in regards to church government he states “that over each church of Christ in the apostolic age a plurality of rulers was ordained, who were designated by the terms elder, bishop, pastor, with authority in the government of the flock.”¹⁶

Discussion Questions

1. What are some of the Biblical duties of a pastor?
2. What imagery is used in Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 to illustrate how it is not good for work to be done alone?
3. What does Proverbs 27:17 teach us about weakness, and how might the principle of this verse play out in the life of a pastor?
4. In what area do you believe a pastor may need to be sharpened by other pastors?
5. How does a plurality of pastors lighten the workload for pastors?
6. How is church discipline different with a plurality of pastors as opposed to the one-pastor model?
7. What sort of things might burden down the soul of a pastor?

¹⁵ William Williams, “The Gospel Developed through the Government and Order of the Churches of Jesus Christ (1874),” in Dever, *Polity*, 531.

¹⁶ William B. Johnson, “The Gospel Developed through the Government and Order of the Churches of Jesus Christ (1846),” in Dever, *Polity*, 190.

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ABSTRACT

STRENGTHENING THE MEMBERS OF FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH IN HOLLY POND, ALABAMA, IN A BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF A PLURALITY OF PASTORS

Robert Benjamin Smothers, DMin
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2023
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Michael E. Pohlman

This project was designed to strengthen the membership of First Baptist Church in Holly Pond, Alabama in a biblical understanding of a plurality of pastors. Chapter 1 explains the context of FBCHP, the rationale behind the necessity of this project, as well as the goals and methodology needed for the project's success. Chapter 2 provides biblical evidence verifying how plural leadership is an acceptable plan from God in the earliest days of His people and is the plan practiced by churches throughout the New Testament. Chapter 3 reveals the numerous benefits of plural leadership by reporting on insights gained from various scholars and fellow pastors. Chapter 4 details the steps taken during the development and implementation of the project. Chapter 5 presents an evaluation of the project's purpose, goals, strengths and weaknesses, and concludes with both recommended changes to the project as well as theological and personal reflections.

VITA

Robert Benjamin Smothers

EDUCATION

BS, University of Alabama, 2004

MDiv, Mid America Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007

MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT

Student Pastor, Slayden Baptist Church, Lamar, Mississippi, 2004-2007

Student Pastor, Farmstead Baptist Church, Farmstead, Alabama, 2007-2009

Lead Pastor, First Baptist Church Holly Pond, Holly Pond, Alabama, 2009-