

‘Poplar trees by flowing streams’

The work of the Holy Spirit in His church

“I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground: I will pour out My Spirit on your offspring and My blessing on your descendants. They will spring up like grass in a meadow, like poplar trees by flowing streams”

[Isaiah 44.3f]

This short series of studies looks at some significant aspects of the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of Christ’s church, as He brings into being and nurtures a new community of faith which anticipates the glory of the age to come.

You can find the background to this series [here](#).

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3. Acts 20.17-38 [w/b Sunday 3rd June 2018]

“.. Be shepherds of the church of God ..”

The same Holy Spirit who equips every member of Christ's church to share in the ministry of Christ, raises up certain people to fulfill the particular responsibilities of an elder: elders are called to be shepherds (or pastors) of the flock and as such have an important leadership ministry to fulfill.

The Leadership Team, along with the elders, has concluded that it is appropriate at this time to for us to be adding to the number of elders. In our present series on the work of the Holy Spirit in His church, this study, therefore, considers the ministry of the elder - recognizing that it is ultimately the Holy Spirit who appoints them to this ministry (Acts 20.28)

[There may not be time for all the questions to be addressed in your Community Group - but try and ensure that in this study you cover questions 3, 6 and 7. As always try to leave good time for shared prayer - and let the passage inform your praying together!]

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1. **Read Acts 20.17-38.** Read the whole passage. Paul narrates in broad brush strokes the nature of his pastoral ministry among God's people at Ephesus.

What are the features of his ministry which you find most striking?

Read Phil.4.9 - Paul led by example: on the basis of what you read in Acts 20.17-38, what should characterize the pastoral ministry of those who are elders?

2. **Read Acts 14.21-25.** One of Paul's clear priorities was the appointment of elders in a new church. Here on his first missionary journey we see him returning to fledgling churches to do just that.

Read Acts 14.8-20 to get some background: why do you think Paul went back to places which would have exposed him to fresh persecution?

From what you read in these verses, what two primary roles are elders appointed to fulfil?

3. **Read Acts 20.28.** In a couple of short sentences Paul sets out the weighty responsibilities and tasks which the elders are to take on.

Why is it important that the elders recognize their appointment as being from God?

What will 'keeping watch over all the flock' involve for elders?

4. Read Acts 20.29-31. Paul explains here the context in which the pastoral ministry of elders is exercised. The realities to which he points are faced by every generation of Christ's church.

What does he mean by 'savage wolves'? What would be contemporary examples of what he's alluding to?

In what ways might the truth be distorted: and how do elders ensure that the truth is *not* distorted?

5. Read Acts 20.31-35. These verses conclude Paul's address to the elders of the Ephesian church: in some ways they provide a summary sketch of the ministry he himself had exercised.

What necessary character traits in elders are suggested by what Paul says here about himself?

What does Paul mean when he says that he is committing them "*to the word of (God's) grace*"?

6. Read 1 Peter 5.1-11. Peter here uses very similar language to that used by Paul in speaking to the Ephesian elders.

What does Peter highlight as important characteristics of those who are elders?

What does Peter say is the context in which elders are to be fulfilling their ministry?

7. Read 1 Tim.3.1-7 & Titus 1.5-9. These two passages are written to two pastors (Timothy in Ephesus and Titus in Crete) and set out what they are to look for in the elders they appoint.

How would you describe the characteristics to be looked for in elders?

Why do you think the bar is set so high for elders?

Why is it so important that an elder is 'able to teach' (1 Tim.3.2)?