

A Beautiful Task
1 Timothy 3: 1-7
June 19, 2022
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'The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. 'Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, 'not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. 'He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, 'for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? 'He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. 'Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

Happy Father's Day!

Proverbs 13:1 *"A wise son hears his father's instruction, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke".*

When we began this series, you saw how Paul addresses Timothy - *"My true child in the faith, my child"*. In Corinthians 4:17, Paul writes about Timothy even more tenderly *"..Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord"*. Paul was Timothy's spiritual father. And Timothy was a faithful and trustworthy child in the faith.

And Paul, as the spiritual father to Timothy makes it clear why he is writing these instructions to Timothy.

1 Timothy 3:15 *"I am writing these things to you so that, "if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God".*

The household of God is the Father's house.

These letters to Timothy and Titus are the rule book for how his house is to function. No other books in the Bible offer us a more

comprehensive blueprint on how a church ought to conduct its affairs.

So if we fail to conduct ourselves according to these instructions, the implication is that the church (or any church) is simply an unbiblical church. It is not the Father's house. No matter how small or big or how successful, the church that is not built on the foundation of the prophets and the apostles with Jesus as the cornerstone will not have the Father's blessing. And that is why we take pains to study, meditate and pray to bring to you the unvarnished straightforward exposition of Scripture. Line by line, passage by passage expounding as best as we can with the help of the Holy Spirit. So my prayer this morning is that of the Psalmist "*The unfolding of your words give light*" (Psalmist 119:130).

This morning we are going to look at Paul's instruction regarding spiritual leadership.

Now, if you heard me read this passage and think that these instructions apply only to pastors, elders, overseers or aspiring church leaders, that would be a huge mistake. You are not off the hook. Every Christian should aspire to live up to these character traits listed here.

And for a spiritual leader these qualities are *must* have.

Here in verse one of this chapter, Paul begins his instruction to Timothy by talking about an aspiration a desire.

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

Notice the two words – *aspire* and *desire*.

How can you tell if your ambition or desire is noble, honorable and good?

Answer: The object of that desire is the key.

Here the object of the aspiration, the goal, the ambition or objective is the office of the overseer. What is an overseer? The term *overseer* is to be interchangeably used with *pastor* or *elder*.

This word “aspire” is also used in the book of Hebrews chapter eleven. The Old Testament heroes of faith *aspired* to a better land for heaven (Hebrews 11:16).

J. Oswald Sanders author of the book *Spiritual Leadership* says that *“Many who aspire to leadership fail because they have never learned to follow. They are boys playing war in the street, but all is quiet. When you ask, “Is there a truce?” they respond, “No, we are generals. No one will obey the command to charge”.*

I think about my own mentor, Joe, who was my pastor for many years. Sitting under his preaching and teaching for years, I sought his friendship and mentorship. I was catching up with him yesterday and Joe said he was caring for his mother who is one hundred one years old and is aspiring for heaven.

Now, to contrast with a good aspiration or desire, how do we know what you are aspiring or desiring is not honorable?

The prophet Jeremiah tells Baruch these words, *“..do you seek great things for yourself? Seek them not”* (Jeremiah 45:5).

The word *desire* that Paul uses in verse one can be used positively or negatively. In 1 Timothy 6, Paul says, *“But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction”*. 1 Timothy 6:9

You see if the object of your desire is more getting more stuff and more money, Paul says that will lead you into many senseless and harmful desires. And eventually that leads into ruin.

And in verse one Paul says, those who aspire to this role of overseeing, pastoring or eldering they desire a noble task. A good task. A beautiful task. A fine work.

And Paul then transitions into the character traits necessary for anyone who desires to take on such a task.

Now before we look at the specific qualifications for this role, I want

to answer the question, what do overseers or pastors or elders do?
What is their role?

Spiritual Oversight is their role. Spiritual oversight includes the responsibility to determine church policy, provide doctrinal clarity, teach, preach, feed, exhort the truth, refute error, nurture and shepherd the flock of God.

And the overarching quality that an overseer must possess is listed in verse 2.

²Therefore an overseer must be above reproach,

A parallel to this text is found in Titus chapter 1 verse 6 – “*appoint elders in every town as I directed you— ‘if anyone is above reproach’*”

What does Paul mean by “above reproach”?

The overseer or elder is to be the kind of man where any grounds for any accusation against him will not stand. It means this man has a blameless reputation. It does not mean the man is perfectly sinless but over time, his behavior, conduct and demeanor have captured the respect of others for his character. Every Christian should aim to be above reproach but this is an indispensable quality for elders, overseers or pastors. One reminder why every Christian must live life this way -

- Way back in the Old Testament God commanded the people of Israel these words, “*You shall be blameless before the Lord your God*” (Deuteronomy 18:13). As Christians, you are positionally blameless because of what Jesus has done – his death and resurrection and what you have received when you were born again. Your sins are wiped clean the moment you trust in Jesus. So from then on, you are charged to live a life that is holy and blameless – “*And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²²he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him*” Colossians 1:21-22. There was a time you were under condemnation and blameworthy for your sin but when Jesus made the payment, the price for your sin, you were justified. Because you are justified, now be sanctified. And

one day you will be glorified.

- And you know there is a great incentive to living your life blamelessly. Here is the incentive – *“For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him”* (2 Chronicles 16:9). *“The way of the Lord is a stronghold to the blameless”*. (Proverbs 10:29). You want God’s support? Walk blamelessly before God.

And in the rest of the passage, Paul lists a number of qualities the elder *must* possess.

The first qualification is that this man is to be *the husband of one wife*. This literally means the man is a man devoted to his wife. The New Testament authors write extensively on how husbands ought to treat their wives – *“Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church”* (Ephesians 5:25). *“Husbands should love their wives as their own bodies”* (Ephesians 5:28). *“Husbands love your wives and do not be harsh with them”* (Colossians 3:19). *“..husbands live with your wives in an understanding way showing honor”* (1 Peter 3:7).

Two authors John MacArthur and Phil Ryken say that this qualification extends to moral and sexual purity of the man. During the time of this letter, which is about mid-first century, the Greeks and Romans lived in gross sexual sin and marriage was undermined by frequent divorce and widespread immorality. So the first qualification is that of the man’s fidelity and his role as a husband devoted to his wife.

Now, I am going to jump to verses four to give continuity to the family situation.

‘He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive,

So if the Christian or the leader is a married man devoted to his wife, and the Lord grants children to the couple, this man ought to be a man who manages his household well. This word *manage* is verse 4 in the original it is the word *proistemi* – meaning to take charge, to preside over, to engage, to rule. The man’s role in his own home is to be the one in charge. And as a father he is to keep his children in submission. This is the same word we saw last week as to how

women ought to learn with such an attitude in the church. As a father, the children are to obey and respect his authority. The man must conduct his affairs at home in such a way that is not of a tyrant nor of an absentee landlord. The parallel verse in Titus chapter 1 verse 6 puts the husband and the father's role together "*and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination*". This means the children are faithful and do not openly resist or rebel against the authority of the father. Why? Because that can cause shame and disrepute to the family. Now, why does Paul list this quality of a *husband* and a *father* as one of the first of qualifications?

Look at the verse *five*

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

The church is the household of God. It is the family of brothers and sisters who have been adopted into the family of God. God's family has no children by birth. We were all once orphans born into sin. But when you repented and trusted in Jesus' death and resurrection, God took you in. Jesus Christ took your sin and gave you his righteousness. Since then you are part of God's household. And the Christian man's home is the template and model for how he conducts himself in the church. So Paul's argument goes this way: if spiritual leaders are to lead at church they must have **already** led at home.

I gave a book to my son as he was recently heading off to campus living. The book is titled "The Men We Need". The author writes that "*Being passive is a choice. Not taking ownership and responsibility for your family is a choice. The simple truth is that all of our choices have consequences, and the series of choices we make shape who we are, how those around us see us, and determines the impact we can have on the world around us*".

The next qualification is *hospitable*. The overseer must be hospitable. The word hospitable in the original is *philoxenon* – love of strangers. It is the opposite of the word xenophobia – fear of strangers. Does the Christian or leader love strangers? People who are not like you, not from your tribe or language or tongue?

The next three qualifications are *sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable*. We'll try to touch on these next week but so much can be said about these qualifications. These behaviors stem from personal disciplines.

- J. Oswald Sanders shares that *"a leader is a person who has learned to obey a discipline imposed from without, and has taken on a more rigorous discipline from within. Those who rebel against authority and scorn self-discipline – those who shirk the rigors and turn from sacrifices – do not qualify to lead"*.

The next four qualifications are listed in verse 3.

'not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.

Not violent also means not having an excessive inclination to quarrel, fight or strike or dispute.

Again, these qualities are necessary for the overseer or elder. I'll try to touch on them when we go through the passage for deacons next week.

Out of all the character qualities that an overseer or elder must possess, there is one quality or skill the elder must have *and* that is the ability to teach.

The parallel passage in Titus 1:9 expands about this essential quality for an overseer, elder or pastor-teacher *"He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it"*.

All other character qualities are those that an overseer must have and every Christian must aspire to possess. But this quality is one of function or the office of the elder. Teaching is a unique gift that is associated with this office.

Martyn-Lloyd Jones, who served the Queen as a physician and then became a pastor and preacher writes the following about this ability. *"Look for an unusual degree of spirituality and look for a degree of assurance with regard to his knowledge of the Truth and his relationship to it. If he is a man who is always struggling with*

problems and difficulties and perplexities himself, and trying to discover the truth,.. it is clear he is a man who is not called to the ministry”.

How you treat the Bible will show how you relate to God. The leader must be a lifelong student of the Bible. Does the man have a deep affection and joy for the Word of God? Psalm 119:162 *”I rejoice at your word like one who finds great spoil”.*

All of you may not be called to teach in an overseer’s role but as a Christian do you rejoice in the words of God? If it does it will surely become a spring of living water flowing out of you.

For the sake of time, let me just read verses 6 and 7 but we’ll cover them next time.

’He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. ’Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

I want to close with one quality that God wants you to aspire to live by. It’s the quality of blamelessness or above reproach.

”Do all things without grumbling or disputing, “that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation”. (Philippians 2:14-15)

The world around us is twisted and degrading by the day. Good is being called evil and evil is being called good. What the world needs is not more service more good deeds at the expense of your godliness and holiness.

“The Kingdom of God is not going to be advanced by our churches becoming filled with men, but by men in our churches becoming filled with God.” —Duncan Campbell

When the household of God has people filled with God, they begin to shine as lights. This is the beautiful task God has assigned you for you. To live blamelessly before God.

----- Discipleship Questions-----

MESSAGE SUMMARY: A Beautiful Task. 1 Timothy 3:1-7

HEAD: These questions help you examine the truth of God's Word.

1. What is the one overarching quality that God commands all Christians to aspire to have (and overseers/elders/pastors must have)? Ephesians 1:3-4, Colossians 1:21-24, 1 Timothy 6:13-14

HEART: These questions help you wrestle with what you believe.

2. Why does Paul say that our Christian conduct needs to begin at home?
3. What is God convicting you of and to believe in light of this message?

HANDS/HABITS: These questions help you bring the truth into your everyday life and develop behaviors that change your habits.

4. For personal reflection: According to these character qualities is there one thing that needs to change in your own soul or household? What will you do about it?