

# Overseeing the Church

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[ 0 : 00 ] If you're in 1 Timothy chapter 3, would you stand with me as we honor the reading of God's! Just reading verse 1, chapter 3, verse 1.

The saying is trustworthy, If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. May God add a blessing to the reading of his word.

Would you please be seated? I grew up in a Nazarene church, attended a Nazarene college, graduated from a Southern Baptist seminary while I was working as a youth pastor in the United Methodist Church.

The first church that I pastored was associated with the American Baptist denomination. And so I joke that I'm a denominational mutt.

I've seen how different churches and denominations govern themselves through different types of leadership structures and models.

[ 1 : 20 ] I'm not going to get into all the variations of leadership and the models that there are in the more than 200 different Christian denominations that exist in our country.

Some of you might think that that would be interesting to hear about, but most of you probably wouldn't. I think that there are a lot of Christians who, when they come to passages like 1 Timothy chapter 3, skip over them and any other scriptures that talk about church leadership because they don't think that they have anything to grow from spiritually in reading those passages.

Or they skip over them, I think, because honestly they're just stuck in their ways. They are more devoted to their traditions. They are more devoted to their ways of doing things or their church's ways of doing things than what the Bible says.

As I mentioned a couple of weeks ago, the Bible should always be reforming us as we read it.

When we notice that we are not doing something that Scripture commands, we need to reform our ways, our thoughts, to do the things that God has called us to do.

[ 2 : 49 ] To do things the way that God has called us to do them. And this was Paul's primary concern, not just in 1 Timothy, but in all the letters that he wrote in the Bible.

His goal wasn't to promote church growth, but church purity, which he hoped would result in healthy churches, healthy church members, who were growing in their likeness to Jesus Christ.

Spiritually healthy churches have spiritually healthy members who are led by spiritually healthy leaders qualified to oversee the Lord's church.

The Apostle Paul, under the Holy Spirit's inspiration, wrote this letter to Timothy. Remember, a young man pastoring the church in Ephesus.

Paul had started the church in Ephesus, and he served for a time there as its pastor. And on his third missionary journey, as he made his way to Jerusalem, he called for the leaders, the elders of the church in Ephesus, to meet them in the nearby town of Miletus.

[ 4 : 03 ] Paul knew that he faced opposition in Jerusalem. He anticipated that the opposition that he faced for his proclamation of the gospel would be so severe that he would never see these men ever again.

He would never see these leaders in the church, these elders, these overseers ever again. And so in Acts chapter 20, verse 28 through 32, it records what Paul thought would be his final instructions to these leaders of the church in Ephesus.

We read those instructions in verses 28 through 32. He says to them, 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.

I know that after my departure, fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. And from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things to draw away the disciples after

them.

Therefore, be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

[ 5 : 25 ] Paul was arrested in Jerusalem and he was taken to Rome where there he wrote Philemon, Colossians, Philippians, and Ephesians. After his release from that imprisonment, he wrote this letter to Timothy.

And what we learn from this letter is that the problem that Paul warned the Ephesian elders about in Acts chapter 20 became a reality. Some of the elders had gone rogue.

And Paul had returned to Ephesus. He began the work of reforming the church by disciplining and removing two of those wolves whose names are Hymenaeus and Alexander.

We read about them in 1 Timothy chapter 1 verse 20. And then Paul left Timothy in Ephesus to continue the work of reforming the church as he journeyed on to visit other churches.

He gave Timothy these instructions, which we read about in chapter 1 verses 3 through 4. As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith.

[ 6 : 47 ] The false teachers in Ephesus had created disorder in the church. And Timothy's task was to reform, to reorder the church according to God's instructions as he waited for Paul to return.

And Paul tells him this was his purpose for writing the letter in chapter 3 verses 14 through 15. I hope to come to you soon, but 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, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and a buttress of the truth.

In chapter 1, Paul instructed Timothy to counter false teachings with the truth of the gospel. In chapter 2, Paul gives instruction for the church when it gathers for worship.

They are to prioritize prayer and to adhere to the roles God has uniquely given to men and to women. And now in chapter 3, Paul directs his focus from the church's worship to the church's leaders.

These men were to assist Timothy, serving as co-shepherds to tend to the sheep and to protect them from wolves, from the false teachers who sought to deceive them and to devour them.

[ 8 : 14 ] In chapter 3 verses 1 through 7, Paul lists the qualifications Timothy should look for in considering men who would help him oversee, who would help him as elders, who would help him oversee this church.

And so from this text, we see that our main idea is that God renders oversight of his church to men qualified to lead.

God renders oversight of his church to men qualified to lead. Paul had warned the Ephesian elders about wolves back in Acts chapter 20, and before that, Jesus warned about wolves who would devour his followers.

In his Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 7 verses 15 through 20, he says, Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from the thorn bushes or figs from thistles? So every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit.

[ 9 : 21 ] A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, you will recognize them by their fruits.

So as believers, it is critical that we heed our Lord's warning and hold our leaders and those who we may consider to lead our church to the qualifications that Paul lays out here in chapter 3. Otherwise, we run the risk of having to endure the deception, disorder, and devastation that Satan seeks to inflict on the church of Jesus Christ through wolves, through false teachers who are dressed in sheep's clothing.

If we ignore these instructions, churches will pattern themselves after the world's leadership models instead of our Lord's leadership model. In that case, pastors become CEOs.

Elders become like a board of directors. Staff members become more like managers. Members are treated like shareholders or loyal clients, and visitors are seen as potential customers whom the church will try to attract by any means necessary to boost their numbers.

One thing we read and we see about Jesus in the Gospels is that Jesus didn't care about drawing large crowds. Oftentimes, he would send them away because of the hard things that he had to say. [11:00] He cared about making disciples. And so should those whom he calls to lead his church. This text is important for everyone in the church, whether they currently serve as an elder, or may one day serve as an elder, or who will never serve as an elder.

If you want our church to please the Lord, then we must make it our ambition to please him. And a big part of that is making sure that our elders lead us to be more like Christ and less like the world. That they keep us focused on our mission as the church. That they protect us from wolves and their deceptions, which contradict our doctrines and create disorder in the church.

And so today we're going to focus on verse 1 and three aspects of the kind of men God calls to lead his church by providing oversight to his sheep.

Maybe you're here this morning, you're not a Christian, and this is all new to you. Maybe you think this message on church leadership has nothing to do with you.

[12:18] It does. There are a lot of false teachers out there in the world who are being used by Satan to deceive you.

And you need to be able to detect, just as we need to be able to detect, the difference between a true shepherd and a ravenous wolf. But what you most need to know is about Jesus Christ, who is the good shepherd.

And you're going to hear about him today. And I hope that he will draw you into his fold to make you a part of his flock. That you will know him as the good shepherd who gave his life for his sheep.

And so we look at three aspects here. And the first of an overseer is that they recognize the significance of their leadership role. An overseer recognizes the significance of their leadership role. Paul starts out saying, this saying is trustworthy. This phrase is unique to Paul. He uses it five other times in his pastoral epistles.

[13:29] And each time he uses it to introduce something of great importance. Here he uses it to stress the importance of leadership in the church. And that it not be something that leaders or church members take lightly.

This was obvious in Paul's day. And the early church, being a leader in the church, put a target squarely on your back.

Christians were persecuted for their faith. And especially those who led the church, who proclaimed the gospel, they were receiving even more threats.

More beatings. More imprisonments. And sometimes killed. And that's still the case in many places in our world today. But in America, many people seek the ministry for the wrong reasons.

They desire money. Maybe job security. Prestige. Authority. They don't truly realize the significance of their leadership role, which should follow Jesus' example of servant leadership.

[14:44] In Matthew chapter 20, Jesus responds to a request from the mother of James and John, two of his disciples.

And the request is that he would promote them to high positions on his right and on his left in his kingdom. The other ten disciples hear about this request and they get really angry with James and John.

And I think they're angry because they probably had the same desire. They were mad that James and John and their mother beat them to the punch before they could ask.

And look at what Jesus said to them about what true leadership entails in Matthew 20, verses 25 through 28. Jesus called them to him and he said, You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them and their great ones exercise authority over them.

It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant and whoever would be first among you must be your slave. Those whom the Lord renders oversight of his church to are those who must follow his example of leadership.

[16:13] They aren't in it for themselves. They're in it to serve the Lord for his glory. They're in it for others. They seek Jesus' glory, not their own. They lead by following Jesus and his example.

They shepherd his sheep. They don't devour his sheep. Before continuing on, I think it's important here to just stop and address this office of overseer that Paul mentions.

The Greek word is episkopos. It's the same word Paul uses to address the Ephesian elders in Acts chapter 20 where he exhorts them again to pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.

In the ESV it says to care for. And that word in the Greek is poimeon and it's a word used for shepherding. That's how you care for them is that you shepherd them.

You shepherd the church. Elders oversee the church. They oversee the spiritual well-being of the church's members by teaching them, by guiding them, by protecting the congregation.

[ 17 : 29 ] They shepherd the church and its members by encouraging them to adhere to sound doctrine and obedience to the Bible's instruction and disciplining them if they don't.

Elders are overseers who pastor, shepherd the church's members. Like Timothy, Paul left Titus in Crete to put the churches there in order.

And he gives him similar instruction to appoint elders in the churches and he uses the words, the terms, elders and overseer interchangeably. Look with me at Titus chapter 1 verses 5 through 9.

This is why I left you in Crete so that you might put what remained into order and appoint elders in every town as I directed you. If anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife and his children are believers and do not open the charge of debauchery or insubordination.

For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain but hospitable.

[ 18 : 37 ] A lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. 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.

So again, elders are overseers who pastor the church together. And the pattern of the New Testament church is that there be more than one elder.

Acts chapter 14 verse 23 records that Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey, it says there in Acts 14 23 that they had appointed elders for them in every church.

With prayer and fasting, they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed. In Acts chapter 15 verse 2, verse 4, verse 6, verse 22, and verse 23, we see that elders joined with the apostles at the Jerusalem Council where they decided a major issue that was facing the church.

The New Testament pattern is a plurality, more than one, serving as elders in the church, providing oversight as they shepherd the congregation together.

[ 19 : 57 ] Now, while one of the qualifications for an elder is that they be able to teach, in 1 Timothy chapter 3 verse 2, Paul notes that some will serve primarily as the church's main preacher or teacher.

In 1 Timothy 5 17, he says, Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. And it appears that Timothy was the main teaching, preaching pastor in Ephesus.

Whatever leadership structure you're used to or you've seen in the church, please understand that the Bible's example and instruction is for the church to be led by a group of men who are qualified to oversee the church and who recognize the significance of that role.

The church should also, its members, recognize the significance of that role too. I've seen, I'm sure maybe you have seen, how some churches will hand over leadership to a man because he's prominent in the community, because he's vocal in the church's business meetings, or because he has a charismatic personality.

But if they don't meet the qualifications, if they don't recognize the significance of the role of an overseer, then they're not prepared, they're not ready to lead, which leads me to the second aspect that we see in this verse of an overseer.

[ 21 : 33 ] An overseer is ready to serve in their leadership role. They are ready to serve in their leadership role. Verse 1 again, moving on.

If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, Paul says, he desires a noble task. John MacArthur says, those who seek the office of overseer must have a spirit-given, compelling desire for it.

Aspires in the Greek is oregeō, which appears only here and in 1 Timothy 6, verse 10, and in Hebrews 11, 16, only three times.

It's a word that means to reach out after, to stretch oneself in order to touch or to grasp something. So this would be like when the car keys fall between the seats, and you're reaching down, and you're pulling muscles to try to get your hands on them.

Or it would be like an athlete who stretches out, jumps in the air to try to catch the ball. Or maybe this is more relatable.

[ 22 : 48 ] It's like that item at the grocery store that's on the top shelf. It's the last thing you need to complete your recipe. And so you're looking like a fool, maybe even, in the aisle just reaching and closing your eyes and imagining, I'm almost touching it, right?

And you're trying to grasp it. You have to have it. That's the imagery that Paul talks about here, of this desire to lead as an elder.

Desire is from *epithumeo*, which means a passionate compulsion. In this context, it is a desire for something that is good.

While the word *aspire* relates to outward actions, desire relates to an inner compulsion, an inner desire, a fire.

Taken together, the two terms describe a man who outwardly pursues the ministry because they have this inward compulsion, this inward drive, this inner desire.

[ 23 : 53 ] They are willing then to do whatever it takes to prepare themselves and ready themselves to take on this noble task. They have both the aspiration and the desire.

Some men have the aspiration, but they don't have the desire. They want the title, but not the responsibility.

They want the seminary degree, but they don't want a shepherd, the Lord's sheep. Other men have the desire, but not the aspiration. They want to pastor, but they're not self-disciplined enough or willing enough to sacrifice and to achieve to acquire what they desire.

Again, I think John MacArthur is helpful here. He says, the man truly called to the ministry is marked by both an inward consuming passion and a disciplined outward pursuit.

For him, the ministry is not the best option. It is the only option. There is nothing else he could do with his life that would fulfill him. Accordingly, he works diligently to prepare himself to be qualified for service.

[ 25 : 07 ] While some may be called later in life, from that point on, nothing else will do. Having oversight of the church is no small task.

It's a sobering responsibility. A lot of people, again, want the title of pastor or elder without doing what is necessary to earn it because they aren't ready to do the work or take on the responsibility of shepherding the sheep who don't always want to be shepherded or who sometimes would prefer a different shepherd.

And so we read things like Hebrews 13, 17, which give a good reminder to both elders, shepherds, and sheep. Obey your leaders and submit to them for they are keeping watch over your souls as those who will have to give an account.

Let them do this with joy and not with groaning for that would be of no advantage to you. Now some, if they're an elder, if they're a leader, they like the obey and submit part, but they lose sight of the fact that they will give an account to the Lord for each person entrusted to their care.

Maybe you're not as excited about church growth. If you read that verse. James 3, 1 adds, not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

[ 26 : 37 ] If you desire to be an elder, if you have expressed a call to vocational full-time ministry, what are you doing about it? How are you readying yourself for that?

One thing you should do is read over the qualifications Paul lists in the preceding verses and strive to measure up to those standards, those qualifications.

If you think you are called again to vocational ministry, what are you doing right now to ready yourself for that? And what are you waiting for if you're not doing anything?

Jesus called the disciples. He called them to follow him, but they still had to get up and follow him, which meant leaving behind all the things that they were familiar with and were comfortable with, the fishing nets, their jobs, in some cases their families.

But they had to do it because Jesus called them and they were willing to do it. They were willing to follow.

[ 27 : 58 ] They were compelled by an inner desire to follow Jesus, to follow his calling. I know for me, after college, I got a promotion in the company that I was working for.

I went from in college toughing it out in the warehouse to sitting in a soft chair behind a desk. Never had a job like that before.

And there was opportunity, but I didn't have the aspiration and I didn't have the desire for that job.

I was miserable. I wasn't doing what I knew the Lord had called me to do. And so after about six months, I walked into my boss's office and I told him that I'm quitting and I'm going to seminary. And he looked at me like I was crazy. I didn't have another job lined up and I wasn't a very good student. But I knew that there was nothing else I could do.

[ 29 : 14 ] I could be miserable pursuing a career that I didn't have any passion for or I could be obedient to the Lord.

And it was not easy, but it's been worth it. I couldn't imagine doing anything else. Maybe you've been in ministry and you've been burned out by all the things that go on with being in ministry and you need a break and that's okay.

But don't give up. The Lord has called you. He's called you to endure. Don't get bitter and in your bitterness grow to despise the Lord's bride who is the church.

Leading is hard work. Servant leadership is even harder work because you're supposed to care about the people that you're leading. But if you have the aspiration and the desire, those feelings won't go away.

Elders have the ability to teach. And if God has equipped you to be the elder who shoulders most of the preaching, you have to have the desire and the aspiration to be ready to do that.

[ 30 : 32 ] 2 Timothy 4, 1 through 2, Paul talks about that. I charge you, speaking to Timothy directly, in the presence of God and of Jesus Christ who is the judge, the living and the dead and by his appearing in his kingdom, preach the word.

Be ready in season and out of season. Reprove, rebuke, and exhort with complete patience and teaching.

And I know again for me, whenever I don't preach, I feel strange. I feel out of sorts. It's like something in me is missing. I feel useless.

I have to do it. I don't have another option. Elders are men who are ready to proclaim God's word. whether that's preaching, teaching a Bible study, or a Sunday school class, they are ready to proclaim God's word.

[ 31 : 32 ] They are eager to protect the church against false teachings that contradicts God's word and produce men and women and children who are equipped through their oversight for the work of the ministry.

Now we get to the third aspect. An overseer receives the responsibility of their leadership role. An overseer receives the responsibility of their leadership role.

Again, Paul says at the end of verse 1 that this is a noble task. Elders are overseers who receive a lot of responsibility from the Lord to shepherd his people.

They are to rule. 1 Timothy chapter 5, verse 17. They are to teach and model Christ's likeness in the churches, in their homes, and in the community. 1 Timothy 3, 2 through 7.

They are to pray for the sick, James 5, 14, and care for the church, 1 Peter 5, verses 1 through 2. They are to ordain, set aside other leaders and make sure that they are ready for the task of overseeing the church.

[ 32 : 44 ] 1 Timothy chapter 4, verse 14. Because it is a task. The Greek word translated as task means to labor to the point of exhaustion.

Like mowing your lawn on a hot, humid, summer afternoon in Oklahoma. We're almost there. We're almost there. You're mowing, you're hot, you're soaking in sweat, you feel disgusting, you're covered in grass, you're covered in dirt.

Maybe you take a break and you probably should so you don't overheat and potentially die or something like that. You need to take a break.

But even in taking a break, you know that you can't leave the lawn halfway done. You have to finish. And so you're, even though you're tired, even though you're ready to be done, you keep going until the work is completed.

[ 33 : 44 ] And by the end of it, you are again soaked in sweat, you are covered in grass, you are in need of a cold glass of water and a hot shower. It's working to the point of exhaustion.

But it's a good work. Overseeing the church is not a nine-to-five job that you can just pack up your stuff, walk out the door, and forget about it for the rest of the evening.

Paul talks about his task in Colossians 1, 28 through 29. And it's a task that elders share. It says, him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me. There is toil, plowing, planting, picking weeds, watering, but God causes the growth and God gives the energy for the work.

It's a big responsibility, but it's a good responsibility. Elders are stewards who the Lord has entrusted to lead his church, to lead his sheep, to lead his bride.

[ 35 : 12 ] They are men who meet the qualifications. They recognize the significance of the role and they are ready to serve in the role. And they receive the responsibility to shepherd the good shepherd's sheep.

And so how do we adjust to this one verse that we've read? I think it's to respect the position of men chosen to lead the church.

Respect the position of men chosen to lead the church. I didn't just use respect because it's another R word and I needed an R word. And I also don't mean this in the way as an elder or for our elders to say that you guys should just respect us.

If you have to tell someone to respect you it's probably because you haven't acted very respectably. By respect I mean the position.

The position of leadership in the church. Whether you serve in that position or you don't serve in that position we need to respect the position.

[ 36 : 19 ] And so how do we respect this position? It's by the fact that we don't just lay hands on anyone. who says hey I'm I want to do that. You know we don't just say okay well nobody else will do it.

So we're going to lay hands on you and we're going to give you this task without making sure that you meet the qualifications. That's how we respect the position as well is that we make sure that those who would serve as elders, overseers, pastors meet the qualifications and those who serve in those roles continue to meet the qualifications.

In our sinful nature we would be quick to set aside a man like the rich young ruler whom Jesus encountered. But the Lord though he called him to follow him he was not willing to go.

He calls men who are willing to serve to receive the role who respect and understand the role and ultimately they're men who lead by following the good shepherd Jesus Christ.

How was Jesus the good shepherd? He gave his life. He gave his life for his sheep.

[ 37 : 49 ] He died in their place. He made the ultimate sacrifice that by faith in him will have eternal life.

And so if you don't know anything about you know church or leadership or elders it doesn't matter unless you know who the good shepherd is. and I hope that today he reveals himself to you and that you will follow him.

As for the rest of us if you're serving as elders the ultimate example we have is Jesus who gave his all who gave his life who sacrificed himself for our good and we should do the same.

And for those who are in the church that's the expectation you should have of those whom the Lord has called you to lead. You should know them. They should know you.

And you should see them serving in these roles that remind you of Jesus. And a church who does that will be a church whose aim is to please the Lord and will be a church whom the Lord will do great things through for his glory.

[ 39 : 02 ] Let's pray. Lord we thank you for the leaders that you give to your church.

God we thank you for their willingness to receive the call, to understand the importance of the responsibility and who like you don't seek to use that position to lord it over others, to use their authority in abusive ways, but who seek Lord to serve in their leadership and following the example that you set.

Lord we pray for the elders of our church God as we continue to go through 1 Timothy chapter 3 as we look at these qualifications God thank you for men who meet them. Thank you for men who are willing to lead and who are willing to lead by following you and who are willing to do the hard things. when it comes time to do the hard things but who make decisions for this church because they love you and they desire that you would be glorified in this place.

Lord thank you for the men that you've given to our church to lead and for those whom in the future you may call to lead and for those now Lord who maybe you have called them to serve full time in ministry.

[ 40 : 32 ] Lord if you've called them we pray that they would do work with you to ensure that they have both the aspiration and the desire and if one is lacking Lord to seek you and to find out why that is and that you would do work with them as you help them to wrestle with that.

But Lord we pray that as your church that we would continue to be in your word and doing what your word says. Lord no matter what our traditions might have been in the past no matter what our thoughts or opinions or feelings might be Lord ultimately you are right and you've given us your word for instruction and I pray Lord that we would all submit to it and be in obedience to it because God ultimately we see that your ways are best that your ways are true and Lord you've given us a mission to go out and make disciples and we will be failures in that mission if we do not order ourselves and conduct ourselves in the way that you've called us and commanded us to do in your church and so Lord may we all have the aspiration and the desire to be the kind of church that you've called us to be and we pray that you'd be glorified by all that results from that. We ask these things in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.