

1 Timothy 3:1-7
A Noble Task Requires Noble Character

Some dads just know how to do everything. They know how to fix windows, build additions, volunteer for nonprofits, and lead churches. They do it all. But sometimes these kinds of dads spend so much time doing everything they neglect to teach their sons how to do anything. And so when the sons come of age they are not equipped to lead their families or their communities, and yet the shadow of their Father looms large over them. This can be crippling.

In a similar way some lead pastors do everything. Some lead pastors are very busy skillfully servicing the needs of the congregation. They preach compelling sermons, they listen and counsel hurting people well. They skilfully administrate and lead the church to a place of numerical and financial success. But after a generation of this the pastor dies or leaves the church. What now? The church flounders and fumbles and struggles to get their bearings. And in many cases, the absence of the busy pastor is a roadblock that cannot be overcome by the church. And so they wither and die.

The fatal fall in both of these cases is the lack of intentional leadership development. A Father who does not train his children dooms his family's future. A pastor that does not train more pastors dooms the future of his church.

The importance of leadership development is baked into the very fibers of our faith. Jesus called the first disciples fishers of men. Multiplication was a part of their very identity. Disciples that make disciples make pastors who make pastors who plant churches that plant churches.

This is why Paul is writing to Timothy. This is a letter entirely focused on leadership development. And Paul knows that leadership development is hard. This is why he opened in his letter with the encouragement to stay on in Ephesus. Your work is not finished there. As Paul said in his next letter to him in 2 Timothy 2:1 — what I have taught you entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. Paul is reminding Timothy of his sacred responsibility as a steward, a caretaker of the church and of the faith itself. It is his holy duty to preserve and transmit the faith to the next generation. And ground zero for that to happen is the training of leaders.

Our text this morning begins in chapter 3. Paul has just finished giving Timothy instruction on how the gathered church worship should be ordered. And now he is sharpening his focus on how the government of the church should be ordered.

The connection between the last section and this section is this: Paul's instruction to Timothy was that in all the congregations of the Christian church he did not want men to abdicate their responsibility to lead their wives and lead the church. This is why he said I do not permit a woman to teach and have authority over men in worship. This is because that is the responsibility of the male overseers. But not just any man should assume the role of overseer in the church. Many men are excluded from this role and only a few possess the qualifications necessary for this kind of leadership. Paul details the most important qualifiers and disqualifiers for men that aspire to this kind of leadership in the local church.

[1] The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.

Paul's phrase, "the saying is trustworthy" means that what he's about to say is important. He's drawing a big highlighter over this and telling Timothy to pay real close attention. This is critically important.

If anyone strives for, desires to be an overseer in the local church, he desires a noble task. A noble task means this person desires hard and excellent work.

But before we get too far into this cut, we need to pause and check our line. We need to understand what overseer means. Or other translations may use the word bishop. The reason we need to pause and understand what Paul meant when he used this word is that different churches vest a different amount of authority in their church government. For example, at some churches a person can be serving in the role of elder and what that means is they check budgets, attend meetings that decide on church business, and in general function as a board member similar to that of any non profit. But at other churches the role of elder may be a person who deals with none of that stuff but instead mainly focuses on preaching the Bible, doing marriage counseling, and teaching Sunday school. So what we need first is to define terms.

The word overseer is translated from the Greek word *episkopos*. That word in the most general sense means a person who is responsible for watching over a group of people and making sure things are done correctly.

Now to hone this in a little bit further, mark down 1 Peter 2:25. The same word is used to describe the role of Jesus. This verse says that We are all like sheep that have gone astray but Jesus is the Shepherd and overseer of our souls. So what we get with this verse is the understanding that overseer means one who not only watches over, but one that watches over souls in their relationship to God. And an overseer is a shepherd of souls that helps bring people closer to God.

The biblical writers also use the word elder to describe someone in this overseer role. That word is in the Greek presbyteros. Which is of course where we get the word presbyterian or presbytery. So biblically the words elder and overseer are used interchangeably to describe the same role.

But why do we use the word pastor? If you word search “pastor” in the esv bible app you won’t find that word. So why do we use it? Because the word pastor comes from the latin word that means shepherd. So the English word pastor means someone who shepherds and oversees souls like a shepherd oversees his sheep.

The reason I spend all this time on definition is because it sets accurate expectations. At Hope City church, our church is elder led. Because we see that as the way of the early church. And what does an elder do? They are pastors. Elders are pastors, pastors are elders. And a pastor elder has the responsibility of overseeing the care of the souls that are entrusted to him by the chief pastor who is Jesus. So at the end of the day I am simply an errand boy for Jesus. I bring people to Jesus and Jesus to people.

So the pastor is entrusted with a weighty and sacred responsibility. A pastor is to represent God’s own Son. This is more than pointing fingers and making decisions. This is about laying down our lives for the flourishing and well being of our church. One who aspires to this task aspires to a noble work.

Look at verse 2. “*Therefore...*” What’s the therefore there for? Paul’s saying in light of pastoring being such a weighty responsibility, the person aspiring to be a pastor needs to know what they are getting into. And so Paul lists core qualifications and disqualifications for the man who aspires to be a pastor of a local church.

An old Pastor named John Calvin said this about men desiring to be a pastor. “Discernment must be exercised in admitting pastors, since the office is laborious and difficult, and those who aspire to it should be careful to consider whether they are capable of bearing such a heavy burden. The reason why men who have neither ability or wisdom often desire so confidently to hold the reins of leadership is that they rush into it with closed eyes. Thus Quintilian remarked that the ignorant speak boldly while the greatest orators tremble.

So church, I want you to have eyes wide open. And I pray over the next handful of years, called and qualified men in this church would step up to serve as pastors, not with prideful desire to control and get their hands on the wheel, but with a fear and trembling of God that would make them humble and useful pastors. Meek men make great pastors. And great pastors make healthy churches. This is a hill I’ll die on.

Given that this is a noble task. It will require noble character. Paul lists character traits essential to the pastor. He's saying Timothy, this is what to look for in a man aspiring to be a pastor of a local church. These are the essential qualifications and disqualifications.

First, he must be above reproach. This means he is free from the distractions of scandal or disgrace that would detract from his authority and duty.

He must be the husband of one wife. This means specifically he must not be a polygamist. He must only be married to one woman. But more generally he must be a model of faithfulness to his spouse demonstrating Christlike love to the church. It does not mean a pastor must be married, because Jesus was not and neither was Paul. If you're married, stay faithful to your wife. If your single make sure your celibate until your married.

Sober minded: A pastor must be temperate and clear headed as he oversees the church. Like a watchman on a wall or a shepherd in the field. He can't be goffin around when the wolf appears or when the sheep wander off a cliff.

Self controlled: This means a pastor must be able to control his appetites. He should not be flighty or unstable. He's a man who behaves decently and honestly.

Respectable: A respectable pastor means his actions lead others to hold him in high esteem. He's not a joke or a cause of shame around the house.

Hospitable. A pastor demonstrates a posture of openness and welcome to Christians and strangers. Specifically he helps set the tone for opening the home and doing life around the table, because this is what families do. And the church is a family.

Able to teach: Just as Jesus was a teacher a pastor is to be a teacher. This is central to the purpose of the church which is to make disciples, teaching people the way of Jesus as the great commission states. And so the pastor is responsible for the very preservation and transmission of the faith. It does not mean the pastor is the only one doing this. But it does mean that he is overseeing that it is being done and done correctly. And that through his teaching he is equipping the church to do the work of the ministry.

So those are the essential traits of what a pastor is. These are essential qualifications that a man must possess if he is to be fit for the office of pastor elder. Now Paul pivots to disqualifiers. These are characteristics that would be red cards for a man aspiring to pastoral leadership.

Not a drunkard: it follows that if a pastor has self control he will not be a drunkard. This does not mean a pastor cannot drink alcohol. In fact Paul tells Timothy to drink alcohol later in the letter in order to help his frequent stomach issues. "Not a drunkard" means he is not getting drunk on alcohol. He is not getting drunk with wine rather he is filled with the Spirit as Eph 5:18 says. So an alcohol problem in a man disqualifies him from being a pastor.

Not violent but gentle: A man who is harsh and ungracious. Someone who is mean spirited and warlike with his temperament is disqualified from being a pastor.

Not quarrelsome: A quarrelsome man is someone who is always seeking to pick a fight. It's the air he breathes. And so everyone around him is on edge. This person is disqualified from being a pastor. As Calvin said a pastor who is not quarrelsome "excuses much, swallows insults, who does not make himself dreaded for his harsh severity, nor rigorously exacts all that is due to him."

Not a lover of money: A man who desires to be rich is disqualified from being a pastor. Because a man who loves money will be greatly tempted to use and abuse his congregation in order to get wealth and possessions.

After these disqualifiers Paul describes another positive qualification. *[4] He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive,*

A pastor must be a good and well tested family man. Manage means he orders and watches over his own family with skill and care so that they flourish. His children honor and respect him. They submit to his leadership. Not because he forces it out of them but because he is like Jesus and draws it out of them because he is a man worthy to follow.

[5] for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?

Here's the overall principle: If a man can't lead his family he can't lead the church. You don't get second things if you don't get first things. Paul sees the family is the pastors first priority and also his proving ground for pastoral leadership. This is because the local church congregation is basically a collection of families that make up a big family. So if a man can't lead one family how's he going to lead several.

[6] He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.

Also being new to the faith excludes a man from serving as a pastor. The reason being is that the authority and leadership he would possess as a pastor could go to his head. He could become puffed up with pride. A noob in the faith who is given too much leadership too fast could become prideful which is what happened to the devil. The devil was prideful and puffed up which became his doom. He was condemned by God for his rebellion. Paul is saying that what happened to the devil could happen to you. Pride goes before the fall.

Now verse 7 is the end of the list. It is a sort of final comment on the characteristics of a pastor. *[7] Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.*

A pastor must have a good reputation with those outside of the church. This doesn't mean he won't be misunderstood or persecuted. Jesus said we should expect that. It means that when unbelievers slander and mock his beliefs they should also be forced to admit that he is a good man. If a pastor is not well thought of by the broader community and becomes disgraced, has fallen into the trap of the devil. The devil wants the church's mission to be stifled and so what does he do? He seeks to set a trap for the overseers. Paul is telling Timothy that your pastors should not be disgraced men.

So to summarize: Leadership development in the local church is critical. But it is hard. So we should be committed to the arduous process of raising pastors. And any man who desires to be a pastor should see it as a noble desire for a noble task. And a noble task requires noble character. And noble character requires a noble sacrifice.

At the end of the day being a pastor seems like an impossible weight to bear. But here is where the gospel must be applied. Ultimately the church is not led by men. It is led by Jesus. He is the pastor of pastors. He alone embodied the characteristics of the pastor perfectly. He alone avoided the disqualifiers of sinful men.

And so the Christian pastor at best is pointing people to Christ. He is like a reference point. He's not the point. The Christian pastor is only a man. And because he is a man he is utterly dependent on Christ, like the rest of the church.

It is Christ who carried the heaviest weight. He bore your sins on the cross. He alone rescued us from the penalty of sin and the just wrath of God. No mere man can do that. And Jesus alone clothes you in his righteousness. No matter how righteous your pastor is, you do not wear his righteousness. By faith alone in Christ alone you are given the righteousness of Christ and by faith alone it is his righteousness that makes you acceptable before a holy God. It's not your pastor who does this. It is your faith in Christ.

And it was Jesus alone who raised from the dead and ascended into glory. No matter how successful your pastor may appear he is only a mere mortal dependent on the power of Christ to raise dead souls to life.

And so the call is the same for those of you aspiring to pastoral leadership as it is for those who aren't. Trust in Christ. Follow him by faith. And as you depend on him and get near him he will lead you to pasture. Because he is the shepherd. He will lead you to growth. He will help you become a better husband, father, wife, mother, son or daughter. This is my prayer as your pastor that I simply help you get close to the chief shepherd. I pray the words I speak and the life I lead simply leads you to Jesus and not myself. He is the source of life, not me.

So let me end with some specific application.

1. Be patient with leadership development. The weight and importance of pastoral leadership means it will take awhile to identify and train men to lead this local church. As Paul will caution Timothy later in his letter, do not be hasty in installing pastors. Let them be tested and proved first.
2. This leads me to the second application. If you have the desire to become a pastor at this local church the best thing you can do to prepare and train is to lead your family. Tend that garden. Till, plant, water, weed, and watch over that garden. Farm that field well before you peak over the fence to try and farm more ground. Your family is the testing ground.
3. Not being a pastor does not make you a B team Christian. It's like being a firefighter. A firefighter is a noble work. You sometimes have to run into burning buildings. It's hard and dangerous. But being a school teacher or a bank teller or a farmer is no less valuable in our community. So pastors are not more valuable than others. You can be a fully functioning and committed member of this local church and never be a pastor. And that's ok.

The end of the C.S. Lewis' "The Horse and His Boy" illustrates this well. There is this scene where King Lune is telling one of his sons he is to become the next King. And the older brother actually doesn't want to be King because he doesn't feel up to the task. And he turns to his younger brother and says you should be King. And the younger brother is actually really happy to not be named King. They all know that being King is a weighty responsibility. It is a noble task. And this is what King Lune says,

This is what it means to be a king: to be first in every desperate attack, and last in every desperate retreat, and when there's hunger in the land laugh louder over a scantier meal than any man in your land.

Or to put it another way, leaders are first to die and last to eat. They are sober when others go mad. They are to be watchful when others fall asleep. And they are joyful when others are sad. Few should aspire to this. But some should commit their lives to this noble work.

But at the end of the day all earthly pastors will fall short of this standard. And when they do let that be a reminder that the man who embodied this perfectly was Jesus. Let's all look to him. If Jesus is the main shepherd of Hope City Church then we will all be just fine.