



The Ox – Qualifications of an Acts 29 Church Planter

Mark Driscoll

Even a cursory reading of the Bible reveals that when God wants to get something done He starts by selecting a man to lead that change. Examples include sparing humanity (Noah), founding a nation (Abraham), liberating a nation (Moses), establishing a throne (David), building a Temple (Solomon), preparing hearts (John the Baptizer), and redeeming all of creation (Jesus).

And, church planting is no different. Simply, before God can build a church plant He must build a church planter. Acts 29 exists to find the men who sense that God has called them to plant a church, assess those men to see if they are indeed qualified for God to begin His work with, train those men and help them to plant a church that will, in turn, plant other churches. Therefore, we are very particular in seeking a particular kind of man and this article is intended to clearly articulate what type of man we are seeking.

First, we are seeking a man who is qualified to be the founding elder of a church plant who is so exemplary that God would be happy to then have other men in the church aspire to be like that man. Elders are the male leaders of the church who are also synonymously called pastors, bishops, and overseers throughout the New Testament (Acts 20:28; Ephesians 4:11; I Peter 5:2). The elders are men chosen for their ministry according to clear biblical requirements (I Timothy 2:11-3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9).

The elders are always spoken of in plurality because God intends for more than one man to lead and rule over the church as a safeguard for both the church and the man. Therefore, the objective of the founding elder is to seek out and raise up men who are qualified to be his peers in leading the church and until such men are found, the founding elder has the difficult task of functioning as the solo elder as Paul, Timothy, and Titus occasionally did. This requires that the solo and founding elder be an extraordinarily manly man of great courage, wisdom, toughness, and dedication to Jesus.

To evaluate the fitness of a man to function as the founding elder in a church plant, we examine the teachings of the Bible. There are two primary places that the Bible defines the qualifications of an elder (I Timothy 2:11-3:7; Titus 1:5-9) and the lists are virtually identical. Therefore, to help you understand these qualifications we will briefly list and explain them from their appearance in Timothy.

1 Timothy 3:1-7 Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.

This section of sacred Scripture lists seventeen qualifications for a man to be even considered as an elder/pastor that I will briefly articulate. Additionally, because Paul says that anyone who desires this high calling desires a noble thing it is good for all of God's men to aspire to this kind of life and to become very familiar with each of these requirements.

1. Relation To God

A man -- masculine leader
Above reproach -- without any character defect
Able to teach -- effective Bible communicator
Not a new convert -- mature Christian

2. Relation To Family

Husband of one wife -- one woman man, sexually pure
(this does not require a married as Paul, Timothy, Jesus, and widowed men could qualify though we are very cautious to accept single men as a founding pastor)
Having obedient children-- successful father
Manages family well-- provides for, leads, organizes, loves

3. Relation To Self

Temperate-- mentally & emotionally stable
Self-controlled-- disciplined life of sound decision-making
Not given to drunkenness-- without addictions
Not a lover of money-- financially content & upright

4. Relation To Others

Respectable-- worth following & imitating
Hospitable-- welcomes strangers, especially non-Christians for evangelism
Not violent -- even tempered
Gentle -- kind, gracious, loving
Not contentious -- peaceable, not quarrelsome/divisive
Good reputation with outsiders-- respected by non-Christians

In summary, only men of finest character are fit for leadership in God's church. What is not required according to the Bible is formal theological training, though such training can indeed be very beneficial. What is also not required is a salary, though an elder/pastor is worth an honorable wage (I Timothy 5:17-18). The issue of which men lead the church is of the utmost seriousness because the reputation of the gospel in the community and health of the church are contingent upon godly, qualified men who keep in step with Jesus and can lead the church to do likewise. In this way, the elders function as an accountable team much like Jesus first disciples and are therefore quite unlike secular notions of a business or non-profit organizational board. In addition to the qualifications of an elder, the Bible also provides the duties of elders/pastors.

- Prayer & Scripture study (Acts 6:4)
- Ruling/leading the church (I Timothy 5:17)
- Managing the church (I Timothy 3:4-5)
- Caring for people in the church (I Peter 5:2-5)
- Giving account to God for the church (Hebrews 13:17)
- Living exemplary lives (Hebrews 13:7)
- Rightly using the authority God has given them (Acts 20:28)
- Teaching the Bible correctly (Ephesians 4:11, I Timothy 3:2)
- Preaching (I Timothy 5:17)
- Praying for the sick (James 5:13-15)

- Teaching sound doctrine & refuting false teachings (Titus 1:9)
- Working hard (I Thessalonians 5:12)
- Rightly using money & power (I Peter 5:1-3)
- Protecting the church from false teachers (Acts 20:17-31)
- Disciplining unrepentant Christians (Matthew 18:15-17).

Obviously to achieve these difficult tasks a man must be disciplined, organized, courageous, dependable, patient, well read, hard working, and discerning; a man who gets things done in an effective and timely manner which also means that he's passionate and self-motivated. Practically, this is why throughout the pastoral epistles Paul also speaks of the lead elder with a number of metaphors that are pregnant with meaning and therefore important for every pastor to regularly meditate upon.

To plant a church that honors God a man must preach and teach the Bible with all of the strength and fortitude of an ox that can pull a multitude of people in his wake (1 Timothy 5:17-18). Satan routinely sends heretics, nutjobs, and false teachers of all kinds into a church plant because it's systems are yet fluid, it's leadership is yet unsettled, and it's relationships are yet uncultivated. Therefore, you must ensure that sound doctrine regularly proceeds from your lips and pen so that love for Jesus and love for others (Christians and non-Christians alike) are the marks of health in your church plant.

To plant a church that honors God a man must fight like a dependable soldier of Jesus Christ (2 Timothy 2:3-4). Throughout his letters Paul continually admonishes Timothy to fight a good fight. And with the world, the flesh, and the devil conspiring to thwart your work you must do likewise. Soft men who are prone to avoid conflict or crumble under pressure will end up like an acquaintance of mine whose church plant collapsed as he lay on his living room floor crying like a baby while Hymenaeus and Alexander proceeded to take over.

To plant a church that honors God a man must train and compete with the precision of a skilled athlete (2 Timothy 2:5). Lazy men who adore their hobbies rarely plant much of a church because they end up wasting time, wasting energy, and being undisciplined with everything from their Bible to their fork as they tend to read too little and sleep and eat too much.

To plant a church that honors God a man must sweat at his labor like a farmer (2 Timothy 2:6). Many young men are attracted to ministry because, as one pastor said, it's a job indoors that does not require any heavy lifting. But, when done rightly, ministry in general and church planting in particular, is work. Like the farmer who owns his own land no one will wake you up in the morning, set your schedule, or give you a performance review to let you know how you are doing. So, like the hard working farmer you will need to simply get yourself up every morning and work hard gathering people, studying and teaching, raising money, locating facilities, building systems, and the like.

The sad truth is that there are seemingly few men who are qualified to hold the title of pastor/elder, let alone be the founding pastor of a church plant. Jesus said as much and commanded us to pray for God to raise up workers and send them into the harvest and so we do.

After reading this article you will likely find yourself in one of three categories. Some will realize that they are simply not qualified and we would simply ask you to not apply to Acts 29 because it is a waste of your time and ours. Some will realize that they are not yet ready but could be and we would encourage you to connect with a good church led by the kind of

qualified men that you aspire to be, where you ask them to help you prepare for God's call on your life. And, some of you believe you are both called and qualified to plant your church and we would welcome you to apply to Acts 29, attend one of our boot camp assessments, and see if we are a good fit for assisting in the church you aspire to plant.