Essential Qualities for Elders and an Eldership Team

A Training Framework for Potential Elders who Pastor the Church

Author

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Introduction:
The Process

The process of training potential elders—those entering a season of intentional formation—requires both time and deliberate investment. It is a journey marked by consistency, relationship, and spiritual discernment. This is not "time for time's sake," but a sacred expression of honour toward God, respect for the significance of eldership within the church, and love for the local congregation.

The length of this process will naturally vary. It depends on the rhythm of people's diaries, their response to training, and, most importantly, the evidence of spiritual fruit that emerges over time. The goal is not to complete a course but to cultivate character, wisdom, and grace that reflect Christ's heart for His church.

The topics that follow provide a framework for deep, transformational discipleship in the area of eldership. While not exhaustive, they represent eight vital areas drawn from years of experience—lessons learned through both success and failure. Together, they form a practical and spiritual foundation for shaping mature, servant-hearted leaders.

It is assumed that those invited into this training are already demonstrating the marks of eldership. There should be a clear evidence of grace upon their lives. These individuals are already pastoring people informally, offering care and counsel without the need for title or recognition. The wider church community will likely be responding to them with trust and respect, recognizing in them a measure of spiritual authority and shepherding wisdom

Potential elders should already display a heart for oversight, taking thoughtful initiative by offering insight, feedback, and care for the wellbeing of the church. They should be bearing fruit within their current sphere of ministry—whether leading a small group, overseeing a ministry team, or serving in another leadership capacity.

In essence, the eldership training process is not about creating leaders from scratch, but rather recognising and refining those in whom pastoral grace is already evident. These are the ones ready to be invited into deeper formation for the sake of Christ and His church.

An Overview of the 8 Part Framework:

1. **Context** – The Servant Shepherd Model of Leadership
2. **The Call** – The Divine Gracing for Leadership
3. **Character** – The Stewardship of the Soul
4. **Competence** – Stewardship of Necessary Gifts
5. **Chemistry** – Stewardship of the Team
6. **Culture** – Stewardship of the Church Culture
7. **Courage** – Boldness for God's Purpose
8. **Capacity** – Ability to Grow With the Team

1. Context

The Servant Shepherd Model of Eldership

Biblical Framework:

A biblical framework for leadership as a whole is necessary for understanding the specific implications of pastoral leadership as an elder.

Hence, the role of an elder/pastor[1] is best understood through the example of Jesus' leadership paradigm and practice. This is fundamentally informed by the growing Old Testament view of who Messiah would be to Israel and the Gentile world. This can be summed up in the following: the Servant Shepherd:

- Psalm 23 – The Lord as our Shepherd provides the original picture of tender, protective leadership.
- Psalm 78 – The Lord shepherds His people out of Egypt toward their inheritance and chooses David, a shepherd who would be king.
- Isaiah 42:1–4; 49:1–7 – The Messiah as the sacrificial Servant of the Lord.
- John 10:11–18 – Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who lays down His life for His sheep.
- John 13:1–17, 34–35 – Jesus, the Servant Leader, demonstrates love through washing His disciples' feet.

Leadership Implication:

Through engaging with this truth, a potential elder must appreciate, amongst others, the servant-heartedness, sacrificial love, and deep personal knowledge of the people required of the function. This is not a leadership of a hierarchy of command but of genuine spiritual authority rooted in an authentic, humble example of Christ-like leadership.

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[1] Please note that these terms can be used interchangeably given both Paul and Peter's theology regarding eldership where they both use elder, overseer, shepherd/pastor as descriptive terms synonymously (Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 5:1-4).

Key Questions:

1. What is the fundamental difference between a hierarchy of position/command and a structure of authority that permits genuine spiritual leadership and influence?

2. How does the servant shepherd framework refute an hierarchical position/command structure and how does the servant shepherd approach foster genuine spiritual leadership?

3. How does the servant shepherd approach already begin to inform one's view of pastoring as an elder?

Key Concepts from John 13:

- **Position** (vv. 1, 3) – Authority comes from knowing your identity in God.
- **Passion** (v. 1) – Love motivates all true leadership.
- **Posture** (v. 4) – Humility is shown in our willingness to stoop and serve.
- **Practice** (v. 5) – Servant leadership is tangible, purposeful and actionable.
- **Point** (vv. 12–17, 34–35) – Love defines discipleship and leadership.

2. The Call

The Divine Gracing for Leadership

What is eldership?

- 1 Timothy 3:1 – Aspiration for overseership is noble, but it is also a weighty call.
  - "Aspires" = eagerness rooted in divine desire.
  - "Overseer" (episkopos) = a guardian, one who watches over.
  - "Noble" (kalos) = beautiful, honourable.

- 1 Peter 5: 1–4
  - Elders[1] are specially graced leaders who provide spiritual oversight, governance and vision[2] through shepherding (pastoring)[3] God's people.[4]
  - Leadership is voluntary, eager service, not a power grab.
  - Leaders are to be examples, not lords.

- Titus 1:5 – Appointing elders was Paul's strategy for strengthening the local church.

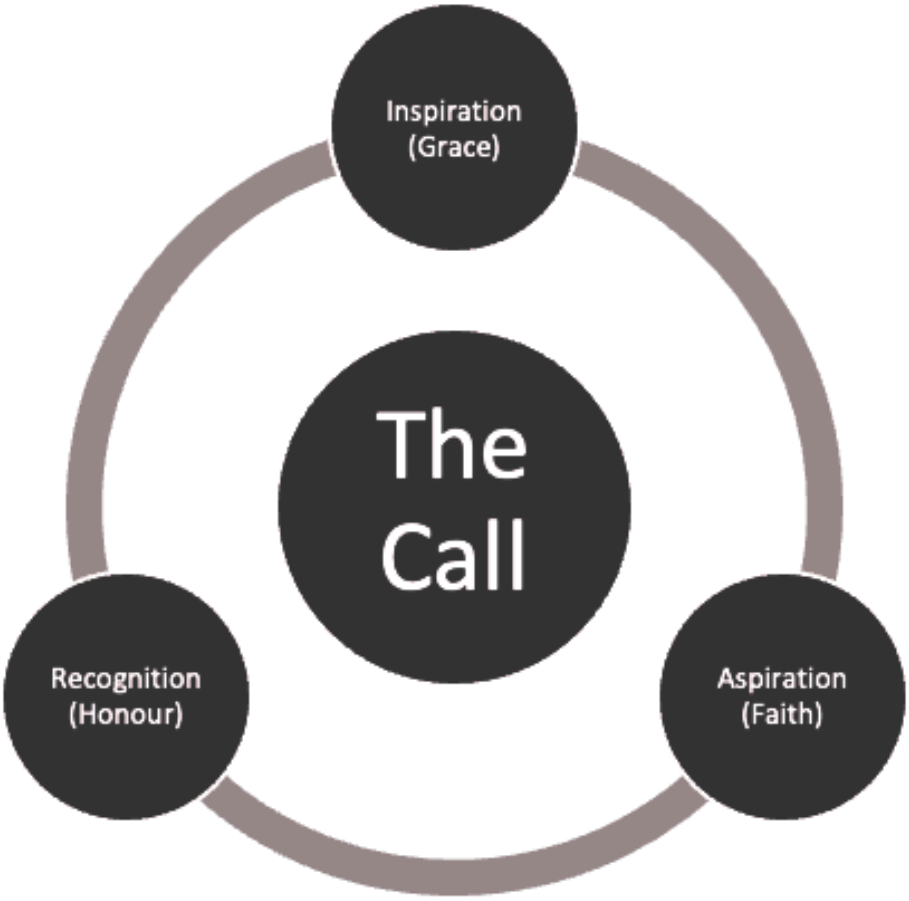
- Ephesians 4:11-16 – Jesus' plan was to grant grace gifts to the church for their maturity and equipping. Eldership is a key part thereof.

Key Insight:

The call to eldership is both internal (aspiration) and external (recognition by others). It must be tested, affirmed, and sustained by God's grace together with the community's discernment. Additionally, and most importantly, one's aspiration toward the beautiful and noble eldership function is catalysed by the initiation of God's invitation and call to the task.

1] Presbuteros. The biblical standard is always an eldership body in plurality with a "first among equals".
[2] Episkopos.
[3] Poimen.
[4] The 1 Peter 5 text uses all three terms interchangeably to describe the over function and mandate of a biblical church elder. While each pastor may carry specific weighting, either vision or pastoring, the team carries the full expression of the demonstration of the three.

Therefore the call to eldership is a mutually symbiotic combination of inspiration, aspiration and recognition: inspiration (God's invitation to the function by grace); aspiration (the person's emerging hunger and faith response as they become self-aware of God's invitation); recognition (the community's acknowledgement, celebration and response to the emerging sense of grace upon the prospective elder).



3. Character

The Stewardship of the Soul

Biblical Requirements:

- 1 Timothy 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9

  This is a list of qualifications that focuses on personal integrity, family order, and public reputation. Each is a reflection of the kind of character necessary to sustain the grace of eldership. The emphasis in Paul's repeated list is of character not necessarily public, prophetic gifting. Prophetic gifting in its breadth is to be harnessed by personal character. In fact, one could say that character trumps gifting.

- Hebrews 1:3 – Christ is the "exact representation" (charaktér) of of God's nature; therefore, leaders, pastors and prospective pastors should reflect His image in an ever-increasing manner.

Why Character Matters:
Character is the bridge between anointing and credibility. It allows the gifts of the Spirit to flow in a safe, trustworthy vessel.

Key Questions:

- *Can I be trusted?*
- *Do I live with hidden integrity compromises?*
- *Is my past healed, and am I walking in freedom?*
- *Am I considered by others as a person of integrity?*
- *Does the team have the same shared character values?*

Training Practice:

- *Inner healing and accountability structures.*
- *Regular spiritual disciplines.*
- *Peer review within the team through dynamic and designated discipleship and accountability.*

4. Competence

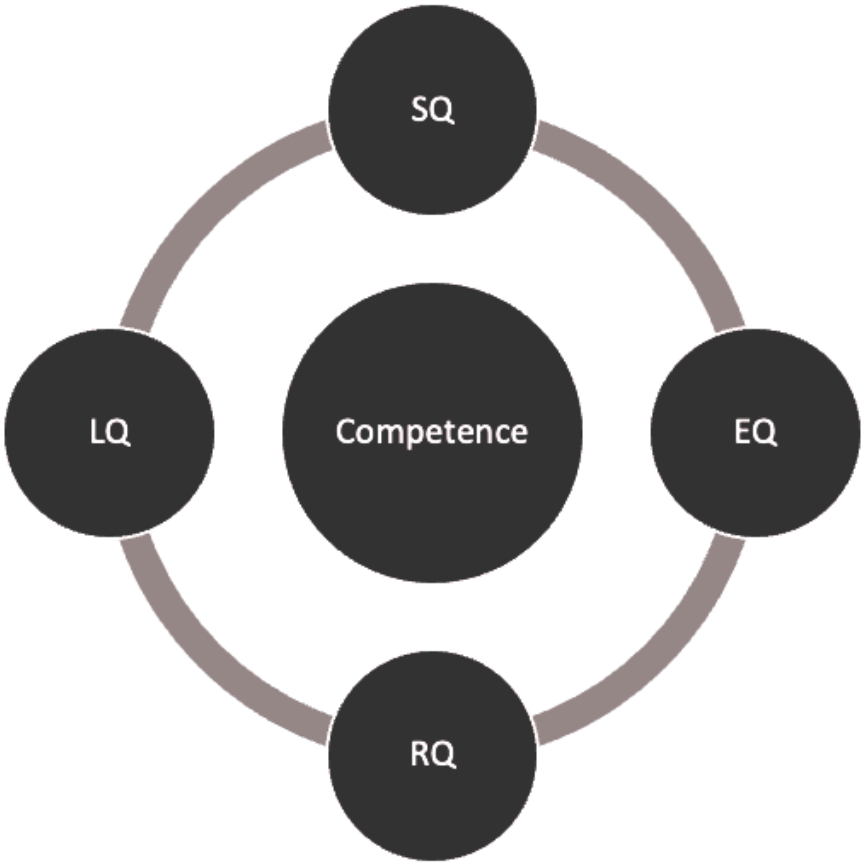
Stewardship of Necessary Gifts

SQ (Spiritual Competency):

- 1 Timothy 3:2 – "Able to teach" implies scriptural depth and gospel clarity.
- Acts 20:28 – Elders must shepherd and guard the flock.
- 1 Corinthians 12,13,14 – Leadership should function in partnership with the gifts of the Spirit, rooted in love, with the aim of building the church body up.
- Ephesians 4:11-16 – There is a divested anointing of Christ upon pastor/teachers to equip the believers for works of service.

Other Essential Competencies:

- EQ (Emotional Quotient) – Am I self-aware and can I manage my emotions well?
- RQ (Relational Quotient) – Do I know how to build and maintain healthy relationships?
- LQ (Leadership Quotient) – Can I mobilize people and resources to fulfil a God-given vision?



Training Practice:

- Skill development in all 4 key areas: SQ, EQ, RQ and LQ.
- Leadership problem-solving scenarios.
- Practical Training: small group shepherding or preaching rotations.

5. Chemistry

Stewardship of the Team

Biblical Requirements:

- Romans 12:4–5; 1 Corinthians 12 – The body of Christ is one, and every part must work together.
- Philippians 2:1–5 – Unity, humility, and mutual submission are essential.

In truth, a collection of gifted individuals does not make for an effective team. It is vital that there is team chemistry, namely a spark and resonance of hearts, minds and convictions. This brings about what Lencioni calls team cohesion, and this is the goal.

Key Questions:

- Do I foster trust? Does my personal safety add to the collective team safety?
- Can I work well with others?
- Do I value team alignment over personal preference?
- Does my commitment to the collective task lead to faith outcomes?

Training Practice:

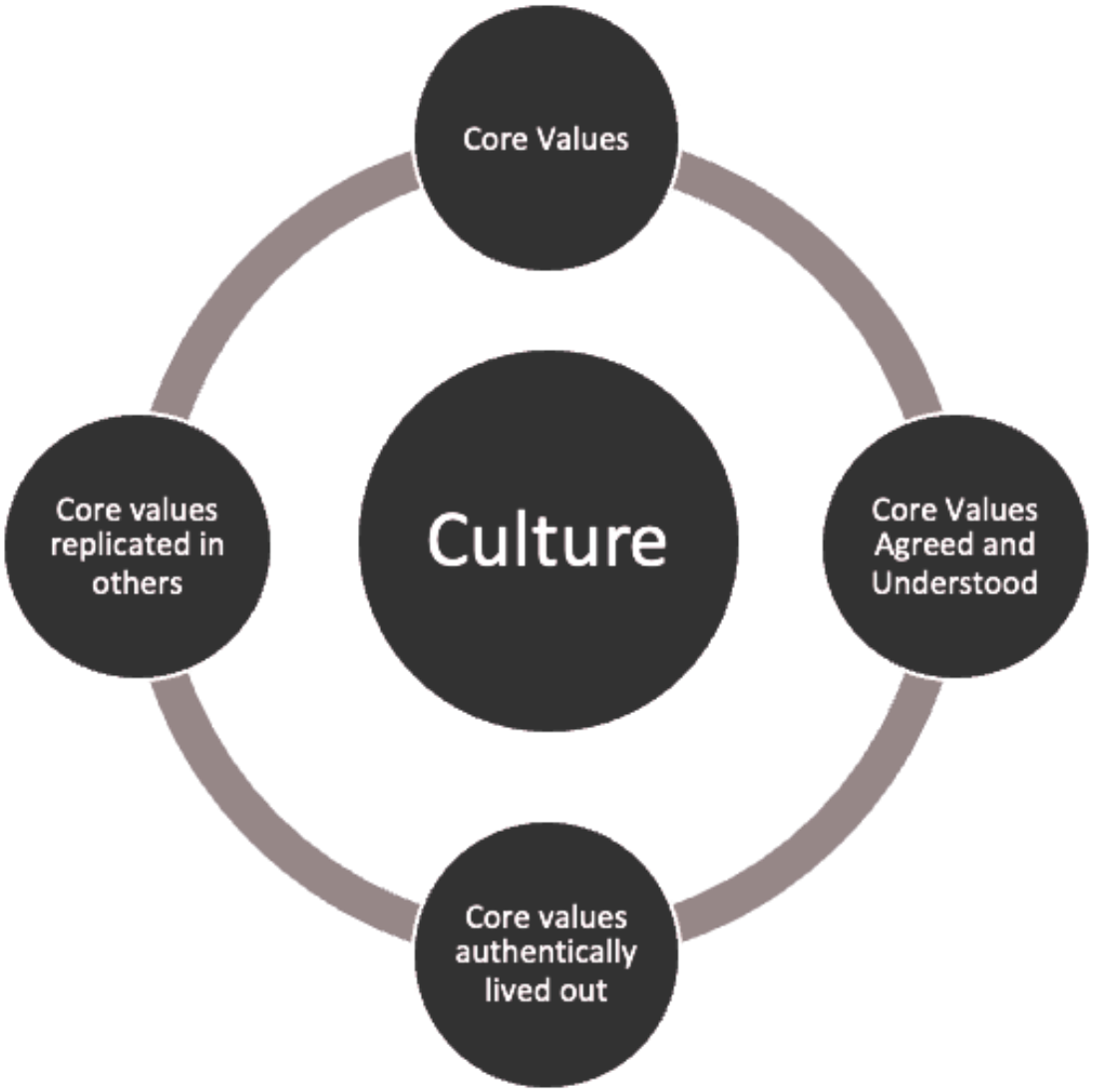
- Conflict resolution training. Conflict vs Combat.
- Team retreats focused on trust-building.
- Peer feedback and reviews. How do others experience me on team?

6. Culture

Stewardship of the Church Culture

Cultural Leadership:

Culture is the invisible environment that shapes everything visible. It is who we are, not the slogans we bark. Elders help maintain the broader church culture through understanding and agreeing with the truth of agreed cultural values, living them out authentically and meaningfully, and then replicating them in others who in turn cycle in equal fashion.



Training Practice:

- Immersion in the church's vision and values.
- Modelling cultural values in services and discipleship settings.
- Assessing to whom and how I am replicating the church's culture (2 Timothy 2:1-2)

7. Courage

Boldness for God's Purpose

Biblical Examples:

- Joshua 1:9 – "Be strong and courageous…"
- Acts 4:29–31 – The early church prayed for boldness to speak God's Word.

Why Courage Matters:
Elders must confront a worldly culture infecting the church as well as peoples' brokenness and sin, while leading change, and speaking truth—often in the face of resistance.

Key Questions:

1. Am I willing to confront for the sake of love and health?
2. What are my internal barriers to leading boldly?

Training Practice:

- Role-playing hard conversations.
- *Testimonies from seasoned leaders about courage under pressure.*

8. Capacity

Ability to Grow With the Team

Key Insight:

Leadership growth within a community requires spiritual, emotional, and practical scalability. This is the responsibility of each team member.

- 2 Timothy 2:15 – Present yourself as one approved, able to handle the Word.
- Luke 2:52 – Jesus grew in wisdom, stature, and favour.

Questions to Discern Capacity:

- Am I teachable?
- Do I value personal growth?
- Do I embrace personal responsibility? Or, am I dependant on another's initiation for personal growth?
- Can I grow under pressure?
- Will I grow with the team as the mission and vision of the church expands?

Training Practice:

- Mentorship with seasoned leaders.
- Progressive delegation of ministry responsibility.
- Ongoing personal learning plan.

Conclusion – The Goal:

Christlike Shepherds

All leadership is patterned after the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ (1 Peter 5:4).

Our goal is not merely administrative leadership – it is spiritual governance of a spiritual community called the church through the function of eldership.

The aim is to form pastor-leaders who serve like Jesus, who shepherd with the smell of the sheep in their nostrils and their garments, with an array of skills to pastor them effectively.

Appendix – Matters to Note

Matters To Note

1. **1 Peter 5:1-4**

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: [2] Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; [3] not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. [4] And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

5:1 – Note that "the elders" presbuterous is an adjective. It is also plural. Equally, "fellow elder" sumpresbuteros is also an adjective. Recall that an adjective is a word that describes a noun.It is a description of the functional role of specific leaders within the church.

5:2 – Note that "be shepherds" is originally stated "shepherd or shepherding". The Greek word is poimanate which is an imperative verb. The imperative indicates an instruction to be followed.The verb infers action. It is a doing word, hence a function of an elder.

5:2 – Note "watching over" here. It is episkopountes which is a present active participle verb. In other words it is a continuous practice and function of an elder.

5:4 – Note here "the Chief Shepherd". It is Archipoimenos which is a noun in the singular.There is only one Shepherd of shepherds in the church to whom we will give and account. He, Jesus, is identified as the singular epitome of the class of Shepherd. In our calling as elders we are descriptive displays of His Nature as Shepherd and we are functional expressions of the One Shepherd to the church. This functional expression is fulfilled in shepherding and watching over the sheep in the church.

2. **1 Timothy 3:1**

1 Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task.

"aspires" – oregetai … to hanker after, to long for, be eager for, aspire to.
"an overseer" – episkopes (noun, feminine singular).
"desires" – epithymei … to long for, covet, set heart upon, to lust after.

"noble" – kalou … properly, beautiful, but chiefly good.

3. 1 Timothy 5:17a

The elders who direct the affairs of the church well … literally "the well ruling elders".
"elders" – presbyteroi
"direct" – proestotes … to stand before or preside or practice

4. 1 Timothy 5:17c
Especially those whose work is preaching and teaching … literally "especially those straining in the word and the teaching".
"straining" – kapiontes … to feel fatigue.

5. Word Study on Strong's Greek # 5481. charaktér

Strong's Concordance
charaktér: a tool for engraving
Original Word: χαρακτήρ, ῆρος, ὁ
Part of Speech: Noun, Masculine
Transliteration: charaktér
Phonetic Spelling: (khar-ak-tare')
Definition: a tool for engraving
Usage: an impression, representation, exact reproduction; a graving-tool.

Englishman's Concordance
Hebrews 1:3
NAS: of His glory and the exact representation of His nature,
KJV: and the express image of his
INT: glory and [the] exact expression of the substance

HELPS Word-studies
5481 xaraktḗr – properly, an engraving; (figuratively) an exact impression (likeness) which also reflects inner character.
[5481 /xaraktḗr was originally a tool (used for engraving) and then came to mean "a die" ("mould"). Finally it stood for a stamp or impress used on a coin or seal (see H, 368). In each case, the stamp conveyed the reality behind the image.]
The Greek fathers (ad 100 -500) used 5481 /xaraktḗr ("the ultimate radiance") of the supreme effulgence of Christ, showing forth His glory as the second Person of the eternal Godhead (Heb 1:3).

NAS Exhaustive Concordance
Word Origin
from the same as charagma
Definition
a tool for engraving
NASB Translation
exact representation (1).

Thayer's Greek Lexicon
χαρακτήρ, χαρακτηρος, ὁ (χαράσσω to engrave, cut into), from Aeschylus and Herodotus down;
1. properly, the instrument used in engraving or carving (cf. ζωστήρ, λαμπτήρ, λουτήρ, φυσητήρ; cf. our 'stamp' or 'die').
2. the mark (figure or letters) stamped upon that instrument or wrought out on it; hence, universally, "a mark or figure burned in (Leviticus 13:28) or stamped on, an impression; the exact expression (the image) of any person or thing, marked likeness, precise reproduction in every respect" (cf. facsimile): χαρακτήρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως τοῦ Θεοῦ, of Christ, accusative to his nature as ὁ θεῖος λόγος, Hebrews 1:3; σφραγῖδι Θεοῦ, ἧς ὁ χαρακτήρ ἐστιν ὁ ἀΐδιος λόγος, Philo de plant. Noë 5; χαρακτήρ θείας δυνάμεως, of the human mind, Philo, quod det. potiori ins. § 23; God τόν ἄνθρωπον ἔπλασεν τῆς ἑαυτοῦ ἐκονος χαρακτῆρα, Clement of Rome, 1 Cor. 33, 4 [ET]; οἱ πιστοί ἐν ἀγάπη χαρακτῆρα Θεοῦ πατρός διά Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (ἔχουσι),Ignatius ad Magnes. 5, 2 [ET]. the peculiarity, by which things are recognized and distinguished from each other (cf. English characteristic): 2 Macc. 4:10.

Strong's Exhaustive Concordance
exact representation, exact likeness
From the same as charax; a graver (the tool or the person), i.e. (by implication) engraving (("character"), the figure stamped, i.e. An exact copy or (figuratively) representation) -- express image.

Matters To Note

A Possible Training Approach

This manual is designed to equip potential pastors and elders (elders in training) in local church leadership. Drawing on the biblical vision of servant leadership, this eight-session training course explores the qualities essential for healthy, Christ-centred leadership.

Each session includes:

- Biblical foundation
- Key concepts
- Reflection questions
- Group exercises
- Application prompts

Session 1: Context

The Servant Shepherd Model

Biblical Foundation:

- Psalm 23
- Isaiah 42:1–4; 49:1–7
- John 10:11–18; John 13:1–17, 34–35

Key Concepts:

- Jesus is the model for servant leadership.
- Love is expressed through humble, practical service.
- Shepherding is personal and sacrificial.

Reflection Questions:

1. How does Jesus' model challenge modern leadership styles?
2. In what ways can we practically serve those we lead?

Group Exercise:

- In groups, read John 13 aloud. Identify each of the 5 Ps (Position, Passion, Posture, Practice, Point) and discuss their implications.

Application Prompt:

Write down 3 ways you can demonstrate servant leadership this week.

Session 2: Call

The Divine Gracing for Leadership

Biblical Foundation:

- 1 Timothy 3:1
- 1 Peter 5:1-4
- Titus 1:5
- Ephesians 4:11-16

Key Concepts:

- Eldership is both a divine call that one responds to in faith, and a community recognition.
- A leader leads not out of obligation, but eager willingness.

Reflection Questions:

1. What indicators in your life affirm a call to eldership?
2. How can you test and confirm this calling?

Group Exercise:

- Pair up and share your story of sensing God's call.

Application Prompt:

Pray daily this week, asking God to clarify your calling.

Session 3:Character

Stewardship of the Soul

Biblical Foundation:

- 1 Timothy 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9
- Hebrews 1:3 (charaktér)

Key Concepts:

- Character sustains gifting.
- Trustworthiness is essential for spiritual leadership.

Reflection Questions:

1. What areas of your character need strengthening?
2. Can people trust you when no one is watching?

Group Exercise:

- Do a character word study on "charakter" using Hebrews 1:3 as the departure point.

Application Prompt:

Meet with a mentor and ask for honest feedback on your character.

Session 4: Competence

Stewardship of Gifts

Biblical Foundation:

- 1 Timothy 3:2
- Acts 20:28
- 1 Corinthians 12, 13, 14

Key Concepts:

- Elders need spiritual, emotional, relational competence, and leadership competence.
- Skills must support calling.

Reflection Questions:

1. Are you growing in your ability to teach and lead?
2. How do you partner with the Holy Spirit in ministry?

Group Exercise:

- Practice giving a 5-minute teaching on a passage of your choice.

Application Prompt:

Identify one skill to intentionally grow this month.

Session 5: Chemistry

Stewardship of the Team

Biblical Foundation:

- Romans 12:4–5
- Philippians 2:1–5

Key Concepts:

- Leadership is not solo.
- Team unity is essential.
- Chemistry through team cohesion aids unity and team effectiveness.

Reflection Questions:

1. Can you receive correction and give input graciously?
2. How do you contribute to team unity?
3. How do fellow team members experience me?
4. Am I a safe person on the team – emotionally, relationally, spiritually and with my leadership skills?

Group Exercise:

- Role-play a team disagreement and resolution.

Application Prompt:

Write a note of encouragement to a current team member.

Session 6: Culture

Stewardship of Cultural Atmosphere

Biblical Foundation:

- Acts 13:2
- John 1:14
- Romans 12:10

Key Concepts:

- Elders help shape and protect church culture.

Reflection Questions:

1. What culture does your church currently embody?
2. How can you positively influence it?

Group Exercise:

- Identify 3 core values your church should protect and embody.

Application Prompt:

Model one of these values in a tangible way this week.

Session 7: Courage

Boldness for God's Purpose

Biblical Foundation:

- Joshua 1:9
- Acts 4:29–31

Key Concepts:

- Elders must lead with truth, love and bravery.
- Courage enables decisive, Spirit-led action.

Reflection Questions:

1. When have you lacked courage to lead?
2. How do you cultivate boldness in the Spirit?

Group Exercise:

- Share a personal story where courage made the difference.

Application Prompt:

Face one fear this week and take a step in boldness.

Session 8: Capacity

Ability to Grow With The Team

Biblical Foundation:

- 2 Timothy 2:15
- Luke 2:52

Key Concepts:

- Elders must be lifelong learners.
- Capacity is about stretchability.

Reflection Questions:

1. Are you willing to be stretched for the sake of growth?
2. What limits your current capacity?

Group Exercise:

- Identify 3 areas where your capacity must grow to lead effectively.

Application Prompt:

Develop a personal growth plan for the next 6 months.

Final Charge: Becoming Christlike Shepherds

- 1 Peter 5:4 – The Chief Shepherd is our model and reward.
- The goal is not title or position, but faithfulness to Christ and the equipping of the church.

Commitment Exercise:

- Write a personal statement of your commitment to grow in eldership.

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