

Leading God's Church: *Qualified Character* Part 1 1 Timothy 3:1-7

"Shepherd the flock of God that is among you"

Introduction: *"As goes the leadership, so goes the church."* This axiom is not new but it is altogether sobering. I've heard and used this saying before, but a section like 1 Timothy 3 brings new weightiness to it. It means that what leaders are in a *microcosm*, the culture of the church will become in *macrocosm* over time (with exceptions for sure). If the leadership is committed to God's Word, or missions, or relationships, the general flow of the church will follow suit. If leadership deals with conflict, takes life seriously (but themselves lightly), and are loving, the church will have the same feel throughout. However, the same is true with negative qualities. If the leadership is overly judgmental, detached, hypocritical, or unloving, the church will attract that type of person and produce this type of character.

What this undoubtedly clear is that leadership, especially any kind of Christian leadership, is a matter of **character**, who someone is over time, authentically in who they are that comes out in their actions. Leadership in a church (or anyplace) can attract all kinds of different people with all kinds of different motivations. There is a clear perception of **prestige** in Spiritual leadership, or a **lure of power**, or the **influence of spiritually directing others**, or simply the draw of personal identity and fulfillment. There is truth in each one of these, but if this is the motivation, then failure will be glaring. *How many of us have observed, been burned by, or felt the effects of failed or unqualified leadership?* If you have been saved and in a church for any amount of time, or simply been alive, you have heard stories of church leaders who have fallen due to pride, sexually sin, or money grabs. I personally have been let down by leaders, and most likely have let down those under my care at some level.

What is at stake? Why is this such an important issue that we are taking several weeks to explain it?

The health of the church - Without healthy leaders, the rest of the church cannot possibly function in this broken world in a healthy, maturing way.

The mission of the church – A church that does not care for itself cannot fulfill its mission, to make disciples of all nations, serving a God "who desires all people to be saved" (2:4).

The purpose of the church – Paul left this letter so that the church would behave and believe as God's household. This means that how we act and what we believe matters, and leadership is paramount to that end.

So we look at what God requires of pastors and elders. I believe if we truly understood what was at stake and the high calling of leaders, we would pray more fervently and often for the leaders God has placed in His church (ours and others). This is no small issue, since *"as goes leadership, so goes the church."*

Timeless Function of a Pastor/Elder: *Shepherding*

Know

*"So exhort the **elders among you**, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: **shepherd the flock of God that is among you**, exercising **oversight**, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you, not for shameful gain but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock."*

- **A note about words used** - There are three words used to describe an elder, and each of the three are used in these verses: **elders** (*presbuteros*), **shepherd** (*poimante*), and **overseer** (*episkipos*). These three words describe and make up the same role/office in the church, which is that of pastor/elder. It describes the office, function, and design of an elder.
- **Notice the proximity of a shepherd** - There are many jobs that can be outsourced today. When we call to change our cable or phone plan, we can be talking to someone almost anywhere in the world with an internet connection. Jobs can become automated so that we can do banking, shopping, and education from our couch without interacting with a banker, checker, or teacher present. But **pastoring is NOT that way**. Notice that elders work **among** the members of the church, not in a distant, decision making function but one that shares life and rubs shoulders. A shepherd would never go too far from the flock and would spend extended time wandering around finding the best watering holes and fields of grass. My brother-in-law's dad raises sheep on his farm today, and during the winter months and birthing times, he is on call at all times of night and day to make sure that the lambs are warm enough and cared for. Pastors/elders are known by the church, and know those in the church. This takes place on the macro scale of prayer and structure, and personal level of discipleship, counseling, and visitation. It takes time to know individuals and families to the point that true spiritual care can take place.

This is one of the reasons that every leader who desires to teach also functions as a leader in our **shepherding groups**. This is a place that we share life, get to know each other, understand the real needs, and care for those needs in real time. A pastor/elder who does not spend time with people in the church is not functioning like a shepherd but something else.

Lead

"Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, and in purity."

A pastor/elder is to lead, but the main venue of leadership is not done in a meeting, but in setting an example for others. An elder says, "**follow me as I follow Christ**." This means that he has a life worth emulating, one that consistently pursues Christ in all aspects, from personal, family and professional worlds.

One of the hardest realities is to realize that a leader in one area of life is far from it at home. The pastor whose wife is neglected, the coach who talks a big game but is a wimp off the field, the boss who preaches sacrifice for the company and himself is unwilling to do so. I loved being able to hang out with Steve Severance over a few weeks in January. I've never been in a church that he's been a pastor, yet he has shepherded me over the years. Each time I've seen him, he asks me about my Bible reading, prayer life, and if he can pray for me. Every time. Every place. Whether he remembered my name or not. That is the kind of leader that leads by example and guides people into Christ-likeness.

Feed

There is one tool that rules them all for an elder. It is not experience or fiscal management (although those don't hurt). The role of a shepherd was to make sure the sheep were fed and watered, and it was his job to search and plan out the best routes and best areas to go to. The pastor's way of feeding is through the Word, in teaching/preaching with patience. This happens corporately in formal gatherings, but it should also happen in times of counseling, over coffee, and taking in the ballgame. Sometimes it means simple encouragement when hard circumstances hit, or it is giving hope in times of loss. Other times it is equipping us to understand the character and nature of God, how to pray, or the goodness of Jesus. The point is that a pastor/elder has a mastery of Scripture, or rather that the Scripture has a

mastery of him. He oozes Scripture, not in an "in your face" way, but it is simply on his mind, heart, and lips. This is the area that an elder must feed himself first, feasting on God's Word so that he has something to offer to others.

Protect

"Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them."

Finally, it is the role of the shepherd to get between the enemy and the sheep. He often carried his staff and sling, one to ward off wild animals and the other to correct and bring the sheep back close. That is the same role the pastor/elder plays. On a macro level, he makes sure that false doctrine veiled in the form of trends, popularity, and harmful people do not enter the church, and if they do, are dealt with. I was just talking with a new friend yesterday and she was telling me of a church plant that was divided by a "pied Piper" who drew people to himself and then led a revolt against the elders of the church. An elder will deal with "fierce wolves" who come in speaking twisted things.

The other part of protection is for the sheep themselves. The shepherd would do everything from pouring oil on the sheep's head to keep bugs and disease away, to correcting them with the rod, to sometimes breaking their leg and carrying them to make sure they did not wander off. While I don't think we'll get into the mob-like leg breaking business, an elder must be willing to confront wrong thinking, challenge decision making through a Biblical lens, and call out sin when it presents itself. It is the tough part of parenting, where there is discipline and correction, when you become the least popular person in the house in order to lovingly bring your child back to the wise path.

Tangible Qualification #1: A Desire for the Work

"The saying is trustworthy: if anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task."

Holy Aspiration

When we talk about qualifications of elders, we typically jump to their character and ability, but one of the first and perhaps most important qualification is this: **he has a desire to do it**. The word for "aspires" means to **reach out after**, and the word for "desire" means to fix one's passion on something. There is an idea of straining forward or upward to grasp something, a strong desire. Now, here in lies the tension. 1) Some men have the character qualifications to be an elder, but do not have a desire to do the work of a shepherd. No one should be forced into service this way (C'mon, you'd make a great elder!), and no one should see lack of desire as a lack of character. 2) There must be a differentiation of proper desire and selfish motive, which is difficult to ascertain. Some have a **desire** (the work *epithumeo* can be positive or negative), but not the character OR the realization that what is emphasized is NOT a hierarchical office but the function of overseeing or shepherding. Some would see the role of elder/pastor as the highest/best in the church instead of one of many that are invaluable.

So how would we differentiate between desires? I think the answer is wrapped up in the understanding of the role of elder.

Hearty Perspiration

Paul said that if one has a desire to be an elder, it is a good desire for a noble task. But it is a task. The word is **work**. So the self-evaluating question for anyone desiring the role of elder: **are you ready to work?** Are you ready to pursue people, care for them, study to teach, confront, and do all of this in a

proactive and reactive way? In other words, has one **considered the cost** of what it means to actually elder? The role is NOT to go to a meeting and make decisions, anymore than being a husband and father is NOT going to work and bringing home money. These are important parts, but only parts. It requires tireless effort, and that has to be considered in desire.

It also means that if the desire is truly controlled by the Spirit (Acts 20:28) and comes out of conviction there will be **preparation and shepherding activity**. In other words, one does not START shepherding when they get the position of elder, they are recognized as an elder. Preparation means that there is a concerted effort to become prepared, both in studying of God's Word and freeing up life to have time to care for others. One of the questions we ask those who desire to be an elder: *who have you disciplined, who have you counseled, or who have you led to the Lord?* If one has not done the work **before** becoming an elder, there is no assurance they will do so after. This is the same question we ask those who'd want to go on the mission field or become a vocational pastor. If one is doing the work before they become an elder, they pass one of the most low tech, non-Biblical but telling reactions: when presented with the person, is someone's response, "That guy's an elder??!", or "I thought that guy was already an elder??!" An elder with an proper desire will be known by those he has influence on in the church, and should mean that we do not **make elders but simply recognize those who are already functioning AS ELDERS**.

Tangible Qualification #2: Character to back up the Desire

Therefore, an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach...

Building on the first requirement, Paul identifies a list of character qualifications that are categorized by inner morality, interpersonal interaction, ability, and family stability. Now, you'll notice that most of these are simply what a **Christian should be!** Every follower of Jesus should be growing in these areas, and that is exactly why a pastor/elder must have a mastery of these areas over a considerable amount of time. There is always tension here as well, since it clearly DOES NOT mean perfection, since that is not only an impossibility, but also would cause people to simply hide their sins and struggles, robbing the rest of learning how to actually work through those things. It is not perfection, but it is one who has worked through these areas by faith and has disciplined himself over time to not allow these things to be an ongoing habit. Connecting dots, we see why these qualifications are so paramount for the church: *if a leader is calling everyone to become more like Jesus, that call must flow out of an **example or model to follow***. A leader is growing and moving, which means they been places previously. An elder/pastor can walk someone through the battle of sin because he has battled, continues to battle, yet has actually come through battles in life (and lived to tell about it). So we will look at some of this list this week and try to categorize them, and finish next week with the rest.

Moral Mastery

The one over-arching moral qualification is the word **above reproach**. The word simply means "not to be taken hold of", no external moral conduct that would give a handle for someone to injure their reputation. This is the first in both lists of character qualifications in both 1 Timothy and Titus 1, which are the clearest and most extensive in Scripture. This means that there is no glaring part of life that has not been yielded to the Lordship of Christ, as this man has been tested over time, put under pressure, and faced trials. This includes his reputation in the church, in his home, and to those outside of the church. Notice that the bookend of this is being well thought of by outsiders (v. 7), meaning how one, especially a bi-vocational man (which most in Paul's day would have been), functions **OUTSIDE** of the church matters, and even there, they are seen as one of integrity. Remember, an elder is not only one that the church should emulate, but the church will reflect the reputation of elders, good or bad. When

we interview potential elders, we talk to them, their wives, people in the church, their neighbors, and co-workers, making sure their reputations are consistent. Now, in what areas is their moral mastery tested? That is the rest of the list.

- **Husband of one wife** - It is important to understand what this is saying and not saying. This does not mean a man 1) has to be married, though most will since the home is where an elder is refined and tested 2) a man is remarried through death or divorce, since Paul gave guidelines in 1 Cor. 7 about ways of Godly remarriage. What this means is that an elder is committed in mind, body, and heart to one woman, his wife. She is his standard of beauty and he upholds her as such. The climate of Paul's day is much like ours, where sexual immorality is prevalent, an elder must be above reproach in sexual purity, since this is a battleground that Satan has gained ground. It is why Paul said that Satan will use this area as a main attack on marriage (1 Cor. 7:5), and why this is typically the #1 area we hear pastors failing in. Satan attacks marriage at this level, in the area of un-forgiveness (2 Cor. 2:5-11), and unresolved anger (Eph. 4:26-27). A pastor/elder has worked through these areas (as all married couples must) and **continues to prioritize his marriage**. If an elder does not lead his home and shepherd his family, HE CANNOT SHEPHERD GOD'S CHURCH.
- **Sober-minded** - The idea of sobriety is to abstain from wine or the influence of alcohol, The point is that an elder is **temperate, calm, and sober in judgment**. He is not given to major swings of theology or cultural pressure, but has a deep wisdom that comes out of Biblical conviction. He is not easily swayed.
- **Self-Controlled** - This means that an elder is an Spirit controlled man, one who is not immature or given to the whims of youth. He understand **appropriateness**, what is needed for every occasion, using his freedom to become all things to all people (1 Cor. 9:23). There are times for seriousness, times of levity, and every time in between. The elder knows and understands what is fitting for each occasion, since life is no longer about him.
- **Respectable** - this refers not only to how people view him, but the fact that he lives an *orderly of mind life*. He has a settled confidence about God's will, his purpose, and life itself. He is not confused about what he's doing in life, but is consistent in his pathway. It's one of the joys of youth is that we feel the whole world is before us, but it also means we will zigzag across the board a few times before understanding what God has called us to. The elder has a settled life that is worthy of respect.

Interpersonal Interaction

The next two have to do with his life of ministry. We'll dig into his life at home next week, but for now, the idea of **hospitable** has to do with a "love of strangers" We all default to loving people like us. That is actually easy and is not distinctive. But it loving strangers that is difficult and flows out of a love for Christ. It's why Peter said, "*Show hospitality to one another without grumbling*" (1 Pet. 4:9). Loving the stranger is hard. This means that the **life and home** of an elder is open to those that are not known (yet), are not just friends, and need care. I love the testimony of Rosaria Butterfield who became a follower of Christ after being invited into a pastors home after he wrote her a letter. Rosaria was a professor at Syracuse, a staunch feminist, and practicing lesbian. But she was overwhelmed by the warm welcome of a pastor and wife who had her over for dinner, engaged in conversation, and did this over months of time. It was these conversations that helped open her eyes to the realities of Biblical

truth and glories of Jesus Christ. Rosaria is now married with children and has made her home a place of gospel ministry.¹

Appropriate Ability

In a few weeks we will talk about Deacons, those who serve specifically in the church. The one distinction between elders and deacons is the **ability or skill in teaching**. This DOES NOT MEAN he *can* teach, it means *HE DOES TEACH*. He must be equipped in God's Word to be able to teach proactively and reactively, or as Titus 1 puts it, "*that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also rebuke those who contradict it.*" (1:9). Giving instruction means to teach all that God has commanded, to understand the scope of Scripture, and how to glorify God in Christ. He also must be able to answer error and false ideas from Scripture, since there will ALWAYS be false ideas coming into the church. Every elder must be theologically skilled and if he does not teach, he cannot be considered an elder. This does NOT mean he has to be a preacher per se, as Paul addresses there will be some who focus MORE on preaching and teaching than others (1 Tim. 5:17), but all must do it in some form.

Concluding Thoughts:

- **This has all been overwhelmingly convicting** - Since Scripture is a mirror into our life, this has personally caused me to evaluate my own life, and talking with some of our elders, it has done the same for them. I hope this list brings conviction and hope for all of us here, since God does not call us to things He does not also empower us to get done. Conviction is good, unless we do nothing with it. *What areas of this list have convicted you? What are areas that need to change?*
- **These are things we should all strive for and emulate for others** - For parents, youth leaders, Sunday School teachers, disciplers, and anyone who has influence over others, is this how you are leading? Husbands/fathers, is this how you are shepherding your home? Wives/moms, is this how you are caring for your home?
- **We need to pray for our leaders/future leaders** - I believe if we understood the importance of shepherding in our life and church, we would pray much more fervently for them. Do you pray for our leaders? Do you pray for future leaders? As goes the leader, so goes the church.

¹ Please, please, please try to read Rosaria's books "*The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert*" and "*The Gospel comes with a House Key*."