

# LIVING AS SERVANTS IN GOD'S FAMILY

1 Timothy 3:8-13

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**Note:** The following are the pastor's notes used in preaching this message. This is not a complete, word-for-word transcription of what was preached. These notes serve as a companion to the complete message, which is available by listening to the audio version. Bible quotes are primarily from NASB and ESV, respectively.

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## INTRODUCTION

As we turn to our passage in 1 Timothy 3:8-13, we will see the characteristics of people in the church who excel in service for the cause of Christ and His church. These servants of the church, or deacons, are worthy of all of our consideration, because what marks them as exemplary servants for the cause of Christ can propel us all toward greater service to Christ as well.

## I. VARIOUS USES OF THE TERM *DEACON*

Before diving into the characteristics of these servants in God's family, let's walk through the more common uses of the term in the New Testament, then circle back to our text's use of the term. The Greek word group for deacon appears over 100 times in the New Testament, but is only twice translated as *deacon* (Philippians 1:1 and here).

### A. Referring to a *servant* or *service*

1. **Publicly**
  - a. **Waiters (John 2:5)**
  - b. **Soldiers (Romans 13:4)**
2. **Privately**
  - a. **Peter's mother-in-law (Luke 4:39)**
  - b. **Martha (Luke 10:40; John 12:2)**
3. **Personally**
  - a. **Tychicus? (Ephesians 6:21)**
  - b. **Epaphras? (Colossians 1:7)**
  - c. **Phoebe? (Romans 16:1)**

### B. Referring to spiritual ministry and/or gifts

1. **"There are a variety of *services*" (1 Corinthians 12:5)**
2. **Leaders equip saints "for the work of *service*" (Ephesians 4:12)**
3. **Using the gift of *service* (Romans 12:6-8)**

### C. Referring to the biblical office

1. **Their office mentioned (Philippians 1:1)**
2. **Their character explained (1 Timothy 3:8-13)**

## II. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE OFFICE OF DEACON (1 Timothy 3:8-12)

### A. Does he have self-mastery? (1 Timothy 3:8)

Here, like with the elder's character, exhibiting self-mastery is critical for those who hold the office of deacon, in several specific ways:

1. **Dignified**

This means *stately, serious*. Overall, this is the disposition of the deacon. He's serious in his service, treating his service—no matter how seemingly insignificant—as something to be taken seriously. As a result, he is respected for how he conducts himself.
  2. **Not double-tongued**

That is, two-tongued—not speaking one thing to one person, and another to another person. This would be a particular temptation for the deacon, because his service would take him from interacting with the
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elders, where he may say one thing, to serving in various places in the church, where he may be tempted to say the opposite.

**3. Not enslaved to any substance**

Like the elder, Paul states that deacons must not be drunkards, or addicted to wine. They must maintain mastery over wine, and every other substance in today’s world.

**4. Not greedy for gain**

The older translations nail this: not greedy “of filthy lucre.” It may have been that deacons were responsible for the distribution of funds for the widows, poor, and others. The temptation to misuse church benevolence funds, then, was an ever-present danger.

**B. Does he hold the mystery? (1 Timothy 3:9)**

The mystery of the faith is the revealed truth of the New Testament that was once hidden in the Old Testament—the gospel concerning Christ specifically. The deacon must hold on to the gospel firmly—and notice, they are not just to hold this mystery doctrinally, but also practically—with a clear conscience. Life and doctrine go together.

**C. Does he have maturity? (1 Timothy 3:10)**

This corresponds to the elder not being a recent convert, but with a slightly different twist, in that the testing is in the present tense, indicating an ongoing time of evaluation is necessary. Once they’ve demonstrated that their reputation and character is “blameless,” coordinate to “above reproach” for the elder, then they may serve in an official capacity.

**D. How is his marriage? (1 Timothy 3:12a)**

Structurally, Paul seems to be enveloping both office’s characteristics with an emphasis on the marriage and home. What Paul began with in 1 Timothy 3:2, he ends with in 1 Timothy 3:12, as if to signal that the section on church leadership is coming to a close. You can discern a lot about a man’s qualification for the office of deacon by seeing how he loves his wife.

**E. How are his minors? (1 Timothy 3:12b)**

Again, this phrase is identical to the elder’s household in 1 Timothy 3:4-5. Managing is exactly what the word means in the Greek, and signals managing well both their children, as well as anyone else in their household (extended family, servants, etc.).

Elder Characteristic (1 Timothy 3:1-7)	Deacon Characteristic (1 Timothy 3:8-13)
Above reproach (1 Timothy 3:2)	Blameless (1 Timothy 3:10)
Sober-minded (1 Timothy 3:2)	Sober-minded (1 Timothy 3:11)
Respectable (1 Timothy 3:2)	Dignified (1 Timothy 3:11)
Able to teach (1 Timothy 3:2)	
Not violent, but gentle (1 Timothy 3:3)	
Not a lover of money (1 Timothy 3:3)	Not greedy for dishonest gain (1 Timothy 3:8)
Not a recent convert (1 Timothy 3:6)	Must be tested first (1 Timothy 3:10)
	Hold the mystery of the faith with clear conscience (1 Timothy 3:9)

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### III. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE OFFICE OF DEACONESS (1 Timothy 3:11)

To be sure, the answer to this question has been debated for a long time, and there are good theologians and pastors who land on both sides. But for these and other textual reasons, it seems better to lean toward seeing women deacons as Paul's intention here. A deaconess is to model these characteristics in an exemplary way, but all women can all learn from these things that mark women who serve the Lord well.

#### A. Is she serious in her devotion?

This is the same term that should mark the deacon back in 1 Timothy 3:8.

#### B. Is she slanderous in her speech?

Literally, "not diabolos," which sounds like not diabolical...not devil-like. The word is used for Satan himself in his role as the enemy of God and accuser of the saints. Slander works by accusing someone behind their back of something that isn't true. Ladies, it takes serious self-mastery to shut down slander in your heart and out of your mouth. The speech from exemplary women is Christ-like, not devil-like.

#### C. Is she sober in her mind?

This corresponds to the elder characteristic in 1 Timothy 3:2, which we said last week was a kind of mental clear-headedness. A deaconess must show the ability to think clearly and evenly, which inevitably will increase the effectiveness of her service to others.

#### D. Is she steadfast in all things?

This is a comprehensive characteristic for the deaconess, but it's good to pause here and ask, "How are you doing in faithful service?" We're not talking about perfection here, but faithfulness, which all of us are called to. How exactly do you gauge faithfulness in service? These questions help discern a deaconess's faithfulness, but can help any of us gauge faithfulness as well:

##### 1. Is the church stronger because of your service?

Do you get more than you give here at NorthCreek Church? There are times for sure that you will be served more than you will be able to serve, but are you here to be served, or to serve?

##### 2. Do you serve with a servant's heart?

Do you serve on the outside, but not on the inside? All of us tire of serving sometimes, right? So, when your ministry becomes mundane, will you become bored? Will you serve with joy when you're under-appreciated, and keep at it when you're unnoticed or even criticized?

##### 3. Do you serve consistently or conveniently?

Is *convenience* serving—serving when it's convenient for me—really serving? Aren't you glad Jesus didn't serve you like that? Are you a consistent worker or a convenience worker?

##### 4. Will you serve short- or long-term?

2 Thessalonians 3:13 says: "*Brothers, don't grow weary in doing good.*" Why? Because it's all too easy to grow weary in doing good! For those who've been serving here for a long time already, don't quit serving now! You have too much to give this church! Keep up the good work of service.

### IV. THE GRACE OF THE OFFICE (1 Timothy 3:12-13)

#### A. Before others: good standing

The word *standing* (used only here in the New Testament) literally means "a step," and so metaphorically "on a stand." Thus, those who serve well as deacons stand with great respect in the eyes of the church, which is a sweet grace God gives them so that they can serve even more effectively in the future.

#### B. Before Christ: great confidence

Deacons who serve well will have confidence in their own faith in Christ. What grace this is as well.

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## **CONCLUSION**

These are the characteristics of the deacon and deaconess. These are the qualifications of those who excel in their service in Christ's church. For all of us, however, this text shows us the character of those who excel in service to Christ.