

## Church Leadership p2

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**Bible Text:** 1 Timothy 3:1-7  
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Well, take your Bibles and let's go to 1 Timothy 3 and let's continue in our preaching through this text on the topic of church leadership as we are calling the church family to seek the Lord about whom he may have called and set apart for the office of elder here at Grace Life Church. Whether it's one or more than one, I don't know what that means. I think our policy states a specific number and we'll go by that until we vote to change it, I guess, but we want what God wants. It's his church. We believe that by his Spirit through the ministry of his word, he calls and sets apart men to the office of elder or pastor or overseer, three words but all define the same office in the church.

1 Timothy 3, beginning in verse 1, we'll go down through verse 7. Paul is writing to his associate, his understudy, Timothy, as he's training him and equipping him for ministry, mentoring him, and he begins in 1 Timothy 3:1 this way,

1 It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. 2 An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, 3 not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. 4 He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity 5 (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?), 6 and not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. 7 And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

Then in verse 8 he picks up with the other office, deacons, and we might look at that a little further down the road.

In review, we begin by saying that elders or pastors, while they are not essential to the being of a church, churches in the New Testament, churches we now sponsor as church plants, actually began with no pastor but pastors are overseers or elders are certainly essential for the well-being of God's church and the maturation and the advancement of his church. We find here in this text that Paul very heavily puts the weight on the character of the man in the office rather than even the function of the office. I'm not

saying that's unimportant but there are gifted people who can perform certain things well but they do not have the spiritual and moral character for the office. Then, of course, sometimes there's a person, as a matter of fact, many times, well, I know it's the case here at Grace Life where there are many many many men who are of outstanding spiritual and moral character but they may not feel led nor may the church feel led to install them as an elder or a pastor. So we're not saying these are the godliest men in the church, we're saying these are godly men who God has ordained to be pastors and elders. In fact, I think overwhelmingly so, the blessing and the strength of Grace Life Church is that he's just scattered all through our congregation very mature and sound people and you're a blessing and a wonderful people to pastor because of that. But for this office in particular, there is a weighty amount put on the truth of one's character spiritually and morally.

Now, we talked about how does God make it clear who he's calling. Well, we talked about in the Old Testament God would often speak from heaven. Jesus called Abram and speak to a prophet and call him into the work. In the New Testament, Jesus would journey around and announce to a person, "Come and follow me." Then after that era closed and we have the completed Canon of Scripture, there are three things that we look for. First of all, there has to be that desire in the man himself. Something is churning, there is a passion in his heart for God's truth and the well-being of God's church, and he feels so compelled to be a part of protecting that and advancing that. Now, again, you can have that and not be an elder or a pastor, but an elder and a pastor must have that.

Secondly, that person must meet the biblical qualifications and we'll do our best, I'm going to be gone from you for two Sundays but when we come back, we'll do our best to outline that in a couple of weeks.

And then thirdly, he must have the affirmation of the present elders and the church body at large. As I've told you, there are some good churches, some good pastors that we highly respect who following the strong New Testament pattern do not believe that even the congregation votes in these matters or affirms, is the word we use. We're not quite there. I respect what they do. I don't think they're necessarily unbiblical but I think the present elders should lead, of course, and qualify at some stage, but the final affirmation should be the church body at large. And then once the church body at large says, "Yes, we've prayed. We do have sense and believe that God has set this man apart for this office," obviously you're putting a great amount of confidence in your present elders to have led in that process, and then after you affirm that and you sense that's God's leading, then you are putting yourself under that person's authority as a church elder. And we believe that's the best biblical balanced approach or at least a very good one to installing elders or pastors in the church.

We talked about how it is an important calling. Paul used the phrase, "it's a trustworthy statement," and we know that that phrase was used in the early church when someone wanted to give an axiom, if you will, of church truth; a foundational truth that is so very vital and important. It's very vital and important to God's work, to God's church, to God's purposes to have men, qualified men in the office of elder or pastor.

Then moving right along, we talked about how it was a limited calling. He said, "it's a trustworthy statement," this is the text now, verse 1, that "if any man aspires to the office." And throughout the context, it's always the masculine gender and he could have used a different word, a different type of phrase that would have included men and women, but it's very clear in God's role of authority and leadership in preaching in the church, it's limited to men.

Now, we come to new material and I call this, III. It's a compelling calling. Let's dig into a little bit more about what's happening according to the Scriptures in the hearts and minds of a man that God is leading to this office. I told you a little bit about my own story when I was converted, having just turned 19, I was converted in February and I was saved in February. I was born in February and I was converted to Christ in February so I don't know exactly which one came first because I didn't write dates down. It was actually several weeks and months before I put all the pieces together about my conversion. I just knew God had invaded my life and it was wonderful and I loved Jesus and sometimes ignorance is good because you don't just jump through the cookie cutter hoops, you just kind of seek God and that was actually better for me in that case. But there was an insatiable passion in my soul that other people must know these truths and I began going to church every time the door was open and I visited different churches and different denominations and in my small town, we knew a lot of folks and knew people and I kept wondering how could they be doing what they're doing and tolerating what they're tolerating in their church members and having experienced what I have experienced. Now, I've told you before and it's just the truth: I had too much pride. I had immature zeal. I was too judgmental. That's all true, but I did have some good points that there was a critical issue of health, biblical health in the churches, or a lack of biblical health.

But that passion just would not go away. I actually tried to ignore it. I was going to do this. I was going to do that. And finally the day came when I realized I'm either going to get paid for doing this or starve to death because this is all...I can't do...I do know what Paul means when he said, "Woe is me if I do not preach the Gospel." It's just there. When I get away from it, when I try to take the harness off and have some down time, it's not but a few days to it's stirring in my soul about, "What's the next truth the body of Christ needs to hear?" It's just a part of what I am.

Now, let's be a little careful with my particular experience because I am called to be a pastor/teacher of a church. Not every elder is supposed to be the preaching pastor or the teaching pastor. He has to be able to teach, but that can be counseling, personal exhortations, other things. It does not mean that God has gifted him for the particular role within the whole body of elders as what we would call the senior pastor/teacher. And we use that designation because we find that in Scripture. Peter was a clear preaching pastor/leader among the apostles and the elders in Jerusalem. Paul was clearly the senior preaching pastor/leader among the apostles and leaders and elders in the Gentile churches. And God has just generally done that throughout the church age. We find a plurality of elders in the churches but we do not find typically more than one main preaching pastor. I mean, you can understand the confusion if all 12 of our guys rotated

in the pulpit and gave their viewpoint and their vision for the church. That would be chaotic and not like God at all. When he set up Israel, he gave her a king. When he set up a priesthood, he had one high priest. He always had a leader among equals to balance things out for the function of purpose and effectiveness in the leadership. So when you're talking about there is something stirring in the heart of a man, you have to understand that it will be different man-to-man but there's something there that's compelling him, if you will, to this office or to this work in the church.

Here's the way Paul described it to Timothy. He says, "It is a trustworthy statement," we're still in verse 1, "if any man," here's the word he uses in the New American Standard translation, "aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do." Now, he uses the word "aspires" first or the word we translate as "aspire," which has the idea of reaching out and grasping. It means this man is already doing things to help equip him, to train himself. He's looking for ways. He may be taking courses online. He may be meeting with church elders and church leaders, just asking to be mentored, be disciplined. He's reading materials to help himself. It's just obvious and this is not a six month thing. I think without question it should be a multi-year thing that he's reaching out; he's involved in discipleship; he's welcoming accountability; he's looking for ways that he can advance perhaps the future for him in being in some form of leadership in God's church. So that's a good thing. That's a right thing. It's something he's reaching out to do. Then Paul balances that with the internal part, the last part of verse 1, he says, "it is a fine work he desires to do." That refers to an internal drive, an internal passion. Aspires is externally he's doing things to equip and prepare himself, and internally it's driven by that drive.

So in summary, the man God is calling has an internal drive so strong that it motivates him toward an external pursuit of that goal and especially for those called to the role of preaching pastor in a church, they need to be that kind of man that says, "Woe is me if I do not preach the Gospel." I could resign from this position but I can guarantee you I'm not going to stop preaching the word of God. I mean, that's something I'm going to do. Pay me, don't pay me, whatever, it just doesn't matter to me. Well, it does matter to me, by the way, but my point is you have to do it if God's called you to do it. I used to use the silly little illustration that if I'm in a ditch with one other man who needs to be converted or grow as a Christian, I've got a purpose. And that's true. If God has called you to that role, now again, I'm separating out some the primary preaching pastor and I believe that's what Ephesians 4:11 refers to when he says God calls some as pastor/teachers, that there is a distinction within the elder body of gifts and you might even say of calling. There is a calling to the office but then there are callings and roles among those men who are in that office.

I mean, for example, being a visionary is just natural to me. I just meditate incessantly on God's truth and what are the needs and what are the purposes and how can we accomplish that, and which goals should be next. Can you imagine how crazy it would be if all 12 elders had that. I mean, can you imagine 12 competing visions in one room. I mean, it would be awful and so it's obvious that God's not going to give every man the same role and some of the most valuable men in our church are those men who have a very quiet and private role but they're very gifted in administering the word in counseling, in

conflict resolution, in discipline settings. And quite honestly as the preaching pastor here, I get reports from these brothers, I used to, we were all involved and I did most of it at one time because we were just learning how to do it, but since that time we have so many men who I think are better than I am in personal exhortations of the word. So when you have a team and you're all divided up with those various gifts, it's so powerful and wonderful and effective for God's church.

So whether you're going to be a primary preaching pastor or just in the office of pastor or elder and have a more private ministry of exhortation and ministry of the word, it all must come from God's Spirit giving you that internal, that's the desire, that's the word Paul uses here, that has caused you to openly and externally be in pursuit of that role as God leads. Now, I might just go ahead and throw this in here and that is that while you are aspiring to the role, you stay humbled and yielded to God being big enough and God being concerned enough about his church if you're supposed to be there, the church and the elders will see it. It's been many many many years in this church since we had anybody in a carnal and fleshly way campaign for authority and power in the church and I'm so glad for that because that is so wrong. That is so wrong. It is something you approach with humility and yieldedness saying, "Praise the Lord. Whatever I'm called to do, whatever I'm asked to do, I'll pray it through and we'll go from there." Can I get an amen there?

So the internal compulsion, we're under it's compelling call, may be stronger in some than others, there may be different roles of one from another, but there must be the presence of the internal passion and the external pursuit. John MacArthur had a quote in his work on this that helped me greatly. He said, "If a man has ambition for position or rank only, he's likely to be corrupt in his pursuits, but if he desires to serve God, that desire tends to purify his actions and guard his motives."

Now, there is some biblical exhortations from the Old Testament I think are very pertinent here. 1 Samuel 13:14 says, "The LORD has sought a man after His own heart." Now notice that, he wasn't looking for power, he wasn't looking for control, he wasn't looking for position, he was seeking the heart of God. That means he had a heart desire to be submissive and obedient to God in whatever it was. And we've done a lot of teaching through the years from our children, our wives, our men, and in church structure, that you honor authority. It's God's purpose for all people no matter what your role is to honor authority and if God wants you in that position, yes, you're to make known that you feel God's leading you, but you will honor the authority of the church congregation and the church elders as to what role and what responsibility you have. That's the only way to keep order in God's church. And the primary thing you're seeking is, "Lord, I want to be submissive to you. I want to be a man after your own heart." Ezekiel 22:30, "I sought for a man among them that should make up the hedge and stand in the gap before Me for the Lord." That is, a man that will represent God and share God's interests and God's passion for the church.

It's so very important that as I am considered a leader among equals and as the elders in concert as a body and, by the way, when we bring any important decision to the church,

we have to have complete unanimity. It's not a majority vote. Every man. If there's one man in there that says, "You know, I just don't have a peace about this," then we table it and pray until we do. And when we bring something, we bring it as a team together before you and what, I think, a strength that has to know that the people that you've identified and you've affirmed to be overseers in the church have that kind of accountability before we bring major decisions before God's church. And our passion must be what pleases the Lord, not what works, not what we think will keep peace. As a matter of fact, we've done a lot of things, especially in the early years, that brought war, it didn't bring peace at all, but it was the right thing to do. Our passion was what does the Lord want us to do.

I found this quote from Samuel Logan Brengle. He said, "It is not gained by seeking great things for ourselves, but rather like Paul, counting those things that are gain to us as loss for Christ. That is a great price, but it must be unflinchingly paid by him who would not merely be a nominal but a real spiritual leader of men, a leader whose power is both recognized and felt in heaven, on earth, and in hell." A good word.

IV. A responsible calling. It's a responsible calling. It's called the office of overseer or some translate the office of bishop. I think that's a bad word to use in the present context because the word "bishop" typically refers to a man who has authority over a number of churches and pastors and I do not see that at all in the New Testament. It just means the overseer of one local church. So Paul words it to Timothy this way, "It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer." Again, that's the word "episkopos" and it's not a sanctified word. It was a common word in the ancient world and, for example, in the ancient Greek culture, the episkopos in the community was the city manager or the city administrator. Among the Jews, the word "episkopos" was used to mark out or identify the man who preached, taught or exercised care or authority over the people. And then, of course, when we come to the New Testament era, Paul pulls this word out of the culture and uses it for the church, episkopos or overseer, and it refers to that man who has the responsibility of leading, instructing, shepherding the people. He receives contributions for his support from the people. He heard and verified accusations and settled disputes among the people and administered church discipline where needed. And so that's what we see in the New Testament and those responsibilities are still the responsibility for men in the office of overseer today.

Hebrews 13:17 speaks to how weighty this responsibility is and we hit on this some time ago but let's be reminded again because if you think that God might be leading you there, you need to feel the weight of this. Hebrews 13:17, "Obey your leaders and submit to them," why? "For they keep watch over your souls," here it is, "as those who will give an account." There is a weighty accounting for the men in the office of elder for the souls of that congregation. It's a difficult thing to think on and if a man does not feel humbled and even to some degree troubled in his soul about the weightiness of that office, he's not a man ready for that office.

James 3:1 says, "Let not many of you become teachers because you'll incur a stricter judgment." Now, teacher here doesn't mean a small group teacher, it means the office of

teaching pastor or overseer in the church. There is a weighty accountability to God that none of the church members will ever have but the men in that office will carry.

So the responsibility is daunting. The elder's responsibility is multi-faceted as we expand further on the New Testament teaching. He's involved in leading the church; he's involved in teaching the church; he must be praying for the church; he's involved in caring for the church; he's involved in setting church policy; he's involved in ordaining other elders, 1 Timothy 5:17, James 5:14, 1 Peter 2:2, Acts 15:6-29 and 1 Timothy 4:14. So it's a responsible calling. Now, he builds on this a little bit more when he uses the phrase there in verse 1, "it is a fine work he desires to do." The word "fine" there could be "good," and it has the idea of a noble, excellent or honorable task. There is a high quality. In effect, it's the most worthy task in the world. If you believe the Bible and you love Christ and you love his church, then you know that the greatest calling in the world is the calling to pastor. It's deeply responsible and it's a daunting task and it has great difficulties. As a matter of fact, I remember pastors telling me or hearing pastors say to me and to others, "Don't you ever try to push your son or your grandson into the ministry. You make sure it is God that has called him to that task." It's not the kind of role or the kind of life you would want them to have to live unless God himself has led them to that task and that role. It is a responsible calling.

Now he says, "it is a fine," then he uses the word "work. It's a fine work he desire to do." It's highly responsible but what he means here, it's highly difficult. Work here means the expenditure of energy and effort and zeal. Pastoring and being called to pastor is a lifetime commitment to a never ending task and for a task oriented guy like me, that was a real challenge. It still is. I like to see things come to a completion and no matter how much you work or how long you work or whatever you do as a pastor in a church, when you're tired and when you're done for that day, there is someone else who could have been ministered to; there is someone else who could have been prayed for; there is someone else who could've been witnessed to; there is someone else who could've been counseled; there's another marriage that could have been helped. It's never ending. It's just continually there and so it's a work that is very unique in that way.

I think this is why 1 Thessalonians 5:13 says to the church, "esteem them very highly because of this work." They've committed themselves to a demanding task. I think someone said it's not like an assembly line that stops and lets you walk away, you just walk away and it keeps moving and you just try to catch it again when you check back in again. One friend of mine said, you know, expository preaching where you are purposing most Sundays of the year to get up on Monday morning and start again, it's like getting pregnant every Monday morning and you carry that baby until you birth it that next Sunday and there's a lot of truth to that.

Building on this concept of the responsibility and the work in this calling, open your Bibles, if you will, and go to 1 Timothy 4 and look at verse 13. As Paul continues mentoring Timothy on how he's to function, now again, let's be careful because Timothy was the primary preaching elder of the church. There would be other elders who do not have the same exact role but it does point out the responsibility and the work aspect

involved in this calling. 1 Timothy 4:13, "Until I come," Paul says to Timothy, "give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching." That's the preaching ministry, the public preaching ministry that is the centerpiece of church life. "Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery," or I think you could translate it by "the board of elders." Then here's what I want to get to, verse 15, "Take pains with these things." Take pains with the public reading of Scripture, exhortation and teaching. The word "pain" there is a present imperative. It means this is your continual role as God's called preaching pastor. I want you to continually be involved in this and taking pain has the idea of give yourselves wholly to this purpose. Then he continues on and he says, "Take pains with these things," and the New American Standard amplifies it this way and "be absorbed in them." Absorbed in them means you give yourself entirely to it. It's an entire self-dedication to this. One Greek scholar said, "This means to be up to your ears in this work and stay with it."

Now, why do you think this redundant clear command is given from Paul to Timothy to stay with this task, this task of being prepared, being disciplined, of preaching, exhortation and teaching in your public ministry? I can tell you exactly why: because Satan will work incessantly to pour on you guilt trips, burdens and requests and demands from a thousand different areas and a thousand different people to do anything else but pore yourselves into that work. "Would you just do this? Would you just visit So-and-so? Would you just call So-and-so? Would you just perform this?" And those are good things and, by the way, I still try to do those things. I've been blessed to do some memorial services lately that dear, sweet folks that I loved. I was honored to do it. But there are times and there are days when as Paul told Timothy, "If you're going to be in the office of elder and primarily as the preaching or a preaching pastor in the church, you have to take pains and be absorbed in the ministry of the word which means you must discipline yourself to the work of saying no to 1,001 other good things."

Now, young pastors, listen to me: this means there are going to be 1,001 people disappointed in you from time-to-time. "Well, he wouldn't call me. Well, he wouldn't visit with me. Well, he wouldn't visit grandmother. Well, he wouldn't this and that." And then the next thing you're to think when you think that thought, you can think, "Well, but is there evidence he's taking pains and being absorbed in the public ministry of the preaching of the word?" If you can say yes there, then you need to get control of yourself and say that "I'm okay. I'm okay."

So not only is this a great work and a responsibility God has given him, it's a great work to fight to do the work God commands pastors to do. Now, for you men who are not the primary preaching elders in the church, you still have to discipline yourselves to be involved in the ministry of the word and not chase other things. That's why you have deacons to chase other things, and that's why you have and meet other important needs but less important than the word, and that's why you have brothers and sisters in the church with the gifts of service and the gifts of mercy and the gifts of help to do other things. So it's a work to discipline yourself to do the work and not do other things, and it's a work to do the work once you get discipline to do the work, and that's the responsibility



God's given. And again, primarily this is addressed to Timothy personally, a preaching pastor, and in this case the primary preaching pastor in some of these churches, at least until he appointed elders.

Now, he continues on and this is so penetrating and important. Look at verse 16, "Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching." Now what he's saying is, "Timothy, you're going to have to study and work to make sure your doctrine is right and to make sure your life does not detract from the doctrine you're preaching."

"Persevere in these things." In other words, see it through, stay the course. This isn't a six month, six year thing, it's a 20 year, 40 year, 60 year thing.

Now, look at the last part of verse 16, church, don't miss this. Don't miss this. This is what sets you apart. Don't miss this. "For as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you." So as Paul is mentoring Timothy to be a faithful pastor, in this case he's mentoring the primary preaching pastor of a church, he says, "The salvation of men's and women's, boy's and girl's, old people and young people's souls, depends upon you staying with this job." If you get pulled apart to 1,001 other things and, by the way, people will hug your neck and pat you on the back for doing all those other things, they'll tell you, "He is the most wonderful pastor. He is the most caring pastor. He's the most compassionate pastor. I can get him anytime I need him." Then he's not worth a flip for what God called him to do. I know. I've been doing it 36 years. This is something I know about. Now, I keep office hours almost every week, appointment times, because I want to try to minister all that I can but it's been a long journey but I've learned to say no to even important and good things so that I make sure I do this thing because the salvation of men's souls depends upon this thing, not the other things. It's the preaching of the word God primarily uses to convert the souls of men.

That's what sets you apart, Grace Life, because you get that and you are so gracious to your preaching pastor and pastors to free us up for that. As a matter of fact, Brother David, Brother Matt, Brother Steve, if they've got a heavy responsibility one week for teaching, do you know what we do? We send them to the house. They don't stay up here in the office. Do you know why? Because all you do in the office is react and respond to people all day long. They'd never get finished so we send them to the house. Get your studying done and when that's done, then you come back and answer the phone. Why? Because even though that might not be their primary role, they do some of this, there are times when you've got to say no to other things. But think about the brilliance and the wisdom of God to call men of different gifts and have different roles in the whole elder body so that no one is neglected that way, and all ministers are taken care of.

Now, I told you this before but when the Pilgrims discovered America and planted here, the first thing they did was establish churches. And reading a book, I forget that he's one of the two or three top historical novel writers in America today and he wasn't necessarily writing from a Christian perspective but he said in all of their churches from day one, they had a pastor and a theologian in every church. I thought, "That's interesting." I did a little research on that. Here's what they meant by that: they would have a theologian who

preached and taught and they'd have another man from day one who would do the counseling and the advising and the caring ministry in the church. Do you know why? They wanted to make sure the preaching of the word was not watered down or that man's energies were pulled away. And I've told you this 1,001 times, I keep saying it because I keep running into like the three pastors I talked to three weeks ago who were struggling and fighting to be biblical in their church and no question about it, had you not become biblical in your view of your preaching pastor's role, I would not be here today. No question about it. I would not be here. I would have at least gone to another church just to have gotten a little break. But you've been so gracious and you've been so kind and I thank God for you for that. Do understand that in the primary role of preaching the word of God, the greatest compassion, the greatest love, the greatest care I can ever show you is to be ready to preach on Sunday. By far and away.

But whether or not you're called to the role of the primary preaching pastor or just the role of pastor or overseer on the elder body, it is a responsible calling and it involves work and if you believe God's put you in this calling, whether or not it's a full time vocational thing or whether it's something you'll do and keep your secular employment, you must know in your heart, "I'm committing to some work." It's a responsible calling.

Let's pray together.