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**5 Ways Elders can Shepherd Elders**

**September 28, 2017 – Phil A. Newton**

Pastors need pastoring.

While some may assume pastors know most everything, live exemplary lives, handle crises with ease, and hold in reservoir enormous amounts of spiritual strength, that assumption fizzles in the face of life’s realities. Pastors face the same struggles with discipline, obedience, humility, and myriad spiritual issues as their congregation.

So who will pastor the pastors? Who helps the pastors maintain steadiness in walking with Christ? Who sharpens them when dulled? Who cares for them when hurting?

Within a plurality of elders, where some pastors receive a salary from the church and others don’t, pastoral needs are pressing. Elders must shepherd the flock together, but they also must band together to shepherd one another.

Paul had this in mind when he told the Ephesian elders, “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock” ([Acts 20:28](https://www.esv.org/verses/Acts%2020%3A28/)). “Yourselves” implies fellow elders. Watch out for your fellow elders just as you watch out for the flock. Just as you wouldn’t think of failing to care for the body, don’t think of failing to care for your fellow elders.

Yet we can easily presume on one another, can’t we? We can have expectations that as elders we all have our acts together. Perhaps sometimes we do. But what about the many times we don’t? If you as the shepherds don’t care for each other, who will?

Here are five suggestions to help pastors shepherd their fellow pastors.

### ****1. Pray daily for one another.****

Just as you pray daily for your own spiritual needs and those of your family, pray for your fellow elders. You hold closest to your heart those you regularly hold before the throne of grace. That act of daily prayer brings to mind the needs of your fellow elders. You’re praying for what you’ve observed about them and what you’ve learned in conversations with them. You’ve been sharing life together, so you share their needs with the Father.

Pay attention to your fellow elders. Communicate about their family, work, and shepherding the body. Discern where the adversary assaults them. Observe their strengths and weaknesses. They serve arm-in-arm with you, so lift them before the Lord. Plead for their personal disciplines, marriages, children, and ministry.

### ****2. Be friends, not business partners.****

We can fall into a trap of treating fellow elders merely as fellow board members. That’s one reason I prefer not to use the term “elder board.” We’re not a board. We’re a body serving the congregation together in the name of Christ. Board members can be somewhat indifferent to each other as long as the board functions. They can discuss, deliberate, make decisions, and think their responsibilities are complete when the meeting adjourns. But when you’re members of a body, you learn to love each other, weep and laugh together, know one another’s struggles, and carry one another’s burdens.

As fellow elders, we’ve joyously shared in births of children and grandchildren. We’ve wept over deaths of parents and siblings. We’ve labored in prayer over struggles with kids and grandkids. We’ve walked through pain, emergencies, and celebrations. Friends care enough to know and serve one another.

### ****3. Speak into one another’s lives.****

When we’re friends rather than just board members, we have the right to speak into one another’s lives. Paul’s encouragement concerning the body’s growth, development, and doctrinal clarity necessitated speaking the truth in love ([Eph. 4:14–16](https://www.esv.org/verses/Eph.%204%3A14%E2%80%9316/)), and elders were not excluded. If elders don’t speak the truth in love to one another, they’ll likely do little of it with the flock.

Yet to speak into another’s life calls for a dual posture. The one speaking must approach his brother with humility, love, and willingness to listen and walk alongside him. The one approached must share that same humility in listening, love in accepting correction, and submission to respond to a brother’s admonishing word. It means both the speaker and the listener must maintain teachable hearts. Elders who think they never need correction and admonition do not need to be elders. Until we stand before Christ without spot or blemish, we need others to speak into our lives—especially fellow elders who pray for us, love us, and hold us in their hearts.

### ****4. Pay attention to pastoral opportunities with elders.****

One of our elders and his wife faced the intense grief of a son dying less than an hour after birth. I will never forget the scene of my fellow elders and their wives gathered around the bedside weeping, praying, and loving this brother and his wife.

Such pastoral care can come in many ways. It can be during a family illness or death; a child leaving for college or the military; the birth of a child or grandchild; adverse changes in life or job or family. Sometimes sensitivity to raging spiritual conflict calls for fellow elders to come alongside their brothers.

Don’t presume another elder will serve the brother in time of need. Take initiative to pastor your fellow pastors. A time will come when you will be on the receiving end of such ministry.

### ****5. Live together in the body.****

By living together in the body, I’m thinking of things regular church members do, things that are intensified among elders. We read books and talk about them. We share stories of how God has worked. We discuss sermons and Bible studies we’re preparing to teach. We open up about our weaknesses and sins.. We visit needy church members. We participate in mission trips. We work side by side in various church projects or work days. We share table fellowship. We pray. We laugh. We do life together.

Yes, pastors need pastoring by their fellow elders. We can certainly develop formal structures for doing so, such as accountability times, Bible studies, peer reviews, and so on, but I’m advocating for something more holistic—life on life in the crucible of ministry.

Know each other well. Serve each other faithfully.

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