

# Our Local Church Leaders

## Part 3: The Overseer

**Elder (Presbyter) = Overseer (Bishop) = Shepherd (Pastor)**

### Introduction:

- In this series so far we have addressed the “Why” for local church leaders (part 1), and have studied the word “elder” and what that means.
- Today we will consider another term used for the local church leaders – Overseer (or bishop).
- The Greek word translated as overseer or bishop is the word *episkopos* meaning to “watch over.”
- *The word “overseer” speaks of one or many to represent the highest person of authority and to exercise authority over whatever was designated. Included in this authoritative oversight was the idea of watching, directing, and protecting the master’s interests. The NT carries these ideas also in regard to men appointed to serve the church on behalf of Jesus Christ (Acts 20:28; Phil 1:1; 1 Tm 3:1, 2; Ti 1:7). Jesus Christ is the great Overseer (1 Pt 2:25). Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, “Overseer,” Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1596–1597.*
- Our goal is to explain throughout the Bible what oversight really looks like.

### 3 observations today to help understand what an Overseer is today in God’s church.

1. **Overseers are not Owners** – They are stewards who care for God’s church locally.
2. **Overseers are not Overlords** – They are soul-watchers in God’s family.
3. **Overseers are not Over-Doers** – They are servants as part of a team in God’s household.

#### #1 – Overseers are not Owners – They are stewards who care for God’s church locally.

- Titus 1:7 – For an overseer, as God’s **steward**, must be above reproach...
- 1 Timothy 3:5 – ...for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he **care for God’s church?** (In the context of appointing overseers, 1 Timothy 3:1).
- 1 Corinthians 4:2 – Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.
  - Paul was given the stewardship of the gospel and apostleship, and he was accountable to God to be faithful to that stewardship.
  - The same is true for any steward (parent, husband, finances, job, teacher, elder/overseer/pastor).
- We can take ownership of this responsibility without acting like owners, instead we understand the incredible gifts and blessings God has placed into our hands and manage them with a mindset that one day God will take those things back to himself and we will account for how we managed them (people, talents or resources).

#### #2 – Overseers are not Overlords – They are soul-watchers in God’s family.

- 1 Peter 5:2-3 – shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising **oversight**, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; **not domineering over** those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. (Context, Peter speaking elders of local congregations, 1 Peter 5:1).
- Hebrews 13:17 – Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are **keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account**. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.
- 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 – We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are **over you in the Lord and admonish you**, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work...
- These three passages explain well the function of spiritual oversight and help us to see what the main focus of the pastor / elder / overseer is – **Oversee souls** (not parking lots, signs and toilets)!

### #3 – Overseers are not Over-Doers – They are servants as part of a team in God’s household.

- Being in charge (husband, parent, manager, supervisor, owner, etc.) will sometimes lead to the temptation to be involved in everything and do everything and make every decision.
- This is not Biblical oversight! In the business world they call this micro-managing. It is crippling to any family, church, nation, school, sports team or business that has leaders like this.
- “Oversee” does not mean you perform every task and make every decision!
- Let us go through several Biblical examples to let the Bible explain oversight.
  - **Joseph** – Joseph was made overseer of all of Potiphar’s house. The text tells us that Potiphar put someone in charge of his house even though Potiphar was the head and master of that house. Potiphar trusted Joseph so much that he let Joseph do his job and didn’t look into all his decisions and actions. Joseph was “overseer” of all of Potiphar’s house, yet we see in verse 11 that there were other servants in the house. Joseph was overseer but not doing all the work personally ([Genesis 39:3-6,11](#)).
  - **Moses** – Moses was faithful in all of God’s house as a servant (Hebrews 3:1-6). But as overseer of God’s household, Moses had to learn delegation and to equip others ([Exodus 18:22-23](#)).
  - **Temple Workers** – When the temple restoration project began under the leadership of King Josiah and Hilkiah the priest, there were faithful and trustworthy workers who were given oversight of doing the actual work. They temple workers had been given “oversight” by the King and High Priest. Notice that the King and High Priests are not doing the actual work and making all the decisions ([2 Kings 22:3-7](#)).
    - “But no accounting shall be asked from them for the money that is delivered into their hand, for they deal honestly” (2 Kings 22:7).
    - Keeping in mind though that some decisions were out of these workers hands. They had to obey God, Moses’ Law, and the King and High Priest. However, many decisions regarding how to spend the money and how much to spend on various resources were made by them.
  - **Apostles** – When the church was dealing with ethnic tensions because the Hellenistic widows were being neglected, the apostles had to guide the church to a solution ([Acts 6:1-7](#)).
    - Notice 3 very important things in this text: (1) The apostles knew their own limitations and their own roles. (2) The apostles trusted the congregation to choose these seven men. (3) The apostles gave “oversight” of widow’s care to these seven men.
    - These men had the ability to make decisions for the best care for the widows. Considering though that this was an incredibly large congregation, it is safe to assume that these 7 men did not do all the actual work of caring for the widows. Oversight doesn’t mean you do it all.
  - **At home** – Where is one place a man learns how to oversee?
    - 1 Timothy 3:4-5 – He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to **manage his own household**, how will he care for God’s church?
    - 1 Timothy 3:12 – Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, **managing their children and their own households well**.
    - [Proverbs 31:10-31](#) – The virtuous wife was **trusted by her husband to oversee things at home**. She made a lot of decisions, even though he was the “head.”
    - If a man micro-manages and controls everything at home, how will he be as an overseer?
  - Other examples (2 Chronicles 2:17-18; 34:12-13,17; Nehemiah 11:9,14,22; 12:42)

### Conclusion:

- Overseers are stewards caring for God’s people, soul-watchers in God’s family and servants in God’s household.
- Ephesians 4:11-12 – The elders were given by God to the church to help equip people. This means elders should empower disciples and prepare them to think and operate as part of the body.
- Acts 20:28 – Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the **Holy Spirit has made you overseers**, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.