

Assessing Readiness for the Elder Development Cohort

Each of these eleven questions offers a different way to think about a candidate's readiness. They are intended more as prompts for reflection and evaluation rather than a long list of entry requirements.

(1) *If he quit his job, would his boss be silently relieved?* Does he struggle to keep the floor of his car clean? Does he mow his yard? Does he show up to work on time? Does he call people back? Is his bank account overdrawn? He doesn't need to be a time management guru, but he should be a responsible adult. Is his life marked more by chaos or conviction? When facing life challenges, is he more reactionary or responsible? Is his conversation characterized more by grumbling or gratitude? Is he lacking in basic character? Is he a man of integrity? Does he keep his word, even when it's inconvenient (Ps 15:4)? Is he honest, sincere, kind, fair, humble, law-abiding, consistent, and compassionate to those in need?

(2) *Is he living with his wife in an understanding way (1 Pet 3:7)?* Are dynamics playing out that are painfully clear to his friends, and painfully unclear to him? What's the temperature of the marriage? Is their relationship marked by warmth and mutual respect, or do they lapse into sarcasm, contempt, and defensiveness under pressure? Do they speak well of each other? Do they enjoy each other? Do they laugh and play together? Do they avoid taking themselves too seriously, while at the same time taking the health of their marriage very seriously? Do they respond appropriately to each other's concerns and requests? Is there an absence of chronic over- or under-functioning for both parties? How do they navigate conflict? Is their marriage more a reservoir from which they draw in order to bless others, or more of a drain which draws them into isolation and unhealthy introspection? Do they keep short accounts with each other, or do they tend to nurse and bring up old wounds? Do they know how to deeply listen to each other, or do they merely talk *at* each other? Are they focused on what they are not getting from each other more than how they are called to love and serve each other? How much does Jesus come up when they speak *to* each other, or *about* each other? What happens when they pray together? *Do* they pray together? Are they unified in how they steward their time, money, and attention?

(3) *What kind of friend is he?* How would his close friends describe him? Does he have any? Would they call him in a crisis? Is he able to both maintain long-term friendships as well as cultivate new ones? Is he hard to know? Does he fall back on humor to derail moments of real vulnerability? Is he prayerfully working to entrust his private life to a few faithful men? Or does he avoid sharing personally at all costs? Alternately, does he rely on false intimacy and over-sharing as a means of skipping the much harder work of slowly building trust over time? Does he possess the kind of self-reflective depth, reliability, and gravity that makes other men want to be his friend? Does he force his wife to meet all his friendship needs on the one hand, or fail to work at befriending his wife on the other? How are his friendships with other women? His mother? His sister(s) (if applicable)? Does he aspire to be a constant, candid, and careful friend? Is he willing to faithfully wound (Prov 27:6), while at the same time avoiding rash words like sword thrusts (Prov 12:18)?

(4) *How would you feel if he became the chief disciple-maker of your kids?* Consider the "plane crash test." If you died in a plane crash tomorrow, would you want him to raise your kids? As you consider inviting him into the cohort, you should find it harder to talk yourself *out* of him than talk yourself *into* him. Based on your knowledge of him—as you consider the questionnaire he would fill out in preparation for the cohort—do you anticipate him being primarily convicted, excited, and invited to grow, or crushed and paralyzed? Beyond being merely a "good dude" who steadily follows Jesus and shows up to meetings and votes, he should be a spiritual pacesetter for the rest of the church.

(5) *Is he increasingly able to make meaningful connections between his story and his family's story?* If you pointed out where he needs to grow relationally, could he make the crack "If you met my family, you'd understand," and then connect the dots for you? Is he beginning to realize how his family tree walks with him into every meeting and moment of relational tension at work? If you asked him to describe the current pain points in his family of origin (parents, siblings, etc.), is he more likely to spread blame or take responsibility for his own presence and being? Can he make the connection between how he regresses to childhood patterns after three days at his parents's house, and how he might regress as he grows closer to his fellow elders? Can he name what his positive contribution to a historically-broken

family dynamic might look like? If he were asked to describe a recent family-of-origin conflict, how insightful would his description be? Is it all “fog of war” or can he objectively and clearly name what happened, and how people responded, for reasons? Does he view his childhood deprivations as putting a ceiling on his sanctification? Or is he increasingly able to see how his family’s story—while significant—is not determinative for the nature of his response?

(6) Does he ask and answer heart-centered questions? Is he able to engage in self-reflection? Can he talk about himself in sentences that begin with words like “I feel that I am...” or “I think that I have...” or is he emotionally shut down? Can he make connections between his emotions and his circumstances? Has he ever asked someone to pray for him about his anger or his anxiety? Having been to counseling is not a categorical requirement, but how would he think or feel about the *prospect* of going to counseling? Does he experience intense resistance at the thought, and if so, why? Being more of an emotional novice than a veteran won’t necessarily prevent a man from benefiting from the cohort experience, but it will put a ceiling on how much he will benefit from it.

(7) Can he name his fears and insecurities? When he prays out loud, does it sound like the real him talking to the real God? Is his view of God mostly three-dimensional or mostly flat? Is God more like a collection of rules than a person? Does he want to cultivate an interior life? Does he desire to regularly talk to God as well as make space to listen to God? Do his times of listening and talking to God tend to involve multitasking, or is he learning to set aside time to be alone in the presence of God? Is he hungry to grow in relating to, relying on, and regularly pouring out his guts to God? Does he view God as aloof and distant? Harsh and impatient? Indulgent and impotent? Is he able to confess his sin in specifics rather than generalities? Does he find it difficult to confess sin and even to admit weakness to God and others to whom he is accountable? Is shame on his radar?

(8) Has the pain of staying stuck become greater for him than the pain of growing? Is he closed-minded and unaccepting of new ideas? Is he paralyzed by his awareness of his sins, errors, and faults? How has he changed over the past year for the better, if at all? If he goes through the cohort, will he be open to shifting from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset? (A person clinging to a fixed mindset will: stick with what he knows, avoid challenges to avoid failure, tend to give up easily, and view feedback as personal criticism. Alternately, a person slowly learning to embrace a growth mindset is increasingly willing to: believe mistakes are an essential part of learning, embrace challenges, welcome feedback from others in order to learn, and believe feedback is a guide to further improvement.)

(9) Is he characterized by spiritual need and expectancy, such that weak people are strengthened in his presence? He should be deeply grounded in the gospel: *inwardly*—growing in humble confidence and self-forgetfulness, and able to confess his sin in specifics instead of generalities, *outwardly*—fluently connecting the real stuff of his friends’ lives to the good news about Jesus, and *intangibly*—there should be a gospel flavor or aroma about him, due to him growing steadily in his knowledge of and love for Jesus.

(10) Is all his learning about God leading him into greater childlike wonder and awe of God? All his theology should be for doxology. God’s truth should be increasingly producing in him a settled sense of peace and deep joy. He shouldn’t be someone who only goes “below the line” under duress, before quickly retreating back to the safety and order of life above the line—away from the messiness of real community and the mysteries of God and the soul. You’re looking for the kind of man who will come to the cohort as a learner rather than a graduate, the kind of man who can’t help but always talk about God’s rules and statutes as pathways to lasting joy and delight (Ps 16:11; 40:8; 119:32).

(11) Will he pastor your soul? He should be not merely a leader, but a leader-in-community—a team player who cares more about the relational frame of the elder community than about being right. You don’t want a man who can’t remember the last time someone changed his mind. He should be more ambassadorial than confrontational (2 Tim 2:20–26). He shouldn’t be someone who constantly craves attention or credit. He needs to be vulnerable, able to build trust with others, and able to engage in productive conflict even when it’s uncomfortable. He needs to be capable of committing to group decisions even if he initially disagrees. He must be capable of paying attention to and picking up on what other people are feeling during meetings and other interactions. He will need to be able to help the other elders feel appreciated, understood, and included, even when navigating hard situations that require tough love.