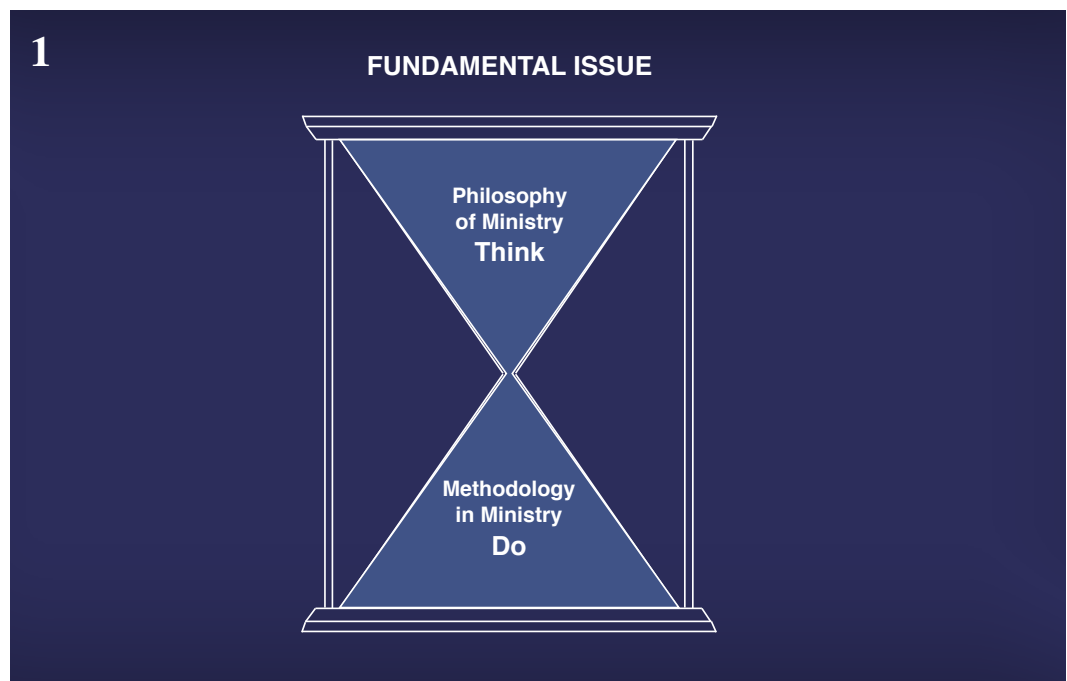


ADOPTING A BIBLICAL MINISTRY PERSPECTIVE

Just like sand flowing through an hourglass, philosophy *of* the ministry determines methodology *in* the ministry (chart 1). What you *think* will show itself in what you *do*! How you align your thinking with the Scriptures is critically important. It impacts your approach to everything in ministry. Ultimately, your *perception* of the ministry leads to its *implementation*.



Developing a biblical philosophy is the result of a study process that considers the various principles and practices of the New Testament church (chart 2). Those principles and practices must saturate your thinking through a grinding process that produces your ministry philosophy, the outflow of your study. There are many texts that must be considered and the following are some of those critical passages.

- ⁴² They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵ and they *began* selling their property and possessions and were sharing them

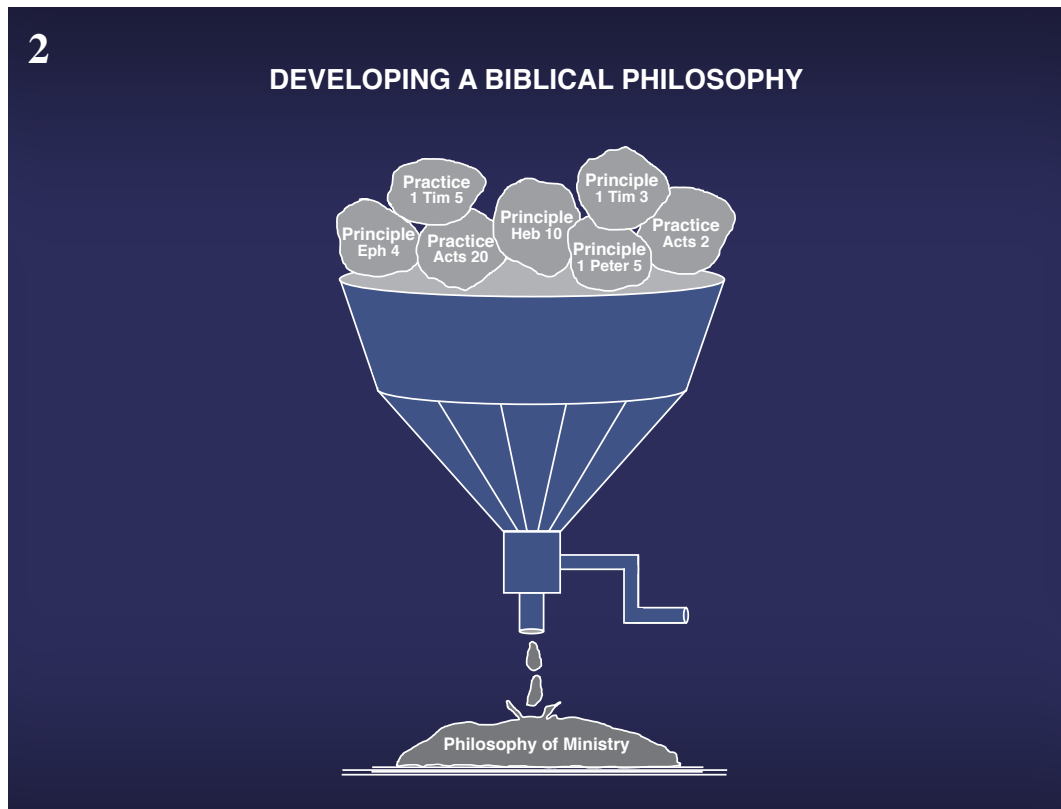
with all, as anyone might have need. ⁴⁶ Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Under the leadership of the Apostles, the early church in Jerusalem gathered both at the temple and in house-churches for worship and fellowship. Generosity within the community was favorably observed by outsiders, resulting in new believers.

¹⁷ From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church. ¹⁸ And when they had come to him, he said to them... ²⁸ Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. ²⁹ I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.

Paul instructs the elders, those who he had previously appointed in Ephesus, of their shepherding responsibility of guarding both themselves and the flock of Christ from spiritual attacks coming from outside and inside the church.

Acts 20:
17-18, 28-30



¹¹ And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ... ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

Ephesians 4:
11-12, 16

God gave corporate gifts to the church to prepare the members of the body to serve one another through mutual, reciprocal ministries, so that the body can grow spiritually (vv 11-12). Further explaining verse 12, verse 16 indicated the body, properly functioning, causes the growth of the body.

1 Timothy 3:1-7

¹It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires *to do*. ²An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. ⁴*He must be* one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity ⁵(but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?), ⁶*and* not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. ⁷And he must have a good reputation with those outside *the church*, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

Paul gives the criteria (qualities, knowledge, and abilities) for elders, leaders of the local body of believers.

1 Timothy 5:17

The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard [in word and the teachings].

This translation makes it clear that distinctions among elders come from differences in effort, not ability. Diligence in ministry, not different ministries distinguished elders when the body of Christ assembled.

Hebrews 10:23-25

²³Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; ²⁴and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

Paul sets forth the responsibility of believers to gather together and through mutual, reciprocal ministries in intimate connections stimulate godly behavior.

1 Peter 5:1-4

¹Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as *your* fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, ²shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of God*; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; ³nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. ⁴And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

Paul instructs elders to shepherd the flock of God through proper motives and by example.

Implementing a Biblical Methodology

A methodology of the ministry is derived from working through the important texts to gain a ministry philosophy. *What you do* is determined by *what you think*. The implementation of that methodology involves an organization, structures, relationships, and a purpose (chart 3).

Organization

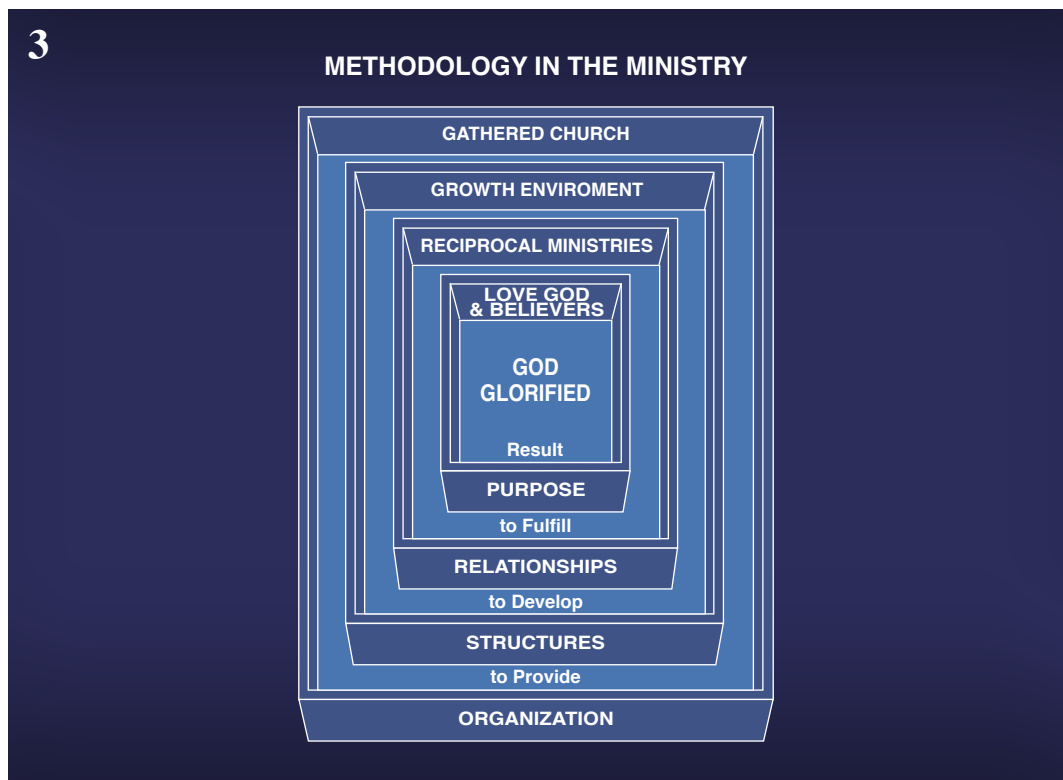
An organization is an organized body of people under leadership for a particular purpose. This applies to business, sports, government, or the gathered church. It is the framework within which people gather for a particular purpose. An organization differs from an organism. The way in which an organization functions as a living entity depends on how well the various parts within it work together.

Structures

An organization is valuable only to the extent that it provides a framework within which constructive activities take place. For the gathered church, the structures addressed here are not those made from brick-and-mortar but rather those referring to (1) the makeup and function of leadership and (2) the makeup and size of gatherings. Together they determine whether or not the environment they establish will lead to the spiritual growth and maturity of the body of Christ.

Leadership

Of the seven principles-and-practices texts above, all but Hebrews 10 directly address New Testament leadership. Apostles are exclusively referred to in Acts 2 and then again in Ephesians 4. Elders were the focus in the remaining texts in which Peter and Paul provided instructions for elders. In the infant church (AD 33), the Apostles were solely responsible for leadership (Acts 2:42-47). Realizing that their primary attention must be the “ministry of the word,” other men were placed in charge of some responsibilities the apostles had previously assumed (Acts 6:1-4). At the Council at Jerusalem (AD 49), Paul and Barnabas met with both the apostles and elders in Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-2). Even prior to the Council, Paul had already been appointing elders in the churches he had established on his first missionary journey (Acts 13–14).



Notice there began a transition in leadership in the first century church from exclusively apostles to the apostles sharing responsibilities with elders and then, particularly as churches were established by Paul, to only elder leadership in every body of believers. In Paul’s letter to the believers in Ephesus (AD 61), he writes to those to whom he had previously spent two years and to whom he had appointed elders (AD 53-56, Acts 19), the very elders to which he met with and instructed in Acts 20:28-30 (AD 57). Yet in the book of Ephesians, Paul did not mention “elders” even though they were obviously present, but he did address apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers—those who were responsible for the equipping and the functioning of the local church. Why the exclusion of elders from the list? Were they not the very ones he had appointed and left to lead each church?

I submit the answers to those questions are found in understanding these four distinct gifts to the church—the church’s corporate gifts. The distinctions in those gifts concern differences in ministries. Ephesians 2:19-21 teach that the apostles and prophets are “foundational gifts” for the establishment of the church. They laid the foundation with Christ being the “corner stone.” The term *apostle* means a “sent one” and is used in a restrictive manner to identify those men who were sent by Christ, having been with Him and having been a witnesses of His resurrection (Acts 1:21-22). Paul is included as an apostle (1 Cor 15:8-9). Through their letters, which have been preserved and incorporated in the Scriptures, they continue to provide direction for the church. The *prophet* received direct revelation from God and spoke to edify, encourage, and comfort the early church (1 Cor 14:3).

While the foundational apostles and prophets established the church, evangelists and pastor-teachers build upon that foundation. Occurring only three times in the New Testament, the *evangelist* proclaims Christ and the salvation message, seemingly in an itinerant manner in new and unreached areas. The *pastor-teacher* gift combines two separate abilities and functions—pastors are also teachers. Notice that Ephesians 4:11 is the one-and-only place that the term *pastor-teacher* is indicated in the New Testament. This takes us back to the question: “Why the exclusion of elders from the list of gifts to the church in Ephesians 4:11? The answer is that Paul equates “elders” with “pastor-teachers” and that is identically how the readers in Ephesus would have understood his letter. Consider the following table that gives perspective regarding elders and their role (Chart 4).

4 **ELDERS = PASTOR-TEACHERS = SHEPHERD-TEACHERS**

Text	Elder	Overseer	Shepherd	Teacher	Leader
Acts 20:17, 28	Elders (<i>presbuteros</i>)	Overseers (<i>episkopos</i>)	Shepherd (<i>poimainw</i>)		
Eph 4:11-12			Pastors (<i>poimen</i>)	Teachers (<i>didaskalos</i>)	
1 Tim 3:2, 4	[Elders]	Overseers (<i>episkopos</i>)		Able to Teach (<i>didaktikos</i>)	Manages (<i>proistemi</i>)
1 Tim 5:17	Elders (<i>presbuteros</i>)				Rule (<i>proistemi</i>)
1 Peter 5:1-4	Elders (<i>presbuteros</i>) Elders (<i>sum</i> [fellow] + <i>presbuteros</i>)		Shepherd (<i>poimainw</i>) Shepherd (<i>arch</i> [chief] + <i>poimen</i>)		

These texts tell us that *elders* are likewise *overseers* and are also *shepherds* of the church. In particular notice in 1 Peter 5 that Christ, the “Chief Shepherd,” is not known as the “Chief Pastor” any more than the “shepherd-teacher” should be labeled the “pastor-teacher.” “Shepherd” is unfortunately translated “pastor” in Ephesians 4:11 and only done so this one time in the New Testament. *Elder is equal to shepherd-teacher* who has both abilities and responsibilities in and for the church.

The “shepherd-teacher” abilities include both the individual gifts of leading and teaching. Of the eight times *leading* (*proistemi*) is used in the New Testament, five of those times it is used with reference to the function of those who lead the church (1 Thess 5:12; 1 Tim 3:4, 5, 12; 5:17). The term means *to stand before* and is the portrait of a shepherd guiding and caring for the sheep. *Teaching* is the second ability and is the ability to communicate the truth of the Scriptures in a manner that brings clarification or conviction. Here, teaching is used in a restrictive manner in reference to those who were responsible to teach in order to equip the body (Eph 4:11; Jam 3:1; 2 Tim 1:11).

Some understand the term *able to teach* (*didaktikos*, 1 Tim 3:2) as a characteristic of a person, meaning to be “teachable.” Nevertheless, Paul uses the term *teacher*, or a derivative, eleven times. Teacher (*didaskalos*) occurs seven times (Rom 2:20, 1 Cor 12:28, 29, Eph 4:11, 1 Tim 2:7, 2 Tim 1:11, and 2 Tim 4:3), with two references to a spiritual gift to individuals and three references to corporate gifts to the church. *Teacher of the law* (*nomodidaskalos*) is used once (1 Tim 1:7) and *teacher of good things* (*kalodidaskalos*) occurs once (Titus 2:3). In each of these occurrences, the term appears in the noun form. Paul twice uses the term *skilled in teaching* (*didaktikos*), which is in the form of an adjective that explains or clarifies that which it modifies. Paul uses this last term once to identify skilled servants (2 Tim 2:24) and, in addition, uses the term to indicate the criterion for being an elder (1 Tim 3:2)—he must be skilled in teaching. Since nine of the eleven times these two terms are used are in the Pastoral Epistles (six times) or in the context of giftedness (three times), word usage would support the position that *skilled in teaching* refers to the gift—elders are shepherds who are also teachers. They are to lead, feed, and protect their local body of Christ.

The corporate gifts (apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherd-teachers) of Ephesians 4:11 were given to the church for the purpose explained in verse 12: “for the equipping of the saints for the work of service for the building up of the body of Christ.” Notice that the preposition “for” is used three times, presenting a progression in thought that builds from one concept to the next. The first “for” indicates the actual purpose of the corporate gifts: “for the equipping of the saints.” Through their giftedness, they were to prepare the members of the body of Christ in order that the two remaining concepts, which are also introduced by “for,” may occur—each the result of the former. The preparation undertaken by the corporate gifts could be equated to the preparation of a passenger ship before leaving port. Food provision stored, cabins readied, and staff assignments made. Without such equipping, a ship would be in jeopardy of providing for passenger necessities for the journey.

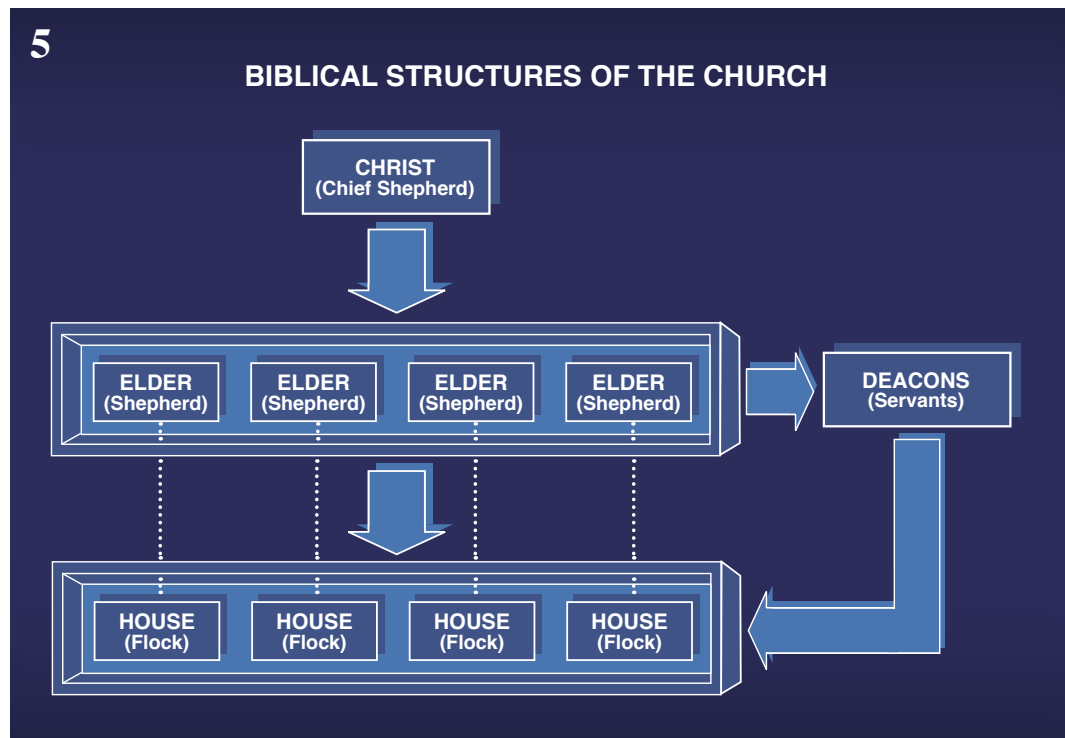
With the temporary nature of the foundational gifts (apostles and prophets) and the itinerant nature of the evangelist gift, those who are shepherd-teachers in the local church are responsible “for the equipping of the saints” so that the body of Christ spiritually grows. Many make the mistake and think “preparing the members of the local body” is primarily a “one-to-the-others” ministry, as one preaches to the congregation. Certainly teaching God’s word passed down from the foundational gifts and included in the Scriptures is the ministry of shepherd-teachers. However, authoritative teaching should not be understood to exist only in the arena of larger gatherings. In addition, the leading ministry of shepherd-teachers would involve providing an environment in which the local body of Christ spiritually grows—an environment in which “the work of service” by the members of the body becomes a reality. This “work of service” is not directing traffic in the church parking lot, singing in the choir, or caring for babies in the nursery. As we will see below from Ephesians 4:16, it refers rather to serving one another, not merely serving in church programs. If not correctly understood, the ultimate result, “the building up of the body of Christ,” will not occur. Remember, shepherd-teachers are to “prepare the members of the body” to function like a living body, not simply occupying pews.

Gatherings

The New Testament speaks to the nature of church as being tiered: universal (Matt 16:18), city (Acts 20:17; Titus 1:5), and house (Acts 18:7; Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Phile 2). When Jesus said, “I will build My church” (Matt 16:18), He referred to the universal church that includes all believers throughout the centuries. Until the third century when Roman persecution ceased, there were no church buildings in which believers assembled. Rather Christians gathered in house-churches during those first centuries. If the church in one city was small, the whole church could meet in one house. On the other hand, larger congregations required multiple house-churches to accommodate the need.

On his missionary journeys, Paul established churches in each city he visited (e.g., Lystra, Iconium, Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, etc.). In addition, he “appointed elders (plural)...in every (single) church” (Acts 14:23) as he “returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch”

(v 21). Paul left Titus in Crete to “appoint elders (plural) in every (single) city” (Titus 1:5). In each case, elders (plural) were in each (single) church, as the body assembled in one or in multiple homes as required. While there is not indication that there were multiple elders in each house-church of larger congregations, one would assume at least one elder was ministering in each house-church. In either case, elders with biblical qualifications and abilities, functioning as shepherd-teachers in small-group settings, promoted the proper working of the body. All elders functioned in the same way (chart 5).



From 1 Timothy 5:17: “The elders who rule [lead] well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard [labor] at preaching and teaching” (underlines added for emphasis), some see elders in two distinct groups: teaching elders and ruling elders. And some even equate teaching elders with pastor-teachers. It is noteworthy to point out that 1 Timothy 5:17 does and is the *only* passage that indicates any distinctions among elders. However, this passage distinguishes elders not by capabilities or ministries, but rather by diligence in accomplishing similar ministries. This is a critical point because it means that all elders have identical ministry responsibilities.

The key to the passage is the emphasis of the passage: (1) to distinguish effort put forth by elders in their identical ministries or (2) to distinguish ministries of elders. First consider the terms *well* and *labor* in this context. In the main clause the distinction is not whether elders lead or not, but the *manner* in which they lead. Additional honor is bestowed on those elders who lead well—diligently and carefully. A further identification of the same group (“those that lead well”) is addressed in the second clause: *especially those who labor*. The emphasis again is on the *effort* taken in the accomplishment of the task of every elder.

Unfortunately the typical English translation “especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching” is somewhat misleading. In fact, this translation supports the typical practice of having both leading elders and preaching elders. Nevertheless a better translation would be “especially those who labor in the word (*logos*) and doctrine (*didaskalia*).” So what do *word* and *doctrine* mean in this preferred translation. The *word* obviously brings to mind the ministry of the apostles—a “ministry of the word” of God that was not to be neglected

(Acts 6:2). It is a verbalization of the truths of God. The second word, *doctrine*, is either an additional verbal ministry (translated “teaching”) or a nonverbal ministry that is the internalization of a system of thought—“doctrine” or “the teachings.” The nonverbal option obviously better fits the context,¹ with *word* relating to oral teaching by elders and *doctrine* referring to the accumulation of a scriptural frame of reference as a result of diligent study. The “word” refers to what one says; “doctrine” to what one thinks. Thus, *doctrine* issues into *word*.

This preferred translation points to the distinctions among elders that come only from differences of effort, not ability—diligence in ministry, not different ministries when the body of Christ assembled in the first century in house-churches. Those small gatherings, under the leadership of elders, were the environment that encouraged the spiritual growth within those assemblies of believers.

Relationships

It is only by means of relationships that the structures of an organization foster a living organism, where the organization can function as it was designed. Biblically, believers aren’t lone rangers. It is true we are saved individually, but we grow corporately. That growth to maturity occurs within relationships with other believers, maturing together through mutual ministries.

Probably you have heard Hebrews 10:25 used by church leadership to expound why it is the responsibility of every believer to “show up” on Sunday for the worship service and hear the sermon. It is usually stated in this manner: “You should not forsake your assembling together with other believers, as is the habit of some of you.” While not disagreeing that believers should assemble together, unfortunately most of those same church leaders neglect to address and fulfill their responsibility to provide an environment for spiritual growth when believers do come together. That is the emphasis of Hebrews 10:24-25. Rather than a “one-to-the-others” pulpit ministry being in view, this text emphasizes the necessity of “one-to-another” relationships and ministries.

Notice in verse 24: “Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds,” and then the remainder of verse 25: “encouraging *one another*.” The passage doesn’t concern *superficial connections* between believers. The writer of Hebrews was *not* discussing a “coffee-and-donuts” time between services and certainly *not* “a please-turn-and-greet-those-around-you” period squeezed between two songs during the worship service. Rather, *intimate connections* between believers are in view through mutual, reciprocal ministries—“one to another.” By means of these intimate connections, each is motivated to seek the highest good of the others (biblical love) and to serve one another in a demonstration of love (Gal 5:13-14). Good works are the result—the very thing for which each believer was recreated (Eph 2:10). Intimate connections not only promote ministry to one another, but also provide an environment for encouraging one another as we fellow Jesus.

Now notice the similarities with Ephesians 4, particularly verse 16 which is often overlooked: “...the whole body, being fitted and held together through every supporting connection, according to the working in measure from each individual, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.”² That translation captures the text’s content and a summary statement could be rendered “the body, properly functioning, causes its own spiritual growth.” The “proper functioning” of the body involves three factors. *First*, the body “being fitted and held together” refers to the adhesion and unity of the body by means of the *second* factor, “through every supporting connection.” These “supporting connections” are the same intimate ones of Hebrews 10—the one-to-another connections where believers stir up love and good works in each other. The *third* factor addresses the responsibility of believers within their connections: “according to the working in measure from each individual.” The work of interconnected believers through mutual ministries, utilizing their individual gifts (see “measure” in v 7) from God, is in view. Then the result when the body properly functions—it “causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.”

Purpose

Notice it is the individual responsibility of every believer to connect and function for the body to mature. This is the “work of service” that leads “to the building up of the body of Christ” (v 12). But let’s not forget that it is the responsibility of church leadership to “prepare the saints” in order that “the work of service” can occur (v 12). Leadership must provide an environment in which mutual ministries are encouraged and fostered. Small-group assemblies being led by shepherd-teachers were the pattern of the first century church. Why shouldn’t it be the same for today?

The purpose of the gathered church with its structures that produce mutual, reciprocal ministries is ultimately two fold: to love God and to love other believers. Jesus set the stage in the Upper Room when He washed the disciples’ feet in an act of love (John 13:1, 4-5). Having finished washing their feet He asked, “Do you know what I have done to you?” (v 12). Jesus then explained that He had given them an example of what they should do themselves (v 15). They should serve as He served them. They should love as He loved. Further, He said,

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another (vv 34-35).

Christ’s commandment gave “love a new standard”—to love one another “as I loved you.”³ His example teaches to love one another is to serve one another. If we followed Christ in loving service to one another in mutual ministries within the body, as experienced in the early church (Acts 2:42-47), then “all men will know [we] are [Christ’s] disciples” (John 13:35) and result in “having favor with all the people” (Acts 2:47). The body operating “in love” generates spiritual growth (Eph 4:16), which in turn leads to numerical growth (Acts 2:47).

Continuing with the Eleven in the upper room, Jesus moves from loving one another *in* the body to loving God *by* the body: “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15) and “He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me” (v 21). To love God is to obey His commands. All believers are, or should be, in the process of learning and obeying God’s commands. Remember, the task of making disciples involves “teaching them to observe [to keep] all that I commanded you” (Matt 28:20). This is the process that all followers of Christ are expected to follow—to keep on learning and to keep on obeying the commands of God. As the body functions as it should in a loving environment, there will be continual and increasing knowledge of and obedience to God’s commands, which will “cause the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love” (Eph 4:16). In so doing, the body of Christ “shines light before men” and God is glorified (Matt 5:16).

**Adopted Ministry
Perspective**

What we think determines what we do. If your ministry methodology does not align with the one presented based on the interpretations of these seven texts, I suggest a second look at these passages would be profitable for yourself and ultimately for your church. Remember, the love environment provided by the structures described above changed the first century world.



Endnotes

1. Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and ed. by Frederick William Danker, third edition, BDAG (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 240.
Under Item #2, BDAG indicates the use of *didaskalia* in 1 Timothy 5:17 refers to “that which is taught,” distinguished from “the act of teaching” (Item #1). Consequently, BDAG affirms that “the teachings” is the intended usage in 1 Timothy 5:17.
2. Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 568-79.
The provided translation is a composite suggested by Hoehner.
3. Gary Derickson and Earl Radmacher, *The Disciplemaker* (Salem, OR: Charis Press, 2001), 81.