

Healthy Pastors for Healthy Churches

Titus 1:5-9

Intro: The Need for Healthy Pastors

One of the most impactful books I ever read on pastoral ministry is a book called *Dangerous Calling* by Paul Tripp. He examines a common culture among pastors where they *confuse*...

- Their identity as a pastor in Christ with their identity in Christ.
- Bible knowledge with spiritual maturity
- Ministry success with ministry faithfulness

It's a sobering book that warns pastors of the dangers of becoming overly familiar with the things of God that they get bored (ch8)...with hiding dirty secrets and justifying them because they're so busy "doing the Lord's work" (ch9)...with thinking they've arrived and so become prideful or complacent (Part 3).

It's a book that functions as a good "kick-in-the-pants" for pastors. And it was written in 2012. That's important because, if you look on the back of the first edition, you'd find some endorsements might raise an eyebrow.

Here's one: "Tripp has done it again. With probing insight and robust realism, he takes an honest look into the challenges that are unique to, or intensified by, pastoral ministry. Gospel-centered and grace saturated to the core, *Dangerous Calling* is a must read."

—Tullian Tchividjian

Know who that is? He was a prominent pastor in Florida who spoke at many conferences and wrote several books but disqualified in 2015 after committing adultery, 3 years after his endorsement of this book.

Here's another: "This book is 'good' in the same way that heart surgery is good. It's painful and scary, and as you read it you'll be tempted to run away from the truth it contains. But it just might save your life. Pastors need this book." —Joshua Harris, former pastor of Sovereign Grace Church, who renounced his faith in 2019, seven years after his endorsement of this book.

One more: "Tripp shines the spotlight of God's Word into the heart of every pastor. If you have

been in ministry for 20 minutes or 20 years, I commend this book to you—be prepared for the change God will make in your heart, life, and ministry.” —James McDonald, former pastor of a Chicago mega church who was fired 2019 for financial mismanagement and abusive leadership.

There is a reason why the apostle Paul urges Titus, as a first item of business, to appoint qualified, godly pastors in the churches on the island of Crete...**BECAUSE *healthy churches need healthy pastors*. A church cannot be healthy if the pastors are not healthy. [v5]**

We’re continuing our study of this letter Paul wrote to his ministry companion (Titus) whom he left on an island called Crete where churches in every town were planted. But there was something woefully lacking.

In fact, that’s the word Paul uses. When he says, “Put what *remained* in order,” the word is *lacking*. There’s something missing that is causing these churches to be disordered. What is it? Elders!...

Men who pastor the church through teaching and leadership. BUT...not just any men. Oh not just any men!!! They must be qualified men BECAUSE spiritually healthy men are essential to spiritually healthy churches. [Say a word on men-only elders.]

Paul mentions three areas of health needed in a pastor's life: family, personal, doctrinal. We're gonna walk through this passage and save application for the end. So hold tight.

1) Family Health [v6]

It's intentional that the first area Paul brings up is the man's family health because it is, perhaps, the most revealing area regarding whether he is fit to be an elder. Why? There's a connection between home life and church life. In fact, Paul alludes to this in **[v7a]**.

Notice, he seamlessly changes the title to "overseer," highlighting a different aspect of the pastor's role—leadership. But he also calls him "God's steward." The word means, "house manager." It was a person in that day who was set in charge of a house by the owner

to make sure everything in it is run properly (TDNT, 150). And Paul is taking that imagery and applying it to the role of an elder—he is a steward of God’s house, the church. Not this building, but the people.

So it’s vital that churches affirm men to be elders who are faithful leaders in their home because leading in the church is, in many ways, like leading in the home—it’s just a bigger family. And therefore, if a man can’t lead his own (smaller) family, how’s he gonna be able to lead a (larger) family?

In his book on *Elders*, Jeremie Rinne asks a helpful question in this regard, “Is the atmosphere of [an elder’s] home predominantly nurturing and orderly or toxic and chaotic?” (Rinne, 27) One thing I ask is: Is his wife happy with him? Does she seem at rest in his love for her? What about his kids? Are they happy? Is there joy the in the home?

Why is his home health so important? Notice the emphasis of Paul’s argument in **[v6a, “above reproach”]** and repeats it **[v7a]**.

That's the main reason. Does the way he leads as a husband/dad bring reproach upon the church. To be *above reproach* means: when blame is casted upon him...when he is accused of behaving in a way that causes him to lose credibility as a pastor...it doesn't stick. The pattern of his life says something different than the accusation.

That's why he is to be (v6) "the husband of one wife." Literally, "a one-woman man." Now, no doubt, that excludes polygamy. But the emphasis is not on his marital status. It's on character. I don't think Paul's point is that he can't be divorced or widowed. And I don't think it means he's required to be married.

The emphasis is not marital status but marital faithfulness. This is a guy totally committed to his one wife to whom he is currently married. He loves her, cares for her, has eyes only for her. He's not ogling other women, looking at porn, flirtatious with coworkers. It is clear to all (and clear to his wife) that he is for her and her alone!

Moreover, he's a faithful dad. **[v6b, "children are believers"]** What do we do with that? Believers? Is a man not qualified until all his kids have new hearts and trust the saving work of Christ. That's NOT the point.

The word *believer* can be translated *faithful*, which would put the focus on the children's *behavior* rather than the spiritual state of their hearts. And therefore, the focus is on the elder's ability to manage their behavior.

But we're also told what *believer* means in **[v6c]**. The word "and" is not in the original. It just says: "they're faithful, not open to the charge of debauchery." Which tells us, *faithful* means "not being accused of debauchery or insubordination"—which are strong words that describe reckless/disorderly behavior.

Think about it: If it's true that an elder must have children who are all saved, then that would mean any time an elder has a baby he's disqualified! The elder *does not* have control over his child's heart—only God does. But the elder *does* have control over his faithfulness

to properly parent his children, leading them away from recklessness. And that's first area to look at in a man: family healthy. Is he a faithful husband? Is he a good dad?

2) Personal Health

Paul lists 5 vices a qualified man must NOT have—all of which pertain to self-mastery. He must be in control of himself! **[v7b]**

It's not accidental that the first vice in the list is **arrogance**. This is foundational to spiritual maturity. If a man in leadership lacks humility, he will wreak havoc on the church. *That was the problem with some of those guys on the back of that book. Arrogance led to abuse, mismanaging money, committing adultery.* Humble men don't do those things!

The word *arrogance* carries the idea of *self-willed* or *stubborn*. He insists on his own way. It's his way or the highway. That's vice #1.

Vice #2 (v7): Quick-tempered. An inclination towards anger. Not only blowing up, but also low-level simmering frustration. You don't

want that kind of elder. You want a happy elder, not one with an anger problem.

Vice #3 (v7): *Drunkard*. Are you seeing a theme? “Can he control his appetites?” It doesn’t mean he can’t ever drink; it does mean he can’t get drunk. Why? I think it’s sad that I have to provide an explanation. It should be obvious! Drinking too much leads to all sorts of problems.

Vice #4 (v7): *Violent*. This word means *pugnacious* or *aggressively confrontational*. It even carries the idea of being bully, a guy primed and ready to argue. You know why that’s a problem! It destroys harmony among the elders, and it will seep into the church.

Vice #5 (v7): *Greedy for gain*. Does he love money? Is he ruled by what he thinks money can give him? Is he always dissatisfied, wanting more? Is he greedy? So many men in leadership have wreaked havoc on churches because they were driven by the love of money. *It’s not a coincidence that many false teachers (you might watch on TV) are so rich.*

Now, it's not enough to avoid vices. An elder must pursue virtues. Paul lists 6 in [v8]. Let's knock these out quickly...

Virtue #1: *Hospitable*. He welcomes people into his home to care for their needs.

Virtue #2: *Lover of good*. He doesn't just DO good; he LOVES what is good. He's not a cynic. He doesn't find fault in everything. When he sees good, he rejoices!

Virtue #3: *Self-controlled*. This word carries the idea of being *sensible* and *prudent* and *thoughtful*. He makes decisions with his mind and careful thinking and level-headedness, rather than reacting from his passions.

Virtue #4: *Upright*. which means *righteous*. He's a man of integrity. He's not putting on a show. His heart is committed to doing right.

Virtue #5: *Holy*. He's devoted to the Lord. You can tell this guy puts the Lord number one in his life. In all he does, he's thinks, "What is most glorifying to God?"

Virtue #6: *Disciplined*. Could be translated *self-controlled*. He's got a handle on his life. He's not an animal who acts out of instincts; he's a man who disciplines himself.

This is a lot. And it's not even exhaustive. But I do think Paul is intentionally highlighting the key characteristics of an elder... because without them, the church is harmed. He must have a healthy personal life.

3) Doctrinal Health [v9]

This is last, not because it's unimportant but because it is meaningless if a guy doesn't have godly character. Why would you listen to anything he says—even if he says it with power and conviction and insight—if he has no integrity? If he's not above reproach in his family life and personal life?

I think one of the main reasons why you were so blessed by the preaching of our lay elders' during my sabbatical was not because of how good their sermons were (though they were very good!). I think you were blessed because you know these brothers. You know they are

godly men who love their families and hate their sin. And that makes you wanna hear what they gotta say.

One person put it like this, “The pastor’s character speaks more loudly than his tongue...Eloquence [of speech] may dazzle... [but] holiness of life convinces.” (Dabney, *Persuasive Preaching*, 11)
Character is foundational to *competency*.

That’s what it means for an elder to be *apt to teach*. He must be competent...which doesn’t mean he has to get up on a Sunday and herald the Word with persuasive power. Some do (as Paul implies in 1 Tim. 5). He must simply **[v9]**.

The word “hold firm” means he’s devoted to it—he’s clinging. Before he can do any effective teaching/rebuking, he’s gotta be *holding*. He can’t be loosey goosey, wishy washy. He’s gotta have strong convictions... *about what?* Paul says, “the trustworthy word as taught.” What’s that?

The same term is in **[3:8, “word”]**. What “word” is trustworthy? It’s what Paul just

summarized in the verses prior. **[3:3-7]** That's the trustworthy word! **[Gospel appeal]**

“Titus, appoint elders who hold firmly to the gospel. Men who believe in the doctrine of...”

- **Sin [v3]**. They can't be wishy-washy on sin. They can't succumb to the culture, calling sin a disease or worse...normal.
- **Grace [v5a]**. You can't have legalists as elders! They gotta love grace, because that's how they'll lead!
- **Regeneration [v5b]**. They gotta believe the HS who brings new life. Not pragmatic practices or cunning gimmicks.
- **Justification [v7]**. No amount of good works can save anyone. If elders are NOT settled in this doctrine, they will lead from a place of insecurity.

They must hold firm to the trustworthy word—the gospel! WHY? **[1:9, “so that”]**

He's gotta “be able” to do this. This implies competency. He must have the *ability* to...do two things: *encourage* AND *rebuke*. The phrase *give instruction* carries the idea of *encourage*. He's gotta be able to build up.

BUT, at the same time, he can't shy away from confrontation. A good pastor isn't always nice! He's always kind and gentle, but when he needs to get serious and firm, he will! John Calvin said, "A pastor needs two voices, one for gathering sheep and the other for driving away wolves." (*Calvin's Commentaries*, 361)

If he's only an encourager and never a rebuker, he could let some feel comfortable holding to false doctrine. But if he's only a rebuker and never an encourager, he's gonna crush sheep and leave a wake of bodies behind him.

Implications for You

Healthy churches need healthy elders. They only model healthy living and they teach healthy doctrine. And when members emulate their lives and listen to their teaching, the church is healthy. Let's consider some implications...

Implication #1: Cultivate a disposition of submission to your elders, not an inclination of suspicion. We don't get everything right, but we are "workers for your joy" (2 Cor. 1:24).

The writer of Hebrews puts it like this, “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, *for that would be of no advantage to you.*”

It is not advantageous to have an inclination of suspicious. It's to your advantage to have a disposition of submission. So, pray for us! We need it! Pray that we would work for your joy.

Implication #2: *Men, aspire to the qualities of an elder.* I'm not saying you should aspire to the *office*, though Paul says that is a noble aspiration (1 Tim. 3). But be careful not to confuse *aspiration* with *expectation*. You should not *expect* or *feel entitled to* the office. But you should aspire to the *qualities*.

Therefore, give your life to these qualities!...

- *Single brothers*, be this kind of guy worth marrying! And trust the Lord that if you should get married, God will draw a woman whose drawn your character.

- *Married brothers*, be a husband/dad worth following. Give yourself to your family! Don't hold back! Get over your insecurity/passivity. You are not gonna be on your death bed wishing you had given less of your heart to your family.

Men, this is a job description for your life.

Work through Titus 1, write each quality out, and bring it before the Lord.

Implication #3: *Single ladies, look for a guy like this.* I'm not saying you gotta marry a guy who is qualified to be a pastor. Some great guys aren't. Maybe they don't desire it or lack the gifts for it. BUT every guy worth marrying is a guy who is on the *trajectory* towards most of the qualities, especially character.

Ladies, do not compromise on character.

- Does he have an anger problem? Does he snap a little too easily? Does he get a little too annoyed by dumb stuff?
- Do you smell pride? Does he always need the last word? Is he overly stubborn? Will he just not budge on silly things? Does he listen to counsel, or is he above it?

- Can he control his appetites? Does he drink too much? Does he have wandering eyes? Does he have self-control with you?
- Is he a lover good? Is his conscience sensitive to right/wrong? Or does he delight in things the Lord despises?
- Is he disciplined? Is he on top of his life? Or is he just lazy/ passive?

Listen, I know the overwhelming feeling of loneliness can tempt you think, “If I just lower my standard, the pool will be larger.” Don’t lower your standard on *character*. (Maybe lower your standard on *looks* a little. You would be much happier being with a godly ugly dude than an ungodly strapping dud.)

Implication #4: *Wives, help your husband become this kind of man.* I said, “Help him.” I did not say, “Nag him.” You can be a HUGE help or a HUGE harm. One way to help him is the *encourage* him. Let that be your primary tone, not correction.

Even more importantly, the best way you can help your husband is to pray for him. *I know*

my wife has prayed for me over the years and she would testify to the change. Disciplined prayer is a lot harder than unrestrained critique, but it's so much better and for you!

Implication #5: *Parents, raise your boys towards these qualities.* Raise them to be godly men. Don't settle for: *Boys will be boys.* No! Push them towards mature manhood.

Implication #6: *Church members, encourage brothers in these qualities.* I wanna cultivate a culture of strong, godly, holy, humble, gentle, sacrificial, assertive, self-controlled, loving, mature men in this church.... Not only because I'm convinced that as it goes with the men, so it goes with the church...

BUT also, we got some strong women up in here! And strong women need strong men who are secure and humble. So everyone, encourage the brothers. When you see them act like men, tell them. And when you don't, pray for them, and consider telling them. And brothers, receive it and grow.

Conclusion

Do you see why a healthy churches needs healthy pastors? They're models for...

- You men in this church
- The kind of man you ladies should look for
- The way you wives should encourage and pray for your husbands
- Faithful Christian living

Do you realize how weighty that feels for the elders? Pray for us. Pray we would never disqualify ourselves.

We're not above any of those men mentioned on the back of that book I talked about earlier. Pray that we would keep clinging to the gospel as fuel for godliness.

That's what he all need—this one, glorious gospel that grows us in grace. Cling to it.