

Discerning Gifts for Spiritual Growth

Thomas Robinson, *Gifts for Spiritual Leadership 4*, March 11, 2018

1 Peter 5:1-7

¹ I am urging the **elders** (*presbyteros*) among you, as a **fellow-elder** and a **witness** of the sufferings of the Messiah, and as one who shares with you in the glory that's going to be revealed: ² Do the work of a **shepherd** (*poimainein*) as you **watch over/oversee** (*episkopein*) God's **flock** that's among you, not under compulsion, but **gladly**, as before God; not for shameful profit, but **eagerly**. ³ Don't act as though you were lords over those for whom you're responsible, but be **models** for the **flock**. ⁴ And when the **chief shepherd** appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

⁵ Likewise, the **younger** people: Be subject to **elders**/older people. But all of you clothe yourselves with humility of thought toward one another, because "*God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.*" (Prov. 3:34; Jam. 4:6) ⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's powerful hand in order that he may lift you up at the proper time, ⁷ while you cast every anxiety on him, because he cares for you.

Mark 10:42-45

⁴² And Jesus called his disciples to him and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers of the nations lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ⁴³ But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you will be your servant (*diakonos*), ⁴⁴ and whoever would be first among you will be slave (*doulos*) of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve (*diakonein*), and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Acts 20:28-35 Paul speaks to the elders from the church at Ephesus

²⁸ Pay attention to yourselves and to the whole flock, in which the Holy Spirit has set you as overseers/guardians (*episkopos*), to shepherd (*poimainein*) the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

²⁹ I know that after I depart fierce wolves will enter in among you, who won't spare the flock. ³⁰ Even from your own selves will arise those who speak distorted things to draw away the disciples after them.

³¹ Therefore keep watch, and remember that for three years night and day I did not cease admonishing each one of you with tears.

³² And now I entrust you to God and to the message of his grace, which has power to build you up and to grant the inheritance among all those whom God has made holy.

³³ I coveted no one's silver or gold or clothing. ³⁴ You yourselves know that these very hands worked as servants for my necessities and for those who were with me. ³⁵ In all things I have shown you that by working strenuously (*kopian*) in this way we must help those who are weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, "*It is more blessed to give than to receive.*"

Hebrews 13:7-8, 16-17

⁷ Keep in mind your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. As you consider the full course of their way of life, imitate their faith. ⁸ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

¹⁶ Do not neglect doing good and sharing together, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. ¹⁷ Have confidence in those who lead you and defer to them, for they themselves are keeping watch for your lives / souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not groaning, for that would be of no benefit to you.

Ephesians 4:11-13

¹¹ And Jesus himself gave these gifts: the emissaries, the proclaimers of encouragement and upbuilding, the announcers of good news, the shepherds (*poimen*) and teachers, ¹² for the process of equipping the

holy people for work of service (*diakonia*), for building up the body of the Messiah,¹³ until we all arrive at the goal of the oneness both of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature adulthood, to a maturity defined by the fullness of the Messiah.

1 Timothy 5:17-18

¹⁷ Let elders (*presbyteros*) who are good stewards / leaders be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who work strenuously in word and teaching.¹⁸ For the scripture says, “*Don’t muzzle an ox while it’s threshing grain,*” (Deut 25:4; 1Cor 9:9) and, “*The worker deserves his wages*” (Luke 10:7).

A Community Process of Discernment

We’ve come to an important time in the process of adding to our leadership. A church is a part of the body of Christ. We exist to help each other and the people around us know the God of the universe who shows himself in Jesus and lives in us in his Holy Spirit. That affects every aspect of life, but its priority is important. We want to discern, participate in God’s work.

We know from our world how cynically leadership is manipulated. Across history, the church is often no different, just another broken human institution. The process of discernment matters for those who believe/trust in God with renewed minds (Rm 12:1-2). There’s no set method or failsafe technique. We do our best. God works. The Holy Spirit acts among us. Always the challenge of Jesus shows us God’s reality turning our world’s values upside down. We must go back again and again to the scriptures as learners, looking at Jesus, growing.

Maturity, Task, Responsibility

In the early church several ideas came together to help shape leadership: (1) maturity / elder /older; (2) the metaphor of shepherd growing from Jesus’ as the good shepherd; (3) the challenge to be watchful, oversee the community so that the Gospel is not distorted.

Peter urges elders to work like shepherds who watch over the flock gladly – no compulsion, ulterior motives, self-aggrandizement, but desiring to set an example, the Gospel’s stamp.

Paul brings together the same ideas as he says farewell to a group of elders, calling them to shepherd and watch for the whole flock. But with a sense of danger – wolves. If they are not shaped by the Gospel, they themselves may become wolves. It is not the people who lead who are the standard but God’s message of grace in Jesus. Leaders strive always to learn that reality, to embody that message and teach it and avoid distortions. But they must also be evaluated by the message. The community thrives as it is shaped by that message.

In all of these there is great seriousness: Peter: “God’s flock,” “chief shepherd.” Paul: “Holy Spirit,” “his own blood,” the “power” of the message. Hebrews: “keeping watch for lives,” “give an account.” 1Tim 5: elders who are “stewards” and “work strenuously in word and teaching.”

A Community that Grows toward Jesus

Ultimately, this whole process and how lovingly, joyfully, hopefully and responsibly we take it is a statement of who we are. We are becoming people who think, see reality, starting from the event of Jesus. He became one of us and gave these gifts for a transforming process. We’re never very good at the process, but it really matters to us and that shapes everything else.

There are shepherds so we can be shaped by Jesus, serving, becoming the body of the Messiah. The aim is for us to grow into the maturity, the serving, the loving, the self-giving, the understanding, the oneness, the beauty and creativity of Jesus, the fullness of God in him.