

1 Timothy 3:1-16

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Date: 17 May 2026

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[0:00] Here is a trustworthy saying, whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable,

hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church? He must not be a recent convert or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap. In the same way, deacons are to be worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They must first be tested and then, if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. In the same way, the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers, but temperate and trustworthy in everything. A deacon must be faithful to his wife and must manage his children and his household well. Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus. And the reasons for Paul's instructions.

Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you with these instructions, so that if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and the foundation of truth. Beyond all question, the mystery from which true goodness springs is great. He appeared in the flesh, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, and was taken up in glory. Amen.

As I said, we've been working our way through Paul's first letter recorded to Timothy. And actually, when you're reading Paul's letters, sometimes it feels like you're kind of listening to one half of a conversation. You know what he's saying, but you're not quite sure the questions or whatever else is being responded to who he's kind of talking to. But here in Timothy's letter, he makes it abundantly clear why he's writing and what he's trying to do. And as we've been saying, as we read in the chapter today, chapter verse 14 of chapter 3, he said, although I hope to come to you soon, I'm writing you these instructions so that if I'm delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth. So basically, he's writing to instruct Timothy to help understand how church functions, how church should be run. And we've been seeing that. We looked at chapter 1, that the churches are to be gospel-centered.

We preach the whole counsel of God centered on the redeeming work of Jesus on the cross. Verse 15 of chapter 1, Paul said, here's a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance.

[3:34] Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst. And then he was reminding us just of the God who comes to save sinners. And that that truth in verse 15 is actually the most important piece of information that anyone will ever hear. Eternity depends on it. It is the most important, verse 15 is the most important piece of information that anyone can hear and everyone needs to hear about it, to have the opportunity to hear about and respond to the gospel of Jesus.

And because that is true, that our work is to be gospel-centered, it also has that gospel-centered purpose. Like I was saying earlier on, verse 4 of chapter 1, it's to our work, the things that we do should advance God's work. What is that work? Jesus makes that plain in Matthew 28, to make disciples, bring folks into and onto following the Lord Jesus. So it is gospel-centered, gospel-centered purpose.

And last week, we saw how gospel-centered prayer and living, chapter 2, verse 1, I urge you, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession, thanksgiving be made for all people.

And then this week, he's saying you need to have gospel-centered people in your leadership.

Gospel-centered leadership. You know, when we conduct interviews for working on the staff or as an apprentice at Cornerstone, we center the interview in four areas. There's nothing new in it. Lots of folks do it. But around character, conviction, competency, and chemistry. And actually, you can see that, you know, the character, conviction, and competency all are arguably drawn from 1 Timothy 3.

And so we'll use some of those ideas in particular, character and competency, and we'll mention conviction as well as the kind of two things that we're sort of hanging our look at this passage on. [5:41] But when you look at the passage, when you step back and kind of see it as a whole, it is very obvious the thing that is really important to Paul in terms of thinking about gospel-centered leadership in the church is the issue of character. Character stands out by a country mile as the most important thing in terms of thinking about who serves within a church. Chapter 3, verse 1, here's a trustworthy saying, whoever aspires to be an overseer deserves a noble task. So the Greek word there for overseer is episkopos, from which we get the word episkopal. The Greek word for elder is presbyteros, where we get presbyterianism. But here's the thing. What should we be sort of focusing on? And obviously, you know that different denominations go different ways. But actually, arguably, the word for overseer and elder, Paul uses interchangeably. He's meaning the same thing. If you turn over to Titus chapter 1, verses 5 to 7, that's page 1198, if you're new to it all. And Paul says this, he said, the reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. An elder, a presbyteros, must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children, believe it or not, open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.

Since an overseer, an episkopos manages God's household, he must be blameless. And so it's the same job, two words he's using interchangeably. So when he says overseer here, I think we can read elder as well. And if, you know, you're sort of looking at the passage and you're sort of tempted to switch off and thinking, well, I'm not an elder. This doesn't apply to me. I'm not a deacon or deaconess.

Then I can pretty much switch. That's for them. I don't need to listen, but hold the phone. Don't switch off yet. Because actually, when you look at the passage, the religious character traits for every single follower of Jesus, these are the things that the fruit of the Spirit, the work of the Spirit is going to be helping us work out in our lives as we take hold of that for which Christ Jesus has taken hold of us. Church leaders are called upon to show these things consistently over a long pattern, not just recently, but over many years.

But in a sense, therefore, these verses apply to us all. As we live out the faith, as we seek to serve the Lord, whether it's in church ministries, whether it's in the other ministries that we're partnered with and other ministers beyond that, that if you're involved in leading, if you're involved in service, these are the kind of characteristics, these are the things that God requires of us.

But leaders in fellowships are especially called to adhere to them, to hold to what is a high bar for godliness and the management of the household of God.

[8:51] And again, as you look at the passage, there is a consistent message for different kinds of leaders in the church. So we can know that this applies not just to elders, like I'm saying, but to others, because the standards that are applied to the two roles that he mentions, the elders and the deacons, well, they're pretty much the same apart from one difference.

And you can see that the elder and the deacon, they're called to the same life, but different roles. The elder in verse 2 is to be able to teach, whereas the deacon later on is to be able to hold to the truths of the faith. Helpful definition from the Gospel Coalition website is this, that deacons or deaconesses, Phoebe was a deaconess in Rome, aid the unity of the church by attending to physical administrative matters, while the elders are focused on oversight over the entire congregation through the work of teaching, praying, shepherding, and leading. He's not saying that one role is lesser than the other. They're called to the same high standard that is expected of both. They just have different roles to fulfill. You see, something of that differentiation between elders and deacons, and maybe in Acts chapter 6, you know, the work was becoming, you know, it was really growing.

And so they were, the apostles felt that actually we need to appoint seven godly folks to look after the work of distributing to the widows and the orphans and so on, so that we can give ourselves to prayer and to the word. And so something of that distinction of role, the folks who are serving the table were managing that were to be spirit-filled, but with a different role to that of the apostles. Peter goes on to outline the role of an elder in 1 Peter chapter 5, verses 1 to 4. That's page 1220. If you're using the church Bibles, have a look at it briefly. It says, To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's suffering, who also will share in the glory to be revealed. Be shepherds. And the Latin for shepherd is pastor.

So be pastors of the flock that is under your care. Watch over them through ministry of word and prayer. Not just because you must, but because you're willing. As God wants you to be. Not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve. Not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.

[11:23] And when the chief shepherd, the chief pastor appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. But before we go into the depths of the passage, actually notice in verse 1 that he talks about that actually whoever aspires or desires to be an overseer and elder. So there's an element of aspiring and desiring in the service of the work. Although it sounds counterintuitive, but there's an encouragement to seek to serve and to aspire that and to see that as a good thing, whether it's in the kids' work or in the band or elsewhere. Doing it for the right reasons.

Doing it and ensuring that you're right and you're walk with the Lord in accord with some of these things that we're seeing in 1 Timothy today. And the thing, you know, in terms of an overseer, and I tend to shy away from it, this idea, but Paul says that when you aspire to some of these things, like an overseer, it's a noble task. And by that, he doesn't mean it's prestigious.

It means it's worthwhile and it's serious. So we should pray for those who are called to lead at all the different levels, whether it's our community group leaders, whether it's folks leading Christian Explored or in the band or having oversight and pastoral care for the church on the staff and so on. You know, Satan has a target on the back of every believer. You come to Christ, he's interested in you. You're not a believer, he's not interested.

Satan has a target on the back of every believer. But I believe he's bigger targets on that of those who are stepping up into leadership roles. You see that in Zechariah 13, 7, strike the sheep, scatter the shepherds.

[13:24] It is hugely costly at times for elders and those who serve in time and in terms of their time and at times heartache walking alongside people in pain.

And of course, as well as joy, rejoicing with those who rejoice like we rejoiced today. So there are lots of ways as we look through this passage that we could kind of parse out.

And I've nicked some headings from other folks as I usually do. So it's not plagiarism if you tell everybody that you've nicked it. So I want to sort of parse out in terms of character, wise judgments, healthy relationships, and moral integrity.

And, you know, as we look through this list, it's not simply a list of sort of to-dos, but actually it's the list of a life that is being changed and has been changed by a living walk with the Lord Jesus.

So wise judgment then. Verse 2, temperate. The dictionary defines that as someone who's marked by moderation, keeping or held within limits, not extreme or excessive.

[14:33] So this is somebody, you know, we're called upon to be thoughtful, not impulsive, watchful, careful in the way that we speak and act. Linked to that comes next, self-control, which is, of course, you know, the fruit of the Spirit, where we're mastering the tongue, our moods, and our passions.

And these are, as we dig into these things in the Lord Jesus Christ, as we walk closely with Him, we become more like Him in these ways. Then this is a life, in the life of the believer, it garners respect, doesn't it?

Verses 2 and 8. That we're called, as we serve, as we follow Jesus, we're called to not be drunken. One church I was in, a former elder, he'd passed by the time that I was there. But I was told with some, you know, by folks in the community, with some kind of sense of revilement that the elder who used to go sort of greet them at the door, or be at the door, would be seen on a Saturday night, you know, staggering home from the pub, you know, drunk as a skunk.

I just, as it was told, there was just, and when that happens, the integrity, the respect that is a godly life for the life of a leader, it goes in an instant, doesn't it?

[15:59] We're called to not drunkenness, not, verse 8, indulging in much wine, you're thinking, that's fine, I don't like wine anyway, that it's a general, you know, alcohol thing.

And part of the reason is that, is that drunkenness makes those first three character traits impossible, doesn't it? Drink, it loosens the inhibitions, it disables the self-control, whether it's over tongue, or mood, or morality, late night accessing things on the internet, gambling, risk-taking behaviour, and so on.

And subsequently, whether it's there and then, or sometime down the line when these things come out, there's a loss of respect, drinking friends. If you drink, moderation is our friend.

Moderation is our friend. So then there's healthy relationships, verse 3, not violent, but gentle. You know, the statistics about domestic abuse and violence in our country are horrendous.

They remain at epidemic levels in the UK. Violence and the threat of violence are a choice in how we respond. Husbands, wives, parents, siblings, work colleagues, church family members, whoever it is that is being responded to, they are the people, they never made us do it.

[17:26] Our response, if we're responding in those ways, is a choice that we make from a number of responses that can be made.

And if this is something that you struggle with, please, please, please know there are other folks who struggle with it too and are getting help. And you also can get help. The gospel is a gospel of second chances.

Please, please, don't feel stuck. Help is available. Seek it out. Also not to be quarrelsome. The kind of person who can't but pick a fight.

Even, you know, just will fight with their own shadow if they could. They court conflict. They're always in contention with someone. They're just contrarian just a bit too often. They're promoting controversy like in chapter 1.

The kind of person that causes all manner of trouble. That is not the kind of person we want, you know, is it? In leadership in any environment, let alone in the church. And if that's something that we struggle with, then, you know, bring that to the Lord.

[18:36] To be sincere. No sides to them. What you see is what you get. Desires of working out the gospel in every area of life. And then character in terms of moral integrity.

Verse 2. Above reproach by holding to all these characteristics. In marriage. Faithful to his wife. It doesn't mean that an elder has to be married.

Paul wasn't married. But it does that if the person is single, then they're celibate. Recent high profile falls in these areas are hard to hear, aren't they?

When they hear them on the news. Sadly, they are not the first and they will not be the last. But here is the thing. If we think that will never be us, we've already put our first rung on the ladder of these things.

We must never think that could never be any of us. We must guard our hearts. We must work on, if we're single, our singleness. If we're married, our marriages. And take practical steps to put distance between us and any possibility of following in this way.

[19:46] A number of folks have commented when I mentioned Alistair Begg's advice. How they find it helpful. He said that if you're really looking forward to meeting someone of the opposite sex, who isn't your wife or your husband, get someone else to go meet them.

Verse 3, not a lover of money. Or verse 8, or pursuing dishonest gain. Not open to fraudulent activities in regard whether it's taxes or dodgy business dealings or lacking in any form of generosity.

It implies here that their gospel and understanding of their money, their wallet, sorry, is gospel-shaped. And that because of that, that they understand that these resources are not their own, that the Lord's to be used for the advance of the kingdom, that they are the kind of people who can be trusted with, for example, the church finances.

Whether in the early years, whether they were money together for collections for other churches who were in distress or difficulty, or whether it was in their own locale for the poor and the widows who didn't have a welfare system in that time.

So they can be trusted with the finances, with the budget, not to steal or squander, but to generously give and see the value in mission and the need to give to it and be helpful in advancing the kingdom.

[21:10] So that is something of what Paul says. These are the kind of things that as all believers, we need to be adhering to. As we walk closely with Jesus, this is the way the Spirit is going to impress and draw us into the freedom for which Christ has set us free in a wise judgment, healthy relationships and moral integrity.

But what about competencies then? And I think there are three core ones. The first is doctrinal, which is about conviction, personal and then spiritual. For the elders, their competency, verse two, they are to be able to teach.

And like I said earlier on, the deacons, verse nine, holding on to the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. One is called to defend and explain the truths, the other to deliver and work them out in practice, letting that gospel shape their actions.

all of which is enabling us as a church to be, verse 15, the pillar, the foundation of the truth.

And as that truth shapes our believing, our living, our convictions, and therefore our desire to take it out to the nation because it is the truth. He is the way, the truth, and the life.

[22:27] No one comes to the Father except through him. And grasping these things, we realize there's a great, we need to, we need to share this. Maybe some of you are thinking, and you know, Cornerstone's kind of, the way that we structure ourselves as a church, going, oh, we don't have deacons.

We've only got elders. How come we haven't got deacons? Talks about deacons here. Well, lots of churches and denomination, they, they work these things out differently, don't they?

Some Baptist churches only have deacons and no elders. Anglicans, bishops, maybe no elders. Presbyterians, elders only, or elders and deacons. And actually, I think there's a bit of liberty in how we work these things out, as long as what we are adhering to are the, the principles that are clearly stated here.

We can have some liberty about how they're, they're, they're the particulars of how we work them out, but we need to adhere to the principles that are explained here and adhere faithfully.

And just as a, as a, as an aside in terms of how different churches might elect elders or leaders.

Some church congregations elect elders by vote of the, the membership, but other churches like ourselves, it is the elders who choose the, you know, the, the subsequent elders.

[23:55] And part of the reason, and I think there's a little bit of biblical validation of that is that Paul said to Timothy that he was to choose reliable men to hand on, you know, to teach the word and leaders and so on.

So, you know, somebody who was already in leadership was appointing others to leadership. And that's one of the reasons we do what we do. And then personal is the, the ability to manage comes up in verse four, five, and 12.

Last week, we said that there are two households where these principles are to be worked out, the home and the church. And so it's not, it's not unsurprising that the two will overlap.

Verse four, he must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him. He must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. If anyone doesn't know how to manage their own family, how can they take care of God's church?

And similarly, in verse 12, why is that? Well, our God is a God who brings order out of chaos. We saw that when we looked at Genesis, Genesis chapter one, Paul, likewise, therefore, it says to the Corinthians, you know, your, your, your services are chaotic.

[25:03] God is a God of order. There needs to be some order in, in, in your meetings and your gatherings together. And so he's saying that, that as we come to know our God and this, and become more like him, then the order which he brings will begin to order our lives and will help us in our home.

And also as we step into leadership in the church. And of course, that doesn't mean to say that there are never stressful seasons for families and so on, but the general principles is what we're looking at.

And where an elder is married, verse 11, wives are also to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers, but temperate and trustworthy in everything. You know, each elder and their wife will be gifted differently.

Because that's the way that God has, has made us. But in general, the marriage man rings that they are one. They support one another in the ministries that God has given to them, seeking to encourage one another in the serving opportunities and support them in the opportunities that God

has given to them.

And this for a while, why for a while now, when we're appointing elders, we also, when they're married, invite the wives to come up and to pray with them both. It's not compulsory for them to come up, but if they're willing to come up, it's lovely, isn't it?

[26 : 25] Just to pray for them both at the beginning of their husband's time in that office. Because we value, we respect them both and acknowledge both their ministries, their significance, importance amongst us.

that they also have in themselves a role in supporting an elder who carries at times heavy burdens. The same is presumably true of deacons' wives or deaconesses' husbands.

If you're relatively new, it may be helpful to know that we ask elders to serve for around about three years and then take a sabbatical of a year.

And then, should they so choose, they can come back on and serve for another two years if they feel that they're still called to it and able to kind of say, you know, I'm still, my life is still in line with 1 Timothy 3.

But we also encourage a sabbatical system in all areas of service and leadership in the church to avoid burnouts. I have one every seven years. We offer to community group leaders the opportunity to do that to those who are working with their kids and with our youth and so on.

[27 : 35] So, do you think about that? You know, you don't have to go on ad infinitum. There may be times where you think, you know, a bit of a sabbatical a year out would actually help me.

Then do talk that through with the group leaders of the area in which you're serving. Yeah. But also here, verse 2, hospitality. And perhaps it's linked to that whole thing of household because when the home is not in chaos, then we're maybe more able to open the door to others.

But then there's the spiritual competency, an ability really in verse 6 to stand. He must not be a recent convert or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil.

What do the Proverbs tell us? Pride comes before a fall. Proverbs 16, Proverbs 16, 18. Conceit, pride, we're puffed up like a peacock.

That means that we're not putting to death that which is sinful. And not letting the life of Christ flourish in us, which produces humility as an overarching attribute of the way that we conduct ourselves.

[28 : 48] Pride. It's prayerless. Pride is careless. Pride. Pride. And pride, as scriptures tell us, leads to a fall. Verse 7, under regard to reputation with folks who are outsiders, who don't come to church, whether that's in the workplace, in the wider family, if they're not believers, in the area that we live in.

That as leaders, as believers, we're of good reputation. We're seen as people of integrity, reflecting the gospel in word, and indeed leaving the aroma of Christ, not the stench of godlessness.

Verse 10 is interesting. They must first be tested, and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. As we take up positions in leadership, in serving, whether it's in the church, or with partner ministries, we need to ask the question of ourselves, or maybe be asked the question, is there anything in our lives that we are aware of that would prevent us from taking up this position in regard to some of these attributes in 1 Timothy 3?

Whatever position we hold, we should be asking that question. Okay, that is a lot, isn't it, of kind of instruction, things to think about.

It leaves us feeling somewhat wilted, and it, you know, we could easily say along with Paul, man, who is sufficient for these things?

[30 : 15] As he says in 2 Corinthians 2.16. And the truth and the reality is that in our own strength, we might be able to get so far, but actually this that we're called to is a spiritual work and a spiritual battle.

And so we need spiritual resources far greater than we could ever muster. And praise God, praise God, we do, because we have an infinite resource in him to strengthen us, to sustain us, to change us, to help us, to guide us, to lead us, to enable us.

That as we are held by the whole of God, within the love of the Father, the saving action of the Son, and the power of the Holy Spirit, we who are not worthy, we who do not feel that we could ever attain to these things, are enabled by the grace of God, by the help of God.

And actually, I think that's why Paul lands where he does at the end of this chapter, as he quotes an early hymn or a creed in verse 16, where he says, beyond all question, the mystery, and mystery in

the New Testament is usually something that was hidden, now revealed in Christ.

The mystery from which all true godliness, these attributes that we've been looking at, spring is great. These spring from Christ, who appeared in the flesh, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by the angels, preached among the nations, believed in the world, was taken up in glory, where he now reigns.

[31:57] And he, the risen, reigning, ascended, Lord of Lords, he is the shepherd of the sheep, the pastor over us, John 10, 14.

He is the overseer of the household of God, the Father, 1 Peter 2, 25. And he comes amongst us as one who serves, Luke 22, 27, literally, Diakonos as a deacon.

He is our one true pastor, overseer, elder, deacon, on whom we lean, on whom we rely, for our ability to serve him in the things, and the attributes that he has called us to.

See, the same gospel that we rejoice in this morning, that saves sinners, chapter 1, verse 15, is the same gospel that produces this kind of godliness, in chapter 3, verse 16.

But let me finish then, with these words from Paul. 2 Chronicles 3, 5, and 6, he says this, not that we are competent in ourselves, to claim anything of ourselves.

[33:04] You feel like that? I do. But he says this, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent, as ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit, for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Our competence, friends, our trust, our hope in these things, is not in ourselves, but it is in the Lord, who has saved us, who has hand upon us, who is enabling us, who equips us, who calls us.

And as we lean on him, will enable us. Who is worthy for these things, in all the ways in which we are called to serve?

In a sense, none of us are, but by the grace of God, he makes us worthy and competent. Let's pray. God, our Father, we, I think it's fair to say, that we all feel somewhat leveled, by this passage.

we all know in our hearts, the ways in which we fall short. But Lord, we ask that you would, we thank you for your word, and the way in which it clarifies, and the way it helps us, and the way it guides us, and the way that makes things clear for us, about the paths that you have for us, about the things that we need to pray into, in the coming weeks, as to our character, and our competency, what we do, and how we do it, and why we do it.

[34:48] And Lord, that we would, we would rejoice, even though laid low, right now, that actually, you speak these words into our lives, because you want us to know life and liberty, in the Lord Jesus Christ, freed from the chains that bind us, set free into the life, that you have for us.

So Lord, we bless you, and thank you for, just the power of your word. Help us not to be like James says, you know, those who look in the mirror, go away and forget what we look at, hear the word of God, and go away and forget, but Lord, help us to, to meditate on these words.

Remind us of the things, that we've taught, as you promise, that we might, be to the praise of your glory, in every area of our lives, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.