SESSION 3

SETTING

THE EXAMPLE

1 TIMOTHY 3:1-13

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

2 An overseer, therefore, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, self-controlled, sensible, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not an excessive drinker, not a bully but gentle, not quarrelsome, not greedy.  

3 He must manage his own household competently and have his children under control with all dignity. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of God’s church?)  

4 He must not be a new convert, or he might become conceited and incur the same condemnation as the devil.  

5 Furthermore, he must have a good reputation among outsiders, so that he does not fall into disgrace and the devil’s trap.  

6 Deacons, likewise, should be worthy of respect, not hypocritical, not drinking a lot of wine, not greedy for money, holding the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.  

7 They must also be tested first; if they prove blameless, then they can serve as deacons.  

8 Wives, too, must be worthy of respect, not slanderers, self-controlled, faithful in everything.  

9 Deacons are to be husbands of one wife, managing their children and their own households competently. For those who have served well as deacons acquire a good standing for themselves and great boldness in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

A This church leader has been called “a bishop” (KJV). The term paints a compelling picture of a person who serves as a pastor today with the responsibility as a manager of the church’s work.  

B Don’t “give people a reason to criticize him” (NCV)  

C Completely faithful and devoted to the person to whom he is married  

D “He must welcome strangers in his home” (GNT).  

E He’s a capable leader of his family who manages “in a manner worthy of full respect” (NIV).  

F “Judgment” (NIV); “be judged guilty just as the devil was” (NCV)  

G The devil is always looking to “steal and kill and destroy” (John 10:10).  

H Servant-leaders or “church helpers” (GNT). The picture is of someone who serves others by running an errand or being a waiter (2 Cor. 3:6; Eph. 3:7; Phil. 1:1; Col. 4:7).  

I Living a lie by pretending to believe what they say; “double-tongued” (NASB)  

J The “revealed truth” (GNT) about Jesus Christ  

K Watch them for a while to see how well they carry out other tasks in the church.  

L Women aren’t excused from living out the standard for servants in the church.  

M “Not malicious gossips” (NASB)  

N “Increased confidence” (NLT)
1. A PASTOR’S HEART (1 Tim. 3:1)
   • Paul affirmed those who wanted to be leaders in their local church, especially the men who desired to be overseers.

2. A PASTOR’S CHARACTER
   (1 Tim. 3:2-7)
   • Paul listed the qualities required of those wishing to serve as pastors.

3. A DEACON’S CHARACTER
   (1 Tim. 3:8-13)
   • Paul listed the qualities required of those wishing to serve as deacons.
   • Briefly identify the two understandings of verse 11 without endorsing one over the other.
   • Emphasize women living in a way that honored God.

SUMMARY STATEMENTS
Godly leaders are needed to lead healthy churches.
• Believers must consider what role God desires them to play in their local church.
• Believers can affirm men who demonstrate the qualities of faithful pastors.
• Believers should seek to live lives that honor God through service.
FOCUS ATTENTION
Consider the most effective or healthy church that you’ve personally experienced. What were some characteristics of the leaders?

- For optimal health, every church needs godly, faithful leaders.
- Pastors not only assume responsibility for leading the church’s ministries and mission, but the pastor serves as an example of a well-lived Christian life.
- The impact of godly pastors goes far beyond the church body to reach an observant community.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE
1 TIMOTHY 3:1
Because pastors are held in such high regard, does that mean every Christian should aspire to join the ranks of church staff?

- The understanding that the church achieves maximum impact under visionary, faithful leaders can be a powerful reason to consider whether God is calling you to be a pastor.
- Discerning that God has placed a call on your life for pastoral leadership demands that you respond in obedience.
- Although an honorable profession, pastoral ministry comes with qualifiers, and the Scripture also clarifies that God calls us to different roles (Eph. 4:11-16).

1 TIMOTHY 3:2-7
Why is it so important that the church call godly, qualified pastors?

- God has deemed the position of pastor as one to hold both honor and responsibility; the stakes are too high for casual commitment.
- Carelessness in the pastorate may result in great damage within the church.
- A church in the hands of an untrustworthy pastor opens the gospel to scrutiny and doubt by the community it’s supposed to serve. Meanwhile, the eternal salvation of people is at stake.

What insights may we gain from the detailed list of qualifications for being a pastor?

- Although every person can be deemed a sinner, being “above reproach” (v. 2) means the pastor can’t be labeled or defined by a certain kind of prevalent sin but instead exhibits ongoing sterling character.
- Some of the qualifications point to a practical skill set that serve pastors well in ministry: able to teach, a friendly and generous host, a capable manager.
- A good family manager has learned to prioritize marriage and parenting faithfully.

- The church is often compared to a family; therefore, someone who manages a family well will have insights into managing a church.

1 TIMOTHY 3:8-13
In what ways are the qualifications for a deacon similar to a pastor?

- Like pastors, deacons are to exhibit top-notch character traits that empower them to bypass the pitfalls of addiction, financial mismanagement, and broken family relationships.
- Deacons also should have these qualifications on full display long before they are called to be church leaders.

How should we apply the detailed references to the wives of church leaders in church life?

- The command to be faithful in everything paints the portrait of a balanced, godly woman who maintains good relationships with her family, church, workplace, and community.
- While there’s room for debate on how to interpret the prerequisite that pastors and deacons should be the husbands of but one wife, that interpretation rightfully belongs to the local church to decide.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE
Despite the high standards and steep responsibilities associated with these positions of leaderships, why should people aspire to these roles?

- Scripture is clear that those who desire to serve in this capacity aspire to something noble, and those who serve well are to be commended.
- Being called to serve by a church who takes these standards to heart means the leader’s faithful witness has been noted and approved by other faithful people.
- Capable leadership empowers the church to do great things in service to Christ. How sad it would be if Christ’s followers declined to serve for fear of failure.

Understanding the focus these positions have been given in Scripture, how much attention should a church give when selecting leaders?

- Due diligence requires that churches lovingly but carefully examine the lives of potential leaders before calling them.
- Knowingly compromising on any standards risks compromising the gospel in the eyes of other believers and unbelievers.
- Upholding the standards as they have been defined by Scriptures puts the church in a position of trust and safeguards its future.

Personal Challenge: Evaluate yourself on your own Christlikeness, and then through prayer ask God to evaluate you, too. Pray for your church’s leaders and consider ways you can bless their faithfulness.
**OBJECT LESSON**

**A SUPERHERO FIGURE**

Before the session, find a superhero figure to bring to the group. It can be a child’s toy or a comic book rendering. Select a non-controversial character that models good character traits, even if that character has flaws.

Show the group the figure you selected. Inquire whether the group members were fascinated with the idea of superheroes. Talk about the continuing prevalence of superheroes in popular culture.

Ask: *What makes this character before you a superhero?* After pointing to super strength or other traits, steer the conversation to discuss the character traits that separate the superhero from ordinary people: *Is the superhero courageous? Does he or she have a strong sense of truth and justice?*

Inquire what Bible characters assumed something close to the status of a superhero (ex.: David’s giant-slaying ability, Samson’s supernatural strength, Paul’s snake charming). Compare those Bible figures to contemporary church leaders. Emphasize that the same all-powerful God who worked through these biblical heroes works through today’s leaders.

**CHRISTIAN CHARACTER**

When we study the list of traits for overseers and helpers in the church in 1 Timothy 3, we come to understand more about the roles of pastors and deacons. We also get a clearer picture of the tasks the Lord intends them to carry out in the fellowship of the church. Pastors lead the church so its congregation can carry out kingdom work, and deacons render service in keeping with the same task. Together, they work with the congregation to extend the kingdom of God by lifting up Christ. They share the good news about Christ in the community, around the world, and everywhere in between so people will come to know Christ and then grow toward spiritual maturity in Him.

Because such crucial work absolutely must be accomplished in the church, we do well to observe the list of qualifications for pastors and deacons noted in the passage. How many of the qualifications in the lists pertain to the development of skills for effectiveness? Only one qualification comes close. It relates to a pastor’s teaching skills. He needs to be able to instruct God’s people adequately (1 Tim. 3:2). No other qualification in either of the two lists has much to do with refined skills for leadership, management, or communication.

What lies at the heart of the qualifications listed in the passage? The qualifications swirl around one critical issue: character. What matters most is whom we have become, not what we can do. And of course, character development for followers of Christ centers in becoming more like Him. For Paul, therefore, exhibiting the character traits of Christ serves as the foundation for effectiveness for church leaders and servants.

Paul wasn’t alone in his perspective. Earlier, the apostles set apart a unique group of men to help them with a problem that seemed to be festering in the new church. They based their choice of men on traits of spiritual maturity, not skills in political diplomacy, human relations, or conflict resolution (see Acts 6:1-6). Centuries earlier, Jethro advised his son-in-law, Moses, to enlist some men to help him as he led God’s people to the promised land. He advised Moses to choose men who exhibited spiritual maturity and strength (Ex. 18:21). For Jethro, godly character mattered most of all.

Wise believers today value Christian character. We know that skills for church ministry in the church matter, but exhibiting the character of Christ matters more.