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Elders and Deacons and Saints, Oh My!

James Kirkland
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For a sports team to be successful, all players must be clear on their roles and how their individual contributions support the team. The same is true for churches. Yet, too often members do not fully understand the purpose of certain leadership positions or the role of the congregation. As a result, many churches struggle to operate effectively amid such confusion and disunity.

Having been a manager, team builder, and planner during his many years as a business owner and certified financial planner, James Kirkland understands the importance of clearly defined leadership roles. He begins *Elders and Deacons and Saints, Oh My!* with what he sees as the five-fold biblical mission of churches: love of God, love for others, evangelism, identification, and discipleship. To achieve these, the congregation and the leaders must embrace a system of church government.

"The Scriptural model is a fellowship of loving people who, being guided by the Holy Spirit, work in cooperation with and submission to their leaders," Kirkland writes. "Elders have the responsibility to lead, and congregations are expected to follow and also obey."

Kirkland rightly takes considerable time explaining the title of elder, since different denominations interpret the term in seemingly contradictory ways. But Kirkland notes, "The words elder, pastor, shepherd, overseer, and bishop are all words that refer to the same person. The elders/pastors are the primary leaders in God's system of government."

Using multiple scriptural references and examples to establish the roles and authority of elders, Kirkland skillfully analyzes the three categories of their responsibility: administration, teaching, and shepherding. He emphasizes that each elder has a varying degree of talent in these areas and that no elder should be expected to excel in all three of them. That, he writes, explains the necessity of everyone working together to maximize individual strengths.

Supporting the leaders are deacons, who serve both elders and members to help fulfill the church's ministry and purpose: "These are the folks that make sure the 'things' associated with managing church grounds, finances, and many other items are done well."

According to Kirkland, the third element of the church team is the members, or "saints," whose primary role "is to be a disciple while doing our part in helping others become disciples also." While deacons and saints are subject to the authority of the elders, their roles are vital to keep the church maturing and growing.

In *Elders and Deacons and Saints, Oh My!*, Kirkland has provided a well-documented, highly readable guide to help church leaders and members better understand their roles and responsibilities.

JEFF FRIEND (January 30, 2012)

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