

Identifying And Mobilizing Servant Leaders

1 Timothy 3:8-13

Introduction: *The gospel changes everything.* Quite possibly the all time understatement, the reality is that the gospel radically **transforms and re-orientates** our hearts, minds, and lives. Our direction moved from following the course of the world with blinders on (we were blind and did not realize it) to seeing everything with a **brand new lens**. Another way to state it would be that before Christ saved us, there was a concave form of life where everything was focused on **self: reliance, righteousness, glory**. But in Christ, who changes us from the inside out, our lives are now outwardly and upwardly focused, looking to glorify God and think of others. When God awakens us by grace to believe (Eph. 2:8-9), to ask for and receive forgiveness through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross (2 Cor. 5:21), we are not only counted righteous but are given the righteousness of Christ. This means that we are saved from **God's wrath**, but also saved TO FOLLOW Christ. But this following of Christ is exceptionally new: *"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it."* (Luke 9:23-24) Christ is Lord, and the Spirit of God quickens our minds to know that He is, meaning He is our sovereign, gracious, good, kind, and generous Master. Salvation in Jesus Christ is no mere addition to our life, like adding an insurance policy to your portfolio. Salvation is a **transfer**, from darkness to light (Eph. 5:8), from the domain of darkness to the kingdom of God's beloved son (Col. 1:13), from wrath to hope (1 Thess. 1:10), from death to life (Eph. 2:5), and from serving idols to serve the living and true God (1 Thess. 1:9).

Why is this all important as we talk about the structure of the church, leadership, and particularly about elders and deacons? The answer is found in the way that we often work from the outside in: work on the structure, and then fill in that structure with people and process. Build it, and they will come. However, **God's church** works in a different order. When we read in **1 Tim. 3:15** that Paul is writing this letter about *how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God*, he is not saying that **behavior** is the basis of belonging, but rather the outflow of belonging. Structure in a church is NOT the identity of the church, but rather it is an outflow of **born again, regenerated, reconciled, repentant, transformed, and radically changed individuals** who come together, out of our former lives to worship, serve, and make disciples. So when we talk about leadership and structures, it is to help us on our mission, not to define a church. It helps us in our **effectiveness**, as these roles are means to a greater end, not merely an end in themselves.

So for the next two weeks we will look at **Deacons** in the church, those leaders that serve for the building up of the Body as assistants to the elders. But because some of us have experiences in church polity that have been less than positive or have been confusing, we will not simply unpack the **qualifications of deacons** but also **how** they function within a church. We are NOT looking to set up more Boards or assign out more titles, since both of those can become problematic. What we DO want to do is understand what deacons are, assess the people and needs we have, and continue to identify and mobilize leaders and people here.

The Call to Serve in God's Church (1 Peter 4:10-11)

*As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever **speaks**, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever **serves**, as one who serves by the strength God supplies --- in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To Him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.*

Means by which we serve

Every believer and follower of Jesus Christ is newly defined as a servant, a slave of Christ. We are slaves of God (Rom. 6:22), slaves of righteousness (Rom. 6:22), since we were purchased by Him, our lives are now about glorifying Him IN our bodies (1 Cor. 6:20). So our lives are about **obedient service**. We do this in both **informal and formal ways**, both inside and outside of the church, in both organized and organic ways. We build relationships with believers and unbelievers, with those in our church and neighborhood, and out of those relationships there are opportunities to serve. I told you before that this was vivid to me when our friend Jim Edward was in the last days of cancer before going to be with the Lord, and we had formal care from our church in Steve Munday and Jean Turkish, and when I visited the hospital I realized that Ken Patton had been visiting Jim as well. Ken was not on a committee or in charge of a specific ministry, but he reached out in love to a fellow believer. This is like the **household of Stephanas** who were the 1st converts of the church in Achaia, and he simply devoted himself to the service of the saints (1 Cor. 16:15). There is a type of service that we ALL do because we are Christians, and we seek to love.

Notice that the means by which we serve largely fall in **two major categories**: *speaking and serving*. This is helpful, not because these are so rigid without overlap ("I'm a speaker so I don't have to serve", or vice versa), but it frees us up to serve in the ways God has gifted us. We will ALL speak and serve at some level, but there will be **primary** ways we do this effectively.

Purpose for which we serve

Notice how this type of general service plays out. God gives varied gifts in order that we would **serve one another**, but He also gives us the **strength to do it**. When we operate out of this strength **through Jesus Christ**, the author and perfecter of our faith, the one whom we point everyone to, God is glorified. In other words, we seek to serve one another ultimately as a means to **bring glory to God**. Serving does not produce belonging, but belonging produces service. We do NOT serve as a means of self-fulfillment or because its easy, we serve to **bring glory to God because glory belongs to Him**.

The Categories of Service in God's Church (Rom. 12:3-8)

*For by the grace given me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all **have the same function**, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having **gifts that differ** according to the grace given to us, **let us use them**: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in **our serving; the one of who teaches in his teaching...***

Gifted to Serve

Now, not only are we ALL called to serve in general, we are gifted to serve in specific ways. The needs of our life and church are varied, and so are the people gathered here. Look around in your section this morning and you will see a huge variance in experience, age, and personality. There is (and should be) a huge amount of difference among us, and that is by design. The church is a place of **unity**, we are all members of Christ's body, but it is unity in the midst of diversity. We are equipped to meet a **diverse amount of and type of needs** because we are different. But we are not only different in personality, we have been given **different gifts by the Spirit**. Differing gifts were given to the church NOT to separate between value (good vs. better gifts), but for the purpose of **function**, so that the church would possess all it needs to function well. (1 Cor. 1:7). God gave the church gifts **to use them**, which means that to the degree that believers are engaged in the service of the body and using their gifts, is the degree of health and vitality that we will have. (f or a list besides here, see 1 Cor. 11:1-11).

Goal in Service

Again the goal of using our gifts in the church is NOT for self-identity or a sense of belonging (although those may be bi-products), the goal is to have the church **equipped** for the **work of ministry, built up** in Christ, and **moving toward maturity** so that it builds itself up in love (Eph. 4:12-13, 16). We remember that the goal of glorifying God comes out of the fact that we all have a role to play here, and there is no such thing as a insignificant role. But it is also true that the statement of "**80-20**" also has merit, where 80% of the work is done by 20% of the people. The fact of the matter is that I cannot grow in the way God has designed in the church when everyone is not playing their role. We are dependent on each other for growth and maturity.

The Case for Leaders Among Servants in God's Church

Now, we come back to the text in 1 Timothy 3:8, and what we see is a group called "deacons" that would be **servant leaders** in the church, qualified to help **mobilize** others to meet the needs of the congregation. Now, it DOES NOT give us a description of what that looks like or how they are selected, but organizing God's people through leadership is NOT a new concept. In fact, there is precedent for an organization of leaders throughout Scripture. Let's look at two vivid illustrations, one from the OT and one from the NT.

Case for Mobilizing Qualified Leaders in OT (Ex. 18:13-27)

In between the time Israel left Egypt through the Red Sea crossing and settling for a time at Mt. Sinai, the nation received much from the gracious hand of God: food in the desert, water from a rock, and a defeat of the Amalekites. The problem was that there were hundreds of thousands of people and only one leader. Each time two people had a dispute, they would take a number, wait in line, and see Moses who would act as counselor, judge, and teacher (18:15-16). He was doing this alone. He was doing this from morning to evening. He was not only ineffective to meet all the needs, he was killing himself in the process. That is when his **father in law, Jethro**, stepped in (this may give actual Biblical precedent for men to listen to their in laws!). Jethro stepped in with great wisdom saying: 1) **what you're doing in not good, 2) everyone is getting worn out; 3) stop trying to do this alone**. This was great advice, not only for Moses, but also for all leaders everywhere. Jethro told him:

- 1) **Know and play out your primary role** (19-20) - Function as a prophet and priest between all the people and God. In other words, Moses had to get up to a proper altitude of leadership, being able to see the whole picture and speak to and on behalf of the whole.
- 2) **Commission qualified men to help** (21) - Do not hand important functions off to just anyone, but find able men who fear God and who were trustworthy in life and finances
- 3) **Structure for effectiveness** - (21-22) - Men were put in leadership over different size groups, depending on ability, and these handled MOST matters that would have come up. The large issues would make their way up the chain to Moses, freeing him to do what he was called to do.

Not only did Moses wisely (or miraculously) listen to his father in law, this brought effectiveness of care to God's people

Case for Mobilizing Qualified Leaders in NT (Acts 6:1-7)

Fast forward to the early church in Acts 6. Here we have the beginning of a church, with those who were saved after Pentecost staying in Jerusalem, some who were native to the land and others from other countries, called Hellenists, or those from Greek backgrounds. Since the Apostles were still

functioning at this time in building the foundation of the church, there was no structure of elders or deacons. But what we do have is a kind of **prototype** of what structures would look like. One thing that the early church inherited from the Jews was the care of **widows**, since this was a huge function within Jewish life in the synagogue. This entailed the gathering of food to distribute to the widows for their survival, since there was no other social program for them. When a **complaint came up in the congregation** (probably an anonymous "connect card" like today :), there was a real problem of care that needed to be addressed. The fact was it was not only too much for the twelve apostles to handle, but it took them away from their **primary role** which was **prayer and the ministry of the word**. So what was the solution? An eerily similar solution as we saw with Moses and Jethro:

1) **Find qualified servants to help with this important task** - They appointed seven men who were of **good reputation, full of the Spirit, and wise** to help in the serving of tables.

2) **They commissioned these 7 for the work** - Notice that they laid hands on these men, conferring a measure of authority on them for the time that it took to finish the job. It was NOT that these men could not teach, since Stephen showed in chapter 7 that he was very skilled, but they were chosen to free the Apostles up.

3) **The Apostles were able to care for the body through better structures** - As the church grew, so did the needs. As the needs grew, so did the organizational structures. Being a **leader does not mean DOING everything, but** recognizing what needs to get done, how to mobilize people in proper roles, in order to ultimately care for the people who one is overseeing.

Notice the end result of this restructuring: *"And the Word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith."* One of the reasons this group became effective was that they had people and leadership in proper places. The Apostles functioned similarly to pastors today, in the ministry of the Word and prayer, which are both imperative to the reaching, training, and sending of disciples. But those that came into the gathering would also need to be cared for, and that meant there would have to be leaders and servants to help in the care of those in need. When the church has proper leadership and have a mobilized group of servants using their gifts and abilities, the church has an opportunity to be effective in making and maturing disciples.

The Care given by Servant Leaders

Definition of "diakonos"

Now, come back to 1 Timothy 3:8. The word that begins this section is the word "diakonos", which has close usage with the words "diakonia" and "diakoneo". These words mean "serve", "service", or one who serves. It is used over 100 times in the NT, and is the predominate usage for the passages we looked at. At the most basic level it means "**table waiter**", which was what was needed in Acts 6. It's also translated as "ministry", which is the diakonos of the Word that the Apostles engaged in. This is the same word used in 1 Tim 3:8, 12, and 13 is the same general word, but here the translators recognized a different situation so they *transliterated the word diakonos* to the word **DEACON**. In other words, "*deacon*" is a new word, or a made up word to differentiate the type of servant being addressed here.

Principle or office?

There is some debate as to what is being referred by Deacons, whether it is an official office of the church like "elders", or whether it is simply talking about a segment of leaders. There is a reference to

both elders and deacons in Philippians 1:1, but nothing else is stated about structure or function. Phoebe is mentioned as a "diakonos" in Romans 16:1, a servant of the church, but nothing else is stated about her. She clearly was a significant of the church at Cenchreae, but the text does not indicate whether she help any commissioned office. So we have 1 Timothy 3:8-13 as a model. Remember the church at Ephesus had time to mature as Jesus was resurrected over 30 years before. Paul had time to train leaders at the church for over 3 years (Acts. 20:31). There had been **time given** to observe the character of leaders, both for pastor/eldership but also for deacons. In order to answer the question of office or not, we have to make a few more observations and then next week, work through the qualifications.

Function of Servant Leaders

1. **There was no distinction of qualifications of elders and deacons, other than "oversight" and "teaching"** - Notice that a deacon role was not someone who was "lesser" or not as qualified as a leader. In fact, ALL leadership in the church has a HIGH call as to moral characteristics.
2. **Deacons were to assist elders in the care and service of the church** - Deacons were not a sub-committee or a parallel group to elders. They were to *assist* elders in the care and service of the church. There is overlap in roles for sure, but elders will have primary roles of authority and teaching, and deacons/servants will have delegated authority from the elders.
- 3) **There was a distinction among the whole of servants (diakonos), leaders among servants, or servants with a big "S"** - Everyone in the church is a servant, but there will be those who will lead servants. It matters less what they are called or what their title is, the issue is that there will always be leaders among equals. In fact, at our church we have those who are being trained to become pastors and elders, but we also MUST work hard at training leaders who will not play that role. It is also clear that there will be more servants/Servants than elders/pastors as the church continues to grow.
- 4) **Deacons would be recognized and distinguished as they served** - How are deacons commissioned? They will be known by their faithful service, by their ability and gifting, and by their willingness to take on more responsibility.

Closing Thoughts & Questions:

1. **If you evaluated your life in terms of serving Christ, where would you place yourself?** Are you active in serving others, in using your gifts in the serving of others? What is your motive in service? Is it to help others mature and to glorify God or something else? What are lesser motives to serve?
2. **Are you growing in your maturity in Christ? Where are areas that need to be strengthened?**
3. **What is your commitment to the people and mission of this church? What else takes precedence?**
4. **Are you moving forward in your ability to lead? What holds you back in this?**

We are at our healthiest and most effective as a church when we can identify leaders and mobilize all members to service. If you are here, if you are a believer, are you in? If not, what is holding you back?

The Character Qualifications for Servant Leaders