

God Gives Overseers to Christian Congregations



Overseers lead, teach, serve and protect congregations.

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Prayer

Ask the Holy Spirit to teach you to oversee the followers of Jesus in your church or cell.

Dialogue

Mr. Trainer asks Mr. Believer, "Would anybody leave a new baby out in the fields to grow up by itself?"

Mr. Believer laughs and replies, "No, its parents would bring the new baby into their home and care for it."

Mr. Trainer asks Mr. Believer, "Would a shepherd leave his sheep to wander about by themselves?"

Mr. Believer laughs again and replies, "No, a good shepherd will guide his sheep and protect them from wolves. As the flock grows, shepherds will train new shepherds to help him care for the sheep."

Mr. Trainer explains, "In the same way, new believers need someone to care for them. We call such caregivers 'overseers'. Overseers are also called pastors, shepherds, elders, and ministers.

Mr. Trainer adds, "Several people have begun following Jesus in your town. If I will train you, will you become their overseer, teaching them and protecting them?"

Mr. Believer replies, "I would like to help the new followers, but I do not know how to be an overseer. What must an overseer do?"

Mr. Trainer suggests, "Let us read in the Bible about overseers."

What the Bible Says About Overseers

1. In Ancient Israel

A long time ago, when the Eternal God helped the Israelite people to escape from Egypt, Moses was their only leader. Every day, from morning till evening, he answered people's questions and resolved their disputes. He grew very tired and people complained, because he could not help all of them.

When Moses father-in-law came to visit him, he saw how busy Moses was and gave to him this advice:

Now listen to me. I will give you counsel, and God be with you! You should represent the people before God, and you should bring their cases before God; teach them the statutes and instructions and make known to them the way they are to go and the things they are to do. You should also look for able men among all the people, men who fear God, are trustworthy, and hate dishonest gain; set such men over them as officers over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. Let them sit as judges for the people at all times; let them bring every important case to you, but decide every minor case themselves. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you. If you do this, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people will go to their home in peace." So Moses listened to his father-in-law and did all that he had said. *Exodus 18:19-24*



Jethro advised Moses to appoint overseers who served an entire population.

Please, answer these questions:

- Why is it important to have overseers?
- What kind of men can become overseers?
- What different group sizes need an overseer?

2. In the Gospels

Jesus knows that his followers need people who will love them, teach them, and lead them. He taught that he himself is the good Shepherd of his flock. He said:

I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. *John 10:14-17*

After Jesus died and came back to life, he appeared to some of his followers.

Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep." *John 21:15-17*

Later Peter wrote a letter to the followers and said:

Now as an elder myself and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as one who shares in the glory to be revealed, I exhort the elders among you to tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it — not for sordid gain but eagerly. Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock. And when the chief shepherd appears, you will win the crown of glory that never fades away. *1 Peter 5:1-4*

Please, answer these questions:

- How is the work of an overseer like that of a shepherd?
- What are some attitudes of overseers?
- What reward does God offer to those who serve as overseers?

3. In the Jerusalem Congregation

The apostles themselves served as overseers in the Jerusalem congregation. Acts 4 & 5

With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. (Acts 4:33-35) ...

As they left the council, they rejoiced that they were considered worthy to suffer dishonour for the sake of the name. And every day in the temple and at home they did not cease to teach and proclaim Jesus as the Messiah. (Acts 4:41-42)

The twelve apostles later appointed helpers whom they put in charge of special tasks.

The twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we

may appoint to this task, while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word." What they said pleased the whole community, (Acts 6:2-4)

The apostles and elders in Jerusalem heard and decided hard questions.

Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to discuss this question with the apostles and the elders. So they were sent on their way by the church... When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them. (Act 15:2-4)

Please, answer this question:

- What are some of the tasks that overseers perform?

4. In the Gentile Congregations

The prophets and teachers who ministered in the congregation at Antioch sent out apostles to start new congregations.

Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers... While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. *Acts 13:1-3*

Paul appointed elders for every congregation where they made new followers.

They had proclaimed the good news ... and had made many disciples... There they strengthened the souls of the disciples and encouraged them to continue in the faith, saying, "It is through many persecutions that we must enter the kingdom of God." And after they had appointed elders for them in each church, with prayer and fasting they entrusted them to the Lord in whom they had come to believe. *Act 14:21-23*

Elders are to watch over themselves and the flock and protect them from deceivers.

[Paul] sent a message to Ephesus, asking the elders of the church to meet him. When they came to him, he said to them ... Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son. I know that after I have gone, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Some even from your own group will come distorting the truth in order to entice the disciples to follow them. *Acts 20:17-18, 28-30*

Please, answer these questions:

- What warning did Paul give to the overseers?
- What are some more tasks that overseers perform?

5. In the Letters to the Congregations

God's Spirit gives gifts to some people to be overseers of congregations and cells. Romans. 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, Philippians 1.

We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us ... the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness. (Romans 12:6-8) And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then ..., forms of leadership. (1 Corinthians 12:28) The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors

and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.
Ephesians 4:11

There are two kinds of workers in a local Christian fellowship.

To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. *Philippians 1:1-2*

They serve the Christian community and others respect them in return.

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae, so that you may welcome her in the Lord as is fitting for the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well. (Romans 16:1-2) Now, brothers and sisters, you know that members of the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints; I urge you to put yourselves at the service of such people, and of everyone who works and toils with them.
1 Corinthians 16:15-16

Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant ... is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf.
Colisians 1:7

Please, answer these questions:

- How do overseers become competent to do their work?
- How can followers recognize believers who would be good overseers?

6. In the Letters to Pastors

Overseers devote themselves to teaching the Word of God, equipping all believers for ministries and training new overseers.

You then, my child, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus; and what you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well. *2 Timothy 2:1-2*

Elders are to be appointed in every town.

I left you behind in Crete for this reason, so that you should put in order what remained to be done, and should appoint elders in every town, as I directed you... as God's steward...
Titus 1:5-7

Overseers and their helpers, the deacons, must meet certain requirements. *1 Timothy 3, Titus 1*

The saying is sure: whoever aspires to the office of bishop desires a noble task. Now a bishop must be above reproach... Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace and the snare of the devil. Deacons likewise must be serious... And let them first be tested; then, if they prove themselves blameless, let them serve as deacons.
1 Timothy 3:1-10

Appoint elders in every town ... someone who is blameless.... For a bishop, as God's steward, must be blameless ... able both to preach with sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it. *Titus 1:5-9*

A Christian fellowship should pay an overseer who works hard, when they can.

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in preaching and teaching; for the scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain," and, "The labourer deserves to be paid." *1 Timothy 5:17-18*

Overseers who sin are to be rebuked publicly.

Never accept any accusation against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest also may stand in fear. *1 Timothy 5:19-20*

Please, answer these questions:

- How are new overseers trained for their work?
- What are some requirements for becoming a full-time overseer?

7. In the Letters to Christians

Not all followers should become overseers who teach others, for overseers must serve as examples to the followers of Jesus.

Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. For all of us make many mistakes. *James 3:1-2*

Overseers pray for the sick.

Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. *James 5:14-16*

Overseers must serve willingly, not greedily, as an example to the flock.

I exhort the elders among you to tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it — not for sordid gain but eagerly. Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock. *1 Peter 5:1-3*

Please, answer these questions:

- What are some duties of overseers?
What is the proper motive for doing the work of an overseer?
Practical Advice

In most cases, a new overseer should be an adult man who already has a home and a family that he leads. Overseeing a congregation or cell is much like leading one's own family. Unmarried young men usually are not respected and do not know how to care for others.

In a new congregation or cell of new believers, often the best overseer will be one of the new believers, because he will understand them and they will respect him. However, a new believer should not be given the title of overseer. Rather, a new believer can be called a "provisional elder" or "apprentice overseer" until he has proven himself and the believers have come to trust him.

Every temporary overseer should have a trainer who will mentor him. A trainer is another overseer who has more experience. The trainer should meet with the apprentice overseer regularly, and do these things:

- Listen to him report what his congregation or cell needs now.
- Help him plan how he will help his congregation or cell.
- Teach him from the Bible.
- Assign to him a lesson that will help him to meet the current needs of his congregation or cell.
- Look over the lesson he has completed, or have him talk about it.
- Practice together new skills that the apprentice overseer needs to learn.
- Pray for the apprentice overseer and for the members of his congregation.
- Do not spend much time with problems. Always deal with new activities or ministries that will help to develop in the new congregation.

Very soon after an apprentice overseer has started his training and is overseeing a congregation or cell, he can begin training another apprentice overseer. The trainer will provide the overseer with advice and materials with which to train the apprentice. In this way, each apprentice overseer can train another apprentice overseer and start many new congregations and cells. *Train & Multiply*[®] is useful program with materials that can help to continually train new leaders for new congregations. Visit www.TrainAndMultiply.com and write to ask about materials in your language.

After an overseer has been trained for about a year, his congregation or the mother congregation can lay hands on him and call him overseer, pastor or elder. This commissioning is sometimes called ordination. If you call it ordination be very sure that you require only what the New Testament requires for it. To add human requirements can stifle new congregations' progress and keeps them from obeying Christ.

Most leaders should start a congregation, oversee it and help it start another congregation, before they go away to a Bible school.

If a congregation grows big enough to afford to pay an overseer, then the members can collect tithes and offerings from themselves and pay the overseer a salary. An overseer who receives a salary must work full-time as an overseer and not be involved in business ventures or have another job.

When an Overseer Sins

Sometimes, an overseer in a Christian fellowship may do something wrong. Overseers must often ask the Lord to help them to overcome temptation. Some common sins of overseers are these:

1. Overseers may take away disciples after themselves.

Savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Some even from your own group will come distorting the truth in order to entice the disciples to follow them. *Act 20:29-30*

2. Overseers may be caught sinning.

Never accept any accusation against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest also may stand in fear. In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels, I warn you to keep these instructions without prejudice, doing nothing on the basis of partiality. Do not ordain anyone hastily, and do not participate in the sins of others; keep yourself pure. *1 Timothy 5:19-22*

3. Overseers may become greedy for money.

Tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it—not for sordid gain but eagerly. *1 Peter 5:2*

4. Overseers may take too much authority.

Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock. *1 Peter 5:3*

5. Overseers may try to be too important.

I have written something to the church; but Diagraphs, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing in spreading false charges against us. And not content with those charges, he refuses to welcome the friends, and even prevents those who want to do so and expels them from the church. *3 John 1:9-10*

Please, answer these questions:

- What are some things you would try not to do as an overseer?
- What should you do if an overseer does not behave properly?

Story Continued

Mr. Believer says to Mr. Trainer, “I see that overseers take care of the Lord's people like a shepherd takes care of the sheep. How can I get started doing the work of an overseer?”

Mr. Trainer replies to Mr. Believer, “Well, here are some practical work assignments. Let us make a plan together for how you will do each one.”

Practical work

- Make a list of all the personal qualities of an overseer and ask the Lord to help you.
- Make plans for all the tasks and activities that God requires that the congregation do, that you will oversee. These must include:
 - solving problems,
 - maintaining fellowship between members and with other congregations,
 - forming tiny groups so that everyone can take part and serve one another,
 - starting daughter congregations and new cells,
 - training new leaders in new congregations and cells.
- Teach your congregation or cell about overseers, using the Bible passages in this booklet.
- Choose some men in your congregation whom you would like to train to become overseers.

Conclusion

The Lord Jesus will give a reward to everyone who oversees his congregations and cells, if they do so with love and wisdom. The Holy Spirit of God gives special ability to those whom he calls to be overseers.

As an overseer, you can help your congregation to love God and each other, and to obey the Word of God. You can also train other men as apprentice overseers who start new cells.