

1 Timothy 3:8-13 - Anatomy of A Servant Leader

My favorite ice cream place, to the surprise of few people who know me, is Jendy's. I was on vacation the first time I went there, and I had gone because I came across a post that they had weird ice cream flavors like rice and beans. Plus, it was closer to Lares, and on my way back from the Coamo hot springs which I had gone to.

When I went in, I met the guy at the counter and he saw I had a star wars shirt on and we started talking because we were both fans. In that conversation I learned he's the owner, so I told him I'll try anything he recommends because as a fellow star wars fan I trusted him. He gave me the rice and beans with some cinnamon on top...it shouldn't be that good. Don't knock it till you try it.

Now, almost every time I go to Jendy's. He's there, dressed to work, talking with people, serving customers, checking in on them. Amongst his crew. That's a good example of a servant leader. He's the owner, yet he's in the midst of his clients and employees, not above them, working and laboring and connecting.

And that's what a deacon should be too! The first time we learn about deacons is in Acts 6. There were the apostles preaching and teaching and praying, and the church was growing rapidly in numbers. But then a dispute happens, there is a fight between the Jewish widows (locals) and the Greek widows (Hellenized Jews) about unfair treatment and who was getting more help.

The apostles realized then and there that they had a choice to make, either attend every single little thing, or raise up men who could meet the practical needs while they focused on the spiritual needs. And so the first seven deacons were chosen, who were all of the Hellenized faction by their names, but were men of rich spiritual life.

So after Paul tells Timothy how to pick Bishops, he now explains how to pick Deacons. But before we look at what qualifies someone to be a deacon, we have to ask the question, what is a deacon?

1. **What Is A Deacon? v8a**

1. **3:8a - "Likewise deacons"**

2. A deacon is another church office. But where pastors usually focus on the spiritual needs like teaching, praying and preaching, Deacons often focus on the practical needs. They do pray and can teach, but their primary focus is often on visitations, food distribution, repairs, basically meeting the practical needs of the church.

3. The Word Deacon is Diakonos and simply means "Servant". Yet, though the pastors might have a quote unquote "greater responsibility and oversight", and though often Deacons are seen as assisting the pastor, they are no less leaders within the church and just as valuable. It is not a matter of importance or prestige, but of calling. And meeting Practical needs is as much an important ministry as meeting spiritual ones.
4. In fact, Jesus often met a physical need before engaging the spiritual need. Why? If someone is starving, it's hard for them to focus on a message isn't it? So meeting their physical need for food then allows them to be open to receiving their spiritual need.
5. Acts 6 is a great example of this. Plus it also teaches us that if a Pastor gets swept up in meeting every physical need in the church, be it maintaining a building, delivering every meal to sick members, fixing every leaky sink, they will not have time to focus on prayer and teaching and the ministry will suffer, which sometimes Satan uses. He will make the pastor so busy with these physical things that they neglect the spiritual. But Deacons serve as a leader that can help carry the burden, and also defend the pastor from that trap.
6. So they are an essential part of a growing church, and the Lord often uses them mightily. So having established that, now we ask the question: Who should be a deacon?

2. **Who Should Be A Deacon? v8-12**

1. **3:8-12 - "Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, 9 holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. 10 But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless. 11 Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. 12 Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well."**
2. Though they might not have the same authority or responsibility as pastors, they are still a church office of leadership and should have a person who meets certain character qualities. Some are the same as a bishop, others are slightly different. So we've studied some of them that I'll only lightly mention, and we'll focus a bit more on the ones we haven't looked at.
3. **Reverent**: It means both to be worthy of and show respect. A deacon should be someone who takes the things of God seriously and shows respect to both God and man. They should have a character worth imitating because they are a respectable person and show respect as well.
4. **Not double-tongued**: It means a person who is not insincere, a gossip, or two faced. They tell you one story and tell someone else a different story.

They are honest people who tell you the truth the first time around and don't contradict it.

5. **Not given to much wine**: We have spoken of this at length in the pastors section. Someone who isn't controlled by any substance or vice, but controls themselves.
6. **Not greedy for money**: We talked about this one too. However, this goes doubly for deacons because they are often the ones doing the finances, doing benevolence which at times involves giving financial aid to church members. So they have to be someone who can be trusted to not put their hand in the offering basket or to falsify benevolence forms for personal gain.
7. **Holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience**: A deacon has to know and live God's Word. The word mystery means a truth that was hidden that is now revealed. A deacon who doesn't know God's Word cannot help manage the church, instead they will be an obstacle to the Church! There are churches who hold their church constitutions and bylaws as holy scripture and know them better than the Bible. Though Churches legally need bylaws and documentation in our country, they should be subservient to the scriptures, not parallel to it!
 1. Deacons must know the scriptures and live them out with a good conscience. They can't make decisions on how to manage a church without consulting the handbook of the Lord of the Church.
 2. In chapter 5, Paul is even going to cover how charity and benevolence should be managed. He's going to answer the question "who in the church should receive financial help". If someone doesn't know the Bible, they might think the church should meet every need in it. But not even Jesus met every need in His earthly ministry. So before you jump to help everyone who needs it, you should know God's Word to know if they should be helped, or maybe what they need is something different.
8. **But let these also first be tested**: Here is something huge that a lot of people skip. Leaders should be tested before they become leaders. Regarding bishops, Paul said not someone new to the faith. Now regarding deacons, he says "test them first." Testing means observing their lives and conduct.
 1. Why should we test them?
 1. Testing proves their motives: Are they serving out of love for Jesus? Or to gain something? Be it a title, get a person's attention, or something else?
 2. Testing reveals character: You can't get to know a person in one night. It takes months of eating, speaking and serving with a person to know who they are. How they act at the restaurant,

with their family, at the church, at their job, and on the road reveals if they are the same in each place, or if they are a different person before others.

3. Testing shows maturity: Someone who gets impatient if they aren't "promoted" in leadership shows they don't understand what leadership is. Maturity is produced and seen through time. So testing leaders, be they deacons or elders, shows if they are mature believers, or immature and not ready for the calling.
4. Sometimes, we think if we give them responsibility, it'll help them. Maybe if I put her to serve on the worship team she'll grow more. Maybe if he's a deacon he'll come to church more. BIG MISTAKE. An untested Christian is an unprepared Christian. For leadership, you want someone who has proven their Christian maturity and character. Someone who has walked with Jesus for several years, has a strong, personal relationship with Him and lives it out in their life.
9. **Being found blameless**: We talked about this also when we covered pastors, a righteous life where accusations don't stick.
10. **Likewise their wives**: This has led to a lot of debate because the wording could be translated as "their wives" OR "the women". Unlike in the pastor section, which is very masculine in its word usage, here it is more open. Historically, we know there were female deaconesses. Phoebe is called a deaconess in Romans by Paul. The issue is we're not sure since the word can be used either way. Plus either context works. If it refers to their wives, then it is valid that a leader's wife should also be a godly person who exhibits godly character. If it refers to women as deacons, then it reinforces that women must meet the same qualifications as men. Either one works.
11. So when it comes to deacons, it is up to the individual church to decide how they feel the Lord leads them in the subject at the time in their church. In the end, the title doesn't matter, what matters is do they faithfully serve their church for the glory of God. It is not necessary to hold an office to be able to have a ministry and exercise your gifts. And many ministries are blessed by the godly women who serve in them.
12. So what does it say regarding the woman's character:
 1. **Reverent**: Once again, the women or wives should be respectable people, showing respect to God and people.
 2. **Not Slanderers**: It is literally the word for devil. Diabolos. Basically saying not accusers or slanderers, not women who lie and attack other people's reputations or character. They aren't busybodies or gossips.
 3. **Temperate**: A word we've seen before. Someone sober, who is calm and self controlled.

4. **Faithful in all things**: Is she reliable? Can she be trusted in all things in life? She has a track record that she can be trusted with anything you give her to do.
13. **Husbands of one wife...ruling their children and their own houses**: We spoke about this also in the pastor's section. They should be good parents, not flirts or adulterous, because if they can't manage their homes, how can they manage the church?

3. **A Deacons Reward v13:**

1. **3:13 - "For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus."**
2. It is the deacons that are promised a reward for their faithful service. Though their practical service can sometimes be looked down by some people who think it is lesser, you will likely see more deacons than pastors reaping heavenly rewards.
3. What is the promise? In a sense, a spiritual "promotion". Though this can mean some become elders and pastors, which happens often, it can also mean that they will be given greater ministry and opportunities to serve and greater respect and standing among God's people.
4. Think about the first deacons of Acts 6. Though Stephen dies in Acts 7, he gets to give one of the greatest sermons in the New Testament to the Sanhedrin, and was the one who preached when a certain Saul of Tarsus was listening, likely been the words that drilled into Saul's mind till Jesus confronted him in Acts 9 and he became Paul.
5. Or Philip, who after having to flee Jerusalem, became a great evangelist in Samaria and his daughters were all prophetesses.
6. Deacons are the perfect example of "if you are faithful in the little, you will rule over much." They are a great example of servant leaders, willing to get their hands dirty to ensure God's people can be ministered to. As a church grows, it is the deacons who become vital servants for God's glory within the church and who will see God's rewards in their life for their faithful service.

Discussion Questions:

1. **What does it mean to be a “servant leader”?** We emphasized that a deacon is a servant, and that practical ministry is just as valuable as spiritual ministry. What are some ways we can serve others that may seem small or unnoticed but are actually important to God?
2. **Why do you think character matters more than position?** Paul gives qualifications such as being reverent, honest, self-controlled, trustworthy, and faithful. Why do you think God places such a strong emphasis on who a leader is rather than simply what a leader can do?
3. **Which qualification challenges you the most?** Consider the characteristics in 1 Timothy 3:8–12—being not double-tongued, not controlled by substances, not greedy for money, holding to the faith with a pure conscience, faithful, and managing one's household well. Which of these areas do you think would be most challenging to consistently live out, and why?
4. **Why is it important to “test” someone before placing them in leadership?** We learned that testing reveals a person's motives, character, and maturity over time. What are some things you can learn about a person's character by watching how they behave at church, at home, at work, and when nobody is watching?
5. **How can serving become about us instead of Jesus?** We mentioned how someone can serve because they love Jesus or because they want a title, recognition, attention, or something else. What are some warning signs that our service has shifted from serving God to seeking recognition?
6. **What does faithful service look like when nobody notices?** 1 Timothy 3:13 promises a “good standing and great boldness in the faith” to those who serve well. Why can it be difficult to faithfully serve in areas that receive little recognition? How can remembering God's reward change our attitude toward seemingly insignificant tasks?
7. **Where is God calling you to be a servant right now?** You don't need an official title or church office to serve faithfully. What is one practical need, person, ministry, or responsibility where you could intentionally serve others this week for the glory of God?