

Let's open our Bible's to 1 Timothy this morning. Our text for this morning is 1 Timothy 3:1-7. As you are turning there let's recall together where we have been and where we are in this letter. Paul is writing to Timothy a pastor of a young church in Ephesus and as he writes to Timothy he writes to the church at Ephesus as well. This letter wasn't private correspondence as we would think of a personal letter in our day, but a letter written to Timothy yet also to the church.

And Paul has encouraged this pastor to stay the course, to maintain a fierce devotion to the gospel of the Lord Jesus even opposing the ones who were corrupting the gospel through their false teaching. Even to the point of reminding the church of the necessary reality of church discipline for those who will not recant of their errors and relentless disunity.

Then as David showed us Paul directs the church in matters of ordered practice. He exhorted the church to pray that God would enable them to live lives that are quiet, godly and dignified in a corrupt society...so that through their godly Christlike life, opportunity would arise for the gospel to spread. Then Paul began to address the complementary roles of men and women within the church. And as David showed us he points both men and women to roles and behaviors that make much of Christ and little of self. Men should lead in prayer and in peacefulness, rather than angry outbursts. Women ought to honor godly men who lead and adorn themselves in ways that did not look like the temple workers who used their bodies to earn income. God is telling us through Paul how His people, His church must look different than the world, and part of that difference is revealed in how we relate to one another in the local church.

This instruction is continued for us in our text today. Now sometimes you unintentionally start something, and I did that when I began asking us to respond after the reading of Scripture, and we are doing pretty good. Practice and repetition are good. So I will read 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and then say, "This is the Word of the Lord" and then we will all say together "thanks be to God" and let's not be ashamed to say that together, because what a privilege we have to read and hear the very word of God together, surely we can voice our thankfulness together...

So follow along as I read 1 Timothy 3 and be ready for your part after I finish...

*"³ The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. ² Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴ He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, ⁵ for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? ⁶ He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. ⁷ Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil."*¹

This is the Word of the Lord...Thanks be to God!

What in the world is an overseer?

- Is Paul talking about a supervisor as at work?
- Is this just another term for micromanager, or a project lead, or a foreman, or general contractor?
- Is this a reference to the one in charge of things?

¹*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Ti 3:1-7.

- Paul, what on earth is an overseer?

Well that is the question I am hoping to address and answer as we explore the text together this morning, and to do that, lets talk vocabulary. I want you to understand what I mean, and that can only happen if you can understand how I am using the words I am using.

So, perhaps the most important foundational word we need to grasp is this word “overseer” — in the original language the word is “episkopos” perhaps you can hear in that word some of our english words, like Episcopal, or the word bishop. The word translated means, “*a religious role involving both service and leadership*”² And in the New Testament, the word overseer is interchangeable with some other words we may have some familiarity with. Perhaps in your Bible reading of Acts, Titus, James or 1 Peter you have come across the word “elder” — that word occurs frequently. Still another word is “pastor” which you won’t find in the English Standard version because “pastor” is the English equivalent of the word “shepherd”, So when Paul says the church has been given Shepherds in Ephesians 4, the word is the word we get the title “pastor” from.

Well what does any of that have to do with our text and the word we have here namely “overseer”? It has everything to do with our text and our word, because here in verse 1 Paul says the role of “overseer” is an office. That doesn’t mean a rectangular room filled with shelves, chairs and a desk, but rather it means office in the way we think of someones position or responsibility. So the office of overseer refers to a specific position of responsibility in the church.

But why the different words? Does that mean every church should have overseers, elders, pastors...do all of those individual terms mean different positions. No, it doesn’t. The New Testament authors used these words **interchangeably** to refer to the same office.³ Let me show you this in real time, turn over to Acts 20 for just a minute, look at Acts 20:17, “*17 Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him.*”⁴ Paul gathers the elders, and then look at what he says to them in vs. 28, “*28 Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.*”⁵ Now in that verse the verb “to care” is the same word we get “shepherd” or “pastor” from. The NASB, NIV and CSB all translate the word in that verse with our English word “shepherd” — So here as Paul addresses this group from Ephesus he uses all three words in speaking about and to them. So, when you see overseer, elder, pastor, shepherd referring to a role or responsibility in the church they are all referring to the same office. The office Paul is talking to Timothy about.

And what is obvious is that churches ought to have a plurality of elders, right there in Acts, Paul didn’t call the elder, he called the elders. Likewise, Philippians 1:1 references the overseers and deacons, plural. And in Titus 1, Paul says for Titus to raise up elders, plural. This is God’s blueprint for church leadership, plurality, not singularity.

² Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 540.

³ Gregg Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*, pp. 211

⁴ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ac 20:17.

⁵ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ac 20:28.

For obvious reasons, one lone elder who operates independently is in danger of always getting his way, which leads to arrogance and pride, he is also in danger of burnout and moral failing because he is doing work that was designed for multiple people to shoulder.

So when Paul writes to Timothy about this office of overseer in the church, he is referring to the same office as elder or pastor, and he is encouraging Timothy with the reality that he is not meant to be the lone wolf pastor operating his own agenda without input or support of other pastors in the church.

Now you may be thinking, “Mike, I’ve been in Baptist churches my whole life and I’ve never heard of elders, that sounds *new*, or even worse *Presbyterian*...but our Baptist history, especially our Southern Baptist history is one rooted in churches that were led by a plurality of elders or overseers. Mark Dever notes this, “*When evangelicals today hear the word elder, many immediately think “Presbyterian,” yet when Congregationalists (our forefathers) first arose back in the 16th century they stressed eldership as well. Elders could be found in Baptist churches in America throughout the 18th and into the 19th century. W.B. Johnson, the first president of the Southern Baptist Convention, wrote a book on church life in which he strongly advocated the idea of a plurality of elders in the local church.*”⁶ Elders/Pastors/Overseers are in our Baptist DNA.

But, who should occupy the office of overseer or elder? That is what Paul lays out for Timothy, and this is a gift for you and I as we are not left in the dark about what qualifications a pastor should have.

Now its fitting to ask, why is it necessary for Paul to write to Timothy about the qualifications of a pastor? Well remember what we have seen. Remember in chapter 1 were Paul revealed that the false teachers that had crept into the the church desired to be recognized as leaders in the church, they wanted to be regarded as the teachers, they wanted recognition and a position of leadership, but Paul dismantled their so-called expertise. And he did it in two ways, he dismantled their *competency*, showing how their teaching was corrupting the gospel and he had exposed their lack of *character* as they have promoted sinful behaviors and blasphemed the gospel by their teaching and conduct.

So then it is fitting that Paul writes to Timothy and says, “shut those guys down and put them out” and then he gives guidelines and says look for guys like this. Paul then lays out the qualifications of a pastor that demonstrate both character and competency. The church needs good leaders, but not “good” in a worldly sense or influence or charisma, no the church needs good leaders who demonstrate right character and right competency.

And note this church, the lions share of the qualifications in this passage deal with a pastors character. Too many churches have prioritized competency, degrees and professional experience in their pastors over character in their pastors, and in doing so they have wounded themselves deeply, and wounded the pastor as well by letting him lead.

I had a chance to sit in on a pastoral internship meeting at Capitol Hill Baptist Church in DC once. Every Fall and Spring the church hosts a group of 6-8 men who desire to be in full-time ministry, and this internship is intense, in a span of 5 months the interns read 5000 pages and write about 100 papers. They meet weekly and discuss the papers they have submitted and the reading they’ve completed with Mark the pastor of Capitol Hill. In the meeting I attended one of the interns, Blake, had made a mistake. The paper was about the reformation and which began in 1517, and he had said

⁶ Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church: Fourth Edition*, pp. 209

it began in like 300 A.D. and Mark asked him why he thought it began then and Blake hung his head and drooped his shoulders and said, “I’m sorry I just got it wrong” — Now mind you, in the room, there were interns, all the church staff, and then all of us spectators so there was probably 25-30 people in this pastors office. And Blake got real quiet for awhile, and stopped contributing the the discussion which lead to Mark stopping the meeting and turn to Blake who was sitting on his left, right next to him. And he said, “Blake, do you feel inferior to these other brothers? Do you feel less than them because you didn’t graduate college?” You could hear a pin drop...And Blake said, “yes, I do” — And Mark looked him in the eye and said, “Blake, I’d take you over pastors with a phds all over their walls because if I poke you the Bible comes out.” And then Mark bear-hugged the guy right there and said, “I want you at this table and I expect you to participate.” Blake was competent to be at the table not but not because a professional education, but because he loved Jesus and loved God’s Word and his life displayed that love.

Paul prioritizes character in his list of qualifications alongside competency, but don’t think of this list as a spreadsheet, I want you to see it as a portrait:

One, a pastor aspires to pastor, the first verse says, “*If anyone aspires to the office of overseer*” (1 Ti 3:1) — A reluctant pastor is unhelpful and wont be useful for the church. An elder should aspire to the task of oversight. The word carries the weight of eager pursuit and desire, to pastor in the church one should aspire to the office.

Two, the office of overseer is reserved for men, “*he desires a noble task*” — though it is increasingly scandalous to say in our culture, the Bible is unambiguous that the office of pastor is reserved for men who were born men. The first group of men I worked with in our church plant to potentially become elders worked through this list we just read from 1 Timothy and I asked the group how they felt they measured up...and after reading the list and seeing high bar of the qualifications laid out, and one brother leaned forward and said, “Well...I am a male”

Three, Paul gives a blanket statement, “*an overseer must be above reproach,*” — this means that his behavior is exemplary, not perfect. If above reproach meant perfect than Timothy, Paul and everyone else not named Jesus would be disqualified. One author helpfully explains it this way, “*Being above reproach means that an elder is to be the kind of man whom no one suspects of wrongdoing and immorality. People would be shocked to hear this kind of man charged with such acts. Being above reproach does not mean that he maintains sinless perfection. It means that his demeanor and behavior over time have garnered respect and admiration from others. He lives a life worthy of the calling of God.*”⁷ That is what it means to be “above reproach.”

Four, this one can be touchy or confusing for some, but Paul writes “*he must be the husband of one wife.*” Now this refers to devotion not just divorce. Certainly men who have wrecked their marriages which ended in divorce, while claiming devotion to Jesus are disqualified from serving as pastors...But...There are godly men who met Jesus later in life after they previously divorced, or men who have remarried after a losing a spouse, so they have been married twice because of being a widower. Or what about the single Christian like perhaps Paul who is not married but wrote “*he must be the husband*” Should these be kept from this office if they are married or single and living in Christlike faith? I don’t think that’s what Paul is saying here. Because lets be honest there are men who may only be married once, but are awful husbands, devoted to themselves... those met do not meet this qualification because they can count

⁷ Thabiti Anyabwile, *Finding Faithful Elders and Deacons*, pp. 57

only one spouse. That's not what is happening here. Paul speaks of men whose marriages are marked by selfless devotion to their wives. Their love for their spouse looks like that Ephesians 5 love. What Paul is saying is that you should be able to observe a pastors marriage and say, I want our marriage to look more like that — again not perfect, but growing in Christlikeness.

And let me pause right here to speak to those of us who are married, particularly husbands. Perhaps you come in here this morning and your marriage feels like it is on the verge of collapse, or it even feels dead. Listen, the God who raised Jesus from the dead can breathe life into your marriage again. Yes, it will be hard. Yes, it will take time, but remember the promise of Galatians 6:9, “*9 And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.*”⁸ — Listen Husband/Wife lean into Jesus and lean on Jesus and trust him to rebuild what sin destroys. The gospel of our God has enough power to ransom sinners from death and there's enough power to rescue marriages that long ago felt destined for the dump heap.

How can you turn the ship around? It starts with honesty with yourself, your spouse and with other Christians. Find a couple in this church with whom you can share your struggles, who will listen to you, pray with you, care for you and strengthen you with the courage to keep going. Get counseling from a godly counselor who can direct you to the hope found in the gospel for you and for your marriage. Listen , The Lord does not desire for your marriage to be a statistic, he desires that your marriage would be a display of His gospel. And if you will abandon your self-saving efforts or self-destructing efforts the Lord can rescue, restore and revive your marriage.

Five, and elder should be *sober-minded*. This isn't about intoxication or intellect, but rather discernment. An overseer should be a careful thinker, one who is equipped to carefully think through matters of faith and practice.

Six, a pastor must possess *self-control*, impulsive men who do not show restraint in their lives are not fit to serve as pastors. A pastor should exercise control of themselves not giving in to every impulse and desire, or saying everything that comes to their minds. They listen more than they talk.

Seven, an elder must be *respectable*, that is their lives are such that people respect them. This isn't someone who has to demand that you respect them, but when you are around them you respect them because of the pattern of their lives.

Eight, an overseer is “*hospitable*” — with their time, resources, and homes a pastor is marked by hospitality. He makes time for people, he makes space for others in his routine and around his table. Hospitality is the mark of a pastor.

Nine, he must be able to teach, and not just have teaching skill. In Titus 1:9, Paul gives more detail to this qualification saying, “*9 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.*”⁹ — A pastor in the church should be able to instruct Christians and Non-Christians in biblical truth. He's not the Bible answer man, but when he teaches the Bible its clear that he has ability. This is a competency a pastor must have.

⁸ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ga 6:9.

⁹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Tt 1:9.

Ten, an elder is “*not a drunkard.*” An elder is not given to abusing alcohol. He is not a slave to the bottle.

Eleven, an overseer is “*not violent, but gentle*” — the character of an elder is that of courageous humility. They aren’t domineering and oppressive, but rather they respond with godliness. This doesn’t mean weak, some of us have bought in to a view of masculinity that assumes gentle means weak. If that is the case than we have a terribly weak Messiah. In Matthew 11, Jesus says, “*28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*”¹⁰ Church, gentleness is not weakness, there was no one stronger than the Lord Jesus and he describes himself as gentle. Dads would your children say you are gentle with them? Would your wife? If not, look to Jesus and learn from him.

Twelve, an elder is “*not quarrelsome*” — he doesn’t go around looking to pick fights and start arguments.

Thirteen, a pastor is “*not a lover of money,*” this has to do with greed. A pastor can make money and spend money, but he must not love it. His life must not be consumed by an overwhelming desire for wealth. Now some churches have used this as an excuse for paying pastors poorly, that is a twisting of this text. It’s not your job to keep a pastor in humble circumstance, God can do that, rather do not hire a pastor who is consumed by passion for material wealth.

Fourteen, Paul writes, “*4 He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, 5 for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church?*”(1 Ti 3:4–5) This requirement focuses on the family of a pastor. Does he lead his home well? That is the question. If a man desires to pastor but his home is in chaos it would be foolish to put him in church leadership. Again, this doesn’t mean perfection, but is it clear to outsiders that his home is marked by godly leadership. No elders are perfect husbands or fathers — if you want proof I have some expert witnesses to my shortcomings in the third row...but even though their families may not be perfect there is a harmony in the home that derives from the godly leadership of dad. Keeping children submissive does not mean perfection, so many pastors kids have been crushed by the weight of a church’s unhealthy and unrealistic expectations. Do us pastors a favor, and let our kids be kids, whether babies, teenagers or adults, expect the same from them that you would other kids. Don’t apply some weird super standard to them by twisting this text. The focus is on the character of the dad, not the actions of the children. Does he father well such that his children, sinful as they are, know their dad loves them?

Fifteen, “*He must not be a recent convert*” — a leader in the church should have time to mature in the faith before he is placed in leadership. This would be particularly challenging for Timothy as the church of the Lord Jesus had only been around a relatively short time, and this church was young. But nonetheless, Paul instructs timothy to resist rushing people into leadership. Again, like tasty bark on good barbecue, a good leader takes time to develop. And Paul warns against what can happen if a pastor is called too quickly, “*he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.*” There is a danger to the new, immature Christian who is placed in leadership too hastily, they may become arrogant and fall. Has this not proven true? Someone who is radically converted and far too quickly thrust into leadership because they had some knowledge and skill and without maturity their pride takes over and to use Paul’s earlier words they have made a shipwreck of their faith. Patience in calling pastors, elders and overseers is helpful to the church and to the potential pastor.

¹⁰ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mt 11:28–29.

Finally, **Sixteen**, “*7 Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.*” — What is his reputation like with non-Christians? That is what Paul is referring to with the term outsiders. Does the this brother have a good reputation at work, in the marketplace. Do non-Christians hate when he comes around, or are they glad to see him. How does he treat people? Is he a jerk? Is he condescending, or uncaring? Is he indifferent towards people he disagrees with, or even worse does he point out their flaws publicly in person, or online? What do people say of him? Paul says this matters again because if he is hated by outsiders, he might fall into disgrace.

This is the skills and requirements of any man who desires to be a pastor. Church this should be the lens through which you look at us who serve you as pastors, not some worldly corporate productivity scale. So let me land this plane with a few quick thoughts and applications:

1. If you take this list as a portrait the picture looks a lot like Jesus. Pastors and would be pastors should bear the aroma of Christ in their lives. Let’s look for pastors who resemble Jesus.
2. The false teachers in Ephesus had desire, but no competency or character. So we might build a pastoral equation like this. Desire - (character & competency) = **a false teacher**, but Desire + (character & competency) = **a faithful pastor**.
3. Perhaps for some men in here this text has birthed a desire to pastor in you, you see the list and you don’t want to run, you want to grow. Let that desire be known to David or myself and let us walk with you as you work through what that means for you.
4. Maybe you’ve listened to this sermon and thought, “pew glad none of this has to do with me.” Well, brother or sister, every requirement except being a male, being able to teach, and being a recent convert is repeated elsewhere in the New Testament of every follower of Jesus. Nearly all of this list applies to everyone who claims to be a disciple of Christ. Maybe you need to go back through this list and thank God for how he has grown some of these characteristics in you, and ask Him to help you grow by His Holy Spirit in those areas where you are weak.
5. Finally, brothers and sisters, can we not look at this list and be thankful? Thankful for Jesus who is the perfect overseer, who himself embodies everything here on this list, who cares for us as the Chief Shepherd, to the point of shedding his own blood on the cross for us and rising from the dead that we might have eternal life. Oh how wonderful Jesus is. And might we also give thanks for faithful pastors in our lives. Many of us here can look back and give thanks to God for the flawed but faithful men he gave us to shepherd us, to lead us and to care for us. Pastors who were for us the very hands and feet of Jesus.

Beloved church, that’s what this text is ultimately about. Seeing the love of God in the face of Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit. We all need faithful pastors because they point us over and over and over again to the love of God displayed in Christ Jesus. We don’t need charismatic business leaders who are productive or flashy, we need godly men who serve as faithful elders/pastors/overseers, who say time and time again, “look to Christ, look to Him, hope in Him, learn from Him, depend on Him for he will bring all of His sheep home to be with Him for all eternity...let’s pray.

