

Before We Lead We Must Learn to Serve

1 Timothy 3:4-13

“Dr. Ironside, when a boy, helped his widowed mother by working during vacations, Saturdays, and out-of-school for a Scottish shoemaker who was a Christian. He posted Bible verses all over the shop so that everywhere one looked, he would see the Word of God. No package went out to a customer without a tract or a word of testimony, and many came back for salvation.

“Dr. Ironside’s job was to pound leather for shoe soles. A piece of cowhide was cut to size, soaked in water, and pounded until it was hard and dry. After endless poundings, he was weary. One day, he noticed that another godless cobbler was not pounding, but was nailing the soles while still wet. “So they come back quicker,” was the reply. The Christian owner explained to Ironside: “I do not cobble just for 50¢ or 75¢ from customers. I do it for the glory of God. In heaven, I expect every shoe returned to me in a pile, and I do not want the Lord to say, “Dan, **that was a poor job. You did not do your best.**”¹

As we come to 1 Timothy 3:4 we see again Paul’s emphasis on home and family. An elder must have the ability to maintain the proper balance of discipline, control, and love within the family in order to demonstrate that he is capable of being trusted to properly manage the affairs of the church. Further, **he cannot be a recent convert** himself because it is highly unlikely that he could properly lead those who are more experienced.

1 Timothy 3:4-5 NLT:

⁴ **He must manage his own family well**, having children who respect and obey him.

⁵ *For if a man cannot manage his own household, how can he take care of God’s church?*

Assuming that the elder is a married man with children, he must be capable of managing his family in an appropriate manner. The concept of allowing a child to do as he pleases cannot be found in Scripture. Authority must be exercised, but exercised in such a way that the child will not become resentful or rebellious. That requires a great deal of

¹ Tan, Paul Lee: *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations : A Treasury of Illustrations, Anecdotes, Facts and Quotations for Pastors, Teachers and Christian Workers*. Garland TX : Bible Communications, 1996, c1979.

wisdom and love.²

God had commanded the Jews from the very beginning to have control of their children and instruct them in the ways of the Lord. That is what develops faithful leaders who will one day be able to be effective **elders** and **deacons** themselves. This is where the modern church has failed miserably. Parents are no longer teaching the Bible to their children, and I am specifically referring to the people that go to church. The problem of growing humanism, liberalism, secularism, and a few other isms in the church can be traced to the homes of the attendees of those churches. We are told that there are only about 5% of all teenagers in the country today who attend church. And when they come to church what are their options?

They can attend services where they very likely will not hear the truth of God's Word because of the liberal leanings of most churches, and/or they can then attend a youth group which is often nothing more than a social club. Consequently, when they go off to college they do not feel strong ties to the Lord or to the church. Hence, because they are not firmly grounded in the Word, they are vulnerable to believing the philosophies of the world and may well stay permanently disconnected from the Church.

And what about the little ones? Their parents put them in Sunday School during the service. Too many Sunday Schools today feel they have to entertain children, so they have dropped teaching methods that would help children learn Bible facts and Christian principles. Then they follow the entertainment up with some game and craft time. Now there is nothing wrong with this approach, when the visuals directly point to and underscore some teaching of Scripture. But when they have no real depth, it is only play time and the child really does not begin to be grounded in the Word of God. One thing that is notably missing in Sunday School today is Bible memorization. When I was a kid and my parents sent me to Sunday School, I remember we were required to memorize a lot of Bible verses. Childhood is the best time in a person's life to begin grounding them in the basic truths of the Bible. A child's mind is like a sponge and can just soak up things they are told to memorize. This is a practice that should be restored without delay.

Proverbs 22:6 NAS:

Train up a child in the way he should go, Even when he is old he will not depart from it.

Genesis 18:17-19 NLT:

¹⁷ "Should I hide my plan from Abraham?" the Lord asked.

¹⁸ "For Abraham will certainly become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed through him.

¹⁹ I have singled him out so that he will direct his sons and their families to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just. Then I will do for Abraham all that I have promised."

Psalms 78:1-4 NLT:

² Baker New Testament Commentary, 1 Timothy 3:1, p. 128

¹ *O my people, listen to my instructions. Open your ears to what I am saying,*
² *for I will speak to you in a parable. I will teach you hidden lessons from our past—*
³ *stories we have heard and known, stories our ancestors handed down to us.*
⁴ *We will not hide these truths from our children; we will tell the next generation about the glorious deeds of the Lord, about his power and his mighty wonders.*

Now as we conclude our look at elders we learn from Paul that they must **not be new converts.**

1 Timothy 3:6 HCSB:

⁶ *He must not be a new convert, or he might become conceited and fall into the condemnation of the Devil.*

So even if a person has all the characteristics we have previously discussed, if he/she has just recently asked Jesus into his/her life, they are not eligible to be an elder. A new convert could easily get puffed up if he is immediately put into a leadership position. Today, we see this often happening with celebrities who become Christians, and then are thrust into speaking publicly to congregations or conferences. However, we must keep in mind that choosing a new convert as an elder could have damaging results for that person as well as for the congregation. They might well become conceited, having been placed in such a position of responsibility and authority so quickly. In other places in the New Testament we see that God places great value on Christian growth and the experiences that lead to maturity. These two passages will give us an idea of what God wants for us:

Hebrews 5:13-14 ESV:

¹³ *for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child.*
¹⁴ *But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.*

Ephesians 4:13-15 NAS:

¹³ *until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.*
¹⁴ *As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;*
¹⁵ *but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ.*

One important reason Paul emphasizes the need to take time following salvation to be grounded in the Word is so that the new convert is not misled by false doctrine. They

have to know the true doctrine in order to discern what is false.

1 Timothy 6:3-5 HCSB:

³ *If anyone teaches other doctrine and does not agree with the sound teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ and with the teaching that promotes godliness,*

⁴ ***he is conceited**, understanding nothing, but having a sick interest in disputes and arguments over words. From these come envy, quarreling, slanders, evil suspicions,*

⁵ *and constant disagreement among men whose minds are depraved and deprived of the truth, who imagine that godliness is a way to material gain.*

And what does the Bible tell us pride will lead to?

1 John 2:15-17 HCSB:

¹⁵ *Do not love the world or the things that belong to the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him.*

¹⁶ *For everything that belongs to the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the **pride** in one's lifestyle—is not from the Father, but is from the world.*

¹⁷ *And the world with its lust is passing away, but the one who does God's will remains forever.*

Proverbs 16:18 HCSB:

¹⁸ ***Pride** comes before destruction, and an arrogant spirit before a fall.*

Paul himself, after his conversion in 33/34 A.D., spent three years in Arabia before doing effective work at Tarsus and Antioch. He was not commissioned to go on his first missionary journey until ten years after his conversion.³

Paul has now completed his list of requirements for an elder. As we come to 1 Timothy 3:7, we see that Paul turns his attention to how the elder is perceived by those who are not members of the church.

1 Timothy 3:7 NAS:

⁷ *And he (the elder)⁴ must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he will not fall into **reproach** and the snare of the devil.*

So an elder must also have a good reputation outside the church. If you are like us, a good number of people we come in contact with every day are unbelievers. One of the main purposes of Christ's Church is to point people toward Christ. That will be very difficult to do if those people do not hold an elder or pastor in high regard. It is necessary that those outside the church see that a church leader conducts his affairs and relationships with

³ Baker New Testament Commentary, 1 Timothy 3:1, p.129

⁴ Parentheses mine.

honesty, integrity, and kindness.

1 Thessalonians 4:1-12 NLT:

¹ Finally, dear brothers and sisters, we urge you in the name of the Lord Jesus to live in a way that pleases God, as we have taught you. You live this way already, and we encourage you to do so even more.

² For you remember what we taught you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.

³ **God's will is for you to be holy, so stay away from all sexual sin.**

⁴ Then each of you will control his own body and live in holiness and honor—

⁵ not in lustful passion like the pagans who do not know God and his ways.

⁶ Never harm or cheat a Christian brother in this matter by violating his wife, for the Lord avenges all such sins, as we have solemnly warned you before.

⁷ God has called us to live holy lives, not impure lives.

⁸ Therefore, anyone who refuses to live by these rules is not disobeying human teaching but is rejecting God, **who gives his Holy Spirit to you.**

⁹ But we don't need to write to you about the importance of loving each other, for God himself has taught you to love one another.

¹⁰ Indeed, you already show your love for all the believers throughout Macedonia. Even so, dear brothers and sisters, we urge you to **love them even more.**

¹¹ Make it your goal to live a quiet life, minding your own business and working with your hands, just as we instructed you before.

¹² Then people who are not Christians will respect the way you live, and you will not need to depend on others.

“Paul was concerned that these believers **not be dependent on anybody**. This was a call to financial independence. We are not to make ourselves a burden to anyone, **although those who are truly in need may accept the generosity of others** (2 Corinthians 8--9). To presume upon brotherly love and generosity and so evade the responsibility of work and providing for oneself or family was not acceptable to Paul.”⁵

2 Thessalonians 3:10 NAS:

For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either.

Instead of lazy behavior, Paul urged Christians to:

⁵ Knute Larson, *Holman New Testament Commentary – I & II Thessalonians, I & II Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, ed. Max Anders (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2000), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 57.

Colossians 4:2-6 NLT:

² *Devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart.*

³ *Pray for us, too, that God will give us many opportunities to speak about his mysterious plan concerning Christ. That is why I am here in chains.*

⁴ *Pray that I will proclaim this message as clearly as I should.*

⁵ **Live wisely among those who are not believers, and make the most of every opportunity.**

⁶ *Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone.*

Anyone not following these teachings and still being elected to the office of elder may become very arrogant thinking that he/she can get away with whatever he/she wants to do. That person will then make themselves vulnerable to falling into the devil's trap and thus fall under his power as well. An elder must be above **reproach** both inside and outside the church, both to protect himself/herself from giving in to the temptations of the devil as well as to reflect the glory of God from the church onto those who are unbelievers.

Then Paul turns his attention to another group of leaders in the Church.

1 Timothy 3:8-13 NAS:

⁸ **Deacons** *likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain,*

⁹ *but **holding to the mystery of the faith** with a clear conscience.*

¹⁰ *These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are **beyond reproach**.*

¹¹ **Women** *must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things.*

¹² *Deacons must be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households.*

¹³ *For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.*

One commentary has these remarks about this passage:

‘Like elders **deacons** must also be men of dignity and quality, even though their function in the congregation is significantly different. The word translated ‘**deacon**’ (*diakonos*) means literally a ‘**humble servant**.’ The role of the deacons is to carry out, under the elders’ oversight, some of the more menial tasks of the church so that the elders can give their attention to more important things.”⁶

Remember Acts 6 where some were chosen to minister to the physical needs of the

⁶ *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 738.

congregation and others were to spend their time studying and teaching the Word.

It is most important for deacons to hold tightly to their faith in the truth about Jesus Christ, and their conduct must be consistent with that faith (verse 9).

Like the elders, a deacon was also expected to give evidence of his maturity in the faith before being entrusted with this responsibility. Therefore, his behavior would be observed over an adequate period of time to ascertain his true character as he went about his daily life. Paul is not suggesting “*A Deacon Evaluation Program*” here but rather that these men “*prove*” their quality over time in the ordinary activities of life and ministry. Having shown themselves worthy they could then assume the office of deacon. Probably, they would also have been through God’s personalized training program as described in James 1.

James 1:2-4 NLT:

² *Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy.*

³ *For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow.*

⁴ *So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.*

Then in 1 Timothy 3:11 Paul tells us that women as well, in the same manner, must be worthy of dignity and respect.⁷

Who are these “*women*” (*gynaikas*) Paul addressed? They were almost certainly not the women of the congregation generally. They were most likely either the wives of the deacons or a group of female deacons, as Paul described Phoebe in Romans 16:1 NLT:⁸

¹ *I commend to you our sister **Phoebe**, who is a deacon in the church in Cenchrea ((sen’ kree-uh)).⁹*

Deacons, like elders, should have one wife and be faithful and devoted to her alone. They should also demonstrate the ability to properly manage their homes and families. You might want to go back and review our discussion of 1 Timothy 3:4-5.

Now, lest you think the position of deacon carried with it an image of menial servitude which the outside world would view as having little importance, remember what Christ said in Mark 10.

⁷ The same word, *semnas*, is used of deacons in v. 8, not slanderers (*diabolous*, from *diaballō* “to slander”; from this verb comes the noun “devil,” the chief slanderer) of others, but temperate (*nēphalious*, “well-balanced”; cf. v. 2; Titus 2:2), and trustworthy (lit., “faithful”) in everything; *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p.739.

⁸ *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 1 Timothy 3:11, p.739.

⁹ Pronunciation added, *Harper’s Bible Dictionary*.

Mark 10:35-45 NLT:

³⁵ Then **James and John**, the sons of Zebedee, came over and spoke to him. “Teacher,” they said, “we want you to do us a favor.”

³⁶ “What is your request?” he asked.

³⁷ They replied, “When you sit on your glorious throne, we want to sit in places of honor next to you, one on your right and the other on your left.”

³⁸ But Jesus said to them, “You don’t know what you are asking! Are you able to drink from the bitter cup of suffering I am about to drink? Are you able to be baptized with the baptism of suffering I must be baptized with?”

³⁹ “Oh yes,” they replied, “we are able!” Then Jesus told them, “You will indeed drink from my bitter cup and be baptized with my baptism of suffering.”

⁴⁰ But I have no right to say who will sit on my right or my left. God has prepared those places for the ones he has chosen.”

⁴¹ When the ten other disciples heard what James and John had asked, they were indignant.

⁴² So Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them.”

⁴³ But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant,

⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of everyone else.

⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Those who submit to their role as a servant of the Lord and to their fellow believers are those who are most capable of leadership among their fellow brothers and sisters. They will also find themselves in a very secure place in their personal relationship with Christ. Assuming the role of a servant flies in the face of everything the world tells us we must pursue. The world seeks after wealth, power, pleasure, self-fulfillment, while the servant of the Lord seeks only obedience to the will of God. This servant will find more fulfillment in obedience to his/her Lord and Master than any dictator, CEO, movie star, sports super star, or entertainer will ever experience. Ignoring all those things that the world offers for the recognition that most people seek, is a true test of the state of a person’s heart. Ernest Blevins has said, “*The best exercise for the heart is reaching down and lifting people up.*”¹⁰ When a deacon embeds his ministry in the lives of others it continuously allows for the growth of his/her faith in Christ and reflects to others what a sincere faith in Christ looks like.

“In the Louvre, in Paris, there is a famous painting by Murillo. It is entitled ‘The Miracle of San Diego.’ A door opens, and two noblemen and a priest enter a kitchen. They are amazed to find that all the kitchen-maids are angels. One is handling a water-pot, another a joint of meat, a third a

¹⁰ From *Quote Unquote* by Lloyd Cory. Wheaton IL: Victor Books, 1977, p. 293.

basket of vegetables, a fourth is tending the fire. The message of the picture is that **no labour** is common unless we make it so. Jesus Christ Himself toiled in a workshop.”¹¹

The Prayer of Saint Francis

"O Lord, make me an instrument of Thy Peace!

Where there is hatred, let me sow love;

Where there is injury, pardon;

Where there is discord, harmony;

Where there is doubt, faith;

Where there is despair, hope;

Where there is darkness, light, and

Where there is sorrow, joy.

*Oh Divine Master, grant that I may not
so much seek to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand; to be loved
as to love; for it is in giving that we receive;*

*It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life."*

"The simple prayer of **St. Francis of Assisi** provides for us a mold in which to cast our own life's conduct and character. It provides a blueprint upon which to pattern our living in our thoughts, speech and actions within our day to day relationships with our fellow beings and with all life around us. Therefore, the prayer of St. Francis is a precious document for us, an indispensable, invaluable frame of reference by which to judge our own lives, and referring to which we can do the necessary things to bring about the needed alterations and modifications for the lifting up and purification of our own daily life."¹²

Let us go forth to our daily lives, no matter how ordinary or routine they may seem, looking for ways to be the best servants we can be--serving others, but recognizing that in doing so, we are really serving our Lord by walking in His footsteps.

¹¹ Tan, Paul Lee: *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations : A Treasury of Illustrations, Anecdotes, Facts and Quotations for Pastors, Teachers and Christian Workers*. Garland TX : Bible Communications, 1996, c1979.

¹² <http://www.dlshq.org/saints/francis.htm>