

# THE PASTORS' PEN

articles from the elders of BBC

The major reason I write articles is because I see it as an extension of my privilege to feed the flock of God. It is an avenue for taking heed to the flock and to offer what I trust will be edifying help to our congregation. As I become aware of matters in the wider culture that affect our congregation, I try to constructively address them. This holds true, of course, for situations that arise from our life together as a community of faith. This article comes from concern about the latter.

Over the years that I have been a member of our church, I have heard what can become an

unfortunate phrase when speaking of the eldership: “you guys.” Of course, this phrase is often used innocently, merely to designate a particular group of men

entrusted by God to care for the flock. But it can also be used in an unhelpful way. For instance, “There is a problem in the church and you guys need to address it,” or, “The church is not doing well in [some ministry] and you guys should sort it out it,” or, “So and so is in some kind of trouble and you guys must follow up,” etc.

Though the subject matter varies, this use of “you guys” conveys the idea that the eldership should be sorting out all the problems in the church. In some cases, the phrase is used as a club: “I am not happy, and therefore I expect you guys to do something about it.” So, is this fair? Or, more to the point, is it biblical?

First, in some cases, it is fair because it is biblical. Elders are entrusted by God with the responsibility

to give oversight to the flock. The etymology of oversight (“to bishop”) is from the civilian world, where it referred to something like a town ombudsman. Responsibility for the welfare of the congregation lies very much with the eldership. We are to manage the household of God (1 Timothy 3:4–6, 15), which includes making sound decisions and actively engaging with those in the household who need special attention. Further, the eldership is responsible to care for the congregation in such a way that she grows in spiritual health, which is characterised by holiness and godly harmony. If it is

true that everything rises and falls on leadership, then there are times when the congregation can speak of “you guys.” Elders, and those who aspire to the eldership, must accept this.

As American President Harry Truman quipped, “If you can’t stand the heat, then get out of the kitchen.”

But in some cases, the “you guys” appellation is not fair because it is not biblical. And ultimately, it is not helpful for the congregation. Rather than the critical “you guys,” the congregation should be thinking “us guys,” and then behave accordingly. In fact, if the “you guys” in the church are faithfully doing what they are called to do, then there will be a development of a healthy culture of “us guys” in the church.

Congregational care is the goal of a healthy eldership. And it is towards this end that it will apply effort. Equipping the congregation to connect with one another in gospel-driven relationships is



what the eldership is called to do. How it does this is open to debate and will vary from congregation to congregation, but in the end the goal is a Christ-centred caring community, which is increasingly committed to carrying the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Clearly, those appointed as elders have the responsibility to train others who will faithfully care for the congregation. This is both explicit and implicit in the words of 2 Timothy 2:1–2: “You, therefore my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” Faithful elders, in other words, are fruitful elders. They are shepherds who produce shepherds. They are caring church members who replicate other caring members. Therefore, the church has every right to (lovingly!) point the finger and say, “You guys need to care, and you guys need to disciple others to care.” But this undergirds the thesis that, when elders do this, a culture of “us guys” will predominate. “We guys” are to so multiply the ethos of “us guys” that there is less and less of a “you guys” mentality. And this is precisely why we are setting aside several Wednesdays in early 2018 to equip “us guys” for congregational care.

The plan is to gather for approximately eight one-and-a-half-hour sessions (7:00 PM – 8:30 PM) to study how to care for one another. (We will set a limit to the size of the group and then repeat later with a second group, and a third group if necessary, depending on interest.) Together, we will examine essentials of congregational care such as the sufficiency of Scripture to address our real needs, as well as the sufficiency of the saints to use Scripture to practically drive home the sufficiency of our Saviour to meet those needs. We will examine what is required of those who desire to help one another in our pursuit of holiness as well as the various heart issues that must be addressed in such a pursuit. We will observe some role-playing as well as investigating “case-studies” to see how biblical congregational care is practically applied.

This opportunity is open to every church member. The requirements are simple: Be committed to gathering for instruction with a heart that desires to serve the Lord by participating in serving one another through walking side-by-side with the congregation. In other words, the fundamental requirement is a commitment to becoming one of the “us guys” of congregational care. “We guys” want to help you towards this.