SETTING THE EXAMPLE

Godly leaders are needed to lead healthy churches.

1 TIMOTHY 3:1-13

MEMORY VERSE: 1 TIMOTHY 3:13

READ 1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:6-9, First Thoughts (p. 34), and Understand the Context (p. 34). Compare the passages for additional insight into qualifications for church leadership as outlined by Paul.

STUDY 1 Timothy 3:1-13, using Explore the Text (pp. 35–39). Familiarize yourself with PACK ITEM 9 (Handout: Models of Church Structure), focusing on the roles of elders and deacons. Review PACK ITEM 4 (Poster: 1 Timothy 3:2-7 and Titus 1:6-9). Using a trusted Bible commentary, research the various interpretations of 1 Timothy 3:2: “the husband of one wife.”

PLAN the group time, looking for ways to incorporate the Suggested Music Idea (p. 42) in the session. Use the ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 40–41), and More Ideas (p. 42). Prepare to emphasize the importance of healthy church leaders without allowing gossip about current leaders.

GROW from the weekly podcast on Ministry Grid (MinistryGrid.com/ExploreTheBible).

GATHER the following items: □ Personal Study Guides. □ A whiteboard and a marker. Prepare to display: □ PACK ITEM 4 (Poster: 1 Timothy 3:2-7 and Titus 1:6-9). Make copies of the following to distribute to group members: □ PACK ITEM 7 (Handout: 1,2 Timothy; Titus Time Line); □ PACK ITEM 8 (Handout: Memory Verse Bookmark); and □ PACK ITEM 9 (Handout: Models of Church Structure).
**FIRST THOUGHTS**

Organizations rise and fall with leadership. Leaders who reflect the values of the company make a lasting difference. Most of us want our leaders to represent us well. We don’t want to see our leaders’ names in the news for the wrong reasons. Paul specified high standards for church leaders knowing that their influence would go beyond the local body of believers they served.

(In PSG, p. 28) What requirements do you value the most when it comes to church leaders? Why do you include each requirement?

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**UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT**

**1 TIMOTHY 3:1-13**

During the early days in Jerusalem, the apostles guided the church’s growth. Although thousands of new believers were added to the church, the organization remained fairly simple. The apostles taught Scripture and the members grew spiritually as followers of Christ. They worshiped in the temple and in house gatherings, where they also enjoyed fellowship. At the same time, they ministered to each other with benevolence as well as spiritual encouragement (Acts 2:41-47).

Within a short time, the need for additional organization became apparent. In response to complaints about the lack of aid to certain widows, the apostles called a congregational meeting. In order for the apostles to focus on the ministry of the Word and prayer, the congregation chose a group of men who were antecedents of deacons. Simple, but important, qualifications sufficed at that time (Acts 6:1-7).

As the gospel expanded, new churches required more leaders. Paul began to plant congregations among the Gentiles. While he was aided by Barnabas, Silas, Luke, and others, Timothy and Titus became two of Paul’s primary missionary helpers.

The congregations were filled with new believers who needed guidance in choosing pastors and deacons to lead local ministries. Timothy and Titus helped Paul with many of these new churches. Timothy also served under Paul’s instruction in Thessalonica, Corinth, and Ephesus. Titus helped in Corinth and in the region of Macedonia, but he primarily worked in Crete. Both of Paul’s sons in the ministry needed direction to help the churches.

In his letters to Timothy and Titus, Paul was inspired by the Holy Spirit to set out specific qualifications for pastors and deacons. Churches today might add other qualities consistent with Scripture, but they should not ignore the basic characteristics laid out in these passages.
EXPLORE THE TEXT

A PASTOR’S HEART (1 TIM. 3:1)

VERSE 1
The word translated overseer describes the office of pastor. Scripture uses three words to describe this role. The concept of overseeing relates to the spiritual leadership with which a pastor guides a congregation. It does not diminish the responsibility of the congregation in church decisions. The two other terms for the office of pastor are “elder” and “shepherd.” The first word refers to spiritual maturity (1 Tim. 3:6; 4:14), while the second describes the caring nurture a pastor uses in ministering to the flock of God (Eph. 4:11). In Titus 1:5-7, the terms overseer and elder are interchangeable. Two scriptural passages use all three words in various forms to refer to the office of pastor (Acts 20:17-28; 1 Pet. 5:1-3). Paul consistently addressed the pastor and deacon as the two offices of the church. (See Phil. 1:1.)

Paul affirmed that a man could aspire to be a pastor. To aspire should not be confused as blind ambition but as an earnest longing prompted by the Holy Spirit. The second phrase of this trustworthy saying uses a synonym—desire. It paints a word picture of someone reaching out for something.

The idea that the aspirant would be male finds support not only in Paul’s use of the word he, but also by the qualifications listed in the following verses. This restriction does not mean women cannot serve the church, but Scripture limits the office of pastor to men.

Paul described the office of pastor as noble work. To be an overseer should not be viewed as an honor to be achieved, but a work to be accomplished. Nor was this work simply another way to earn a living, but rather it was a task that was morally good if undertaken properly.

Within the guidance of Scripture, believers must consider what roles God desires them to fulfill in their churches. God wants every Christian to serve, but He calls some men to minister in specific roles as pastors or deacons.

How do the concepts of overseer, elder, and shepherd influence your view of a pastor’s role?

A PASTOR’S CHARACTER (1 TIM. 3:2-7)

VERSE 2
Not everyone who wants to be a pastor fits the biblical qualifications. Churches need to give careful consideration to the character of any potential pastor. Anyone who aspired to be an overseer should be above reproach. The single word translated above reproach means the pastor should be above criticism. It does not mean the pastor will never be criticized. Rather, this point requires that a pastor’s character reflect well on Christ whom he serves.

VERSE 1
1 This saying is trustworthy: “If anyone aspires to be an overseer, he desires a noble work.”

VERSE 2
2 An overseer, therefore, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, self-controlled, sensible, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,
A second quality, being the husband of one wife, has been understood in different ways. One approach suggests a prohibition for having multiple wives. However, while people in the pagan cultures often had more than one wife, monogamy was standard among Christians. If all believers were monogamous, why would Paul feel compelled to emphasize this requirement for pastors?

Another issue involves pastors who have never been married. Is a single man unqualified to serve as pastor? Obviously, Paul did not intend this interpretation since he was unmarried. A third and most common approach would understand this passage to mean the pastor should not be divorced and remarried. It is also scripturally reasonable to understand the husband of one wife statement as referring to a man who is faithfully and unquestionably devoted to his wife. Churches should exercise biblical responsibility for interpreting and applying this passage.

Continuing the list of character qualities, Paul noted the pastor should be self-controlled. Someone who bears responsibility for the flock of God cannot make rash decisions or live irresponsibly. This characteristic matches that which follows: sensible. Together these words describe a leader who thinks before he speaks or acts, who is reasonable in human interactions, and who is known for sober-mindedness. As a result, a person who lives in this manner would be known as respectable, someone who behaves in a well-ordered manner. Being hospitable certainly involved hosting people in their homes but also includes an attitude of cordiality. Also, the pastor should be able to teach. A primary role of spiritual leadership involves making disciples through preaching, teaching, and mentoring.

**VERSE 3**

3 not an excessive drinker, not a bully but gentle, not quarrelsome, not greedy.

**Churches should take care of their pastors’ families as well as they expect the pastors to take care of the church families.**

Like ministers today, some pastors in the early church received financial support from their churches while others maintained secular vocations to support their families. Paul’s admonition for pastors not to be greedy related to their attitude toward money, not only in compensation from the churches but also in all areas of life. This instruction should not be misused by a church as an excuse for failing to provide financially for
their pastors. Churches should take care of their pastors’ families as well as they expect the pastors to take care of the church families.

VERSES 4-7
The pastor should **manage his own household competently.** This directive does not mean that he is a dictator in his home, but that he should exercise spiritual leadership in his family. The concept of *household* includes not only his wife and children, but also all areas of life. Paul expected the competent management of the pastor’s *household* to include having his *children under control.* However, this injunction does not mean a pastor remains responsible once they become adults.

The phrase **with all dignity** applies to the way the pastor manages his household, including the manner in which he raises his children. It also describes the respect children should have for their parents.

While all fathers have similar responsibilities for their families, pastors have an additional reason for proper leadership in the home. Paul tied the way the pastor managed **his own household** with the manner in which he would **take care of God’s church.** The culture of Paul’s day held fathers in high esteem. Children were expected to obey their parents and follow their examples. If a pastor could not guide his family properly, he would be incompetent in leading the church.

Pride remains a major challenge to any Christian but can be especially so for a pastor. Public prominence places pastors in precarious positions. Consequently, Paul argued that the pastor should not be a **new convert.** A believer needs a certain level of biblical knowledge and spiritual maturity before assuming the role of pastor. Too, the natural inclination of church members to encourage or praise the pastor can lead a new Christian to **become conceited.**

Pride was the original sin of the **devil,** who presumed to become like God. (See Isa. 14:13-14.) Paul was concerned that a new convert would be subject to the same **condemnation.** When people become believers, the church needs to help them grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord before they assume roles of leadership.

At the other extreme from pride is **disgrace.** Another **trap** of the devil involves tempting pastors and other Christian leaders into lifestyles of sin. Not only among church members, but also with **outsiders,** pastors should maintain a **good reputation** by living in an undeniably Christlike manner.

The word for **reputation** literally means witness. If the pastor’s conduct does not produce a good witness, non-believers could disparage the name of Christ. Believers can affirm men who demonstrate the characteristics of a faithful pastor. Whether in personal behavior, character, or leadership of his family, a good minister of Jesus Christ provides a role model the flock of God delights to follow.

(In PSG, p. 33) **How can you help your pastor consistently achieve these qualities?**
A DEACON’S CHARACTER (1 TIM. 3:8-13)

VERSES 8-10

Deacons were never intended to be a board of directors or supervisors of the pastor. The apostles asked the congregation to select these men to serve under the direction of the pastors in order to free the pastors for prayer and proclamation of the Word. (See Acts 6:3-4.)

Deacons were never intended to be a board of directors or supervisors of the pastor.

The term deacon means “one who ministers or serves.” It is similar to the word Jesus used when He said He “did not come to be served, but to serve” (Matt. 20:28). Jesus provided the example of servant leadership that both pastors and deacons would do well to emulate.

The word likewise suggests these qualities required for deacons are similar to those of pastors. Deacons should be worthy of respect. Paul used three negative terms to illustrate his meaning of the phrase worthy of respect. First, deacons should not be hypocritical. This word can be translated as “double-tongued.” They cannot say one thing to one person and something else to another. Deacons must be sincere and maintain integrity in all their interactions. They cannot put forth a righteous image at church while behaving like unbelievers in other dealings.

Second, like pastors, deacons must not be known for drinking a lot of wine. This statement should not be taken as permission for deacons to consume alcoholic beverages on occasion. Should a lost person observe a deacon drinking alcohol, the accusation of hypocrisy would quickly arise. Deacons and pastors should set the example for the church of holy living.

A third qualification involved the deacon’s attitude toward money. Deacons do not receive income from the church, so this instruction obviously relates to business and personal financial affairs. They should not be greedy. Their attitude toward money ought to be generous, fair, and considerate of other people’s needs. Sincere, sober, sacrificial living will result in the respect of the congregation and the world at large.

Understanding verse 9 requires comprehension of the phrase the mystery of the faith. Paul often referred to the mystery of the gospel. (See Rom. 16:25; 1 Cor. 4:1; Eph. 6:19.) One aspect of the mystery involved God’s making salvation available to Gentiles as well as Jews. The larger issue was the fact God would save people through the sacrifice of His Son Jesus and through His Spirit live within believers. (See Col. 1:25-27.)

Paul’s admonition not only meant deacons should be followers of Christ, having the mystery of the faith personally, but also that they should be seen holding this mystery with a clear conscience. The word holding means not only to possess, but to preserve. Earlier in this epistle, Paul urged Timothy to have faith with a good conscience, unlike Hymenaeus and Alexander who “shipwrecked their faith” (1 Tim. 1:19-20).

Just as pastors should not be novices, prospective deacons should be tested first. Testing reflects the need for men to demonstrate consistency
between the faith they profess and their daily practice. The congregation needs time to observe their faithfulness.

Only if they prove blameless can these men serve as deacons. The idea of being blameless does not mean they have achieved sinless perfection. Rather, prospective deacons should live so no one can accuse them of wrongdoing. Their reputations should be unblemished and merit the respect of the church.

Nowhere in Scripture does the idea of a deacon board appear. Paul used the phrase serve as deacons to describe what deacons do: they serve. Only men with servant hearts should be added to this group.

**VERSE 11**

While some translations render the opening word of verse 11 as “women,” the context appears to support the use of wives. Verses preceding and following this verse apply to the deacons. The insertion of descriptions for these women is more natural if the verse is a continuation of the deacons’ qualifications.

If this verse refers to the deacons’ wives, then, for men to serve as deacons, their wives also must be worthy of respect. Like the three qualifiers in verse 8, the definition of worthy of respect for the deacons’ wives includes three examples. They must not be slanderers. No one should accuse them of gossip or speaking ill of others. They also should be self-controlled, vigilant to maintain proper personal conduct. In summary, these women should be faithful in everything, whether it is their families or their service in the church.

**VERSES 12-13**

Like the pastors, deacons should be the husbands of one wife. The same arguments related to verse 2 apply here. Servants of the church should be faithful to their wives in every sense of the word. At the same time, deacons ought to be known for managing their children and their own households competently. If these men are to serve the church well, they must demonstrate competency in leading their families.

The word for in verse 13 ties the previous qualifications with what comes next. Deacons should prove themselves worthy because of the privilege in serving the church. If they have served well, they receive two benefits. First, they acquire a good standing for themselves. Faithful servants earn the respect of the church. Second, by maintaining godly lives, they can exhibit great boldness in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. The witness of their lives validates the witness of their words as they lead the church and share Christ with unbelievers.

Believers, especially church leaders, should honor God through their service to His church. In their personal reputations and their public actions, pastors and deacons have the opportunity and responsibility to glorify the Lord.

How is Christ glorified by the way your deacons serve the church?
LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

INTRODUCE: As the group arrives, ask: What qualities do you value in leaders? Encourage the group to discuss various leadership settings, including work, politics, sports, and so forth. List the requirements on a board.

COMPARE: What requirements do you value the most when it comes to church leaders? Why do you include each requirement? (PSG, p. 28) Compare the original list with the new list of requirements by asking: How are these requirements for church leadership similar and different from other leadership positions? Should church leaders be held to different standards than other leaders? Why or why not?

REVIEW: Use Pack Item 7 (Handout: 1,2 Timothy; Titus Time Line) to note the effort Paul had put forth to establish healthy churches prior to writing 1 Timothy.

ASSERT: Paul specified high standards for church leaders knowing that their influence would go beyond the local body of believers they served. (PSG p. 28)

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: As a volunteer reads 1 Timothy 3:1, point out that this is the second of Paul’s trustworthy sayings, or non-negotiable truths. Explain that the word “overseer” is synonymous with “pastor,” “elder,” and “bishop” in the New Testament.

VISUALIZE: Distribute copies of Pack Item 9 (Handout: Models of Church Structure) and highlight the roles of elders and deacons.

DEBATE: Call on a volunteer to read the first sentence in the PSG under verse 1 (p. 30): There is a link between godly pastors and healthy churches. Lead the group in exploring whether this statement is universally true. As you discuss the high standards that Paul called church leaders to, remind the group that through sanctification all believers are being made more Christlike.

ASK: Why is it important for every believer to seriously consider the role God wants him or her to play in His work? (PSG, p. 30)

READ: Invite someone to read 1 Timothy 3:2-7. Direct the group to pay attention to how Paul begins and ends the list.

DIRECT: Call attention to Pack Item 4 (Poster: 1 Timothy 3:2-7 and Titus 1:6-9). Assert: Paul framed his list with statements about church leaders’ reputations.

STUDY: Create two teams. Direct one team to search 1 Timothy 3:2-7 and locate the verses supporting the qualities listed on Pack Item 4 (Poster: 1 Timothy 3:2-7 and Titus 1:6-9), while the second team locates the specific verses from Titus 1:6-9.
**GUIDE:** Lead the group in a discussion of the importance of character, reputation, and actions. Discuss these categories using the requirements listed by Paul. *How are they interrelated? Consider the impact that the reputation of a church leader can have among unbelievers.* From the PSG (p. 33): *How can you help your pastor consistently achieve these qualities?*

**READ:** As a volunteer reads 1 Timothy 3:8-13, encourage the group to look for similarities and differences between the requirements for a deacon and those for a pastor/overseer.

**HIGHLIGHT:** Invite the group to highlight the following sentence in the PSG (p. 34) under Verses 8-10: *The word deacon means “one who serves.”* Explain that this could include things like serving meals, caring for the needy, and freeing up apostles (or pastors today) to focus on prayer and preaching.

**ANALYZE:** For further study of the church leadership roles, lead the group to share insights they gained from the Bible Skill activity on page 33 of the PSG: *Create a list of the qualifications listed in 1 Timothy 3. Compare the following passages related to biblical expectations for every Christian: Ephesians 5:6-18; Philippians 1:27, 2:14-16; and Colossians 3:5-13. In what ways are the qualifications for pastors and deacons different from qualities of all believers? How are they similar? Compose a personal statement committing to fulfill scriptural expectations as you serve your church.*

**ASK:** *How has your understanding of church leadership changed as a result of this study?*

**EMPHASIZE:** Note the statement from the PSG (p. 35): *Godly behavior is to be expected of all church members, regardless of role or gender.*

**COMPARE:** Lead in a broad look at servant leadership. Invite small teams to read the following verses: Matthew 20:20-28; Luke 22:25-26; John 13:1-17; and Philippians 2:5-11. Ask: *How do these verses impact your understanding of the role of a deacon?* Call for responses.

**DISCUSS:** Direct the group to verse 13. Point out this is the week’s memory verse as you give copies of Pack Item 8 (Handout: Memory Verse Bookmark) to those who need one. Then discuss from the PSG (p. 35): *How does faithful service honor God? How might memorizing 1 Timothy 3:13 be a way for all believers to remember the importance of service?* (PSG, p. 35)

**SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)**

**REVIEW:** Direct the group back to the original list of leadership qualifications compiled during the Focus Attention time. Lead the group to add any additional information they learned about church leadership based on what was discussed today.

**RESPOND:** Guide the group through the second question set in the PSG under In My Context (p. 36): *Discuss ways your group can encourage your pastor and his family. What actions should be taken as a result of this discussion?* Invite volunteers to take responsibility for these plans this week.

**CHALLENGE:** Encourage the group to take time throughout the week to pray about their roles in the church and where God is calling them to faithful service.

**PRAY:** Close in prayer, thanking God for the leadership He has placed in your church and asking Him to continue His sanctifying work in your leaders.
PRACTICE

• Review the personal statement you wrote for the Bible Skill activity (p. 33). Pray through this statement, asking for guidance as you serve the church.

• Follow up with those who volunteered to help implement the group’s suggestions for ways to encourage your pastor and his family. Remind them of the suggestions and offer to help in organization and implementation.

• Prayerfully consider if there are people in your group whom you see God calling to roles in the church. Contact them and affirm the giftings you see.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

Create smaller groups of two to five people. Direct the groups to write a “Wanted Ad” for a hypothetical church leadership position. Invite the groups to share their job descriptions and make a list of qualities and requirements for church leadership.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

• Direct the group to the following sentence under Verse 1 in the PSG (p. 30): Aspiring to be a spiritual leader is worthwhile, but there can be a big gap between aspiration and qualification. Ask: How can we discern when a desire to lead is a calling from God? Guide the group in considering ways to affirm those called to this noble work.

• For further understanding of 1 Timothy 3:2 and the different interpretations of the phrase “the husband of one wife,” use information under Verse 2 (p. 36) and the PSG (p. 31) to discuss the meaning. Emphasize that marriage is ultimately a picture of Christ and the church. Conclude by pointing out that each local church has the responsibility of interpreting for themselves what verse 2 means and how it applies.

• For further discussion of 1 Timothy 3:8-13, call on a volunteer to read Galatians 5:22-23. Ask: How do the qualifications listed in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 serve as practical expressions of the fruit of the Spirit found in Galatians 5:22-23?

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Lead the group to quietly reflect on the third question set under In My Context on page 36 of the PSG: List ways you honor the Lord both in your church and outside of it. What actions will you take this week to honor Him in your church? List actions you will take to honor Him outside the church. Call for a volunteer to share their thoughts.

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

God has a plan for each person in your group. As your group considers what role God desires them to play in the local church, play or sing the hymn, “Take My Life, and Let It Be Consecrated,” by Frances R. Havergal.